

USA Weekend  
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**With more than 2,000 CSA farms in operation nationwide, you can search online to find one that delivers produce to a location near you, usually within 24 hours of it being picked.**

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## **Eat fresh. And help locals, too.**

**Everyone wins when you "join" a community farm.**

*By Janet Reese*

**You can enjoy** farm-fresh peas in spring, plucked-from-the-vine tomatoes in summer and ripe butternut squash in autumn -- and have them all delivered directly to your neighborhood. How? By getting a produce subscription to a Community Supported Agriculture farm, or CSA.

Here's how it works: Usually, members pay an upfront fee, anywhere from \$300 to \$600 each season, which helps the farmer cover seeds, equipment and labor expenses. Come harvest time, most CSAs deliver shares of vegetables to local centers, like church parking lots. A few even offer door-to-door service.

Lisa Pierpont of Centennial, Colo., has subscribed to Monroe Organic Farms, a CSA north of Denver, for the past year, and she is hooked. "CSA is about more than the food," she says. "It's a family experience, from cleaning the produce to eating it. My kids learn about a variety of seasonal fruits and vegetables. And they try everything."

More and more folks are echoing Pierpont's sentiments, and subscription farms are on the rise, says Guillermo Payet, the president of LocalHarvest, an organization that maintains a Web directory of family farms, including CSAs. Payet estimates that there are now more than 2,000 such farms across the country.

Here's what you need to know before subscribing to a CSA farm:

**Do your homework.** Your best bet? Visit the farm. Find out what types of produce it offers, how items are packaged (or do you bag your own?), where the distribution centers are located and who else the farm supplies (sometimes local restaurants will be given the cream of the crop).

**Size up the portions,** which can vary from abundant to skimpy. Ask for the names of some longtime members, then quiz them on how much produce they typically receive.

**Arrive early on pickup day.** You'll likely get the best of the bunch if your CSA lets you pack your own bags.

**Be adventurous.** Like a lot of other CSAs, the Golden Earthworm in Jamesport, N.Y., offers exotic vegetables in its mix, including mizuna, which is a delicate Japanese lettuce, and garlic scapes, which are tall, curly green stalks with a mild garlic flavor. The farm even provides subscribers with weekly recipes for cooking inspiration.

Find a CSA farm at [localharvest.org](http://localharvest.org) or [wilson.edu/csasearch](http://wilson.edu/csasearch).

*Additional reporting by Walecia Konrad*