

Community Supported Agriculture: Find your match at MinnesotaGrown.com!

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www.minnesotagrown.com

It's that time of year, folks! It's time to reach out and get to know your friendly local Community Supported Agriculture (CSA) farmer. While this may sound a little like speed dating, it's important to know that every farm is a bit different – and that's what is so beautiful about the Community Supported Agriculture model! Never participated in a Community Supported Agriculture program before? Not to worry! We have the information you need to get started. There are over [70 CSA farms](#) included in the Minnesota Grown Directory for you to choose from. This year, we interviewed Minnesota Grown CSA farmers Leslie and Brian Axdahl from [Axdahl's Garden Farm & Greenhouse](#) for their expert advice on joining a CSA program.



What is Community Supported Agriculture?

Community Supported Agriculture (CSA) Farms are a fast-growing direct-farm marketing and production model. A CSA farm sells **subscriptions** or **memberships** to their CSA program. Members pay up front and then receive a **share** of produce, generally once per week for 14-20+ weeks. The cost varies from farm to farm depending on the products in the share and the number of deliveries included. CSA farms deliver your share to a **drop site**, which might be a local business, the farm itself, a farmers market, or other establishment where you will pick it up, take it home, and enjoy local products harvested just hours ago. Many CSA farms have drop sites outside the city they are located in.

Additionally, CSA farms offer special opportunities for their members such as on-farm activities, weekly newsletters and other membership benefits.



Benefits of Community Supported Agriculture

Community Supported Agriculture is a win-win model. Consumers benefit by enjoying ultra-fresh produce: think of carrots that were just pulled from the soil, tomatoes ripe off the vine, fresh eggs... the possibilities are endless! Becoming a member also builds a special relationship with a farm and farmer, offering a very real connection between the farm and your fork. CSA memberships are perfect for busy schedules; your box of produce is delivered weekly and might mean one less trip to the grocery store that week! When you become a member you might receive produce that you have never tried before and you are likely to eat more vegetables than you typically would. It is a great way to add variety to your weeknight dinners. The farmer benefits by sharing the harvest-season risk with the program members. For example, if the farm gets bad weather, like a hailstorm in the summer, perhaps some of the green bean crop is lost. Because members purchase the subscription ahead of time, the farmer is able to balance the share and add a different product, like tomatoes, to make up for the lost green beans that week. The idea of shared risk is what creates a sense of community and a stronger connection to the farm.



Leslie and Brian shared with us their ideas on the many benefits of joining a CSA:

- *“Nutrient-rich, sustainably grown, fresh, safe produce*
- *Knowing that what you are eating is locally grown and healthy.*
- *Your produce hasn’t traveled great distances and used up valuable non-renewable resources for transportation before it reaches you.*
- *You help to ensure the success of a local farm and the families we employ.*
- *Buying a share of this year’s harvest in advance supports the kind of stewardship that is good for the land and the community. You share in the rewards as well as the risks of the year’s crops.*



Although you share in the risk of the farm with us, [Axdahl Farms](#)’ risk is relatively low. We farm over a wide area, have diversity of crops and successive plantings. If one planting is not as productive we have others that are. One of the most rewarding aspects of being a CSA farmer is the ability to plan the harvest for a certain number of members and know that the produce that is grown will be consumed and enjoyed fresh. That is why it is so important for members to sign up early so that the farmer can do a better job of planning.”

Meet the Farmers



Leslie and Brian Axdaahl
from
**Axdaahl's Garden
Farm &
Greenhouse CSA**
Stillwater, MN

Axdaahl Farms is a family-owned farm. Brian and Leslie Axdaahl are the husband and wife team leaders.

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“CSA memberships offer a great opportunity for families to cook with, learn and enjoy fresh produce. Get the whole family involved!”

Joining a CSA Program

Like two homegrown tomatoes, no two CSA farms are exactly alike. This is why it's very important to do a little digging and find a CSA program that is right for you and your family. To illustrate this, we asked our experts for a taste of the unique offerings of their CSA program and a little history on how they got started.



Axdaahl's Garden Farm & Greenhouse CSA

Leslie and Brian Axdaahl

[Axdaahl Farms](#) is a family-owned farm. Brian and Leslie Axdaahl are the husband and wife team leaders and have been Minnesota Grown members for many years. The main farm is in Stillwater Township along the St. Croix River. The Axdahls also have a consumer-friendly farm on the site of one of the first farmsteads in Washington County, located at 7452 Manning Avenue North, just west of downtown Stillwater. It is a traditional roadside market with seasonal offerings. The Axdaahl family have been members of the St. Paul Farmers Market for over 30 years. They supply various grocery stores, restaurants and schools through wholesale distributors with fresh seasonal produce, in addition to their CSA program.



**AXDAHL'S
Garden Farm
& GREENHOUSE**

A Year with the Axdahls

“Beginning in spring we have colorful hanging baskets, bedding plants, vegetable and herb plants, trees, and shrubs. We also have a full array of organic and sustainable gardening supplies to keep our customers’ plants healthy. Summertime brings fresh produce of all varieties including our famous delicious sweet corn, heirloom tomatoes, fresh green beans and lots, lots more! During the fall, the farm is filled with pumpkins and fall decorations of all shapes, sizes, and colors. Hayrides, petting zoo, pick-your-own patch, and other fun things for families. At Christmas time we have freshly cut trees, garland, custom wreaths and other holiday decorations. Stop by and enjoy a cup of hot chocolate while you shop for your perfect Christmas tree.”



Their CSA Program

“2016 will be our sixth year as a [CSA farm](#),” Brian and Leslie told us. “We started getting requests to offer CSA memberships a long time ago. We had been actively selling fresh produce directly to the public and did not really know much about CSAs. We attended a Minnesota Grown Conference and learned from other CSA farmers about what they were doing. We decided to utilize our existing greenhouses and start our own CSA program.

“Every CSA farm is different in its offerings, pricing, and start/stop weeks. Our CSA runs for 18 weeks. We offer two share sizes: full share and half share. A full share is packed in a bushel box and is typically for a family of four+. A full share costs \$684 (about \$38 per week for 18 weeks). A half share is packed in a 5/9 bushel box. Customers who have only one or two people in their family usually choose the half share option. It costs \$22 per week for 18 weeks. The selected share is delivered to the customer’s chosen location at the same time each week. Drop sites include our farm market in Stillwater, River Market Coop in Stillwater, Lake Elmo Inn in Lake Elmo, Jordan Meats & Deli in Woodbury, Fresh & Natural Foods in Woodbury, and all Twin Cities-area Lunds & Byerlys.

“Our CSA includes fresh produce and seasonal local fruits, like melons and strawberries. Some farms also include meat, eggs, bread and/or cheese.

“A typical season of our CSA starts with greenhouse-grown/hydroponic lettuces, herbs, cucumbers and tomatoes. As the season progresses we add peas, asparagus, rhubarb, and strawberries. The main season includes sweet corn, green beans, zucchini, cucumbers, peppers, potatoes, broccoli, cauliflower, melons, and more. Fall goodies include beets, kale, winter squashes, pumpkins, and more! We try to add unique items which may be new to some customers. Our customers have compared getting their CSA box to getting a new Christmas present each week. In the fall our CSA customers are invited out to our farm market to pick out their own pumpkin, take a hayride and enjoy the fall harvest.”

Thank you to Brian and Leslie for teaching us about your CSA!

Types of CSA Programs

Looking for more than just veggies? Many types of farms have adopted the CSA model, from mushrooms to meat! Farms have even established winter CSA programs filled with yummy root vegetables and more. Interested in a fresh bouquet of local flowers each week? There's a CSA program right for you! Check out the Minnesota Grown Directory to find CSA programs for your favorite local products.

CSA Advice from the Experts

Sign up sooner rather than later! All our CSA farmer experts agree, signing up early is key! Memberships are already filling up. Though the summer season seems far off, the time to sign up for your CSA membership is now.

If you have questions, ask! Many of our farmers have expressed that they are happy to answer questions about allergies, shares, and more. Take advantage of your participation in this community program. Reach out, chat with your farmer, and learn more.

Head over to www.MinnesotaGrown.com to start checking out the CSA farms in your area.

