

EVERDALE CSA

By Gavin Dandy

Everdale Farm's CSA is celebrating its tenth anniversary this year. Since we started, we've benefitted from having a solid support from our shareholders.

A big part of farming is the strong connection we feel with the people who eat the food we grow. Another big part of farming for us is being creative in the way we grow and sell our food. We feel strongly that every farmer should feel free to “break the mould” in whatever way he or she sees fit.

Over the past ten years, at our farm near Kitchener, Ontario, we've “tweaked” the traditional CSA model so that it serves our customers and us better. I'm not suggesting that the system described below is the best way to do a CSA. But it does work for us and if some of the ideas seem appealing to you then I recommend that you try them for yourself and see if they work on your farm too.

In a time when farming news is usually bad news, we're proud to say that Everdale Farm *works*—ecologically, socially and economically. We haven't really advertised much but every year our membership has increased. Most of that growth has been thanks to word of mouth by current shareholders.

Since the beginning, we've adopted a policy of slow and steady growth. We have always valued quality and direct customer relations above high volume and wholesaling. In 2008, we are expanding our capacity by ten percent once again so that now we have room for 200 shareholder households. Everdale Farm's 2008 CSA service is being offered from June to November.

Everdale's harvest shareholders choose from a wide selection of locally grown organic food. Everdale Farm grows a wide variety of fresh certified organic vegetable crops for our shareholders. We also want to provide our shareholders with the best of what other local organic farms have to offer. With this in mind, we have arranged things so that about 65% of the CSA produce is grown at Everdale Farm and the other 35% comes from other local organic farms.



For us, this shared crop (multi-farm) CSA model is preferable to the traditional CSA model (in which a single farm strives to grow all 40+ vegetable crops) for several reasons:

- It allows us to focus on the crops that we grow best while letting other local farms grow the ones they do best. Of course, there are many reasons (e.g. soil type, equipment, farmer personality, farmer knowledge) why some crops grow better on certain farms;
- Specializing our crop mix a little (but not so much that it compromises our biodiversity and our ability to have a solid crop rotation) makes it easier for us to make more intelligent choices regarding issues,

such as the best use of land, the best investment in specialized equipment, and ultimately the best ecological practices. For us, the 40+ crop demands of the traditional CSA model were just too much. Growing 20+ crops allows us to be much more efficient and focused;

- Sharing with other farms is a great way to build local farm power and to encourage new farms to come on board with local markets and organic farming;
- For our shareholders, this multi-farm system means better variety and a closer connection with a community of farms. That makes our CSA a gateway to the entire local organic food system and our shareholders are directly supporting the growth of a multitude of local organic farms.

Also, we offer our shareholders a lot of choice. For example, we have four different share sizes starting at a small (about \$12 per week) and going all the way up to an extra large (about \$48 per week).

Our shareholders have told us that choosing their own produce

is important to them so we have come up with a system whereby our shareholders have complete freedom to pick and choose their vegetables every week. We tell them: your mother may have told you to eat all your veggies but we know that most people have at

“Know your food, know your farmer ~ Thank-you for choosing us to be your farmers!”
—Everdale CSA newsletter

least a few vegetables that they don't like. (Confession: I don't care for Brussels sprouts.) Each week our shareholders get to pick and choose from a selection of about 20–25 different crops of freshly harvested organic produce.

This free choice system makes a bit more work for us but it's worth it. Shareholders take an amount of produce in keeping with their membership size. It all works on a points system. A small share has 6 points to spend each week, medium share 12 points, large share 18 points and extra-large 24 points. Each crop is assigned a point value (for example, a bunch

of carrots might be worth a point, same for a head of lettuce, a large melon might be worth two points, etc). It's simple: every week our shareholders come to the farm or to the urban pick-up location and “spend” their points however they want. No restrictions. If a shareholder with an extra-large membership wants to take home 24 bunches of carrots that week, they can!

Of course, no one does anything that extreme. In fact, what we've discovered is that people's veggie habits are quite predictable. For example, we know that in July about 75% of people will take carrots, but in August (when the selection is greater) only about 55% of people take carrots. Knowing this, we can avoid having too many or too few carrots on hand each week. It's not a perfect science but the variations are absorbed by our farmers markets and our large intern/staff group (they eat a lot of food!).

This system also allows us to ensure that we're making money from the CSA and our shareholders are getting good value. We keep track of the wholesale and retail value of each crop (a local

The payment chart that goes out with our registration information each spring. This helps people calculate how much they owe for the season.

No. of weeks you will be picking up	Harvest shares:			
	Small	Medium	Large	X-Large
14 weeks	\$161.70	\$323.40	\$485.10	\$646.80
15 weeks	\$173.25	\$346.50	\$519.75	\$693.00
16 weeks	\$184.80	\$369.60	\$554.40	\$739.20
17 weeks	\$196.35	\$392.70	\$589.05	\$785.40
18 weeks	\$207.90	\$415.80	\$623.70	\$831.60
19 weeks	\$219.45	\$438.90	\$658.35	\$877.80
20 weeks	\$231.00	\$462.00	\$693.00	\$924.00
21 weeks	\$242.55	\$485.10	\$727.65	\$970.20
22 weeks	\$254.10	\$508.20	\$762.30	\$1016.40

EVERDALE SEASONAL CROP LIST

Crop	June	July	August
apples			
asparagus			
beans			
beets			
blueberries			
broccoli			
Brussels sprouts			
cabbage			
carrots			
cauliflower			
celery			
chard			
cucumbers, field			
cucumbers, English			
eggplant			
fennel			
flowers, bunched			
garlic			
garlic shoots			
greens			
grapes			
ground cherries			
herbs			
kale			
kohlrabi			
leeks			
lettuce			
melons			
mushrooms			
onions, cooking			
onions, Spanish			
onions, green			

tomatillos, Mexican

Rigatoni with Swiss chard

Coarse salt and freshly ground pepper

1 pound rigatoni

2 Tbsp. unsalted butter

3 Tbsp. extra-virgin olive oil

2 garlic cloves, thinly sliced

2 medium shallots, finely chopped

1½ lbs. Swiss chard, leaves cut into ½-inch strips and stems cut into ½-inch pieces

2 Tbsp. lemon zest, finely grated

½ c. dry white wine or stock

½ tsp. red pepper flakes

⅓ c. fresh ricotta cheese

⅓ c. pine nuts, toasted

Freshly grated Parmesan cheese for sprinkling

Bring a large pot of water to a boil. Add 2 Tbsp. salt and the pasta. Cook 3 minutes less than the package indicates. Drain. Heat butter and oil in a large Dutch oven over medium heat for 1 minute. Add garlic and shallots; cook, stirring, until fragrant, about 2 minutes. Stir in chard, lemon zest, wine or stock, 1 tsp. salt, and the red pepper flakes; season with pepper.

Cook, covered, stirring occasionally, until chard has just wilted (2 to 3 min.).

Stir in pasta, ricotta and pine nuts. Cook, stirring occasionally, until pasta is *al dente* (3 to 4 min.).

Divide among 4 serving dishes. Serve sprinkled with Parmesan.

supplier sends us their weekly produce list), so that we know the exact value of the produce that our shareholders receive.

We also offer a bunch of other services to our shareholders:

Selecting weeks

The amount shareholders pay for their membership depends on the size of share and how many weeks they'll be picking up. If they are planning to be on holiday for a few weeks, they tell us when they'll be away and we keep track of that.

Flexible pick-up days

Shareholders have a choice of picking up on either of our two pick-up days each week. Shareholders pick up their produce

once a week during designated times when all of the week's harvest is laid out in our farm store. The designated pick-up times are Thursday (3–8pm) or Saturday (10am–4pm). Shareholders don't need to tell us which day they'll be coming and they can change their pick-up day from one week to the next. Also, shareholders can send someone in their place to pick up. If a shareholder chooses not to use any of the options listed above and the share is not picked up, we'll donate that person's unclaimed produce to the local food bank.

Cut flowers and herbs

Shareholders choose from a selection of free choice culinary

herbs each week (in other words, they can take what they need of these items and it doesn't count against their weekly share amount). Plus, shareholders have a free pass to harvest their own bouquets of fresh flowers from our beautiful flower gardens. Or, if they don't have time to pick their own, we have bunched flowers for sale in our store.

Option for more

On those occasions when shareholders need a bit more produce than their share size provides, they can buy extra produce. Our store also carries organic meat, eggs and other food products.

Cooking tips

This year we are starting a new farmer-chef internship. Our 2008 farmer-chef intern is a graduate of the Stratford Chefs School and he will be honing both his culinary and farming skills this season. Among other things, he'll be giving cooking demonstrations to our shareholders throughout the season.

Our seasonal crop list

The chart on the previous page shows the crops that we are planning to have for our shareholders and the months in which they are usually available. We tell our shareholders to keep in mind that every growing season is unique; there are always some crops that exceed expectations and others that don't do as well. That's the beauty of eating in season! We guarantee that every week they can choose from the best selection of top quality locally grown organic crops.

Swiss chard with toasted breadcrumbs

2½ Tbsp. butter
½ c. fresh breadcrumbs
Coarse salt and ground pepper
2 lbs. Swiss chard

In a large frying pan, melt ½ Tbsp. butter over medium heat. Add breadcrumbs and a pinch each of salt and ground pepper. Cook, tossing, until golden brown. Set aside.

Slice Swiss chard crosswise ¾-inch thick, keeping stems separate from greens.

In the same pan, melt the rest of butter over medium-high heat. Cook stems until tender. Add greens; cover and cook over medium-low heat until wilted. Uncover; cook, stirring, over medium-high heat until pan is dry.

Perfect roasted garlic

Garlic loses its trademark pungency and becomes sweet and nutty once roasted. Roast a few bulbs at a time because you'll find yourself adding it to every recipe!

A few bulbs of garlic
Olive oil
Aluminum foil

Slice off the top of the garlic bulb, exposing the tops of the cloves. Place on a large square of foil. Drizzle with olive oil. Fold up the edges of the foil to create a package. Roast garlic in an oven, or toaster oven, at 350°F for approximately half an hour.

Once cool to the touch, squeeze the garlic out of the bulb. Use as an appetizer on baguette, on pasta, in mashed potatoes or any other favourite garlic-friendly recipe.

Our long-term vision

Our goal at Everdale is to work with other local organic farms to create a large CSA farmer cooperative with several other farms. We believe that a co-op like this could supply a very large CSA membership in an urban area. For example, we might serve several thousand members in a single downtown Toronto neighbourhood. In our experience, the demand is there. People are clamouring for access to a CSA farm. We get phone calls and email every week from urban folks who want us to set up a CSA in their neighbourhood. Our answer is always the same:

Recipes are excerpts from the Everdale CSA newsletter, Gifts from the Field.

Creamy zucchini and garlic

This recipe is from <http://garlicrecipes.org>, which has many other recipes to inspire you to experiment with garlic. This recipe also features zucchini, which is at its peak just after the garlic harvest.

6 medium zucchini, grated
6 cloves of garlic, minced
2½ Tbsp. butter
2½ Tbsp. sour cream
1 tsp. fresh thyme leaves, chopped
Salt and pepper to taste

Melt the butter in a skillet. Add minced garlic and sauté on low heat for a minute. Add grated zucchini and thyme. Cook, stirring frequently until zucchini is tender.

Remove from the heat and stir in sour cream. Season with salt and pepper and serve.

Sorry, we'd love to but we are already over-subscribed.

But we also tell these people not to lose hope. We believe that the day is coming when CSAs will be in every neighbourhood across Canada. The CSA model is tried and true. Whether the CSA is structured in the more traditional way (one farm growing 40+ crops for its members and pre-boxing the produce each week) or in a modified way like ours, the basic premise is the same: people connected with farms and food.

Gavin Dandy is a COG board member and the Farmer and Farm Education Manager at Everdale Environmental Learning Centre (www.everdale.org). Everdale has a working organic farm as well as an array of eco-education programs. Everdale's Future Farmers internship program and their newly launched Farmers Growing Farmers programs are helping to train new organic farmers.

Photos provided by Everdale Environmental Learning Centre.