



# Local Harvest

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## Features

Getting Your Share

CSAs in Waterloo  
Region

Dandelion Asparagus  
Quiche

Why Participate in a  
CSA?



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## Getting Your Share: Community Supported Agriculture in Waterloo Region

While many grocery stores and retail outlets are ramping up their local foods offerings, increasingly consumers are turning to alternative markets such as Community Supported Agriculture (CSA). CSAs consist of a community of individuals who pledge support to a farm operation, sharing the risks and benefits of food production. Members or subscribers pay at the onset of the growing season for a share of the anticipated harvest. Once harvesting begins, they receive weekly shares of vegetables and fruit, and also sometimes herbs, cut flowers, honey, eggs, dairy products and meat.



*Purchase a share of the harvest and be treated to fresh, locally-grown produce all season long*

CSA farmers receive a set fee from their shareholders, prior to the start of the growing season that assists with the purchase of seeds, soil amendments and other seasonal start-up costs. In return, the shareholders receive weekly "food boxes" of produce from the farm throughout the growing season. CSA programs feature sustainable, and sometimes organic farm products and the appeal of knowing the folks who grow their food.

"Instead of purchasing produce every week during my regular grocery shopping, I shell out one lump sum in early spring. By the time I start getting my produce in the summer, it's already paid for, so it feels like I'm getting free food for five full months!" recounts one CSA member. "I feel this is one of the best grassroots ways of connecting to local farmers and connecting to my food," she adds.

By being a part of a CSA program you become an investor. Bumper crops lead to extra veggies and a savings to you as the consumer; however less prosperous years result in less veggies in your share. The amount of choice you have with your produce depends on the CSA program you join. With a traditional CSA share, you get which-

ever foods need to be harvested--this is a great opportunity to try new foods! Most CSAs come with the promise that the produce is naturally grown without pesticides and chemical fertilizers, while others are full-on certified organic.

Within Waterloo Region there are a variety of CSAs available to consumers. Most are seasonal, running from June to October and offer both flexibility and options with regards to size of share and selection. Some farms encourage their members to visit the farm and spend an hour or two getting their hands dirty to see first-hand how their food is grown while others offer special events such as harvest potlucks, affording members an opportunity to get to know one another.

A few CSAs are structured more like buying clubs and operate year round. In addition to featuring a summer bounty and fall harvest, they also offer winter selections. Local foods such as fresh eggs, apples, root vegetables, grains, pantry items, greenhouse produce, herbs, sprouts and frozen foods can be enjoyed 12 months a year!



## History of CSAs

Although CSAs are one of the fastest growing segments of the Eat Local movement, they are far from a new phenomenon. In fact, they have been around for well over a half century developing simultaneously around the world.

In the 1920s, Rudolf Steiner, an Austrian, established the concept of the CSA. In Europe, during the 60s and 70s, many of the community supported farms were inspired by his economic ideas. It was around this time that groups of consumers and farmers in Europe formed cooperative partnerships to fund farming and pay the full costs of ecologically sound and socially equitable agriculture. Meanwhile, in Japan, families were concerned about the rise of imported food, the loss of arable land, and the migration of farmers into cities so they started CSA projects called Teikei. The word “Teikei” literally means “partnership” or “cooperation”. It is also possible that communities in South America were practicing a form of CSA independently of the Japanese, around the same time.

In 1986, two farms in the USA (Indian Line Farm in Massachusetts and Temple-Wilton Community Farm in New Hampshire) completely independent from each other, formed the first CSAs in the US. A few years later, the Huron Community CSA was started in Goderich, Ontario.

Today, there are over 12,000 of these community supported enterprises in North America according to the US Department of Agriculture in 2007. The largest subscription CSA has over 13,000 families-- “Farm Fresh To You” in Capay Valley, California. By contrast, Waterloo Region CSA programs tend to have an average of 60 to 100 members.

CSAs first grew out of concern about food safety and the urbanization of agricultural land. Increasingly, people have struggled with the basic question of where to find good, local food. This quest has never been more relevant and the popularity of CSAs has exploded. Why not skip the produce aisles of your grocery store and give Community Supported Agriculture a try? ♦



## CSAs in Waterloo Region

Following is a list of six *Buy Local! Buy Fresh!* CSAs in Waterloo Region. For further information go to the [foodlink.ca](http://foodlink.ca) website and plug in the key word “CSA” when on the Local Food Finder Page. In addition to the traditional CSAs, buying clubs allow consumers to customize their order and select the exact items and quantities desired. **Bailey’s Local Foods** is an on-line ordering service featuring a comprehensive product line with two convenient pick-up locations in Waterloo and Breslau. Many CSAs also set up at markets and sell food to consumers who are not members.

### *Fertile Ground: Inspiring people to get excited about their food*

This small farm, operated by Angie Koch is located just west of Waterloo. It offers fresh, local, organically-grown produce from June to October at the Kitchener Farmer’s Market, through a weekly CSA and at the Working Centre’s Commons Market in downtown Kitchener. Fertile Ground has carved a unique niche for itself offering customers both traditional as well as a variety of some of the more unusual vegetables. These include an assortment of Asian Greens as well as edamame, ground cherries, tomatillos, daikon radish, okra, celeriac and Napa cabbage. It is perhaps this offering of less traditional crops that differentiates Fertile Ground from other CSAs and market gardens.

The CSA pick-up is market style and includes lots of choice in what members can bring home each week. Later in the season, members have the privilege of buying bulk amounts of tomatoes, herbs, beans, greens and fall storage crops. This bulk buying is ideal for those who want to order extra produce to can, freeze or stock up for winter. A U-Pick option is also offered to members.

Fertile Ground is in its 6th year and Angie notes that in spite of the roller coaster conditions and “challenges aplenty” of the 2011 season, she’s been propelled forward by an “incredible squadron of committed volunteers” who helped last year through the really intense months of June and July. She jokes that members “stoically (even jovially!) spent hours removing rotting cabbages and squishing looper worms at their September work bee”. Members are so supportive that they’ve been known to drop off meals on her doorstep and send encouraging notes – reassuring her and keeping her focused.

With the farmers’ market and sales through Bailey’s Local Foods buying club, she gratefully acknowledges that last year was the best year of sales for Fertile Ground and credits her community of members for this success. “Together, we’re doing something pretty incredible here” says Koch. “We’re creating a food system buffered from the vagaries of the world mar-



ket.” And in return, she gives back, proudly noting that this year, sliding scale subsidized shares will be provided (thanks to support from returning members). The philosophy of the operation is to welcome people of all ages and experience levels, to teach and inspire families and children.

**Offerings:** Wide range of vegetables and herbs, including the familiar and less traditional. Supplies are dependent on member interest but may include meats, eggs, fruit, honey, maple syrup, and bread.

**Pick up points:** Tuesdays in Kitchener (Guelph/Moore Streets) and Friday on-farm pick-up.

**Contact:** Angie Koch, 1560 Carmel Koch Rd. St. Agatha 226-747-2552  
[www.fertilegroundcsa.com](http://www.fertilegroundcsa.com)



*Fertile Ground can be found at the Kitchener Market from May to October*

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## **Garden Party:** *A food hub that experiments with new ways of re-connecting feeders and eaters*

Garden Party is a multi-faceted local food operation that celebrates local food all year long. Special features include a certified organic CSA program, a buying club, a weekly farm market offering fresh processed foods from the farm kitchen, “cut your own” flower gardens, a micro nursery specializing in edible landscaping, as well as many farm events.

Garden Party offers a flexible and diverse organic food box program. The CSA is available year round so you can choose winter, spring, summer or fall food box shares. Shares change with the season so you are always getting the freshest local and organic produce possible. Plus, you get to choose your own produce – so no more vegetables you don't like rotting in the fridge! Everything is displayed in bulk and you can pick up the exact size of cabbage or cucumbers or squash that works best for you.

An added benefit is that when members come to pick up their box, they will also have access to lots of other organic and local staples like milk, eggs, cheeses, flours, grains, dried beans, prepared soups and baked goods, beef, chicken and other meats. It is like having your own private organic farmers market!

This summer, owner Theresa Schumilas will host canning workshops in the evening. Take a trip out to the farm, enjoy a light supper in the garden and then roll up your sleeves in the farm kitchen. Her weekly farm market features a wonderful selection of garden herbs and runs year round. If you like being able to escape the mayhem of a supermarket,

Garden Party offers you a more relaxing way to shop. Theresa also welcomes volunteers and is open to bartering.

**Offerings:** Year round certified organic CSA featuring a wide variety



of fresh and preserved produce, plus a buying club for other local and organic products (cheese, milk, eggs, meats, grains and freshly baked goods)

**Pick up point:** St. Agatha

**Contact:** Theresa Schumilas, 1528 Notre Dame Dr., St. Agatha 519-885-8775

[www.gardenparty.ca](http://www.gardenparty.ca)

## LOFT Local Organic Food Team: *The goodness of 16 local farms*

LOFT is a cooperative of local certified organic farmers who grow high quality organic food products. A weekly CSA program is available from mid-June till early December at selected depots throughout the area. Each week of the season the food boxes feature approximately a dozen varieties of fruits and vegetables. The boxes are assembled at Lester & Irene Brubacher's farm in Elmira.

A unique feature of the program is the flexibility offered in the pick-up weeks. Members can put their share on "hold" while they're on vacation. They can sign up for the full season or a minimum of 10 weeks. Another special feature is the freshness of the produce. "The fruits and vegetables are picked early in the morning and packed into the food boxes on the very same day", says Phil DeVries, LOFT Marketing Coordinator.

Linda Laepple, of Laepple Organic Farm was the founding director of LOFT and has supplied potatoes to the CSA program for the past five years. She points out that one of the strengths of LOFT is its ability to be very diversified. "In addition to offering a wide range of products, we also have more than one farm growing the same thing. This way if there is a low yield at one farm, it can be supplemented by the crop at another farm," explains Linda.

Many of the LOFT growers such as Laepple's also supply produce to other programs including **Grand River Organics**, a newer food box program offering year-round delivery of local fruits and vegetables from organic growers within the Grand River watershed.

**Offerings:** An extensive selection of fruits and vegetables

**Pick up points:** Waterloo, Elmira, Guelph and Elora

**Contact:** Phil DeVries, 519-766-7813 or email [pdv@bell.net](mailto:pdv@bell.net)

## Stevanus Family Farm CSA: *Fresh produce delivered to your door*

The Stevanus' are fourth-generation produce farmers who have sold at local farmers markets since 1921 and more recently through a CSA program. While attending fruit and vegetable conferences Dale and Linda noticed a trend towards local food and CSA programs. They experimented with a small CSA in 2007 which proved to be successful so in 2008 they left the farmers' market and focused their energies solely on expanding their CSA operation. "Our belief from the beginning has been if we grow produce the way we like it, others will like it too," says Linda Steva-

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nus. Now in their 6th year, Stevanus Family Farm offers a local farm-fresh CSA program with limited shares available of pesticide-free vegetables and herbs delivered to your door.

Most years the Stevanus' sell out the limited shares that are available through their CSA. Even though there is pressure to expand, their philosophy is to keep numbers reasonable and ensure that they can always "deliver". Not only do they carefully plan their quality, service and delivery, they are always experimenting with new products to meet consumer needs. This year, they have done trials of Asian cabbage, kale, rapini and stevia, a sugar flavoured herb.

A popular feature of the Stevanus community share agriculture program is that their hand-picked fresh produce is conveniently delivered right to your door. This year they have also begun to deliver to a few work places where five or more employees have signed up for the program. In addition to the CSA program, the Stevanus' also sell wholesale to fine local restaurants in Waterloo Region. Another recent venture on the farm has been bee keeping. If successful, honey could be a sweet addition to the food boxes.

**Offerings:** Extensive variety of produce including corn, herbs and fruit.

**Contact:** Linda & Dale Stevanus, 1082 Snyder's Flats Rd. Bloomingdale, 519-585-7784; [www.stevanusfarm.ca](http://www.stevanusfarm.ca)

## The Commons Market CSA: *Build Your Own Share*

This CSA offers affordable, seasonal, local, organically-grown produce in addition to a range of other products. The Commons Market takes place Wednesdays at the Commons Cafe and features fresh local food direct from farmers and producers. It is run by the Working Centre, a non-profit, community-based, volunteer inspired venture that seeks to give



individuals and groups access to tools and opportunities to become involved in the building of community projects in Kitchener-Waterloo and surrounding areas.

Members can build their own unique shares and choose from boxes of vegetables, flower bouquets, fresh baked goods, bread, cheese, eggs and meat. Members are also given the option of making their payments in three installments rather than one lump sum.

The Commons Market CSA has been in existence since 2005 and grew out of “Fair Share Harvest”, one of Waterloo’s first CSAs! A unique feature of this community program is that it provides training and experience to the unemployed, offering a “hand up”.

**Offerings:** Farm fresh local produce, eggs, cheese, meat, baked goodies, loaves of bread and flower bouquets.

**Pick up points:** The Commons Market, Downtown Kitchener and Tannery Building (for member employees only)

**Contact:** Greg Roberts, 43 Queen Street South, Kitchener 519-743-1151 x139; [www.theworkingcentre.org](http://www.theworkingcentre.org) (click on Community Tools) for the online registration form.

## **Transpire Organic Farm & Wellness: Growing Community by Inspiring Healthy, Whole, Abundant Living!**

Transpire Organic, run by Candace Wormsbecker, is a two-acre certified organic farm that provides 75 summer CSA shares as well as 20 winter shares. In addition, they sell wholesale organic produce offering bulk shares of tomatoes, peppers and herbs. This year, Candace has confirmed shares with restaurants and will continue to sell at the Uptown Waterloo Market on Thursday afternoons.

Candace encourages people who have an interest in learning how to farm, to grab a hoe, roll up their sleeves and volunteer. Appreciation is shown by providing access to extra produce or a discount in the member share. Transpire Organic barter, providing six shares for people who are really interested in learning more about agriculture. Some of the interns who have worked for Transpire Organic have taught Candace a thing or two, sharing their cultural practices, food traditions and farming techniques.

At Transpire Organic the philosophy is to grow community by inspiring healthy, whole, abundant living. They produce and provide sustainably-produced foods in a way that nurtures the grower, the eater, and our Mother Earth. Candace seeks to provide resources to help people think about food differently. She is excited to be offering community wellness programs that bring together various elements of healthy, sustainable living.

She is hosting sessions at peaceful, pastoral settings at Transpire, Pfenings and Vibrant Farms. Candace maintains that these wellness pro-



*A CSA customer picks up her weekly produce at Transpire Organics in New Hamburg*

grams embody the philosophy that “food connects us to the land, to each other and to the miracle of life”. In sum, it has the power to nourish all parts of our lives — body, mind and spirit. With these concepts in mind, local experts will lead participants in a series of workshops spanning Holistic Nutrition, Metaphysical Gardening, Preserving, Juicing, Eating for your Blood Type, Digestion & Cleansing.

Clearly, Transpire Organic is much more than just a farm that produces vegetables. Candace is pleased to offer a wellness component to round out her CSA program so that it complements healthy local eating for body, mind and spirit.

**Offerings:** A wide selection of vegetables and herbs

**Pick up points:** New Hamburg and Uptown Waterloo Market

**Contact:** Candace Wormsbecker, 519-496-2127 (shares can be purchased online); [www.transpireorganic.ca](http://www.transpireorganic.ca) ♦





## Dandelion Asparagus Quiche

*Here is a delightfully simple recipe from the Working Centre that takes advantage of early season produce. It is versatile enough so that you can substitute different veggies and cheeses.*

### What you will need:

- 1 cup of cream
- 6 eggs
- 2 cups of chopped asparagus
- 2 cups of finely chopped spring dandelion leaves\*
- 1/2 tsp salt
- 1 cup finely chopped mushrooms
- sprinkling of cheese
- one prepared pie shell



### Method:

Add all vegetable ingredients to pie shell; Sprinkle cheese on top. In a bowl mix together eggs, cream and salt. Pour egg mixture over vegetables in pie shell ensuring everything is covered by egg. Bake in 350 degree oven for 40-45 min.

\*It is recommended that you use organic or pesticide-free dandelion leaves.

*Source: The Working Centre*

## Why Participate in a CSA?

- Direct knowledge of where your food comes from
- Help to support small-scale farming
- Receive exceptionally fresh and tasty vegetables grown close to home
- Help to guarantee a farmer the necessary income to continue farming from year to year
- Build community around your food and meet new people
- Sample new and interesting vegetables NOT available at the grocery store
- Access to surplus veggies through U-Pick
- Savings on the cost of vegetables
- Develop a relationship with your grower and be able to actively participate in the farming process in different ways
- Learn more about farming and agriculture and the work that goes into your food
- Support your local economy
- Be inspired by knowing you are taking positive social and environmental action!

*Source: Transpire Organic Farm & Wellness*

