

THE HEALTHY BASKET

The Lebanese Community Supported Agriculture Newsletter

What is Community Supported Agriculture?

Community Supported Agriculture (CSA) is a relationship of mutual commitment and support between a farm, generally organic, and a community of supporters who purchase a share of the farm's harvest at the beginning of the season. Such a commitment is of mutual benefit for the farmer as well as for the consumer.

Community Supported Agriculture took shape first in Europe in the 1980s and then the concept expanded to North America. Today, more than 1,000 CSA projects exist in the world.

CSA was launched in Lebanon this year (2002) through an initiative from the Faculty of Agricultural and Food Sciences at the American University of Beirut.

The Healthy Basket project is a CSA project aiming at supporting the Lebanese organic farmers to develop sustainable incomes while protecting the environment and people's health.



"CSA is a universal concept deserving increased recognition and application. Equally empowering to both the community and the farmers, CSA offers solutions to common problems facing farmers and communities worldwide." (Robyn Van En, 1992).

What are the benefits of CSA?

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1. CSA's direct marketing gives farmers and growers the fairest return on their products.
2. CSA keeps food money in the local community and contributes to the maintenance and establishment of regional food production.
3. CSA encourages communication and cooperation among farmers.
4. With a "guaranteed market" for their produce, farmers can invest their time in doing the best job they can rather than looking for buyers.
5. CSA promotes a locally based, sustainable agricultural system that preserves the environment.
6. CSA develops ties between local farmers and consumers and creates opportunity for dialogue between them
7. CSA creates a sense of social responsibility and stewardship of local land and encourages the consumers to share the risks of crop production with the farmers.
8. CSA increases understanding of how, where, and by whom our food is grown.
9. CSA provides high-quality organic produce to consumers.



Where was the food grown?



The organic farm of Yamouneh

The fruits and vegetables that you receiving in your basket this season are mostly harvested from organic farms in our fertile Bekaa Valley. The farms are located in Qaraaoun, in western Bekaa, and Yamouneh in central-north Bekaa.

These farms are under “organic” management by the American University of Beirut.

A tentative production calendar was prepared in order to give our sharers an idea about what might be included in their basket during the season. However, it is of great importance to mention that the production is sometimes beyond the con-

trol of the farmer. Weather conditions and many other factors such as diseases play an important role in production. These are some risks that the farmers fear in addition to the marketing of their produce.

One of the advantages of CSA is to encourage consumers to share the risks of crop production with the farmer and encourage him to pursue his efforts in producing the best quality produce he can.

In our Healthy Basket project, we will strive to provide our sharers with the best quality produce and the biggest variety possible every week.

Why did our farmers go Organic?

Farmers who practice conventional agriculture do so because they believe that applying fertilizers and pesticides will increase their yield and give them better returns. They do not take into account the indirect losses that these practices cause such as the disruption of the ecological balance, the soil disintegration, the contamination of underground water, etc... Moreover, there is the effect of pesticide residues on their health whether in the produce they eat or what they inhale while spraying.

In spite of all this, it is not easy to convince the farmers to shift into organic agriculture except after a lot of meetings and discussions to explain the benefits of organic farming on the economic, health, and environmental levels.

Our farmer in Yamouneh, Mr. Kamil Akoury, shifted into organic agriculture having the health concern as an incentive to quit conventional practices. On the other hand, one of the farmers in Qaraaoun,

was convinced in organic farming because of the higher returns that organically grown produce brings compared to the conventional produce.

“I was worried about my kids’ health when they moved from Yamouneh to live in Byblos and they had to eat food available in the market. I wanted to grow for them something healthy, and this is how I started to produce organically”- Kamil Akoury, an organic farmer from Yamouneh



Our chef suggests these recipes!

SQUASH

Squash vary widely in size, shape and color but can be roughly divided into 2 categories: summer and winter squash. Summer squash is generally picked immature and the flesh has high water content and requires little cooking.

Squash gratin à la Provençale

Ingredients to serve 4:

3 small squash
1 large white onion
1 clove garlic
125g butter
Freshly grated Parmesan, Emmental or Gruyere cheese
Olive oil
Salt (to taste)
Pepper (to taste)

You need an oven proof "lasagna" size dish

1. Peel the squash then remove the seeds and the surrounding fibers. Cut into small dice and blanch for 5-6 min in boiling salted water. Then refresh in cold water and drain well.
2. Chop the onion and sweat gently in butter for 5 minutes
3. Rub the inside of the gratin dish first with the cut garlic clove then with soft butter
4. Arrange a layer of squash pieces, then the onion, then the rest of the squash in the dish. Sprinkle generously with the cheese (a parmesan/emmental mix is best), and drizzle over olive oil...
5. Put in pre-heated oven (220° C/425° F), until nicely browned

PLUMS

Plums originated in Asia, and were first cultivated in Syria. There are many varieties, and are used in confectionaries as well as fresh.

APRICOTS

Originated from China, their flesh is sweet and fragrant and has little juice. They are used fresh or dried in desserts, fruit salads, jams, etc...To dry them at home, split in half and place on a tray with greaseproof paper, leave in the sun, or put in an oven at 50 °C until dark red, flatten with your fingers and keep in an air-tight jar.



CRUMBLE

Ingredients:

1 ovenproof "lasagna" size dish
250g butter (very cold, cut into small dice)
250g sugar (caster)
325g plain flour
125g ground almonds

Fruits to fill your dish. Careful! The fruits will collapse during cooking!

Approximately 200g caster sugar, depending on the acidity of the chosen fruit.

Grated orange zest and juice, some vanilla powder or ground cinnamon.

1. Half or quarter of your plums/apricots-stones out-and put in dish... Evenly cover with the sugar, orange (plus juice), cinnamon and vanilla.
2. Rub the butter into the flour in a cold bowl with your fingertips until it resembles fine breadcrumbs. You can do this quickly in a food processor. Make sure all your ingredients are cold. Stir in sugar and ground almonds.
3. Cover the fruit with a very generous layer of crumble mix, and place in an oven (180°C) until the top is slightly golden and you can see the cooked fruit syrup "bubbling" in the corners after about 45 min.



Serve with English style custard, mars Capone cheese or fresh cream.

By Rachel Brard



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For further information please contact:

Rania Touma, Project Coordinator
American University of Beirut
Faculty of Agricultural and Food Sciences
Beirut, Lebanon

Tel: 01-350 000 Ext: 4578 or 03-576986

Fax: 01-350 000 Ext: 4572

Email: rt05@aub.edu.lb

WE WILL BE SOON ON THE WEB

Events

"Participating in an environmental forum"

Our Community Supported Agriculture project participated in the "Go Green" environmental forum held at Schtroumpf.

Initiated and co-managed by Schtroumpf, the 'Go Green' project includes a series of activities that promote Corporate Social Responsibility practices and environmental protection. 'Go Green' was launched in April 2002 by Schtroumpf and the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP)/United Nations Volunteers (UNV) programme (UNDP/UNV), in partnership with Coca-Cola Middle East, FTML-Cellis and Tetra Pak East Med.

The aim of this forum was to increase public awareness in relation to environmental issues.

Organic Agriculture contributes directly to the protection of the environment since it avoids all conventional practices that deplete the soil, disrupt the ecological balance, pollute groundwater and affect human health.

In order to promote organic agriculture and its importance on the environmental and health level, Bio-Coop Loubnan and the Healthy Basket project participated in the forum. Organic farming practices were explained to visitors and enjoyed tasting the different organic products that were displayed.

Activities

"Farm visit"

One of the advantages of Community Supported Agriculture is that it allows the consumers to know more about how, where, and by whom their food was grown.

With our CSA project, you will have the chance to visit the farmer on his farm and observe how your food is grown.

We are arranging for a visit to the Yamouneh farm during this season. It will be toward the beginning of August. If you are interested in joining this trip please sign your name at the drop-off point on the next delivery day.

