

Member Guide for using Ward Vegetables CSA - 2023 Version

We are sharing this Member Guide with you so you will use your membership in the CSA to your best advantage. This guide is broken into several sections so you can find what you are looking for quickly.

What is a CSA?

It is important for a member to understand what a CSA actually is. By definition a CSA stands for Community Supported Agriculture. It is a business model where the farmer and the CSA member share in the risk of what is being grown for the member. In other words you are a part of the farm, you are a part of the process of growing food, you are a part of successes and failures that happen when working with Mother Nature and you are a valued member of the farm.

It also means you are a part of the Ward Vegetables CSA “community”. Our CSA community consists of approximately 100 families sharing in the food we produce. So there will be times when you order many of a certain veggie or green but only get one or two because the whole community gets an equal share as you all are taking the reward/risk with the farm.

How does Ward Vegetables CSA work? Our most frequently asked question!!!

One of the most asked questions we get is, how does the CSA work? Most CSA's are a weekly pickup for a predetermined amount of weeks (usually June through October) and predetermined products that will be in your basket. Ward Vegetables is much more flexible and customized to our members. Membership is required and offered at three different levels (see below). Your membership dollars are put into your CSA Member account and as you order your account is debited. You are **not required** to order each week, only when you want fresh, Certified Naturally Grown vegetables but we would love for you to order every week if you so choose. When your CSA Member account has been spent you can renew your membership. ***We actually want to be a part of your weekly/biweekly shopping routine so that each week you and your loved ones are eating nutrient rich veggies!***

We grow vegetables year round with the goal being to have fresh, local, nutrient dense veggies from 42 to 48 weeks of the year. We specialize in greens and other cool season crops which allow us to grow almost the entire year. We do miss a few weeks due to plants transitioning, weather conditions, and some time off for our crew and farmers. Below are other details about how our CSA works.

Membership Levels - we offer 3 levels of membership. **Salad Bar** - requires a membership fee of \$500 and offers the member a free week of your average purchase of greens and veggies when you renew, a gift certificate to BR Lunch Box for two, and a sample package of other products available to you at no cost. **Good Veggies** - requires a membership fee of \$300 and offers the member a free week of your average purchase of greens and veggies when you renew plus a gift certificate to BR Lunch Box for two. **Keeping it Local** - requires a membership fee of \$100 and again offers the member a free week of your average purchase of greens and veggies when you renew. At this time we are only able to accept cash or checks. Checks should be made out to “The Farm”. ***We do not offer refunds but you can sell your share to another person if the membership does not work for you.***

Ordering - your CSA member account is charged when you order veggies from us. Ordering typically happens from Saturday afternoon through Sunday at 7:00 p.m. A weekly email goes out each Saturday with a menu of what is available for the upcoming week, a farm update on all the activities happening at the farm, a veggie of the week attachment (nutritional info plus how to store and use the veggie), and any other items that are available from other farms who do business at our Farm Shed (eggs, raw milk, grass-fed meats, jams, vinegar, sourdough bread and occasionally other items that are fresh and grown naturally).

Pickup - pick up happens at Ward Vegetables on Tuesdays and Wednesdays between 4:00 p.m. and 6:00 p.m., the member selects the most convenient day for them but you can always change that day by letting Farmer John know. You can choose the curbside pickup where we hand you your order at pickup or you can park and chat with the farmers for a bit. We hold your order for one day and then distribute to our working shares or compost your goodies. *If you order but do not pick up your vegetables your account is charged.* We also offer delivery during the winter months (November through March) to your home. There is a delivery charge for this service which is deducted from your account. Farm hours are Monday - Friday, 9:00 a.m. to 6:00 p.m., Saturday and Sunday by appointment, and the Farm closes at 7:00 p.m. during the weekday.

Our Partners - We work with several farms to have their awesome products available at the farm during your pickup. These are separate items from Ward Vegetables and all the farms accept cash or check. Currently those farms include: **Apsey Farms** (eggs and grass-fed meats), **Under the Maples Farm** (eggs, both retail and egg shares, grass fed pork and beef, and raw milk shares), **Jana's Sourdough Bread** (a bread CSA), and **Ward Orchards** (jams and vinegars). We have these farms at our farm because their agricultural practices are similar to ours, regenerative, sustainable, and healthy soil. And the **BR Lunch Box** offers CSA meals during our pick ups, order directly from them and they drop off on your pick up day.

So what is different about this CSA? We are certainly a different type of farm for our area. Below are some aspects of where we stand out for our best practices as a farm and as a business.

Soil - The soil is our biggest asset and we treat it with care. The soil must be healthy, full of microbiology, full of nutrients, full of life! We do not use any conventional chemicals or other chemicals on our soil or our plants. We use minerals to replace what the vegetables take out of the soil. Our ultimate goal is to reduce our dependence on mined minerals and transition to using our own plants to continually feed the soil. We do this by utilizing plants like thistle, nettles, burdock, curly dock, dandelion, yarrow, comfrey and other plants. Those plants are rich in minerals like calcium, sulfur, phosphorus, potassium, silica, and a host of micro nutrients that replenish the soil. We also utilize green manures (plants like buckwheat) and cover crops growing in our soil all year long. Our soil is rarely bare, we are always feeding our microbiology.

Nutrition - By having a healthy soil our vegetables and plants benefit from all the activity that is constantly taking place, 24/7 and 365 days of the year. Our vegetables are nutrient rich and we know this because we use a BRIX meter to test nutrient density several times each month. Our veggies are consistently in the excellent range of the BRIX chart.

Size of Veggies - Our vegetables are not huge, a huge veggie is one that is missing lots of nutrition. We harvest our veggies at their optimum, meaning we do not have oversized vegetables. Occasionally a crop like zucchini will get ahead of us and we try to move the large fruits to folks who like making zucchini bread. If you are looking for large veggies we will disappoint you, but if you are looking for flavor and nutrition you will be very happy with our products!

Customized for You - We harvest each week based on our members' orders. This "customized approach" means that we harvested specifically for you. Each week is unique and customized to you. Most of the vegetables we harvest for you are less than 48 hours old when you pick them up. Our serving sizes offered have been refined over the last 16 years to meet the needs of our members. And we strive to not run out of products, especially our salads and greens so you have a consistent supply of those nutritious products all the time. We achieve this by spending hours upon hours detailing out a planting schedule that keeps our year round plants and seasonal plants producing when they are supposed to.

Year Round Production of Greens and certain Herbs and Veggies - We utilize several hoop houses to produce lettuce and greens approximately 42 to 46 weeks out of the year. The hoops also allow us to grow a couple of herbs like cilantro (nothing better than winter cilantro) and parsley along with beets, carrots, radishes, and turnips throughout even the winter months. As a member you will have many opportunities to avoid shopping at big box stores for those types of greens and veggies. You will have the choice to keep it local and nutrient dense.

Certified Naturally Grown - We are the only farm in Mecosta County that is Certified Naturally Grown (CNG) and one of only 36 farms in the state. This certification is very similar to Organic in that it uses all the same standards and practices but is geared to a local market instead of regional, national, or global markets. The other beauty of CNG is that it is a peer reviewed system, meaning that each year our farm has an actual CNG farmer inspecting our operation and Farmer John is required to inspect a farm each year as well. This is a perfect opportunity to learn and apply new knowledge to our farm yearly.

This all leads up to these last pieces of advice....

What is the best way for me to use my membership?

Understand what we grow and that we specialize in greens. It is important as a member of a CSA that specializes in greens that you like greens. We grow seasonal vegetables as well, tomatoes, cucumbers, peppers, eggplant, green beans, rhubarb, and a host of other seasonal vegetables. But we specialize in greens and we are the only farm in the area that does that.

Utilize us as your Local Vegetable source. Seasonal produce is a good thing for your overall diet and eating those items when in season is very healthy for you. We do grow crops that do well for us in all seasons and it is now possible in a northern climate to have lettuce, multiple varieties of greens, spinach, kale, chard, cilantro, parsley, carrots, beets, salad turnips, and radishes pretty much year round and we are your local source for those delicious veggies.

Our goal is to become your main source of those kinds of foods on a weekly/biweekly basis.

Communicate with us about Quality, Quantity, Flavor, How to Use, and Questions. The only way for our farm or any other business to survive and thrive is for our customers/members to communicate with us. If there is a quality issue you should feel very comfortable letting us know about the issue, if you say nothing a problem can't be fixed or we cannot improve a process. Let us know what you think of different products and how you use them. And if you do not know what something is let us help you understand the product and how to best use it, store it, wash it, etc...

Sample all the Different Greens and Vegetables. It is very easy to get into a routine of just ordering what you are familiar with. Our recommendation is to try as many vegetables as you can. You may be surprised by the difference in flavor of fresh veggies versus store bought. A great example for us are the stalks of most of the greens we grow. Members are used to just utilizing the leaf of a crop like chard when the real flavor and nutrition is in the stalk. We also offer advice on how to increase the flavor of something you may have had as a kid. Beets come to mind with this example and if you were to roast beets or better yet smoke beets the flavor is simply outstanding. Jump into the CSA with both feet and try new things!

Visit the Farm and Wander. While we try to have several events at the farm each year, our members are invited out anytime to visit, wander, sample, take pictures, bring friends, etc....Part of being a member is enjoying the beauty and peacefulness of the farm. We always encourage our members to park their car and wander at pickup. It is a nice way to end the day, breathe, and take a little nature in.

Take the Opportunity to Share your Experiences with the Veggies and/or Recipes. The best part of a CSA is the community that it builds and as a member you can participate in that community if you choose. We will always strive to give as much information about what we grow as we can but many times the best information comes from our members. We hope to have a shareable folder that will house nutrition facts, recipes, and other important info that our members have access to 24/7. As a farm we also try to share what members tell us and we are hoping to have the opportunities to have more events at the farm for our members to partake in.

There you have it! Welcome to Ward Vegetables CSA and happy, healthy eating. Hopefully this guide helps you utilize the farm to your best advantage and lets you know more about the farm and how the CSA works. Thank you for eating **local, fresh, nutrient dense,** and **healthy** food!