

History of CSA

Community Supported Agriculture consists of a community of individuals who pledge support to a farm operation so that the farmland becomes, either legally or spiritually, the community's farm, with the growers and consumers providing mutual support and sharing the risks and benefits of food production.

~United States Department of Agriculture

Today, Community Supported Agriculture is somewhat of a household term in the Upper Midwest and in many other communities throughout the United States. However, this innovative partnership between consumers and producers is a relatively recent development. The growth of the movement and its wide adoption are astounding and inspiring.

The concept of CSA harkens back to a time when people knew where their food came from, ate in harmony with their local seasons, and enjoyed a balanced, nutritious diet of basic, natural foods.

Community Supported Agriculture as we know it began in the early 1960's in Germany, Switzerland, and Japan as a response to concerns about food safety and the urbanization of agricultural land (sound familiar!?). Groups of consumers and farmers in Europe formed cooperative partnerships to support farms and farming by paying the full costs of ecologically sound, socially equitable agriculture.

In 1965, mothers in Japan concerned about the rise of imported food and the loss of arable land started the first CSA projects, called "Teikei." The Teikei movement in Japan is alive and well, along with its sister movement of cooperative networks. The largest cooperative network in Japan is called the Seikatsu Club and is made up of 600 producer-consumer groups that supply food to more than 22 million people.

While Seikatsu is distinct from CSA and Teikei, all three speak of "seeing the farmer's face on their vegetables" and shortening the supply chain to support local farmers, prioritizing environmental stewardship, and maintaining control of their local food system.

CSA began in the United States on two East Coast farms in 1986. Since that time, CSA farms have been organized throughout the country with over 12,500 community supported farms serving farm-fresh food in every state.

The Midwest, and the Madison area in particular, have proven to be fertile ground for CSA farms and communities. In Wisconsin, the first CSA projects began near Milwaukee and the Twin Cities in 1988. In 1996, more than 65 Wisconsin CSA farms grew food for an estimated 3,000 households. The first Madison area farms began in 1992 and by 1996 more than 4,000 area residents were CSA participants. Presently, more than 25,000 area residents eat fresh food from their FairShare farm every week during the growing season.