

Lessons Learned Offering Spring, Summer, and Winter CSA Shares

Christa Alexander
Jericho Settlers Farm, Inc.
22 Barber Farm Rd. Jericho, VT 05465
802-899-4000
www.jerichosettlersfarm.com jsfarmvt@gmail.com

Jericho Settlers Farm has been offering a year round CSA program since 2010. We divide the year into three seasons: Spring, Summer, and Winter. The Spring and Winter seasons each consist of eight pickups that occur every other week, with the winter season running from mid October to early February and the spring season from late February through May. The summer season runs weekly from mid June through mid October for 17 weeks. We offer vegetable, meat, and “settlervore” (eggs, bread, cheese, plus) shares from which members can choose to sign up for any combination of shares. Year round members receive discounts for signing up for the same type of share for all three seasons. Annual memberships start with the spring share and we open up signup in January each year. Members can sign up on-line and pay via Paypal or mail us a check. Both full payment and quarterly payment options are available and we arrange other payment plans upon request.

In a given year our membership represents 300 families on average. Our membership per season is 150 shares (spring and winter) and 200 shares for the summer season. We began offering year round membership discounts in 2011 and twenty members signed up. Now in 2013 we have thirty-five year round members, or about 10% of our total member population. Our goal is to have 75 year round members by 2016.

Offering a year round CSA program obviously has some disadvantages if you want to take the winters off from farming, but since we are also livestock farmers that is not something we are going to do anyway, so keeping our vegetable operation going year round makes sense for us. It has numerous advantages:

MARKETING

- It helps to maintain customer loyalty – our members don’t have to find another farm, farmers market, or store to provide their local food in the winter and spring
- Our marketing efforts are less per product sold: we can sell more to our current customers, rather than having to recruit more new customers
- We do not have to compete as aggressively in a somewhat saturated summer CSA market

EMPLOYEES

- We have year round work for our employees, allowing for better employee retention and thus gained production efficiencies in not having to retrain a new crew each year
- With this trained crew we can more effectively schedule family vacations, because we have the confidence and strong working relationship with our crew to know they can run the farm in our absence (hence we don't necessarily need "winters off")

FINANCES

- A year round CSA program provides year round cash flow
- And it is a solid retail market during the "off seasons".

There are a few areas we pay close attention to in order to keep our year round program successful.

- We focus on keeping share composition exciting during the deep winter. For us this means a commitment to winter growing and providing "fresh" green vegetables all winter long, as well as freezing the summer favorites like tomatoes and corn.
- We have a comfortable, accessible winter pickup location: the art gallery on premises at the farm.
- The every other week pickup schedule in winter suits both our needs and our customers' needs: it gives a less intense schedule than summer, and since the produce is less perishable than most summer crops the members can receive enough for two weeks worth of eating without it spoiling, which means their pickup commitment is also less intense.
- During the winter we switch our "on farm" pickup day from a Monday to a Saturday, which allows members to pick up during daylight and keeps the pickup relaxed and enjoyable. We offer a "bag it up" service for late pickups.
- We provide recipes via e-newsletter for every pickup and make sure they are appropriate to the season and focused on simple, fast food prep ideas that bring out the best in the winter vegetables without enslaving members to their kitchens.