

Community Supports Agriculture In This Kimberton 'Garden Of Eden'

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tomatoes are raised on five beds each measuring 165 feet long. Because of the lack of space, no sweet corn is grown.

"The thing about this system that's nice is that we can be so diversified," said Barbara Sullivan. "We don't have cost analyses on every single crop. We look at it as a total system. We're trying to feed people, enhance the environment, and make a good living — not necessarily making the maximum possible profit."

Barbara said what they grow provides a balanced mix that "you would see in somebody's kitchen."

The CSA garden includes about 10 acres of silty loam soil owned by and leased from the Kimberton Waldorf School, a private school for kindergarteners through 12th grade. It is located next to Seven Stars Farm. For years, the land was known as Kimberton Farms. Now it is leased by the Seven Stars Dairy Farm.

Too often, the Sullivans believe, vegetable production focuses on "monoculture" — growing acres and acres of one type of crop, selling bushels and bushels of it wholesale, and trying to make a living using high levels of inputs for maximum yields. Their efforts are looking the other way — through biodynamic farming, as it is called, the Sullivans grow a wide variety of produce with natural inputs for fertility.

The Kimberton CSA was the first CSA in Pennsylvania, begun in 1987, and the third to begin in the country. There are probably about 1,000 CSAs in the country now, according to Kerry.

Both Kerry and Barbara have a wide range of experience in biodynamic farming, which began in Europe in the 1920s and continues strong. Kerry said they were

trained in Great Britain to grow crops biodynamically. The method makes use of not only figuring crop nutrition but looking at a wide range of environmental "holistic" factors that provide a healthy crop.

"You learn to think in terms of the farm being a self-contained organism, a living system," said Barbara. "Most of the inputs come from the farm and wastes are recycled on the farm."

With the CSA, which has 150 member-households, people have begun to think in terms of the "community," according to Barbara.

"Members are really excited about it when they join and then it's really a few years before it gets ingrained, and it just becomes a part of their life," she said. "We have quite a few members now that have been with us nine years."

No work is required of CSA members, but some sign up as members of the CSA to contribute to some of the work on the community garden.

"Almost all of the strawberry beds are adopted by the members," said Kerry. "Certain members will say, 'I'll take care of this bed for a year, weeding and whatever it needs.' That's worked out very well. So that frees us to grow other produce for them. They get excited about weeding strawberries because they love them."

Members pay a yearly fee depending on share size. One full share, at a cost of \$950, allows members to pick up harvested produce twice a week. A half share, at \$600 each, allows members to obtain produce only once a week. In addition, pick-your-own crops are available for much of the season and are included in the share price.

For the fruits, flowers, and vegetables that are pick your own,

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Learn How Community Garden Operates At Kimberton Field Day

KIMBERTON (Chester Co.) — Barbara and Kerry Sullivan will host a field day at their Community Supported Agriculture (CSA) farm near Kimberton on Saturday, June 8, from three to six in the afternoon.

The open house will be of interest to farmers and nonfarmers alike, as the Sullivans work with both the rural and urban communities operating one of the oldest CSAs in Pennsylvania.

From 3 p.m. to 4 p.m. Barbara will discuss Community Supported Agriculture, a form of marketing that is gaining ground in this country. This CSA provides eight months of fresh fruits and vegetables to 150 member families who each pledge up front to pay for their fair share of the produce.

If you are a farmer looking for an alternative marketing strategy, you are interested in starting a CSA, or you are simply someone with an interest in agricultural land preservation, agricultural viability in urbanizing areas, or community involvement in agriculture, this session will add considerably to your understanding of the "how to's" of CSA.

From 4 p.m. to 5 p.m., the spotlight will turn on Kerry, who will lead the tour of the organic/

biodynamic farm, focusing on early season and spring-extended vegetable production. Avid home gardeners as well as market farmers will find much to glean from this impressive grower. The Sullivans routinely grow and sell some of the earliest green vegetables and they will be gearing for full production by mid-June and fully expect to continue harvesting through late fall for the CSA members.

From 5 p.m. to 6 p.m., Kerry and Barbara are willing to field questions about their operation, composting, CSA, biodynamic and organic production, and any other questions participants might have. This open session will allow the participants to get the "nitty gritty" from the farmers in an informal dialog.

Preregistration is requested. Please call Kathy Koehler at (610) 683-1415 to register and to receive detailed directions. The farm is located on Seven Stars Road opposite the Kimberton Waldorf School. Refreshments will be available from 2:30 p.m.

This field day is sponsored by RISA, the Regional Infrastructure for Supporting Agriculture Project, and is supported by a grant from the W.K. Kellogg Foundation.



CSAs are labor intensive and demand a lot of time and management. But they can draw on a vast membership to volunteer their time. At the high tunnel are, left to right, Cary Oshins, Rodale Institute; Jonda Crosby, RISA associate; and Kerry and Barbara Sullivan, owners of the Kimberton CSA.



Members pay a yearly feed depending on share size. On the blackboard is the produce available when the season opens May 21.



Members can make suggestions about what they want to see grown but the farmers make all final decisions about production. At left is Kerry Sullivan, at the cooler door, and right is Cary Oshins, Rodale Institute.