

Farmers reap profits with delivery programs

► CSA

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which detail alarming aspects of large-scale food production and the American diet.

"I also believe it's part of the troubled times we live in — the war and the economy," says Walker. "People are yearning for some kind of community."

CSAs differ from produce delivery programs such as Planet Organics or the Fruitguys, which sell wholesale. With CSAs, customers have a direct relationship with the grower, who benefits from higher profit margins and market stability — the only way many small farms can compete.

"With the CSA, if we pick 320 bunches of arugula, I know every one is sold," says Walker, who also sells at farmers' markets. "If I pick 100 bunches for the market, I may sell out or I may come home with 30 or 40 bunches."

Since most Northern California CSAs run year-round, farmers also can offer employees steady labor and benefits that are unheard of in California agribusiness.

While the true CSA model means only getting what is coming straight from the farm or neighboring farms, Farm Fresh to You also offers the additional option of receiving bananas from Mexico and apples from Washington.

"People are drawn to CSAs for different reasons. Some are on the local-sustainable bandwagon," says Moyra Barsotti of Farm Fresh to You. "There's also the facet that finds it convenient."

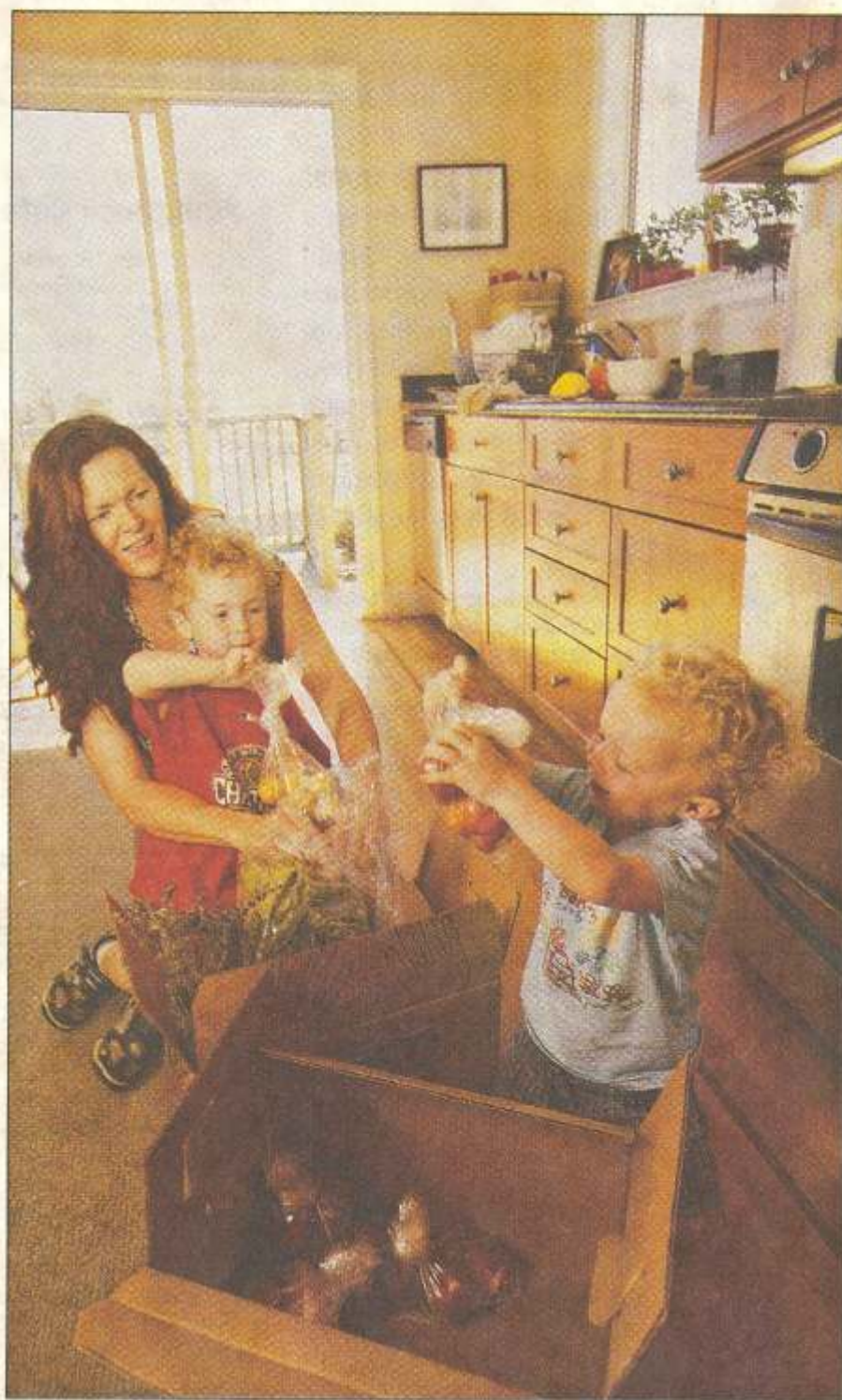
Barsotti points to a survey of her customers that asked what was most important to them: Whether food was local, sustainable or organic. They answered local. Yet in a separate section asking what their favorite fruit and vegetable was, bananas were the top pick.

Farm Fresh to You delivers directly to customers' homes, though the majority of CSAs deliver to drop-off locations all over the Bay Area, which tends to cost less. Usually a customer hosts a drop-off site that's accessible for several hours on a given day of the week, in exchange for a free box.

The downside to joining a CSA can be receiving produce you don't like, such as the perennially divisive beets, and perhaps having to serve kale and kiwis from week to week, especially in winter.

"You have to be a vegetable eater," said Mueller, who has run his CSA since 1994. "It ends up delivering more fruits and vegetables into people's lives than they're used to."

However, the vegetable boxes, which vary in size from farm to farm, come with newsletters full of recipes. Most CSAs



CRAIG LEE / The Chronicle

Julie Caskey and her 2-year-old twin boys, Jonas (left) and Jasper Kra-Caskey, look over their delivery from Farm Fresh to You.

allow customers to take vacations or receive a box every other week. While the minimum sign-up is usually one month, discounts are offered for larger subscriptions, and a few farms require longer commitments.

Some CSAs ask members to pitch in on sorting vegetable boxes or other work, which cuts down on the overall cost. And CSA lovers tend to be a committed bunch. They show up in droves on farm days to

pick pumpkins or strawberries and to see where their food is grown.

"We hear stories about how people read the CSA newsletter to their children before they go to bed or who sit on their doorstep to read it before walking into their house," Barsotti says.

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Cream of Greens Soup

Serves 8

This recipe is from the farmers at Full Belly Farm. The bacon is optional, but it makes this homey soup special.

- 1 large bunch Swiss chard
- 6 to 8 slices bacon
- 1 cup chopped onions or leeks
- 3 large potatoes, peeled and cut ½-inch thick
- 7 cups vegetable or chicken stock
- ½ cup sour cream
- Salt and freshly ground pepper to taste

Instructions: Trim the stem ends of the Swiss chard, then pull the leaves off of the stems. Chop both the leaves and stems; set them aside separately.

Fry the bacon in a large saucepan, drain, crumble and set aside. Save 2 tablespoons of the fat and saute the onions or leeks in it. (If you're not using

bacon, substitute olive oil for the bacon fat.)

Add the potatoes and stock, bring to a boil, reduce the heat, cover and simmer for 10 minutes, or until the potatoes begin to become tender. Add the stems from the greens and cook 5 minutes, then add leaves and cook until tender, about 5-10 more minutes. Cool slightly, then puree in a blender or food processor.

Add the sour cream, reheat gently, and season to taste. Sprinkle each serving with the chopped bacon bits.

Per serving: 192 calories, 8 g protein, 14 g carbohydrate, 12 g fat (5 g saturated), 19 mg cholesterol, 1273 mg sodium, 1 g fiber.

Northern California CSAs

The following is a selection of farms that deliver to Bay Area locations. Many also deliver to the Sacramento and Davis. For more farms, visit localharvest.org.

Canvas Ranch (Petaluma). Delivers to Marin (Mill Valley, San Rafael) and North Bay (Petaluma, Novato, Santa Rosa). \$24 per week. (707) 766-7171; info@canvasranch.com; canvasranch.com.

Farm Fresh to You (Capay Valley). Delivers to San Francisco, all over the East Bay, Marin and parts of Napa, the Peninsula and South Bay. \$21.50-\$29. (800) 796-6009; farmfresh toyou.com.

Frog Hollow (Brentwood). Fruit only. Delivers to drop-off locations in San Francisco, East Bay (Berkeley, Piedmont, Alameda) and Peninsula/South Bay (Belmont, San Carlos, Redwood City, Menlo Park, Palo Alto, Los Altos, Mountain View, Sunnyvale, San Jose). \$20-\$35 per week. (888) 779-4511; csa@froghollow.com; froghollow.com.

Full Belly Farm (Capay Valley). Delivers to East Bay (Berkeley, Oakland, El Cerrito, Albany, Emeryville), North Bay (San Rafael) and the Peninsula/South Bay (Fremont, Mountain View, Menlo Park, Palo Alto). \$17 per week. (800) 791-2110; csa@fullbellyfarm.com; fullbellyfarm.com.

Riverdog Farm (Capay Valley). Delivers to East Bay (Berkeley, El Sobrante, Emeryville, Oakland, Richmond, Vallejo, Walnut Creek, Concord) and North Bay (Napa, St. Helena, Yountville, Calistoga). \$16

per week. (530) 796-3802; csa@riverdogfarm.com; riverdogfarm.com.

Secret Eating Society (Santa Rosa). Pickup at farm only. \$30 per month. (707) 228-0800; twilight@secreteatingsociety.com; secreteatingsociety.com.

Terra Firma Farms (Winters). Delivers to San Francisco and East Bay (Alameda, Berkeley, Kensington, Oakland, Orinda, Pleasant Hill, Rockridge). \$59-\$132 per month. (530) 756-2800; goldenball@aol.com; terrafirmafarms.com.

Tierra Vegetables (Windsor). Delivers to North Bay (Healdsburg, Santa Rosa, Windsor). \$20 per week for farm pickup; additional fee for delivery. (707) 837-8366; evio@tierravegetables.com; tierravegetables.com.

The following farms have wait lists: **Eatwell Farm** (866-627-2465; eatwell.com); **Good Humus** (530-787-3187; KI@HiNeighborBand.com; goodhumus.com); **Live Earth Community Farm** (831-763-2448; farmers@cruzio.com; liveearthfarm.com); **Live Power Community Farm** (707-383-8196; livepower@igc.org; livepower.org); **Two Small Farms** (831-786-0625; twosmallfarms.com).

— Compiled by Maryann Smitt, Gaby Camacho and Tara Duggan