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PICKERING

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SUPPORTING LOCAL FARMS

Pickering residents heard about community-supported agriculture that allows residents to eat local fresh produce while also reducing their carbon footprint at a recent meeting hosted by Durham Sustain Ability.

One such local farm -- Forsythe Family Farms of

Scugog -- runs a community-supported program where consumers support the farm operation by purchasing a farm share and benefit by receiving a weekly box of fresh produce directly from the farmer.

STORY PAGE 8

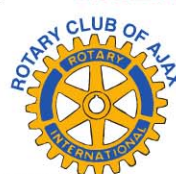
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Buy local, support a farm

Pickering asked to buy into community-supported agriculture, which allows residents to eat fresh produce, reduce carbon footprint

Kristen Calis

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DURHAM -- Durham farmers are asking the public to support local agriculture, reaping the benefits of fresh fruits and vegetables while they're at it.

"It's a pledge of support," said Daniel Forsythe of Forsythe Farms.

An event hosted by Durham Sustain Ability on community-supported agriculture drew a large crowd of people to Ray's Cafe in Pickering recently, eager to learn all about this method of eating locally harvested food. Also referred to as 'farm share,' CSA is growing in popularity as a way for local residents to get fresh produce onto their kitchen tables while supporting local farmers.

"The farm share program is the way we connect with our customer," said Jennifer Eng of Zephyr Organics.

DSA hosts EnviroChats throughout the year on various environmental issues that affect people in Durham.

"This is more than we've ever gotten before," said Bob Hester, a volunteer with DSA.

Although the farms featured at the event are located in northern municipalities such as Port Perry and Uxbridge, they deliver to Durham households. He felt it made sense to provide the information to residents in south Durham, as well as another session that was held in the north.

"There are so many more people here," Mr. Hester said. "The environmental footprint of the people living here tends to be much larger as a group than up there."

In advance of the growing season, consumers pay for a share of the farm's harvest, and food is delivered to their home either weekly or biweekly, depending on the option they choose.

Farmers at the event explained purchasing the farm share in advance helps the farm fund and plan the gardens in advance.

It gives the farmers a better idea of how much seed to buy and how many plants to plant, said Kelty McKay of Willowtree Farm.

"There's so much good that comes out of it," she said.

She said the farm is starting to favour CSA over farmers' markets because it's more controlled. Rainy days, for example, could make for a bad turnout at a farmers' market.



SCUGOG -- Daniel Forsythe operates a community-supported agriculture program at Forsythe Family Farms. Consumers support a farm operation by purchasing a farm share, and benefit by receiving a weekly box of fresh produce directly from the farmer.

Jason Liebrechts / Metroland



HOW THIS IMPACTS YOU

Community-supported agriculture:

- Brings fresh food to your home
- Reduces your carbon footprint by buying food close to home
- Supports local farmers
- Supports the local economy
- Allows consumers to connect to the farmers

Plus, Ms. McKay finds investing in a farm share is the cheapest way to buy fresh local food, and when there's an abundance of a crop, the customers will get extra in their basket.

The program varies from farm to farm, but options include either ordering half shares or full shares. Some farms also pro-

vide meat and egg shares.

"Me as an individual, I want to see a positive impact with the lives it touches," said Mr. Forsythe.

He feels the program raises awareness of the need to support local farmers, and helps consumers relate with the farmers as they are "taking on some of the risk."

"It puts you in the farmer's boots, so to speak," he said.

Ms. McKay and Ms. Eng noted that CSAs can give people a greater appreciation for fresh fruits and vegetables, which are only available at certain times of the year, such as pumpkin in the fall.

"You get to learn to eat through the season," said Ms. McKay.

"I think it increases your enjoyment of those foods," said Ms. Eng.

Rachel Vigliatore of Pickering said she always wanted to try a farm share but didn't know it was available in Pickering. She's interested in CSA to eat locally and to reduce her carbon footprint, as well as to educate her children.

"I try to encourage my kids to understand what it's like to eat real food," she said.

Pickering resident Cathy Nelson works

for a health food company and chose to attend the information session.

"I'm a lot concerned about what's going on as far as food, GMOs (genetically modified organisms)," she said.

She feels farm shares are a good idea.

"It makes sense because we know where our food is coming from," she said.

The growing season generally runs from mid-May to late October, or for 18 to 21 weeks. Some farms have an early bird rate, so it's best to call in advance of March 31 to inquire about specials.

Fast facts

Farms that participated in the event and offer CSA:

- Zephyr Organics, Zephyr -- 416-577-3685, www.zephyrorganics.com
- Forsythe Family Farms -- 905-809-1364, www.forsythefamilyfarms.com
- Willowtree Farm, Port Perry -- 905-985-7493, www.willowtreefarm.ca
- Lunar Rhythm Gardens, Janetville -- 905-986-9612, www.csafarmdurhamkawartha.com

Page 6 - Today's editorial