Are you CSA relationship material?

You are not alone if you’ve never heard of community-supported agriculture (CSA) before.

CSA is a marketing model that many small diversified farms use to rally up a group of supporters to invest in their farm for a season (by purchasing a share) and invite those folks to come along for the ride – to be an integral part of the farm, ride some of the uncertainties of the season, and celebrate and share in the reality of small-scale farming. It’s a way to plug into your food system fully, enjoy the bounty that the soil is producing in season, and stay in touch with weekly newsletters and celebrations at the farm.

There are countless benefits to plugging into a CSA program locally, but we don’t think that the CSA model is right for everyone. Below we look at what sorts of people seem to be the most pleased with their shares and CSA experience in order to see if you are CSA relationship material:

1) You like to eat your vegetables.

This may seem basic, but investing in a CSA share means eating vegetables on a daily basis. Fortunately, local veggies are often packed with flavor that you can’t find at the grocery store. Also, many CSA farms, offer multiple share sizes to accommodate households of varying sizes.

2) You value cooking meals at home or with friends.

Vegetables are pretty ready to eat as is, to be sure, but for full meals you’ll be looking at some sort of preparation, even if it’s just chopping. It’s not quite a heat-and-eat meal in a box, but the variety of veggies in a CSA share is a great opportunity to get creative in the kitchen, and share a mealtime with your family and friends. Nothing strengthens relationships like cooking and eating together.

3) You want to get to know the people who grow your food.

Wendell Berry famously wrote that “eating is an agricultural act”, and we couldn’t agree more. All of your food came from somewhere, and unless you foraged it from the fields and forest (which can be lots of fun!), somebody put their sweat and spirit into growing that food. CSA is a
unique opportunity to make friends with your farmer, learn about their lives, the local growing season, and the joys and tribulations of farming, and support a livelihood for the agriculturally minded among us.

4) You are comfortable letting someone else pick out your groceries.

CSA is a balancing act for farmers, since we are the ones who decide what goes in your CSA share each week. We love being creative in the fields and growing 50 different kinds of fruits and vegetables, not to mention all the additional varieties with their distinctive flavors and colors. But we also know that we need to make sure to give people what they’re looking for. Inevitably some people will want kale every week and some will be satisfied with one bunch all season, and we all do our best to balance those two. The willingness to try new foods and expand your vegetable repertoire is important for CSA members.

5) You schedule allows you to pick up your share on a regular basis.

We dedicate a particular chunk of time each week to packing and delivering our boxes. Whether you’re picking up at someone’s house or at a local business, they are doing all of us a courtesy by opening a portion of their space to us. So it’s important that you have a schedule that allows you to commit to picking up your box each week within that time frame. And it also helps to choose a pick-up location that’s convenient for you – on your way home from work, or just down the street, for example. This means boxes are less likely to be forgotten or left at the pick-up site for the host to deal with.

6) You like to try out new recipes and want to hear all about how the farmhouse kitchen deals with the bounty of the season.

Just as you’re not alone if you haven’t heard of CSA, you’re not alone in making the most of a CSA share. Your farmer’s kitchen is full of all these foods and your farmer makes sure to pass along plenty of ideas for cooking and combining the flavors of the season. In the weekly CSA newsletter, not only do you hear about what’s happening on the farm, but you get plenty of hand-picked recipes tailored specifically to the fruits and veggies in that week’s box.