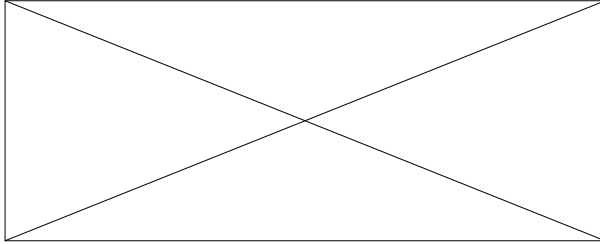


Meet Eve Kaplan: Organic Farmer, Garden of Eve

"I always tell people farming is like having an office job where you never know if your office is going to be locked."

By [Joseph Pinciario](#) | [Email the author](#) | April 9, 2011

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Eve Kaplan and her three-year old daughter, Shira.
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Eve Kaplan and her husband Chris opened [Garden of Eve](#) - an organic farm located at the end of the Northville Turnpike, on Sound Avenue in Northville - over a decade ago. The farm harvests over 150 different kinds of flowers, vegetables, and herbs on its 40 acres. Eve - a New Jersey native whose family summered in Riverhead growing up - said it was always her "dream to live in Riverhead. And now I do."

How did Garden of Eve start?

We started as gardeners with a big garden. We were invited to sell at the Greenport farmers' market, which is ironically starting up again this year and we're hoping to be a vendor there. So we just brought some of extra produce there and sold it, made little bit of cash, thought that was great, and pretty much expanded from there

We both had jobs off the farm for quite a few years before able to get to this scale where we're full time.

And what did you do in your past life?

Both Chris and I worked for environmental non-profit groups. Then he left first, doing the farm full-time and I was still working. And then I worked in the Town of Southampton for a few years as a planner.

Tell me about your operation now.

[Community Supported Agriculture](#) is about 70 percent of what we do. It's basically a partnership between members of the community and the farm. It's like a subscription – people sign up in the spring, and prepay for vegetables. It started out as a literal share of the farm – if we had 100 people, each person would get one 100th of what we harvested throughout the season. Now it's not literally that, but people still get a share. We offer organic vegetables, local fruits, our own eggs, and our own organic flowers. People can get any combination of those.

We go to 13 different locations around the New York/metro area and drive to different distribution points. It's kind of like a fruit of the month club, except it's a veggie of the week club. We select

what's going to be shared based on what's being harvested each week, and what's ready. Generally it's about 7 to 9 items each week. We try to get some diversity in the share – usually it's enough for two large meals or sides for each meal for a week.

How many people does the program serve?

We serve over 1,000 households overall, all the way into Queens, Brooklyn and Manhattan.

How much does the program cost to participate?

A full veggie share – each week, for 24 weeks from the first week in June through the week before Thanksgiving – is \$560. A half share, which is every other week, I think is \$295.

I didn't know that was how you operated. Is that a common business model?

It definitely is. Almost solely organic farms are doing this. On Long Island I would say there are close to 10 farms that offer CSAs. Some only offer it from the farm itself. Others offer like we do, and drive to other locations.

What's your goal?

Our goal has always been to be able to farm and also be a sustainable living for us as farmers. Long Island is a very expensive place to live. And we're a young business and also a young family. So we have those typical costs – a house to pay off and stuff like that. So our goal is to keep the farm profitable and I think long term what we want to try to do – because we go into New York City twice a week – our goal is to bring more focus back to the farm and try to get people to get some of the veggies right off the farm and do less driving.

What have you found to be the biggest challenge, now that you're a full time farmer?

I think biggest the challenge is the complexity of it. People have no idea how complex it is to run a farm. I always tell people it's like having an office job where you never know if your office is going to be locked when you show up for work in the morning because the weather dictates what you can get done. So first you have your plan of what you'd like to do but whether you'll be able to do on any given day is not up to you.

Then, even if are able to do it, we're a very diverse farm. As I think most organic farms are now. We're growing everything the customer wants, which means 150 kinds of vegetables and herbs that all have different needs and schedules: when they need to be planted, weeded, and harvested. And add to that, 13 different drop-off locations we have to pack for and two or three different farmers' markets we're going to each Saturday.

Which farmers' markets do you go to?

We're planning on going to Greenport. And we go to McCarren Park in Brooklyn, Manhattan, and Westhampton Beach.

Talk a little bit about organic farming in particular. How come you decided to go that route, and what have been some of the challenges inherent in that decision?

We were essentially new farmers new coming in, so I think for a new farmer coming in it's just as much work to learn to spray chemicals as it is to not learn to spray chemicals. So it's really a no brainer, and when you're living the same place as you're working and eating, it's pretty tough to want to be spraying toxic chemicals on food that you're going to be feeding your family.

I think a lot of farmers do it because that's what they grew up doing and that's what they know. But if you're starting from scratch, it's not any more difficult to grow organically than it is to grow with chemicals.

Then what good are the chemicals?

They make certain things a lot less work for the farmer. So once you get used to them, it's hard to say 'Yes, I want to spend eight hours doing what it takes me half an hour to do now with chemicals.'

What would an example be?

Weeding. Because you could spray an herbicide, and it kills all the weeds whereas we have to go in with all our guys and we might spend a whole half day with four, five, or 10 people weeding a whole crop.

How about on a wider scale? I don't know much about farming, but it seems like I hear more and more about organic farming every year. Why is that?

I think people are coming to their senses. If you think about it, all farming everywhere was organic in the entire world basically before World War I, and for the most part until World War II. And a lot of those wartime chemicals became marketed toward farmers as an additional source of revenue for companies that were profiting off of the war. And then farmers got used to them, dependant on them, but they're very expensive. They contaminate our water, our soil, and they make people sick. And they're really not necessary. And they're really not sustainable. Because in the long term, with oil doing what its doing, and the prices going up and down, it's a lot nicer to know you can farm without those chemicals.