

Schreiber & Sons CSA

It's a Culinary Adventure

Schreiberandsons.com

April 20th, 2010

Why Join Schreiber & Sons CSA, or for that matter, any CSA.

If you receive this directly from us, it means you have already joined the CSA and have already made your value-loaded decision regarding Schreiber & Sons; however, I wanted to take some time and tell you why I think you have made the right decision. (You can always forward this to someone who is contemplating joining.)

It's The Local Economy. By joining a CSA you are voting with your dollars. If you buy some California, or heaven forbid, Peruvian asparagus, New Zealand apples, Mexican melons or Arizona mixed greens, most of the money you spend leaves the Tri-Cities. I happen to have the inside track on the economics of imported asparagus. If you spend \$2 on a pound of imported asparagus, 50 cents goes to the grower/shipper, a dollar goes for transportation, about 25 cents goes to the store, and another 25 cents goes to getting it out of the country in which it is grown. Of the two dollars, less than 10% stays in the local economy; most as wages paid to the workers in the store.

If you spend \$2 at our CSA, much more of your money stays here. Over half of the money that comes into the CSA goes into wages and benefits of our workers. Our seed, fertilizer, petroleum and other supplies are purchased locally—mostly from local owned businesses. Some of the CSA land is rented and that money goes to a local farmer. The cost of water and electricity is local, propane for heating the greenhouse is local.

I think the impact on the local economy is probably the greatest hidden secret about the value of our CSA. If everyone in the Tri-Cities joined the CSA, the impact would be tremendous. But you know this—since you have already joined.

Your Economy. Year before last we did a little research on the value you receive from being in the CSA. One caveat to this section—it assumes that you eat everything in your box; yes, I know for some of you this is a tall order. Yes—I know that some of you THROW some of my produce away!!!!!! (but it serves as pretty good, local compost as well!) Anyway, moving on. We priced the items in your boxes at two grocery stores and compared these to what you would pay if you bought them individually (not even counting time and gasoline). We used Yokes and Winco as our standards—Yokes has one of the highest non-sale prices on average and Winco has some of the lowest prices for produce. In both cases, we found that the amount paid for the CSA was substantially less than the grocery store prices. This may not seem realistic until you

think about the above breakdown regarding prices. The single biggest expense for most items of produce is transportation. Our transportation costs are negligible compared to trucked/flown in produce.

There were two additional observations we made during our investigation. Several items in your boxes were not available anywhere in the Tri-Cities, so an additional advantage is receiving the otherwise unobtainable. The second find applies to the organic members. The organic offerings in the Tri-Cities are miniscule (and often, organic produce is substandard). When we did our price comparison it ended up being a valid comparison only for the conventional produce as no store carried enough organic produce to even do the calculation. If you value organic produce, the CSA is THE only way to go, particularly when you include price and availability.

Since we started our CSA, another CSA has started up. Although this CSA delivers into the Tri-Cities, it is from out of state. Our operation starts earlier than this CSA, ends later, has a higher diversity of produce and more items per box. On a per box basis, our CSA is a substantially better value. (This is not the case for the CSA I mention, but Schreiber & Sons has been known to supply a CSA about 200 miles from here with needed produce—interesting to realize—but CSAs are NOT all the same!)

Flavor. Most produce items in local stores have been trucked in from other locales.... California, Texas, Mexico, Chile, Peru, Australia, wherever the lowest cost producer in the world is located. Most flavors in fruits and vegetables are aromatics and over time volatilize off or otherwise degrade. For the vast majority of the produce you receive it is picked within 24 to 48 hours of when you receive it. We pick Monday and Tuesday for the Tuesday deliveries and Wednesday and Thursday for the Thursday deliveries. It is true that the winter squash, the dry peas, lentils, chickpeas, gourds and pumpkins are usually older than 48 hours when you get them, but that is not going to compromise flavor. Some of these items (such as winter squash), you want to cure them before you eat them to improve flavor—so you do not want them fresh... but I digress.

If you eat our carrots, you will see what we mean. There is simply nothing better than our carrots. Every one of our tomatoes is vine ripened. Of course that leads to problems because our tomatoes are picked at the peak of ripeness and the varieties we raised are not made for transportation. I will put the flavor of our produce up against the flavor of anything in the grocery store.

Nutrition. I was involved in a study with Washington State University that included collecting asparagus grown from around the world, available for sale in Washington. It included asparagus from Peru, Mexico, California, Washington and Michigan. Statistically, Washington asparagus had higher levels of antioxidants than asparagus from other locations. There are a few reasons why this might be true including differences in varieties and growing conditions, but the assumed basis for the difference was that the asparagus from other locations was older due to the time it takes for transportation and the Washington asparagus had an edge because it was fresher. (As it turns out the Washington Asparagus Commission decided it could not use this as a marketing tool since most of our asparagus is shipped a long distance (the leading market for Washington asparagus is New York/New Jersey) and we were as vulnerable as our competitors

on this issue.) *The point here is that buying produce that is fresh and local is much more likely to be better for you.*

There is second and perhaps more important reason why joining the CSA makes nutritious sense for you. If you join AND YOU EAT WHAT IS IN THE BOX, we promise that you will eat better. Your diet will contain more vegetables and more diverse vegetables. Would you really be eating kohlrabi, kale, 12 different kinds of melons and 12 different kinds of tomatoes and six different kinds of eggplant if you were not in the CSA?

Bottom line: by joining the CSA you made a big step towards improving your diet.

Know Your Farmer. You know who your doctor is, you know your dentist, accountant, lawyer and so on, but do you know your farmer, do you know where your food comes from? If you join Schreiber & Sons CSA, you know where your food comes from—just a few miles north of Pasco in Franklin County. My wife and I own the farm and the business. Our boys work at the farm even though they are 8 and 14.

Before you get any crop, we eat it at home first. Radishes, asparagus, turnips, kohlrabi, spinach, mixed greens, mustard greens, kale, rhubarb, eggplant, melons, squash and on and on and on; I personally pick the first one of whatever it is, bring it home and Tanya cooks or prepares it. We eat it before you do.

As a CSA member, you are invited to the farm. You get to meet us, see the fields, the crops and have fellowship with us and other members. We think if you know us, see the farm and understand what we put into growing the food you eat, you will feel better about the whole system.

The Environment. I am an advocate for agriculture. I think, for the most part, American agriculture is a positive force for the environment (I probably would draw the line somewhere when it comes to large confined feeding operations.) However, I think buying local is better for the environment. I could just stop with the tremendous reduction in petroleum. When you ship produce by plane, the amount of fossil fuel that is used is just stunning. I think one of the most obvious arguments that can be made for joining a CSA is the betterment of the environment.

Joining Schreiber & Sons CSA is Fun and Intellectually Fulfilling. I like to write. Unfortunately, I am overextended and have no chance to really write. I have a dream of going on sabbatical, oh wait, there is no sabbatical for growers. Anyway in this dream I would stay in a small cottage, wood heat, someone drops off food twice a day and I could just write and write and write.... then the alarm goes off, I wake up and remember, oh yeah, it was just a dream. Now haul your tired carcass out of bed and get to the farm. The one chance I get these days to really write are these little dispatches about the CSA. Hopefully you enjoy them and learn something. (It is therapeutic for me.)

Being in the CSA can be fun. We have two farm parties each year... one in the Spring on Memorial Day Weekend and a second one in the first half of September. We host a party at the farm, roast a hog in the Spring and assorted poultry in the fall, take farm tours, have fellowship

and light a big bonfire made from orchard and vineyard prunings. Also, again this year, we are going to have the Giant Pumpkin Project. If you want a really big pumpkin, you can sign up for a big pumpkin and we will grow one for you. How big, you ask. The smallest big pumpkin was around 50 pounds last year, and the largest was over 200 pounds—there were some *really* big pumpkins.

Joining the CSA puts one in touch with like-minded people. It also entitles you to a free pass to feeling very good about yourself and the right to brag about what you are doing for the local economy, the environment, your family's health and some poor farmer out at the end of Road 68.

Joining the CSA is The Morally Right Thing To Do. The last thing I want is for someone to press their values on me and I refuse to impose mine on you. Having said that let me make the moral case for belonging to our CSA. If you agree that joining a CSA is: good for the local economy and the environment, makes financial sense, is good for your family's nutrition and/or is fun and intellectually fulfilling, then you are well on the way to making a moral case for enrollment.

Let me go a little deeper into this arena. We believe we run a good, moral and ethical farm. All of our year-round employees make a living wage or better. All of them have the option for medical insurance, of which we pay for half, and this is extended to their spouse and children. Each employee gets paid sick leave and four weeks of paid vacation. They can sign up for a retirement plan for which the company contributes the maximum amount allowed by the rules of the plan (it is like a 401K). All are eligible for bonuses and most receive bonuses every year. Almost all of these employees receive cost of living increases annually.

When it comes to our seasonal employees, things are different. The above benefits are not offered to them (nor are they offered on any other farm). This is a complicated and involved issue. For example, seasonal employees do not want medical insurance. They feel it is too expensive and know they can obtain medical care, should they need it, from *La Clinica* for next to nothing. They do not want four weeks of leave, they want three to five months leave—at the end of the growing season, in Mexico. I actually offered my workers medical insurance several years ago and every single one of them turned me down.

Every worker on Schreiber & Sons/ADG Farm is paid above minimum wage—no one works for me at that level—I refuse to pay minimum wage. Here is some insight into how my seasonal workers feel about working at our farm. My seasonal workers have been with me longer than any of my year around (shall I say “white” employees). They started with the farm in 1999 and never left. Having virtually no turnover with seasonal employees is the proof I need to know they feel well treated, sufficiently paid and reasonably content. When they run into a problem, they know they can come to us for help.

While I do not want to trade on the following story, I am going to share with you so you have some insight into our operation. My wife (and son) are members of the First Lutheran Church in Pasco. This is an amazing little church that puts its actions where its values are. The congregation engages in a number of community outreach efforts that consistently move me with their generosity. One of their outreach programs is working with the Pasco School District to

find the poorest of the poor in Pasco. Although I feel that I am socially aware, I had no idea how poor and in what desperate straits some people (especially children) are in our community. The church finds these families and provides food for them in the summer. During the rest of the year, the families, or at least their children, can get two meals a day from local schools—but not in the summertime; when school is not in session, many children literally go without food.

At regular intervals, the First Lutheran Church provides these families with non perishable food items and milk. Church members deliver the food to the families. Schreiber & Sons (your CSA) puts together boxes of food and provides them to the Church for delivery with their food parcels. Last year, we provided food to 20 of the poorest families in Pasco. Each delivery was about 35 pounds or 700 pounds total every two weeks. In the heat of the season about 5% of our CSA produce went to these folks. No we do not get paid for this, but it makes us feel good and hopefully it teaches our children how lucky they are and how to share.

One of the interesting facets of this effort is that most of the families are recent migrants to the area (yes most are Mexican, but certainly not all) and as such they have certain dietary preferences. Before you think like my dad...”if they are hungry they should be willing to eat anything” we think they should be like each of you... we should try to give them what they want. So we find out ahead of time the cultural affinity of each recipient and then design their boxes to meet their needs—this is very interesting. Russian families get eggplant, but never, every give Mexicans eggplant. Who knew that Mexicans love Swiss chard, but they will only eat it if it has a white rib? Mexicans love green or gray summer squash, but will not eat a yellow or crooked neck squash.

Bottom line, by joining the CSA you are doing a good thing for not just yourself and the local economy and the environment, but you are helping us help others that are less fortunate. (We have toyed with the idea of asking for a cereal box donation at the drop off site once during summer months—the impact would be tremendous!)

. I hope you feel good about being part of Schreiber & Sons CSA (and will pass that information along to others who may be interested).

Thank you for your time and your support,

Your Farmer.

Alan Schreiber