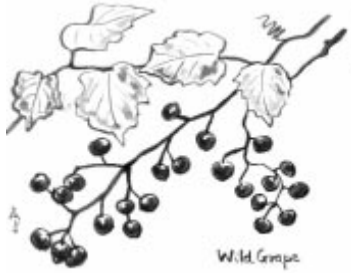


Frequently Asked Questions about Henry's CSA



1. How do I contact you?

Once the growing season begins in earnest, my life is a whirlwind of activity with little space for returning phone calls. I do try to check my email once a week, so please contact me at henhiroko2@netscape.net. If you need an immediate response, call my cell phone (309/231-8353).

2. Why do I have to pay for the whole season up front? Why can't I just pay week by week throughout the season?

The reason that I have members pay up front is that I need to know in the spring how many people I will be feeding in the summer and fall months. When I plant the first broccoli and pepper seeds in the greenhouse in early March, I need to know how many broccoli and pepper plants I need to grow this year and the only way I can know that is to know how many members I have. The other reason I like payment up front and in full is that it shows that you have made a hard and fast commitment to me and the CSA. My commitment to you begins when the first seeds go in the ground in early spring. If members could pay as they go, some members would drop out as the season progressed just due to the law of entropy. Members would drop out in late August, for example, as life becomes hectic when the kids go back to school. Unfortunately, I would have already invested months of time and work and money to grow that member's food for September and October. Finally, if I had to spend time keeping track of who paid what and when, I would never have time to actually raise the vegetables.

3. How much produce is in a share?

This is a difficult question to answer. Weight is not really a good measure because in the spring when you are getting lettuce, spinach and other light things a whole bag full of produce might not weigh more than a couple pounds whereas in the late summer when you are getting heavy things like melons, sweet corn and tomatoes you might lug home as much as 10 pounds of produce. Volume is not really a good measure either, but generally you'll be able to fit a weekly share easily into two plastic grocery bags and most weeks it will fit in one if you work at it.

The way I measure a weekly share is by value. When I decide what to give you each week, I make sure it comes to around \$14 worth of produce because that is what I am charging you for it. In reality, however, you almost always get more than \$14 worth, because I think that you should get a better deal through the CSA than you would at a farmers market. Most years, the CSA weekly share has averaged at over \$15 in value compared to my market prices. And if you were to buy the same amount of all the vegetables in your share at the local Jewel or Kroger (conventional, not organic), you'd be spending twice that amount – see FAQ #5 below.

The best way to measure a share is to say how many people it can feed. Unfortunately, this too is a very difficult question to answer because people's dietary and cooking habits are so varied. However, most CSA members find that a share is adequate to feed a family of four "omnivores" or a family of two vegetarians. That said, I have had a family of two consume a double share and I have had two families of four members each share a single share. It really comes down to two factors: how often (how many meals) you cook at home as opposed to eating out or eating prepared dishes and how many vegetables you include in your diet.

4. I don't think I can use a full share. Do you have half shares?

No, I only offer full shares. If you don't think you can use a whole share, I would encourage you to join up with a friend, family member or neighbor to share with. I have many members who do this. Some of them divide up each week's produce while others alternate who picks up every other week. Sharing is also a good idea if you think you might miss a lot of pick-up days because of travel, work or kids' activities, because your share partner can pick up for you when you cannot.

5. How does the price of your produce compare to produce prices in the grocery store?

Several times over the past two years, I have gone to the Jewel grocery store in Normal with a list of the produce that CSA members received from me that week and priced out how much it would have cost to buy the same items there. My \$14 full share has consistently priced out at a \$15 to \$32 value. And remember, that is how much it would cost you to buy the factory-farmed, chemically-grown equivalents of my organic produce. So, in other words, produce that was raised with chemicals, picked days if not weeks ago and shipped across the country—produce with little nutritional value and less flavor--costs more than organic produce bursting with flavor and nutrition that was raised locally with love and care and picked that morning. Go figure.

6. What happens to produce left over on the Exchange Table or left over from members who didn't come to pick up that week?

It depends on how much is left. If there is just a small amount left on the Exchange Table, I divide it up amongst my extended family and we eat it or put it up for the winter. If there is more left over than we can possibly use, I feed it to the chickens or put it on the compost pile. No organic matter ever goes to waste on this farm. Either somebody eats it or it is recycled back into the soil.

7. Why can't I choose which vegetables I get each week? How do you choose what to pick each week?

First of all, the amount of time and record-keeping it would take in order to allow the members to choose the vegetables in their share each week is mind-boggling. Each week I would have to make up a list of available produce. You would have to call in your order each week. If I didn't have enough of something to give it to everyone who ordered it, I would have to figure out some fair way to make substitutions. Furthermore, I'd have to run all over the field picking a little of this and a little of that and harvesting would take forever. Then I'd have to pack each member's share up separately. I'm starting to pull my hair out just thinking about it (in my dreams I still have hair).

The other part of the answer is that the ability to choose which vegetables to pick gives me great control over the quality of the produce you get and the health of my farm. Each week I look over my fields and chose which 8 or 9 vegetables are at their absolute best that week. If the green beans are

ready to pick this Tuesday, by next Tuesday they will so stringy and overmature that they won't be worth picking at all. The spinach that is sweet and succulent on June 1 will be bitter and tough on June 8.

The ability to select which vegetables to harvest each week also helps me manage all sorts of problems in the field. For example, say it's mid-June and the weather forecast is calling for a week of dry, 90-degree weather. What I'll do is harvest out the last of my lettuce, radish and other cool weather crops that week before the hot, dry weather cuts their eating quality in half. In the fall, you'll know when the first killing frost is in the forecast because you'll get lots of peppers, eggplants and other tender vegetables that I've rescued from the cold.

As an organic farmer, timely harvesting is one of my most important tools for controlling insects, weeds and disease. If the weeds in a carrot bed are starting to flower, for example, I'll clean out that bed as fast as possible so I can till down those weeds before they start dropping seeds onto the soil. The best method of controlling weeds is to keep weed seeds out of the soil to start with. If I start seeing swarms of cabbage butterflies fluttering around my cabbage patch, I'll start harvesting the cabbages even if they aren't full-size because I know that it won't be long before voracious green cabbage worms will be feasting on them.



In general, when I get to choose, I can run my farm much more efficiently, with much less waste and far fewer pest and weed problems. And you get to eat produce that is always at its absolute best--even if you aren't able to choose what you get.

And I am conscientious about putting together a nice eclectic selection each week. I make sure you'll get a mix of salad crops, root crops, cooking greens, herbs as well as the "fruit" vegetables like peppers, tomatoes, cukes and squash. And I can absolutely guarantee that no two weeks will ever be alike. I just looked back over last year's list and the greatest number of vegetables that I ever gave twice in a row was four (lettuce, spinach, green onions and radish), and that was early in the season when there isn't a lot to choose from yet.

8. What if there are vegetables that I just don't like or am allergic to?

Although I choose the 7 to 9 vegetables that make up your share, I try to give you some say in the matter by having the Exchange Table. The Exchange Table is the place where you can exchange the vegetables that you just can't eat for something that you can.

The way it works is that I prime the table with extras of some of the vegetables I brought that week or sometimes I bring in something completely different for the Exchange Table. First, go down the line picking up your share, taking one of everything available that week even if it includes something that you have absolutely no intention of taking home and eating. When you get to the end of the line, put anything that you don't want on the Exchange Table and take what you want instead from what is there.

Don't be shy about using the Exchange Table. Chances are that somebody else loves precisely what you loathe. This fact was driven home just this spring when one day a member requested that I grow

fewer beets this year. The very next day I ran into another member who said, "I sure hope you're raising more beets this year."

Also make sure you pick up every item in your share and don't skip over those things you don't want. No beet-lovers will be able to grab up your beets unless you have carried them down to the Exchange Table. If everybody uses the Exchange Table properly, no one should ever have to eat something that they don't like.

Often I will also give you choices right on the tables. For example, the sign on a box might read, "Take one cilantro *or* one dill bunch" or "Take two sweet peppers *or* two hot peppers" and I will have some of each for you to choose from. Sometimes, usually in late summer or early fall, I will bring in a whole range of vegetables to choose from. I'll put up a big sign that says, "Choose Any 7 Vegetables!" and it will be up to you to make up your own share for that week.

Of course, in all honestly, I have never met a vegetable that I didn't like. Show me a vegetable you don't like and I believe that between me, Hiroko, my sisters, my mother and mother-in-law, we can fix it a way that you will like. And you will find some of those recipes in each week's flyer. It is always a good idea to re-try those things that you "know" you don't like. You may not like broccoli because your first experience was with those pale-green, rubbery stalks of overcooked broccoli served in the school cafeteria. Try the real thing--you may be delighted to find out what you have been missing.

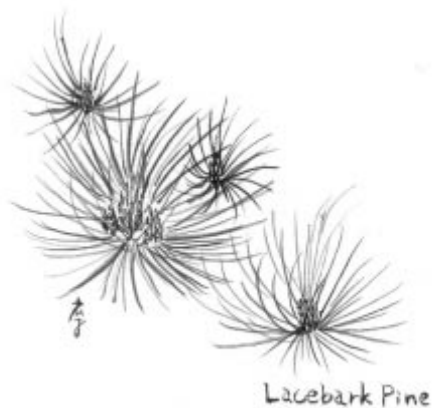
9. What if I get vegetables, like tomatillos or daikon radish, that I have no idea how to cook or eat?

Almost every new CSA members is introduced to some vegetables that are completely unfamiliar. To help out, my sister Terra publishes a e-flyer each week that lists what vegetables you'll get that week and gives simple-to-make and delicious-to-eat recipes for them, particularly vegetables that aren't traditional central Illinois fare. We try to get it out to you early enough to give you a little heads-up on what you'll find at the pick-up. My goal is to get the flyer out on Monday evening, but Tuesday morning is probably a more realistic prospect.

Furthermore, all new members receive the recipe booklet that Terra put together. It covers (almost) every vegetable I grow from arugula to zucchini and features all the favorites from past flyers. There is also lots of information about putting up extra produce for the winter.

10. If I notify you well beforehand, can I get a refund for those weeks that I will be out of town during the season?

I cannot refund members for missed weeks. The reason is that even if I know that I don't have to pick for you, I cannot tell the vegetables not to grow that week. The vegetables will be there that week whether you are in town or not and I cannot afford to not be paid for them. I cannot afford not to be recompensed for the hours and hours of labor and love that have already gone into growing them. The fact that everything I grow for the CSA is paid for up front and in full is one of the major reasons why I can provide fresh, organic vegetables to CSA members at or below what you would pay for chemically-raised produce in local stores. Nothing goes to waste and every minute of work in the field is paid for.



11. Can members visit the farm?

Every year we have a fall potluck/farm tour to which all CSA member families are invited. The fall potluck is tentatively planned for the first Saturday in October. Members are also invited to visit the farm at anytime throughout the season. The best days for visits are Monday through Wednesday; don't come out on Tuesday unless you plan to help us pick the produce for your share that week. Arrange with me by email or cell phone to come out. Kids of any age are welcome. I encourage you to come see where and how your food is grown.

12. What do you mean when you say you farm organically?

Well, first of all, I no longer “say” that I farm organically—not legally at least. Because I am not certified organic by the USDA, I cannot call what I do “organic farming,” under penalty of severe fines or jail time. (Yes, it's true.) So instead I have to use terms like “natural” or “sustainable” to describe what I do. The term “organic” is now wholly owned by the USDA, I'm afraid.

All little history: Starting in 2000, only farmers whose growing practices meet newly minted USDA standards for organic production can call their produce "organic." Previously, independent certification agencies certified farmers as organic, using a set of standards upon which the current USDA standards are based. For my first seven years of farming, I was certified by one of the largest organic certification agencies, the OCIA (Organic Crop Improvement Association), but I have not gone through the certification process since then. The transition from the old independent certifiers to the monolithic USDA certification process was such a chaotic mess that I opted to drop out until the dust settled. Well, the dust has settled, but I just haven't gotten back on the certification wagon again. I haven't changed the way I do anything on the farm, so I still consider myself org...uh, I mean, “natural, sustainable.”

As for what certified organic means (under the old independent system or under the new USDA system), one must not use or have used for the previous three years any synthetic chemicals of any kind on one's farm. That means no man-made insecticides, herbicides or fungicides. A certified organic farmer can kill no organisms with manmade chemicals; even rat poison is banned. It means no synthetic fertilizers, no hormones and no genetically modified plants or animals.

In the 15 years that I have been farming, I have never farmed in other way than this. I didn't convert to organic farming. I started out my first year farming with natural and sustainable processes. Most of the farm has never been farmed chemically, even before my family bought it in the late '60s.

A true definition of organic goes beyond a list of rules, a list of do's and don'ts. Organic farming is a philosophy and a way of life. Since organic food has become big business in the last few years, many farms, particularly corporate farms, are going organic for purely economic reasons. To them, organic standards are simply a series of hoops they have to jump through in order to get their fingers on a piece of the organic pie—and organic premium prices. To me, farming organically means farming in a way that is harmonious with Nature. It means realizing that Nature is the true expert farmer. The natural world is the master of producing abundant food for all living beings. Nature produces food for each organism without harming the environment for other organisms. My goal is to



learn enough about Nature to be able to produce food for humans without spoiling and destroying the environment for all other living things. I still have a lot to learn.

Farmers should be able to raise food without polluting the air and water, without degrading the health and fertility of the soil, without destroying biodiversity and without leaving our children a less healthy planet. This statement is self-evident and no farmer and no consumer would argue over its validity. In practice, however, it is a radical notion, for most of our agriculture today does, in fact, pollute the air and water, degrade the soil, destroy biodiversity and leave the planet a less hospitable place for future generations. My duty as a farmer is to fight this trend.

In short, you can decide for yourselves whether I am “organic” (or natural or sustainable) enough for you. You are welcome to come to my farm anytime. You can do your own inspection and conduct your own certification process. Although neither you nor I have the legal right to describe what I do as “organic” farming, last I checked we are still free to think and believe whatever we want.

In truth, I would have to write a book to answer this question fully. (Come to think of it, I have.) My booklet “Organic Matters” gives a fuller answer to the question of what organic--or natural or sustainable or in harmony with Nature, or whatever you want to call it, for God’s sake!--is. You can order it on my website www.henrysfarm.com or through my sister Terra at terra@brockmanfarms.net.

13. Will our vegetables be full of bugs because you farm without chemicals?

Full of bugs? No. Will you ever find an insect on your produce? Yes.

You might find a corn earworm on the tip of your sweet corn one week for instance, or a cabbage worm in your broccoli now and again. But it will be rare. My philosophy is live and let live. I know some people are so squeamish that if they see a bug on a vegetable, they’ll throw the whole thing out rather than eat it, but I think that is silly and wasteful. Look at it

this way. Say you have an earworm on your corn. Earworms come in at the tip of the ear and they eat the silks and the kernels at the very end of the ear. Now all you have to do take a knife, flick out the worm and cut off the tip of the ear. Voila! You have a perfectly good ear of corn.



The other alternative is to spray the corn with a toxin that will kill all the earworms in the field (and other life as well). As someone once said to me, "Would you rather have a worm that you can see or a poisonous chemical that you can't?" Besides earworms and cabbage worms, few insects are dumb enough or slow enough to stick around after a vegetable is picked. Sometimes you will see the telltale signs of where insects have eaten a little of your produce before you got to it. Often the greens will have little holes in the leaves where flea beetles were munching or the beans will have some gnaw marks from bean beetles, but I see nothing wrong with sharing a little of our food with our insect brethren. Sometimes insects can feed so heavily on a crop that it’s no longer worth it to harvest or try to eat, but if the damage is only cosmetic I will go ahead and harvest and sell a crop with a little insect damage. I certainly won’t go out with insecticides (even organic insecticides) just to ensure the cosmetic beauty of a crop.

Remember, just two generations ago, before the rise of chemical farming, everybody dealt with insects and their handiwork everyday--and were healthier for it.

14. Do you ever supplement your produce by buying certified organic produce on the wholesale market and reselling it?

Absolutely not. First of all, most produce on the wholesale market doesn't meet my standards for quality, taste or sustainability. More importantly, however, I would never sell you produce about which I know nothing. I am not a merchant; I am a farmer.

That said, for the past several years, I have asked two neighboring certified organic farmers (Larry and Marilyn Wettstein and Dennis and Emily Wettstein) to grow sweet corn and green beans for the CSA to supplement my own supply. Sweet corn takes up a lot of field space and I just don't have enough room to grow enough to satisfy the demand and beans take so much time to pick that I can rarely get enough to give to all members. I have known both of the Wettstein families for years and trust them as much as I trust myself. Both farms are certified organic and have been so longer than my farm.