

Veg out, eat well

People lacking energy for gardening can still enjoy farm-fresh produce

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For a Midwest farmer's daughter, moving to Anchorage last June wasn't so much culture shock as it was produce shock.

I suffered several get-out-the-paddles-I'm-going-into-cardiac-arrest moments while surveying the grocery stores. For every time I found a crispy green pepper or smooth ear of corn, there were three more times when everything in the bins was crunchless, shrunken or as bruised as David Hasselhoff's ego.

And joy of joys, everything cost three times what I was used to.

I suppose some people in my position would be motivated to plant a garden. Not me. And not only because I don't have a yard.

There is a good reason for this. Laziness and my addiction to Skype are factors, of course. But the reason has more to do with the fact that I come from three generations of land-loving, hardworking South Dakota farmers -- and I don't fit in.

My three brothers got roped into doing way more farm work than I did. But I did my fair share of nursing runt pigs and chasing cows that escaped our fences. My grandmother definitely saw us as free labor for her gi-normous vegetable garden, knowing she could shut up our complaints with a slab of homemade bread slathered in chokecherry jam.

So I've done just enough farm work to a) have an enormous amount of respect for farmers, and b) know that I don't want to be one. Not even in the vegetable patch sense. The only part of a soybean's life cycle that I like is the eating part. This may mean I'm a horrible person. More likely, I'm just a typical consumer. I can live with that. What I can't live without are fresh vegetables.

Thankfully, in the middle of last summer, a co-worker urged me toward a local farmer's market. Cue the angelic choir. Since then, I've learned about great ways to support family farmers with minimal effort and maximum pleasure.

The following are some of those options, organized by my personal lack-of-initiative system.



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Monique Anderson examines her Full Circle Farm produce shipment at the Midtown pickup site. "This is my introduction to community-supported agriculture," she said of her subscription.

FEELING LAZY: CSAS

Advantages: With community support agriculture, you're paying a flat fee upfront, then picking up a box of produce once a week. It's fast and easy and requires practically zero planning.

Disadvantages: Since you get a box full of whatever crops are coming in, you can get stuck with veggies you don't like.

- Arctic Organics, Palmer -- 1-907-746-1087, beans@alaska.com

Enrollment for this farm's established CSA program is in mid-April, so it's filled for this year. Keep in mind for next year that a subscription costs \$575 and includes weekly boxes from June through September. There are several drop-off locations in Anchorage.

If you want to sample the Beans' produce before subscription time, find Arctic Organics at the Anchorage Farmers Market and at their farm stand 5 to 7 p.m. Fridays starting June 15 on Smith Road near Palmer, south of the Mountain View RV Park.

Co-owner Sarah Bean said that in the first few weeks of the season, offerings will depend on weather but may include bok choy, Chinese cabbage, arugula, spinach or a greens mix.

- Domer Family Farm, Lazy Mountain near Palmer -- 1-907-745-6561

Marie Domer and her family have been running a CSA program for three years. The Domers' program is filled for this summer, but she will start taking subscriptions for next year during winter. The farm offers a 12-week season starting in June.

Options are a \$250 half-share, which feeds two, or a \$450 full share, which feeds a family of four or more.

Domer said this year's planting includes a lot of Oriental greens, such as bok choy and komatsuna (like a mild spinach), along with Valley staples such as radishes, carrots, turnips, beets and peas.

- Full Circle Farm, Carnation, Wash. -- 1-425-333-4677, www.fullcirclefarm.com

Tamara Fisher of Full Circle Farms says she has 150 Anchorage residents on her CSA waiting list. Although all seven local drop-off sites are full, she's still taking names because Full Circle plans to add a half-dozen more sites in Anchorage in early summer. They also have drop-offs in Palmer and Wasilla.

Although the farm's produce is not Alaska-grown and spends more time traveling in a box, Full Circle offers a year-round program and a large array of fruits. Last Thursday's box included Gala apples, yellow peaches and Ruby Red grapefruit, alongside veggies such as snow peas, green bell peppers and ginger root.

Full Circle offers subscriptions for a week, a year or any time period in between. In Alaska, weekly prices start at \$37 for a small box (family of two), \$47 for medium box (family of four), and \$56 for a large box (family of six).

- Spring Creek Farm, Palmer -- 1-907-745-7406, ancokell@earthlink.net

This is the first stab at running a CSA for Anne-Corinne Kell and Steve Rubinstein, who teaches environmental science at Alaska Pacific University. They're starting small and are filled up for this year but will begin taking subscriptions for next summer in December.

Spring Creek offers weekly boxes from late May through early October, with one drop-off site in Anchorage and pickup in the Valley. A full share goes for \$525 and feeds a family of four. Spring Creek has started with the basics: broccoli, carrots, potatoes, tomatoes and cucumbers, as well

as some herbs and flowers. The farm also offers a \$110 salad share for people who want fresh greens exclusively.

SLIGHTLY MOTIVATED: FARMERS MARKETS

Advantages: Produce is super-fresh, often picked that morning or the night before. Plus, the farmers are happy to chat if you have questions about upcoming crops, keeping produce fresh or preparation ideas.

Disadvantages: If you don't get there early-ish, the pickings can be slim. If you're shopping for a specific recipe, you might need to visit several markets to find all the ingredients, since every market is a little different.

Anchorage Farmers Market

Where: Central Lutheran Church parking lot, 15th Avenue and Cordova Street

When: 9 a.m.-2 p.m. Saturdays, May through October

Anchorage Market and Festival

Where: Third Avenue between C and E streets

When: 10 a.m.-6 p.m. Saturdays and Sundays, May through September.

South Anchorage Farmers Market

Where: Subway Sports Center/Cellular One Sports Center, 11111 O'Malley Centre Drive

When: 9 a.m.-2 p.m. Saturdays, May through October

South Anchorage Farmers Market

Where: Behind Dimond Center mall in front of Dimond Hotel

When: 11 a.m.-7 p.m. Wednesdays, May through October.

Wednesday Market

Where: Northway Mall, 3101 Penland Parkway, just off the Glenn Highway at Airport Heights Drive

When: 11 a.m.-5 p.m. Wednesdays, July through September

Eagle River Farmers Market

Where: VFW Post parking lot, 10527 VFW Road

When: 3 p.m.-7 p.m. Tuesdays, May through September

Palmer Friday Fling

Where: Pavilion across from visitors center, 723 S. Valley Way

When: 11 a.m.-6 p.m. Fridays, May through August

Wasilla Farmers Market

Where: Behind Wasilla Public Library, 391 N. Main St.

When: Noon-6 p.m. Wednesdays, June through September

UNCHARACTERISTICALLY AMBITIOUS: YOU-PICK FARMS

Advantages: Guaranteed freshness. Prices are usually eye-poppingly cheap. And the outing lets you survey lush fields, breathe fresh air and feel a connection to the land -- sort of the "greatest hits" of farm life.

Disadvantages: You-picks start later in the year than subscriptions and farmers markets and are by far the most time-consuming option.

Pyrah's Pioneer Peak Farm, Palmer

This family you-pick operation has been offering field-fresh food at fair prices for 20 years. Call 1-907-745-4511 or e-mail pppfarm@gci.net for hours of operation and directions.

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www.alaskagrown.org