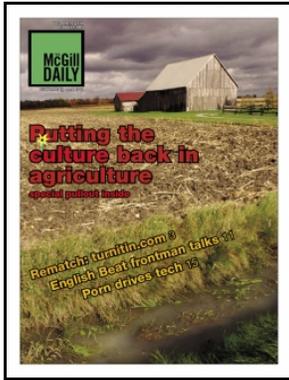




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Meet your neighbourhood farmer community supported agriculture delivers

By Jeremy Delman
The McGill Daily

If you buy a tomato in the next few months, it probably grew hundreds of miles away, was picked by an underpaid migrant worker, and traveled in several containers before reaching your shopping cart, covered in pesticides.

Community Supported Agriculture (CSA) is changing that process worldwide, one consumer at a time.

The movement, which started in Europe and has rapidly expanded in North America in the last decade, is revolutionizing the distribution channels of agriculture by linking small-scale farms with local households.

Equiterre, the ecological organization in charge of coordinating CSA in Quebec, has set up a network of 77 organic farms that are willing to deliver baskets of produce at drop-off spots to their members.

Ann Lévesque, the CSA coordinator at Equiterre, said that the movement is trying to stem the tide of large agribusinesses that are completely disconnected from their consumers.

“It is very important to support our small, local farms; they’re the ones that really respect nature by diversifying their crops, they’re the ones that help the local economy by going to local stores, and they’re the ones that are able to provide fresh and organic food for a reasonable price,” Lévesque said.

Each farm has its own consistent group of members, who must sign a contract before the start of the season in order to offer the small farms financial security in case of a bad year.



Plateau residents pick up their weekly baskets from Frederic Theriault of a CSA farm.

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“For the farmer, CSA is great because we sell directly to the consumer and people pay in advance, so we have money up-front before the plants go in the ground, and that’s a huge help,” said Frederic Theriault of Ferme Tourne-Sol, a CSA farm established this year by five McGill graduates.

Receiving the money up-front is especially helpful in a business where large farms are able to drive down the prices supermarkets will pay to an unsustainable level for socially responsible farms.

“If you sell wholesale you pretty much have to give your produce away. It’s ridiculous the hold that the big distributors have on the market,” Theriault said.

In an era where the origin of the food in people’s homes is becoming increasingly hard to determine, CSA provides consumers with an opportunity to meet the growers of their food.

“There’s a relationship, you see the same faces every week, you know who comes early and who has to come late, you know who’s always going to trade the garlic [for something else in their pre-packed basket] and who won’t,” said Daniel Brisebois, also of Ferme Tourne-Sol, which supplies the Macdonald Campus organic food co-op in addition to its 110 CSA members.

To strengthen this bond, most of the CSA farms also give their members a chance to work on the farm. For some, it is even required.

“They like to come and see where their food grows,” said Alison Hackney, whose farm in Senneville is one of three CSA farms on the Island of Montreal.

Her farm began as a project to preserve the fallow land of her family, which was under threat by developers. Without CSA, which does all her marketing and finds her consumers, she would not have been able to survive as a businesswoman.

“The land is being developed voraciously here. If my project is to succeed it’s going to have to be more than just a farm that sells vegetables, it has to be part of the community, it has to be of educational value,” she said.

You can get in contact with CSA farms that are delivering baskets during the winter throughout the Plateau and Mile-End. To reach the farms call Ann Lévesque from Equiterre at 522-2000, ext. 223.

—with files from Charles Mostoller

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