



# A study in cooperation

by **Ambrose Clancy**

**S**ome say the movement started many years ago in a small Japanese town. A group of women were fed up with paying exorbitant prices for produce trucked in from distant places, when a couple of local farmers were going broke. The women banded together and became shareholders in the farms, paying an

annual fee that allowed the farmers to buy seed, fertilizer, machinery and other farming essentials while in return the farmers gave the women a box of vegetables every week direct from the fields.

will feed each week since people have different eating habits. "We size it for two to four people, and if your diet is primarily vegetables, it would be on the two-people end," Wood said. Golden Earthworm has 15 different pickup locations Islandwide. Those concerned about ultra-fresh food can't do better unless they had their own farm. "When you pick up your produce, the last hands to touch it were the hands that picked it

**Community supported agriculture produces benefits for farms, individuals and the environment.**

So community supported agriculture was born, some say. Others tell a different tale, that the shareholding concept first surfaced in this country when the idea, with a long history in rural European and South American societies, was brought over by Jan Vander Tuin from Switzerland in the late 1980s.

Almost everyone agrees the first two CSA farms sprang to life in Massachusetts and New Hampshire in 1986. America proved fertile ground for community supported agriculture, with more than 1,500 operations in existence. New York leads the nation with close to 200 CSA farms, 164 on Long Island, many of them certified organic.

Maggie Wood, co-owner of Jamesport's Golden Earthworm Organic Farm, has 80 certified organic acres in production. Members who sign up to be shareholders pay \$530 to receive a box of vegetables every week from June 1 through Thanksgiving week. "Members get whatever's in season over the 26 weeks," Wood said. "The box includes eight to 12 different items."

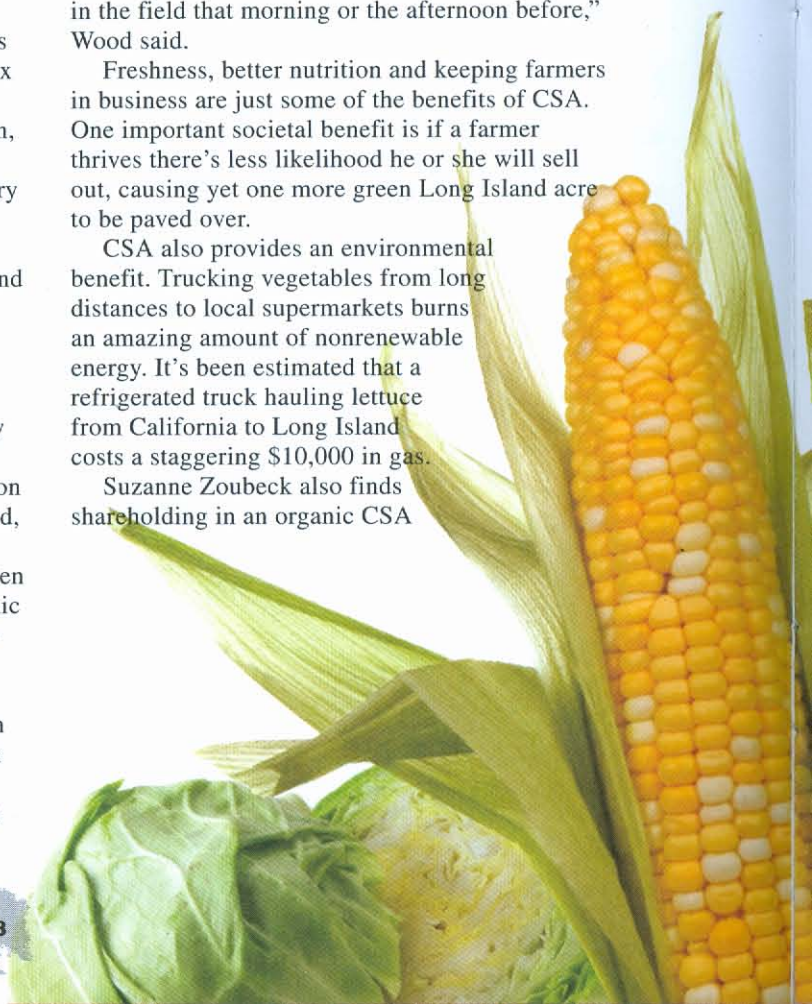
It's difficult to say how many mouths the box

in the field that morning or the afternoon before," Wood said.

Freshness, better nutrition and keeping farmers in business are just some of the benefits of CSA. One important societal benefit is if a farmer thrives there's less likelihood he or she will sell out, causing yet one more green Long Island acre to be paved over.

CSA also provides an environmental benefit. Trucking vegetables from long distances to local supermarkets burns an amazing amount of nonrenewable energy. It's been estimated that a refrigerated truck hauling lettuce from California to Long Island costs a staggering \$10,000 in gas.

Suzanne Zoubeck also finds shareholding in an organic CSA



farm actually costs less than buying vegetables at a store or green market. "I've gone to a health food store and bought bananas, lettuce and something else, paid with a \$20 bill and didn't get change," said Zoubeck, who organizes a CSA pickup location for Water Mill's organic Green Thumb Farm.

Last year a share in Green Thumb Farm cost \$555 for a weekly box of fresh vegetables from April through December. If a shareholder works at the pickup spot at Unitarian Universalist Fellowship church in Huntington, the share price is reduced by about \$100.

Juliane Saary-Littman participated in a CSA program in her native Germany and got involved here about five years ago after she put down roots in Port Washington. She said she enjoys the freshness and the nutritional bonus of the organic food but also uses the weekly box of produce as an educational exercise for herself and her three young children.

"It's great if you really like to cook," Saary-Littman said. "You get things in the box you would normally not buy. Getting my share every week really broadens my horizons."

She described gathering her children around the weekly share on the kitchen counter. "We ask, 'What can this be?' And then we look it up, get a recipe and realize it's delicious."

The mystery vegetables she's come to enjoy are various kinds of kale and rutabaga. "It's a kind of turnip we'd never seen before and we thought it was really good."

Joanne Strongin of Port Washington also likes the surprise of new foods provided by CSA. "I'm now a proud eater of kale," she said. "I never had it before I was part of CSA. Other surprises were garlic sapes, kohlrabi, purslane and celery root. All delicious, useful and healthful."



## Maggie Wood,

co-owner of Golden Earthworm Organic Farm, said shareholders receive whatever's in season over 26 weeks.

