

## FARMERS' MARKETS AND CSA'S



In the month of May Farmers Markets open around the state like roses in the Portland Rose Garden. Unlike the Rose Garden, however, Farmers Markets maintain their peak through the summer and into September.

While most states have Farmers Markets, Oregon seems to hold a special place for them. Every community that has a Farmers Market promotes it, brags about it, and takes special pride in it.

Catholic bishops hold a special place for agriculture "because it touches all our lives, wherever we live or whatever we do. It is about how we feed our own families, and the whole human family. It is about how we treat those who put food on our table and those who do not have enough food. It is about what is happening to food and farming, rural communities and villages, in the face of increasing concentration, new technology, and growing globalization in agriculture."

"When we go to the supermarket, we rarely think about where our food comes from, who produces it, who harvests it, or what it takes to process, package, and distribute it [food systems]." (USCCB: Pastoral Reflections on Food, Farmers, and Farmworkers)

Across the country there is a growing movement to improve our food systems to make food healthier for all people and the environment. Regional food systems – local for local – are preferable to national food systems.

While food systems, or supply chains, generally include the grocer as the middleman, a special relationship can and should be created by connecting the local farmer and the local consumer. The two most common connections are **Farmers' Markets and Community Supported Agriculture** programs.

**Farmers' Markets** epitomize the blend of many principles of Catholic social teaching: Call to Family, Community and Participation, Dignity of Work, Preferential Option for the Poor, Care for God's Creation.

By "Call to Family, Community and Participation" the U.S. Bishops explain that each person lives and develops in community. Catholic teaching's focus on the social nature of the person emphasizes family, community, solidarity and cooperation. Buying local essentially encourages the viability of a local economic enterprise, the farm, and supports community.

By "Option for the Poor" the U.S. Bishops apply the basic moral test-how our most vulnerable members are faring-and "extend in a special way to those who work in agriculture... Those who farm must have decent wages and a decent life." Farmers' markets enable farmers to keep approximately 80 cents of each dollar spent by the consumer.

Catholic teaching about the "Dignity of Work" insists that farmers must be able to support themselves and their families through their work. Farmers' markets advocates show that the markets help farmers stay in business.

By buying locally we reduce the number of food miles our food travels from the time of its production until it reaches the consumer. A typical carrot travels 1,838 miles to reach your dinner table. The food miles for items in the grocery store are, on average, 27 times higher than the food miles for goods bought from local sources. In the U.S., the average grocery store's produce travels nearly 1,500 miles between the farm where it was grown and your refrigerator. Farmers' Markets and CSA's reduce the amount of energy required to grow and transport the food to you by one fifth, thus practicing the U.S. Catholic teaching "Care for God's Creation."



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The "community" in "Call to Family, Community and Participation" also includes low-income people. We live in an Alice-in-Wonderland world when the cheapest foods are often highest in calories and lowest in nutrition but the cheapest foods are what is available when you try to stretch your food stamps (SNAP and WIC). We appreciate the value of a Farmers' Market that accepts WIC and SNAP since this practice creates opportunities for everyone. Accepting these ensures that more Oregonians can access healthy, fresh, affordable, sometimes organic, locally-grown food.

We encourage parishioners to visit their Farmers' Market.

**Community Supported Agriculture (CSA)** directly connects participants and farmers where the participants in a CSA pay their farmer at the beginning of the season to receive a weekly box of fresh fruits and vegetables during the harvest season, usually 10 weeks from June to October.

By buying a share, usually in March, consumers share in the risks with the farmers, thus creating a bond even stronger than frequenting your favorite farmer at the Farmers' Market.

By selling shares and raising capital, farmers avoid taking out a loan, the absence of which, with its interest payments, increases the economic circumstances of the farmer.

The Interfaith Food and Farms Partnership (IFFP) is a project of Ecumenical Ministries (EMO) and its Interfaith Network for Earth Concerns ministry. IFFP creates a direct relationship between congregations and new and immigrant farmers where farmers bring fresh, local food to congregations. One example of this ministry is a CSA program.

"That's My Farmer" is a partnership in Eugene between 13 CSA farms and 16 local congregations. Similar to the Interfaith Food and Farms Partnership program, "That's My Farmer" also sells a coupon book that you use at the farmers' market to buy from one of the 13 CSA farms.