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Community Supported Agriculture offers shareholders a tasty payout

By [Mary Beth Smetzer](#)

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FAIRBANKS FARMS

These local growers participate in Community Supported Agriculture.

- Basically Basil

Gretchen Kerndt

Pearl Creek
Farm/Herreid Road

479-2089,
www.basicallybasil.com

- Calypso Farm and Ecology Center

Christie Shell, Susan
Willsrud, Tom Zimmer

4780 Old Nenana
Highway

451-0691,
www.calypsofarm.org

- DogWood Garden

Bill and Cheryl Wood

3843 Old Nenana
Highway

451-0061 or 388-1943

- Feedback Farm

Theo DeLaca and Allison
Wylde

Two Rivers

488-5993, fstcd@uaf.edu

- Rosie Creek Farm

Joan Hornig and Mike
Emers

479-3642,
www.rosiecreekfarm.com

- Spinach Creek Farm

Pete and Lynn Mayo

5181 Murphy Dome
Road

455-6043

- Wild Rose Farm

2431 Lawlor Road

Eric Mayo and; Susan
Kerndt

479-6363



Photo by [Sam Harrel](#)

FAIRBANKS — A good investment in tough economic times might just be your local farmer.

Barring a plague of arctic-acclimated locusts, shareholders who buy into local farms are guaranteed a return on their annual investment all summer long — freshly picked, top quality vegetables and, in some instances, fresh herbs and flowers as well.



Photo by [Sam Harrel](#)

Community Supported Agriculture, commonly called CSA is relatively new to the Tanana Valley. It is a partnership between a local farm and a community of shareholders who buy in for a bounty of fresh vegetables delivered weekly over the summer months.

Pete and Lynn Mayo of Spinach Creek Farm started the first CSA in the area 12 years ago. They already were selling produce at the Tanana Valley Farmers Market when they began hearing about the community support concept.

“It was a good idea, and we thought we’d see how it would work,” Pete Mayo said.

“We started doing it because it was another day of the week we could pick fresh vegetables and get them out to people.”

The first year, the Mayos signed up about a half dozen shareholders. Today, Spinach Creek Farm provides weekly food boxes to 40 subscribers with a waiting list to boot.

“In some ways, it is simpler than selling at the market, but both the market and CSAs have advantages and disadvantages,” he said.

Twelve weeks is the average delivery to weekly pickup points for most of the farms, although a few offer 16 weeks of produce deliveries and winter storage shares as well. Prices vary from farm to farm.

Most of the CSAs offer a wide variety of produce and deliver enough to satisfy two to four people for a week. Many of the growers begin with greenhouse cultivated greens early in the season and build up to a large selection of vegetables as the season progresses.

Joan Hornig and Mike Emers of Rosie Creek farm started off selling and delivering bouquets of cut flowers 10 years ago before branching out into vegetables. This season, they boast 100 shareholders and will start supplying fresh produce the third week of June for 12 consecutive weeks. Salad shares begin June 1.

Emers said they will make a decision in early June whether to take on more shareholders. “Sometimes, later in the season we can add more people,” he said.

For Emers the best part of the CSA marketing is meeting his customers.

“Your CSA members are your cheerleaders, your biggest fans. They’re with you through thick and thin,” he said.

Shareholders not only help farmers to cover season start up costs but allow them to plan their season out as well.

Gretchen Kerndt of Basically Basil cultivates 2.5 acres and employs six assistants during the summer on Pearl Creek Farm. She likens the community support to a gift.

“Instead of having to go to a bank, I get money from the community itself. And when they pick up the boxes, it’s like a gift itself. There is no money exchanged,” she said.

Kerndt also likes knowing what she has to produce in advance before she even starts planting.

“There’s no standing in the market and wondering, and waste is really cut down,” she added.

Wild Rose Farm, owned by Eric Mayo and Susan Kerndt, started small, contracting with four or five shareholders about 10 years ago, and have 50-55 customers this season.

“We started it because of our children,” Susan Kerndt said, “to teach them how to farm sustainably and how to market food, and they have taken off with it.”

The oldest of the couple’s four children, son, Cody, 18, grows and markets baby salad mix and put himself through flight training from the profits earned over two summers.

“After years of growing their own gardens and farms, they start seeing the dollar signs,” Kerndt said. “They all work for us for pay and sell at the farmers market.”

By all accounts, CSA shareholders get the best of the harvest.

“If it is a choice of 100 pounds peas going to shareholders or to market, the shareholders win,” Emers said.

“They give me money, and I give them the best.”

Emers said he gets a bit nervous for his shareholders if the growing season isn't going well.

“It's a contract, and I really want them to get their money's worth,” he said.

Calypso Farm and Ecology Center also offers a wide range of produce throughout the growing season and a number of community agriculture programs including the Schoolyard Garden Initiative. The program started as a pilot program in 2003 and now involves five local schools with active gardens and three more in the planning stage.

“We've been getting national and state inquiries about the program,” said Susan Willsrud, who runs Calypso with her husband, Ron Zimmer, and Christie Shell.

Both Calypso and Rosie Creek farms offer internships and learning programs.

New to CSA farming, but no less passionate about providing fresh, homegrown produce to community members are Bill and Cheryl Wood of DogWood Garden.

This is their third year working their small family run farm and providing subscribers fresh produce for 15-18 weeks.

“We love growing food and providing food for other families,” Cheryl Wood said.

Also taking on new shareholders are Theo DeLaca and Allison Wylde of Feedback Farm who are planning their second CSA season.

The upside of CSA, DeLaca said, is that it provides a little money early in the season for supplies from seeds to greenhouse covers.

“It's a nice way to sell it (produce). We're not having to compete at the market.”

And like all the CSA farmers, they grow a little bit of everything from greenhouse crops like tomatoes, cucumbers and peppers, to field and root crops.

“We don’t do the asparagus and garlic yet. We’re working on that,” he said.

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