

In the Key of Green: Myerov Family Farm CSA

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A little Bach with your broccoli? Coltrane with your Kohlrabi?

Picking up the weekly vegetables at the Myerov Family Farm can nourish the spirit as much as the body: Neil Myerov is not only a longtime farmer but a professional musician. Smack in the middle of the farm store is a piano, and it's not unusual to find him practicing while customers prowl the produce.

Myerov and members of his family have been farming the 12-acre Bedminster Township property on Elephant Road north of Dublin since 1980, selling vegetables at the New Hope, Doylestown and Perkasio farmers markets. This is the first year the farm will be operated as a "Community Supported Agriculture" (CSA) enterprise.

CSAs are a relatively recent phenomenon in Bucks County. A CSA sells annual memberships to individuals or families, who share whatever the farm produces over the season. If it's a good year for lettuce, members will be swimming in salad; if a blight devastates the beans, it's ciao to chow-chow. Members share in the risks and rewards of farming, and help out with planting, weeding, harvesting or social events.

The Myerov farm will yield vegetables, herbs and flowers May through November. The farm will feature variety. There will be not just beets, but beets in three colors; squashes in a half-dozen sizes and shapes; pear tomatoes, heirloom tomatoes and Japanese black tomatoes. The farm's vegetables will be augmented with fruits from local berry farms and orchards.

The store will sell salsa and ketchup made from the farm's produce, and Myerov will teach classes in cooking, canning and flower arranging. To accommodate customers' busy schedules and a dispersed community, there will be dropoff points in New Hope as well as Glenside, Newtown, Doylestown and Skippack.

On a sunny but chilly March day, Neil Myerov pads happily about in sandals. This time of year, he is on a weekly cycle of planting seeds in tiny pots lined up on long tables in a greenhouse. The seedlings will be transplanted to fields as they mature, yielding a steady flow of new crops.

Myerov himself is a transplant. A Northeast Philadelphia native, he began backyard gardening in high school. His interest evolved into an obsession. After nearly three decades working Bucks



Neil Myerov will operate a family Community Supported Agriculture vegetable farm this season.

County soil – including a stint as horticulture production manager at Delaware Valley College – the self-taught farmer still exudes the enthusiasm of a neophyte. "I just love growing food – it gives me a thrill. I don't have any particular notion of changing the world, but

it's what I like to do."

Myerov also designed and built all the structures on the farm, including the family home and the store that will double as a community room with a coffee bar – and a piano.

While small farmers typically work off-farm to supplement their seasonal income, Myerov's is not a conventional steady job. He's the organist for both a synagogue and a church. Last year he recorded a jazz piano CD.

Myerov envisions the farm playing a musical role in the community. He's planning to invite area musicians to play at a monthly "salon," an informal event in which singers and instrumentalists perform in an intimate setting.

For a farm to be a locus not just for local food but for arts, crafts and cultural events is not unusual in the CSA movement. The idea is that the farm should enable people to reconnect with each other, creating community by building on the fundamental relationship between land and food.

Picking up farm-fresh vegetables each week is also a way of "forcing people to change their habits and eat healthily," notes Myerov. It's easy to buy frozen, prepared or fast foods; gathering ingredients, planning meals and cooking fresh vegetables the old-

fashioned way requires more time and effort. But CSAs are catching a wave of demand for wholesome, natural foods.

CSAs are also benefiting from a burgeoning demand for foods grown or processed locally. "Localvores" support the community's economy, save energy and preserve open space. Establishing a personal relationship with the farmer or processor also gives consumers an added sense of food safety, no small benefit in light of recent scares such as E. coli-laced ground beef from California and toxic ginger from China.

The Myerov property was once part of a network of farms: a working landscape that defined a close-knit, farm-centered community. Now it's surrounded by subdivisions; the landscape is fragmented; the community, spread far and wide. Farms – and communities – must evolve to survive. Starting with some classical notes, improvising a few riffs and applying years of practice, the Myerov Family Farm is composing a new tune, creating a modern farm-connected community.

The Myerov Family Farm, 306 Elephant Road, Perkasio, is still accepting members for 2008; see myerovfarm.com or call 215-249-3145.