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COMMISSIONER HOOKER ENCOURAGES CONSUMERS TO JOIN A CSA

Community Supported Agriculture Farms Provide Fresh Produce, Local Returns

New York State Agriculture Commissioner Patrick Hooker today encouraged consumers to support New York farmers by becoming members of a local Community Supported Agriculture (CSA) farm. CSAs or “subscription farms” market their farm products by asking consumers to become farm members and pay in advance for a season’s worth of farm products.

“Joining a CSA and eating farm fresh products is a terrific way to stretch your food dollars and support your local farmer,” the Commissioner said. “New York has nearly 150 CSAs across the State that provide their members with direct access to a variety of healthy foods picked off the vine and out of the field. They are also a great way for people to learn more about how food is grown, and some provide a first-hand experience with work-share memberships.”

CSAs share the risks of production by selling farm shares or memberships in advance of the harvest. This advance sale helps farmers cover up-front expenses for seeds and equipment, while also assuring a market for their products. In return, consumers not only receive farm fresh products, they also become more directly connected to their food source. As members, consumers also share in the risks and rewards of production agriculture, including reduced harvests due to unfavorable weather or pests, and bounties during a good growing season.

The typical CSA membership in New York will provide enough fruits and vegetables to feed a family for six months, but may not be limited to solely fresh produce. New York State CSAs reflect the diversity of agricultural production in the State and some CSAs provide a full array of farm products including eggs, meat, milk, baked goods, honey and maple syrup. CSAs are also known for their heirloom varieties and organic or sustainable production techniques.

Purchasing a share or membership in a CSA varies by farm. While paying in advance for all the fresh produce a family will eat in six months may not seem thrifty, studies show that CSAs are a bargain when compared to conventional produce sold at most retail stores. Some CSAs offer a work-share program, where members can work on the farm

for a portion of their membership. Members start receiving product as it comes into season, around June, and can pick up a week's share of farm products at the farm or at a pre-determined distribution site until the end of the season, usually through November.

CSAs have become extremely popular in recent years due to the numerous benefits to farmers and members. Besides offering fresh and affordable food directly from the farm, they also encourage consumers to eat healthier and to try different varieties of produce. For farmers, CSAs eliminate some of the financial risk associated with production agriculture by requiring advance sales and serving a defined customer base.

The Pride of New York program supports CSAs and promotes New York State food and agricultural products. The program assists farmers and food processors in branding their products by using the Pride of New York emblem, helping consumers identify high-quality, local agricultural products.

Currently, there are 133 CSAs listed on the Northeast Organic Farming Association of New York's website, www.nofany.org/dbapplet/csadirectory.html. There are also 50 CSAs located in the metropolitan New York area that are listed on the Just Food website at www.justfood.org/csa/.

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