

## LIFESTYLES WITH SYLVIA



Dear Friends,

What a glorious Memorial Day weekend we are having! I know it will be long gone by the time you read this, but it makes me smile just thinking of how many of you are probably hosting or (if you're really lucky) guests at a barbeque at this very moment. That said, it should come as no surprise that I'm even more pleased by the thought of those of you who are taking full advantage of this beautiful weather by running, biking, sailing, walking or simply getting out and about!

But regardless of what you're doing or where you are, let's all take a moment to welcome the start of summer together... and what better way to do so than to embrace the return of farmers' markets!

I visited three of my absolute favorites this week: I stopped by the Thursday Market on Imperial Avenue in Westport, which is open from 10:00 am to 2:00 pm, and I was thrilled to see the familiar faces of many farmers who are back again this year. After a quick lap to check out my options, I scored some beautiful greens, whipped honey, amazing whole grain bread and a dozen eggs, fresh from the farm. In fact, I made the most delectable French toast with those very same eggs this very morning, and topped them off with sweet-as-sugar sliced strawberries that I bought at another farmers' market gem, the Wilton Farmers' Market, located just behind the Wilton Library on Wednesdays from 2:00 pm to 6:00 pm. Last but certainly not least, I visited the farmers' market just behind the Saugatuck Church on the Post Road in Westport and bought the most delicious locally grown tomatoes, the first of the season!

For those of you in need of a refresher on the value of the farmers' markets, remember that by purchasing locally grown foods we not only increase the nutritional quality of what we eat, but we also reduce our carbon footprint. After all, we're currently facing some of the greatest environmental problems of all time, and local farmers are a small but important part of the solution. For example, the farmers you'll meet at these community markets often have only 20 to 30 acres to work with at the most and don't have the option of moving when their soil becomes unworkable. As a result, small farms have led the way in adapting sustainable agricultural techniques that protect water and build healthy soils.

At the same time, the devastating consequences of our overdependence on oil are more apparent than ever, so every time you buy locally grown food as opposed to food shipped halfway around the world, you reduce the amount of oil used and the amount of toxins emitted into the atmosphere. In other words, when we shop at local farmers' markets, we (and our children and our children's children) end up getting a lot more out of our food than just a delicious and nutritious meal.

So are you feeling all warm and fuzzy about farmers' markets yet? I hope so! If you are, you're probably wondering whether there's any more you can do to invest in these farms in order to keep them thriving in our communities. Or maybe you really want to buy more locally grown, seasonal food but just don't have the time to get to the market. Either way, there's a simple solution to both issues: you can do what I just did for the first time, sign up for Community Supported Agriculture (CSA).

### ***A Little Background On CSA***

Over the last 20 years, CSA has become a popular way for consumers to buy local, seasonal food directly from farmers. Here are the basics: a farmer offers a certain number of "shares" (also known as "memberships" or "subscriptions") to the public. A share typically consists of a box of vegetables, although other products may be included depending on the type of farm. Interested consumers purchase a share and in return receive a box of seasonal produce each week throughout the farming season.

### ***CSA advantages for farmers:***

- Farmers can market their food early in the year, before the 16 hour days in the fields begin
- Farmers can receive payment early in the season, which supports their farms' cash flow
- Farmers have the opportunity to get to know the people who eat the food they grow

### ***CSA advantages for consumers:***

- Consumers get to enjoy ultra-fresh food, with all the flavor and nutritional benefits
- Consumers are exposed to new vegetables and new ways of cooking
- Consumers usually get to visit the farm at least once a season
- Consumers find their kids typically favor food from "their" farm – even veggies they have never been known to eat (and what parent wouldn't love that?)
- Consumers develop a relationship with the farmer who grows their food and learn more about how their food is grown

Now that you know a little bit more about CSA, I'm sure you can imagine how excited I was to sign up! I purchased a share in Belta's Farm, which is right here in Westport, after meeting the wonderful gals who run it at their farm stand. It's always such a treat to see them and they consistently grow the highest quality produce, so it was an obvious choice. Plus, they often offer vegetables that I'm not too familiar with, and they're always quick to suggest interesting and delicious ways to prepare them – as a result, whole new worlds of flavor have opened up to me. Now, in return, not only do I help these farmers grow the best food in the best soil each season but I also reap the benefits, too. Real food, in season, picked at the peak of perfection, and practically grown in our own back yards... it's perfect!

So what are you waiting for? It's a simple idea with a profound impact, so find a CSA and sign up today!

For more information on CSAs, feel free to contact me at [Sylviae9@aol.com](mailto:Sylviae9@aol.com) – I look forward to hearing from you and hope to see you at the markets soon (for a reminder on the best ways to shop farmers' markets, pull up my column from August 2009 on the SouthportRacquet-Club.com website). My recommendation: make sure you catch the strawberries in the next few weeks... they're delicious!

One last thing: if you found last week's column on salt interesting, be sure to check out the article on salt from the Sunday, May 30<sup>th</sup> edition of the New York Times – I guarantee you'll enjoy it!

Until next time, happy healthful eating,

*Sylvia*

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