



Every river has a watershed. Every city has a farmshed.

Factors to Consider When Choosing a CSA Farm and Buying Directly from Local Farms

The Central Wisconsin area is very fortunate to have several Community Supported Agriculture and diverse Direct Market Farms. The Central Wisconsin Farm Fresh Atlas is an excellent resource to learn about and contact local farmers. Given the many choices however, interested eaters may have difficulty choosing one of the CSA farms to join or direct markets to purchase from. All of the CSA farms follow the basic CSA model, grow a wide variety of crops, and produce these crops without the use of synthetic pesticides. Beyond these similarities, all farms have characteristics which are uniquely their own. It is important to consider which farm will best meet your needs and expectations. Browse through the following list and note the factors that are important to you. As you listen to the farmers at the CSA event or as you peruse the atlas consider which farm would provide the best fit.

Location: Farms serving the Central Wisconsin area are scattered throughout several counties. (See the map and Farm Fresh Atlas for specific locations.) Consider how often you want to be involved in on-farm activities and how far you would be willing to drive or car pool with friends. Remember that some farms have activities that take place in Stevens Point and other cities, yet some of the longest drives are the prettiest and most rewarding adventures.

Size: Some CSA and direct market farms have small operations offering fewer than 25 shares with different varieties of produce, while others are large and offer over 100. Within these size categories there are those farms that grow exclusively for their CSA members and other farms that do CSA along with selling at farmers markets, stores, restaurants, etc. You might consider how much interaction you would like to have with your farmer and their scale of production.

Price of Share and Produce: It is very difficult and not recommended to choose a CSA or direct market farm basing the decision solely on price. Comparing each farm's prices is not easy considering they have different season lengths, crops, sizes of shares, etc. We also hope that CSA members and direct farm shoppers will consider all the beneficial aspects of an experience such as community and education and not view it solely as an arrangement based upon X amount of produce for X amount of dollars.

Length of Season/Number of Deliveries: The length of the season and number of deliveries varies among CSA and direct market farms. Most begin harvesting in May or early June, and end anywhere from October to February. Those with longer seasons utilize season extending

devices such as hoopouses and also focus in the later months on storage crops such as root vegetables. If you are a home gardener or travel frequently during the growing season, you may want to consider purchasing a winter share of squash, cabbage, and vegetables for storage.

Pick-Up Site: Almost all of the farms have sites in Stevens Point where weekly deliveries of vegetables are dropped off or for sale. Many also have sites in outlying towns. These are usually located at the homes of fellow farm members or on the farms themselves. Some farms rely on members to pick up and deliver shares on a rotational basis or in exchange for a worker share. Consider how important it is to you to have a pick-up site that is located near your home, school, work, or if you would enjoy a regular farm visit and delivery to your routine.

Delivery and Market Day: The days and times that CSA farms make their deliveries or farmers sell at the market varies. Some CSA members prefer receiving their shares at the end of the week or the weekend so they can shop at the farmers market for any additional produce they want. Others prefer deliveries early in the week so as not to have weekend obligations. Consider which farm deliveries coincide with your cooking and weekly activity patterns.

Varieties of Produce and Other Foods: All of the Central Wisconsin farms offer a wide variety of fresh, seasonal produce. Many have specialty items, which are included in the share or can be purchased additionally including: flowers, honey, meat, apples, cheese, grains, wool/yarn, eggs and others. Some farms have various arrangements for receiving larger quantities of produce including free U-Picks, preservers' shares and juicing shares. If you home garden, you might consider seeking out harder to grow, heirloom and wild edibles from specialty farms.

Production Practices: All the Central Wisconsin Farm Fresh Atlas farms are committed to sustainable growing practices. Some farms are Certified Organic, some use organic practices and are certifiable but have for various reasons chosen to not register with the Organic Certifying Agency, and some use biodynamic practices in addition to organic practices. There is also a great deal of variety in how mechanized each farm is. It is best to get to know your farmer personally to understand their beliefs, practices, and let them know what is important to you.

Opportunities for On-Farm Involvement: All CSA and direct market farms encourage some kinds of involvement from their members. Most farms organize one or more farm events each season and some farms encourage their members to "drop in." The farms put different amounts of emphasis on volunteer workdays, community/celebration events, educational opportunities, involvement with planning and administration of the farm and other projects.

Opportunities for Communication and Education: One of the basic ideas of CSA is to connect urban consumers with farms and farmers: offering a variety of ways to keep in touch through on-farm activities, newsletter articles, and pick-up sites. Many farms also offer opportunities for education: from farm tours, canning workshops, herbal workshops, newsletters, children's' workshops, social gatherings, and education through work opportunities.

Each farm has its own unique characteristics and emphasis. Enjoy the diversity!

For additional resources and program information visit www.farmshed.org and go local.