



# MSU STUDENT ORGANIC FARM FARM NEWSLETTER

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February 15, 2006

## ***In your share this week***

- Kale
- Choi
- Baby salad mix
- Squash
- Carrots
- Onions
- Potatoes
- Garlic
- Popcorn

## ***Announcements***

### ***Share Price Change!***

Did that get your attention?

The CSA management team (Jeremy—farm manager, John—farm faculty advisor, Laurie—farm faculty advisor, Melissa—winter tunnel expert/John’s technician, and Jay—assistant farm manger) is reevaluating our share price. The current price of \$350/16-week session was set three years ago before our first growing season or session. Now, with three years of experience, it is time to reevaluate using the knowledge and experience we have gained. This is the first of three weekly newsletter pieces exploring the price of the MSU SOF CSA (got all those acronyms?☺).

I would like to start by looking at the role of the SOF (student organic farm) in the Michigan CSA (community-supported agriculture) farm community. The SOF has an educational mission and is committed to training new farmers, eaters, and food activists, about organic food production. It is therefore incumbent on us to use a price structure that reflects the true costs of production, values fresh-as-it-gets local organic produce, and assures a fair and livable return to the farmer and farm workers for their work. If we are not doing this we are undercutting our goals and message for helping to establish more organic farms in our area and in the state. We need to be setting, using, and teaching a workable example for farmers and eaters that promotes sustainable, local, organic food production.

As a member of a fairly small community of CSA and organic produce farms in the state and especially in our area, our CSA prices (especially because we are high profile and the largest CSA in the Lansing area) greatly influence the public perception about CSA prices and, in turn, what other farmers can charge. As part of a university, the SOF is a public

institution that is in many ways subsidized, compared to a family farm. For example, (1) we do not pay taxes, rent, or mortgage payments on our land; (2) we have access to university vehicles and equipment; and (3) we have been eligible for and have received considerable grant funding (much of which has gone to covering education costs, but also start up costs and wages as well).

Because of these factors, we have a moral and mission-fitting obligation to avoid creating downward pressure on CSA prices in our area and the state. In fact, we must maintain a price that is on the upper end or ahead of other CSA prices so that we are not undercutting other farmer's prices and in effect unfairly taking money they need for clothing, healthcare, children, etc. away from them because we, as a subsidized entity, are undercharging. On the contrary, as I have stated, this community of farmers is the population we are trying to help. They are our friends and peers and have been very helpful and supportive of the SOF. We must remain true to our support of them by making sure that our prices are not lower than theirs.

Here is a list of what other CSA farms are charging for their shares, which are intended for a family of four, like our shares. All of the figures are price in \$/week, since different CSAs have sessions of varying length. The examples I give are for CSAs with 25 or more members (below this size a CSA is not really the main part of the farming operation or a person's income, and is less comparable to our situation). These are last year's CSA prices and probably have gone up a bit for this season. For comparison, we currently charge \$21.88/wk.

Maple Creek – Yale MI	\$29/wk
Needle Lane- Adrian	\$30/wk
5 Spring – Traverse City	\$27/wk
Trillium Haven – Grand Rapids	\$20/wk
Eaters Guild – Kalamazoo	\$25/wk
Garden Patch – Pinckney	\$30/wk
Meadowlark – Cedar M	\$29/wk
Tantre – Ann Arbor	\$26/wk
Garden Works – Ann Arbor	\$28/wk and going up to probably \$30 this yr
Community Farm – Ann Arbor	\$41/wk
Wagbo – East Jordan	\$26/wk

I talked to one Lansing area grower with whom we have worked and who **was** doing a sizable CSA at \$22/week (which is our price). She said it's "just not worth doing at that price" and that we are "undercutting the Food Co-op at those prices." This made me wonder if the reason the Lansing area has such a dearth of CSA's despite our 75+ person waiting list (which many of you are all too familiar with) is in part because we are setting a

price that is so low that no non-university farm could match it and stay in business. This thought was awful, and as I have stated above, undercutting the prices of other farmers undercuts our SOF goals, negatively impacts farmers and the sustainable food movement, and is unacceptable.

It is also important to remember that our year-round, 48 week CSA, which amazingly provides us with fresh produce in Michigan all winter, is special and has costs of production that are higher than those for summer production only (what most CSAs do), as well as a higher value. If we want to encourage more year-round production and CSAs in Michigan, we need to charge prices that reflect those extra costs of greenhouses, labor, and storage and that would allow local growers to succeed doing it, ensuring a fair and sustainable price for their produce.

It is with in this very compelling context that we must examine and adjust our share prices to be in line with our goals, values, real world costs, and other CSA prices. I hope this exploration has been educational and thought provoking. Next week Laurie Thorp will include a piece on the real value of food and the illusion of cheap food.

Thank you so much for your time on this very important issue.

Jeremy Moghtader  
Your farm manager

### **Food Facts**

- If every Michigan family spent \$10 per week on Michigan-based products, we would return \$35 million to the Michigan economy weekly (Select MI Campaign, 2005).
- Did you know . . .
  - French fried potatoes constitute 23 percent of all vegetables eaten in the U.S.
  - Fruits and vegetables that are fried, in chips, candy, and condiments make up a sizeable portion of fruit and vegetable exposure of most U.S. children
  - Children of all ages have especially low intakes of citrus, melons, berries, and dark green/yellow vegetables
  - The SOF farm share last week (February 1, 2006) contained approximately 32 cups of vegetables—that's enough vegetables to meet the weekly vegetable needs of an active family of three!
- Breakfast doesn't have to take long to fix, or be eaten at the kitchen table to count as breakfast. Be sure to include at least one fruit or vegetable for breakfast. Try these quick and easy healthy breakfast ideas:
  - A bagel with a slice of cheese and SOF tomato
  - A SOF carrot, a piece of string cheese, and a mini-muffin
  - A hard-boiled egg, sliced SOF turnip, and a glass of 100% tomato juice
  - Scrambled eggs in a tortilla with SOF tatsoi, SOF onions, and salsa
  - Waffles with fruit on top
  - A carton of yogurt with extra fruit stirred in
  - A whole grain granola bar and a glass of 100% pineapple juice
  - A peanut butter and banana sandwich with milk

- o A piece of leftover pizza and a Michigan-grown apple
- o Cold cereal or oatmeal with any fruit

## **Recipes**

### *Carrot-Squash Muffins*

(Makes 12)

- 1-1/2 c. whole wheat flour
- 1-1/2 tsp. pumpkin pie spice (or 1/2 tsp. cinnamon, 1/2 tsp. allspice, 1/4 tsp. cloves, 1/4 tsp. nutmeg)
- 1 tsp. baking soda
- 1/2 tsp. baking powder
- 1 egg or 1/4 c. fat-free egg substitute
- 1 c. cooked, mashed squash (acorn or butternut)
- 1/4 c. honey
- 2 T applesauce
- 1 T canola oil
- 1 c. shredded raw carrots

Preheat the oven to 350° F. Coat a 12-cup muffin pan with cooking spray, or line with paper muffin cups.

In a large bowl, mix the flour, pumpkin pie spice, baking soda, and baking powder.

In a medium bowl, whisk the egg, squash, honey, applesauce, and oil until smooth. Add to the flour mixture and stir until just combined. Do not overmix. Fold in the carrots. Spoon into the pan.

Bake for 25 minutes or until a toothpick inserted in the center comes out almost clean. Remove from the pan and cool on a rack.

Per muffin: 145 cal, 3 g. protein, 31 g. carb, 2 g. fat, 0 g. sat. fat, 18 mg. chol., 3 g. fiber, 93 mg sodium.

### *Scalloped Acorn Squash and Spinach*

- 1 bunch fresh spinach, washed and trimmed
- 6 c. cubed, fresh acorn squash
- 1 T. olive oil
- 1-1/2 c. thinly sliced onions
- 1/4 c. all-purpose flour
- 2 c. low-salt chicken broth or vegetable broth
- 1/2 tsp. salt
- 1/4 tsp. ground nutmeg
- 1/4 tsp. pepper

¾ c. shredded Swiss cheese, divided

Blanch the spinach in a pot of boiling water until just wilted. Remove spinach from the water with a slotted spoon and set aside. Use the same water to cook the cubed acorn squash in boiling water for 8 minutes or until tender. Drain and set aside. Heat olive oil in a large nonstick skillet over medium heat; add onion, and sauté 7 minutes or until golden brown. Remove onion from skillet, and set aside. Add flour to skillet. Gradually add broth, stirring with a whisk until blended. Cook over medium heat until thick and bubbly (about 6 minutes), stirring constantly. Remove from heat; stir in salt, nutmeg, and pepper.

Combine acorn squash, onion, ¼ cup cheese, and blanched spinach in a bowl. Spoon acorn squash mixture into a 6-cup gratin dish coated with cooking spray or oil. Pour the sauce over the squash mixture. Sprinkle ½ cup cheese over gratin. Bake at 375 for 30 minutes or until bubbly. Broil 3 minutes or until cheese is golden brown. Let stand 5 minutes before serving. Serves 4.