

Fact Sheet on Abbott Farms CSA

What is a CSA?

A CSA (Community Supported Agriculture) is a modern, innovative way for people to buy fresh vegetables (and sometimes other items) directly from the farm where they are produced. The farmer sells shares of the produce to shareholders, who pay an agreed on fee and come each week and pick them up.

What makes a CSA different from buying vegetables at a farmer's market?

1. Reduced food waste! At a farmer's market, the farmer just has to guess how much produce to bring and what will sell, and any unsold perishable produce at the end of the day is often wasted. The USDA estimates that 19% of all vegetables offered for sale in the United States are wasted, and the main reason for this is our market-style distribution system. If all food that was picked had a guaranteed buyer who purchased only the amount of food that they were actually going to eat, this food waste could be practically eliminated. That is exactly what a CSA does.
2. Guaranteed income for the farmer! Selling produce at a farmer's market is always a gamble; sometimes the farmer will sit all day and hardly sell anything. It's very difficult to predict what the demand will be in any given season, which makes it hard for the farmer to plant the right amount of each type of produce.
3. Guaranteed produce for the customer! You don't have to worry about getting to the farmer's market too late and missing something popular that has already sold out; with a CSA, each shareholder gets an equal share of what was grown that week, whether they are the first one to pick up their basket or the last.
4. More variety and specialty crops! The farmer can experiment with novel varieties of crops that may or may not sell at the farmer's market; part of the adventure of a CSA is trying new things and new ways of preparing them.

I've never been part of a CSA before; how do I know if it would be a good fit for me?

You will likely enjoy our CSA if:

1. You cook the majority of the food you eat—and enjoy cooking!
2. You eat vegetables every day, including kale and other greens.
3. You are willing to experiment with lots of different kinds of vegetables and want to branch out beyond the American mainstays of potatoes, carrots, lettuce, and green beans.
4. You plan your week's menu *after* seeing what's in the basket for the week, not before.
5. You get excited about a full basket of lots of different kinds of fresh, local produce.

What makes the Abbott Farms CSA different from other CSAs in the Kalamazoo area?

1. Large share baskets—heaping peck for regular share
2. Extra produce available either U-pick or pre-picked during peak season
3. More variety—8-14 different vegetables per week, depending on what's ripe
4. Five or six different types of fresh-picked herbs each week
5. Fresh-picked flower bouquet with each share
6. Cookbook of recipes on how to use fresh vegetables
7. Weekly payment plan available—only a four-week deposit required at beginning of season

How do you grow your vegetables at Abbott Farms?

We grow our vegetables organically, although we are not USDA certified organic because we are a very small farm and the certification process is expensive. Our garden is fertilized with goat manure and compost from our own farm. We focus on keeping our soil healthy because plants grown in healthy soil are usually not seriously affected by insects or disease. We do not spray any type of chemical or natural treatment for insects or diseases. We weed our vegetables by hand and mulch some of them with organic material (old hay, pine needles, etc.). Once our plants are healthy and can out-compete the weeds, we allow some of the weeds to grow as trap crops for insects and to cover the bare soil and prevent soil erosion. We grow heirloom and open-pollinated varieties of most of our vegetables and save some of our seeds from tomatoes, beans, corn, and some kinds of squash. We do grow some hybrid vegetables if they have unique characteristics that we can't get in heirloom varieties—for example, it is nearly impossible to save cauliflower seeds in Michigan anyways, so we grow hybrid yellow and purple cauliflower because it is fun. We do not grow any genetically engineered vegetables.

What types of vegetables do you grow?

We can never guarantee exactly which vegetables we will have in the share, but in addition to the vegetables listed below, we will also try to grow green beans and possibly some shiitake and oyster mushrooms. The actual weeks in which certain vegetables are available will depend upon the weather and how well the plants grow. Here are some examples of what would typically be available during the season:

Season-long crops: Kale (several varieties), white and purple top turnips, Swiss chard, mustard greens, herbs

July: Radishes, lettuce, Chinese cabbage, garlic scapes, kohlrabi, summer squash (several varieties)

August: Summer squash, cucumbers, broccoli, radishes, many varieties of heirloom tomatoes (red, dark purple, and yellow), several types of cherry tomatoes (yellow, pink, red, and “chocolate cherries”), ground cherries, okra, leeks, kohlrabi, peppers (Anaheim, green bell, banana), eggplant (several varieties)

September: Tomatoes, cherry tomatoes, eggplant, okra, peppers (including banana, Anaheim, green bell, Jimmy Nardello, and poblano) several types of melons (including cantaloupes and watermelons), cauliflower, broccoli, carrots, winter squash, cabbage, carrots, rutabagas, tomatillos

October: Pumpkins, celery, cauliflower, carrots, rutabagas, turnips, cabbage, cherry tomatoes, peppers, tomatillos, winter squash (including butternut), beets

What types of vegetables do you *not* grow?

Since we are a small farm, there are some vegetables that we grow only for our own family and not for the CSA. Thus, our CSA does *not* include snap peas, sweet corn, rhubarb, or asparagus. We grow garlic, leeks, and onions for ourselves and do not always have extra, so we will likely put some in the CSA but probably not every week.

What types of herbs do you put in the CSA?

We have perennial herbs available all season, which include: lemon balm, mint, oregano and lavender. We also grow annual herbs which we start in the greenhouse to be ready as early as possible. These include: basil, dill, cilantro, fennel and parsley. Some years we experiment with different herbs. We often have several different varieties of basil.

How big is the Abbott Farms CSA share?

Our regular sized basket is a peck, which is half of a half bushel. We load our baskets to give you the most for your money.

How much does the CSA cost?

Our regular share basket is \$20 per week. The full 16-week season will be \$320. A four-week deposit is required by March 31st, which for a regular share is \$80.

How long does the CSA season run, and how does this compare to other CSAs?

Because we do not use season extension in the spring, we start our CSA a bit later than some others. Our first share baskets will be available the first week of July and will contain mostly greens and vegetables like bok choi, Chinese cabbage, kohlrabi, and radishes. By late July/early August we will also have summer squash, and by the end of August there will be lots of vegetables including tomatoes, peppers and beets. September is our peak month and will have almost every kind of vegetable we grow, and we usually have root vegetables, winter squash, and greens all the way through the end of October. We plan on a 16 week season and if we can go longer, we just have you pay by the week. If we can get the season started earlier, we will let you know.

How does the CSA pickup work?

We have opted to make up baskets in advance for our shareholders rather than doing a market-style CSA to reduce waste and ensure fair distribution and fresh vegetables. This also makes the pickup go faster for our shareholders if they are in a hurry. Each shareholder will get a full basket of produce and bring back the basket from the previous week, along with the weekly payment. The pickup time will be Thursdays from anytime after you get your notification the basket is ready until 6:00 p.m. If you want to join our CSA but this pickup time does not work for you, let us know and we may be able to work out an alternate time. We do not distribute baskets at farmers' markets or deliver.

Do you have any CSA add-ons?

Abbott Farms also sells farm-fresh eggs, goat milk and honey soap and lotion, lip balm, and lotion bars, all of which will be available for sale during the weekly pickup window. We also offer goat milk herd shares, which can be picked up at the same time as the CSA share if desired. If we have extra vegetables, we will also offer those to our CSA customers at a reduced rate, either pre-picked or U-pick depending on how much extra we have.

Will you make substitutions if there's something in the basket I don't like?

We really encourage you to try everything we offer; if there's a recurring vegetable that you absolutely hate, please let us know because we would rather give it to someone who wants it than just have you throw it away. We may or may not be able to substitute it with something else depending on availability.

Can I pay for part of my share by doing farm labor?

Yes! We are always looking for people to help with the goats and chickens when we go on vacation, and if you would like to help us weed the garden or pick veggies, please let us know that when you sign up for your share so that we can schedule you in. We do not require anyone to work on the farm and do reserve the right to decide whether or not to allow each individual shareholder to trade labor. You must be willing to be properly trained for any labor you do at our farm, and we are not responsible for any injuries that may be incurred while shareholders are working at the farm. We apply your labor to the CSA fee at a rate of \$20/hr. We are also open to the possibility of having one or two shareholders pay for their entire share with labor; this would be about 16 hours total for the regular share. If several people are interested in paying for their share completely with labor, we may interview the applicants to determine who would be most suited for the position. Financial need is not necessary to apply for a labor share.

If you have any other questions about our CSA, please send us an email at abbottsfarm@gmail.com or call us at 269-692-2328. We'll be happy to talk to you more about it!