



## 2017 CSA Produce Share

You are receiving this invitation because you have been a previous customer of our farm. We truly cannot express how much we appreciate your patronization and faith in our food products. We are thrilled to partner with customers like yourself, who are passionate about improving health, supporting local small business, and being stewards of our earth. For the 2016 growing season, we offered a pilot program to a handful of long-time customers, allowing us to enter the world of Community Supported Agriculture (CSA). The program was so successful, we are going to expand it this year and you are invited to join us! If you participated last year, please read the following, as there will be some changes this year.

In case you are not familiar with the concept, a CSA is a way to help finance a farm by partnering with customers. Customers pay for their "share" of the annual harvest upfront, then receive their products from the harvest throughout the rest of the season. The farmer benefits by receiving cash up front to help purchase seeds and supplies, which will produce food for the season. He also has a guaranteed customer base for the entire growing season. The customer benefits by receiving priority on the best produce, on a regular basis, throughout the season, for a lower price statistically than purchasing randomly from the grocery store. In addition, the customer knows the farmer, invests locally, and receives a variety of items that they might not otherwise have tried. We were introduced to CSA's years ago, before we began farming. We purchased almost all of our produce through a CSA. Every week, it was so exciting to go open our box and see what was inside. I learned to cook vegetables I never would have purchased in a store, and some I had never even seen or heard of! It was so much fun, and since we were used to paying organic costs at the grocery store, the CSA saved us several hundred dollars over the course of a few years!

Our farm has been offering a modified form of a CSA since the beginning. We have always required deposits on our meat products, and those deposits have been used to help the upfront costs of the early growing season, when sale dollars are few and far between. In this case, we are simply expanding what we offer by formalizing our produce sales and a few new offerings. You will find several types of shares offered in your order form, but this letter is focused on the garden produce shares.

A CSA does have some risks and downsides. Part of the idea is the farmer and customer share the risk. Weather, drought, animals, bugs, and disease can potentially wreak havoc on a crop, which may reduce the quantity, quality, and variety of produce you receive in any given week. It is possible you will receive a type of produce you don't care for or more of an item than you might normally use. Due to laws regarding processing, we are usually not allowed to clean your produce in any way, so you will have to deal with dirt and soil on your freshly-picked food. Because our food is grown completely naturally and free of pesticides, you may find the occasional bug or worm in your food, and the produce may have naturally-occurring blemishes.

On the other hand, it can offer several advantages! Where else could you purchase fresh, naturally-ripened fruits and vegetables, picked off the plant within 24 hours of you receiving it?! Since you may already purchase meat or eggs at our farm on a regular basis, this offers you more of a one-stop-shopping experience! Additionally, if it happens to be a bountiful harvest, you may find your bucket overflowing with fresh food that you can either preserve or share....and it doesn't cost you any extra!

Because a CSA is a big undertaking for a farm like ours, and we are trying to minimize our challenges by expanding slowly. We will do our very best to make it work, and CSA participants must do the

same. CSA customers must be dependable in their weekly pick-ups to prevent food going to waste. In addition, a big change this year is the addition of “working shares,” which means customers who agree to the terms must be dependable in regular participation in order to ensure the CSA is a success for everyone involved.

### ***How does it work?***

First, you must decide what size share you prefer. We currently offer 2 sizes: Small and Medium. Next, you must decide if you want to purchase a “Full Share” at full price, or a “Working Share” at a discounted rate. Full shares are limited. Finally, you pay for your share, either all at once, or in monthly installments until paid. Each week, from about May to September/October, or about 22 weeks, you will receive a bucket of fresh produce. Our goal is to offer between 4 and 10 different varieties of fruits, vegetables, seeds, nuts, herbs, and/or edible mushrooms each week. You will have a pre-determined day to pick up your bucket, to ensure your produce is at its best. Because you have already purchased the items through your pre-season share payment, if you are unable to pick up your produce on a given week, it is up to you how it is used. It can be donated to someone else, we can donate it to another family, or you can have someone else pick it up and store it for you. Most items will keep for a few days at minimum, if stored properly. What we cannot do is refund if you are unable to pick up, nor can we double up in the future. To keep things simple, we are going to allow you to take your bucket, with all its contents, home. Many weeks, you will also find your bucket contains produce bags and/or berry baskets to keep items from being damaged. To keep costs down, we ask that you return the bucket, bags, and baskets every week, so we can re-use them.

### ***What is the difference between a Full Share and a Working Share?***

A Full Share is intended for folks who want show up each week, on your assigned day, pick up your bucket of produce, take it home, and enjoy the benefits of others’ labor. All the work is done for you. A Working Share is intended for folks who want to enjoy the bucket of fresh produce, but either can’t afford the full price or perhaps just enjoy working outdoors in a garden setting. The difficulty we face here at Red Gate Farm, LLC is that we are still too small to hire employees. Therefore, we often offer farm products in exchange for services. The only way our CSA program can continue is if we have some help running the gardens. When you sign up for a Working Share, you are agreeing to come out to the farm for a specified number of hours, spread throughout the season, to help us with whatever garden projects are needed. Tasks will include weeding (LOTS of weeding!), harvesting, pruning, mulching, raking, hauling compost, planting seeds, watering plants, and more! Don’t worry if you feel uncomfortable doing certain things, as there will always be a selection of tasks to choose from! Also, you get to choose when you volunteer on the farm. Although we need hours spread out over the entire season (we can’t have everyone work in June and September, and no one in July or August, or it won’t work!), you can choose whether to work your monthly hours in the same day or spread out over the course of several weeks. We will also offer “Garden Party” times, to allow multiple volunteers to work at the same time, which always makes work more fun!

### ***Can I bring my children during my work share hours?***

Please be aware that, although we love children (we have 5 after all!), we must ask that working share members not bring their children during your scheduled work hours. If you desire to teach your children about growing and harvesting food, we would be happy to accommodate that during other hours that are separate from and in addition to your work share. This will allow you to focus your efforts on the garden during your work share hours, and on your children during the non-share hours.

### ***What kind of produce might I find in my bucket?***

Variety varies each week. We grow about 60-80 varieties of produce each year, though weather and annual environmental changes will help determine how many actually produce to harvest. In recent years, we have typically harvested an average of 40 types of fruits, vegetables, mushrooms, and more. The early season will see more cool season vegetables such as lettuces, radish, rhubarb, strawberries, or horseradish. Mid summer buckets will vary week to week, but you may find blackberries, black raspberries, peaches, pears, apples, plums, apricots, cherries, herbs, beets, chard, kale, lettuce, onions, potatoes, green beans, kohlrabi, melons, summer squashes, radish, turnips, and more. Later

season items may include winter squashes, bell peppers, tomatoes, okra, sweet potatoes, sunflower seeds, nuts, and others. With so many varieties to choose from, you should always find a bucket of some of these varieties ready for your dinner table! *The key is be flexible and learn to prepare food that is in season.* I always found it fun and even challenging to learn how to use and live on whatever showed up each week. We try hard to supply you reasonable amounts of produce, but in the early and late season, you may find your bucket is on the slim side, while at other times, it may be overflowing with bounty. Furthermore, in order to prevent waste, sometimes we may share our abundance of certain items with you. If you find a bucket overflowing with extra zucchini or okra among other things, for example, just realize you are reaping the benefits of an unpredictably abundant harvest of those items. Just learn to preserve them or share them with a friend!

***What if I don't want an item in my bucket?***

We understand that not everyone has the same taste preferences. Because I can't control the weather or pest conditions, I cannot make any promises as to how many and what varieties of produce we will have in excess. However, we will always do our best to provide a give-and-take bucket, where you can swap items you don't want for more of items you do. If there is nothing to swap for, and you have an abundance, you can always feel free to leave items in the bucket, and we will either use it, donate it, or, if nothing else, recycle it as livestock food or compost.

***What if I don't know what an item is, or how to prepare it?***

Every week, we will send out an e-mail with information regarding that week's harvest. It will include names, details, preparation tips, and we will even try to include some of our favorite recipes whenever possible.

***What if something unforeseen happens and there is little to harvest one week?***

Because this is still a new program for our farm, we totally understand how risky this may feel for you. Our promise to you is that we will do our best to ensure you receive a fair share each week. At our discretion, we may occasionally substitute eggs, chicken, fresh baked bread, or even a gift certificate to make up the difference. Our goal is to ensure you will always feel that you receive your money's worth.

***How much does it cost?***

We are offering 2 options this year:

A "*Small*" share receives a 2 gallon bucket, intended for 1-2 people. Cost is \$396, or about \$18 per week, for a Full Share. Cost for a Working Share is \$296, and requires a minimum of 15 hours of volunteer time (or roughly 3 hours per month).

A "*Medium*" share receives a 3.5 gallon bucket, intended for 3-4 people. Cost is \$660, or about \$30 per week. Cost for a Working Share is \$530, and requires a minimum of 20 hours of volunteer time (or roughly 4 hours per month).

After you decide which size and option you would like, you can pay the entire cost at once, or you can pay in monthly installments of your choice. We require a minimum first payment of \$100 to reserve your share. Either way, the entire cost must be paid prior to May 1. Remember, we are offering only a limited number of Full Shares, so if you would like to participate in our 2017 produce share, don't delay ordering!

I thank you sincerely for your time and consideration of this next phase for our farm. Please don't hesitate to contact me with any questions.