

Community Supported Agriculture Shares Available at Washougal Main Street Market
by Liz Pike, Guest Columnist

When the Washougal Main Street Market opens on Saturday, May 23rd, Community Supported Agriculture shares will be available for sale directly at the market. Over the last 20 years, Community Supported Agriculture (CSA) has become a popular way for consumers to buy local, seasonal food directly from a farmer. This year, two of Clark County's largest organic food growers including Gee Creek Farm and Northwest Organic Farm are offering CSA shares in downtown Washougal at the Washougal Main Street Market held each Saturday from 9:00 a.m to 4:00 p.m. beginning May 23rd.

Here's how a CSA works. A farmer offers a certain number of "shares" to the public. Typically the share consists of a box of vegetables, but other farm products may be included as well. The growers and consumers provide mutual support and share the risks and benefits of food production. In return, consumers receive shares in the farm's bounty with a box, bag, or basket of seasonal produce each week throughout the farming season.

This arrangement creates several rewards for both the farmer and the consumer. Advantages for farmers include the ability to market their food early in the year, before their 16 hour days in the field begin. CSA farmers receive payment early in the season, which helps with the farm's cash flow, and it allows the opportunity to get to know the people who eat the food they grow.

CSA consumers get to eat ultra-fresh food, with all the flavor and vitamin benefits. They also get exposed to new vegetables and new ways of cooking. While consumers are invited to visit Northwest Organic Farm and Gee Creek Farm, a trip to the farm will not be necessary if CSA shares are purchased at the Washougal Main Street Market. The farmers will bring their CSA shares directly to the market for pickup by area CSA consumers.

Local residents are urged to sign up early in the season to take advantage of the full 22 week harvest program. "The market's CSA program is a way to connect our local families directly to the farm and farmer," says Stacey Sellers, Mayor of Washougal. "Your commitment to spend some of your food dollars with our local growers results in a secure market and a dependable income for our farmers," says Sellers. "Our farmers are extremely loyal in their efforts to provide our citizens with the highest quality and most nutritious organic produce for weekly harvest shares," added Sellers. The Mayor says it's a win-win situation for both the farmers and local consumers.

Every Saturday, beginning May 23, CSA members may pick up their box of just harvested, organic food at the Washougal Main Street Market located at Reflection Plaza at the corner of Main Street and Pendleton Way. A typical CSA share will supply a family of four each week with all the vegetables they need. Full shares and half shares are available, with prices ranging from approximately \$325 for a half share and up to \$600 for a full share. You pay once at the beginning of the season and then receive fresh produce for 22 weeks in a row. Other easy payment plans are also available on the farms' websites.

You don't have to wait for the market to open on May 23 to sign up for your CSA share. Go to www.NorthwestOrganicFarm.com or GeeCreekFarm.com to sign up online for their respective 2009 CSA programs.

"I believe everyone should have access to local, organic and garden fresh food," says Lyle Stanley, owner of Gee Creek Farm. "We have been offering CSA Memberships for the past three years and we are delighted to bring our CSA program and fresh bounty to the Washougal Main Street Market," says Lyle. Gee Creek Farm also sells organic produce to local stores, restaurants and Portland area farmers' markets. You don't have to sign up for a CSA share to purchase fresh produce at the Washougal Main Street Market. "Each week, we will bring an abundance of fresh produce, grass fed beef, lamb and bison, along with fruits and berries to sell to the general public in downtown Washougal," promises Lyle.

Live music will be performed by a variety of musicians each week at the Market. In addition to local produce including fresh fruit and vegetables, market vendors will be selling natural, free-range eggs, specialty meats, organic cheese, honey, artisan breads, fine chocolates, vegetable starts and hanging baskets. Original creations by local artists and craftsmen including fine art, jewelry, soaps, lotions, and a variety of other hand-crafted items will be available at the Washougal Main Street Market each week through September 26th.

For more information, visit www.WashougalMainStreetMarket.com or contact Jordan Boldt, Market Manager, at (360) 901-6818 or via email at MainStreetManager@gmail.com. The website offers a complete list of vendors and available products along with a schedule of special events throughout the season.