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GLENDALE COUPLE FORMS LOCAL CSA GROUP

Residents Can Buy Shares of Fresh Produce

By Conor Greene

Area residents will have the option of purchasing fresh, locally grown produce directly from a Long Island farmer this summer through a new community supported agriculture group founded by a local couple.

Under the CSA arrangement, members pay an upfront fee at the start of the season, and then receive allotments of goods such as fruits, vegetables, eggs and flowers throughout the summer. Along with community gardens and greenmarkets, CSAs are becoming more popular throughout the city as people pay more attention to the food they consume.

"After two years [with the Brooklyn group] we learned a lot, but we live in Queens and looked around the neighborhood and said there needs to be more, so let's try it," said Kevin Burns, who is launching the effort along with his wife, Kimberly Ferstler. "The farmer takes the lead - they know what they can grow - and we do a little administration and set up the memberships, they do the planting and harvesting and bring it to us."

Through their connections with the Greenpoint CSA, Burns and Ferstler were able to reach an agreement with Garden of Eve farm in North Fork. "Getting to know the farmer is a big part of it," said Burns. "If you know the farmer, you know your food and have greater confidence in it... By the middle of the season, we do very nicely with the distribution and the shares are very generous."

The couple is hoping to have between 30 and 40 members in the first year, which will run from June 12 to Thanksgiving. Full shares of organic vegetables cost \$540, while a half share runs \$280, and neighbors are allowed join together and split their bounty. Shares of fruit, flowers and eggs are less expensive, and a mega combo that includes all four categories is also available.

Part of the process has been educating people about how CSAs operate, but so far the idea has been warmly received at local civic meetings, said Burns. "Some had heard about them before, while others needed a little clarification on how it works." There is also an educational component to the group, as the weekly selection often includes produce that members aren't accustomed to. "You may get items that are new to you, but we explain what it is, how to cook it and provide recipes," said Burns.

That's also part of the fun, added Burns, as the group receives a list of available goods a few days before the farmer drops it off, but never knows exactly what they will receive. "It's seasonal, so you get a sense [of what's coming] and you learn to eat seasonally. It's an adventure," he said.

Typical deliveries include squash, broccoli, potatoes, lettuce and tomatoes. "There's no guarantees [about the options], but when there's a plentiful harvest, it gets to us," added Burns. "Compared to what you get in the market, shipped halfway around the world, there is a world of difference."

So far, the biggest challenge has been coming up with a drop-off location where the food can be picked up by members each Saturday. The couple encountered issues with using local parks or businesses for distribution, so for the first year the items will be handed out from their Glendale home. "I think one of the bigger issues, which is why the library couldn't [host the group] is liability," said Burns, adding that he hopes the City Council will consider a law allowing CSAs to freely use public parks for distribution.

For more information, check glendalecsa.com.