

# Schreiber & Sons CSA

*It's a Culinary Adventure*

[www.schreiberandsons.com](http://www.schreiberandsons.com)

April 22, 2009

**Know Your Farmer.** Do you know your doctor? Do you know your lawyer? Do you know your accountant, your realtor and so on? Do you know who grows your food? What is more important knowing who gives you your physical, writes your will, prepares your taxes, sells you your house, or grows the food your family eats? All of these people are important to you--but do you know your farmer?

Meet your farmer. You can come to the Spring CSA Farm Party on the Sunday of Memorial Day and meet us. If you cannot attend that function, then read on.....

The point of this email is not to aggrandize Schreiber & Sons, but I think some CSA members do not know the whole story. To understand us, you need to hear the whole story. Some folks will be disappointed when they hear this, some will be happy to hear this and many of you will think "who cares, just get me the box of produce I paid for". Bear with me....

**The Early Years.** I grew up on a farm in Missouri... corn, soybeans, alfalfa, Hereford cattle and a few dairy cows. We worked seven days a week, 365 days a year. There were six kids; three boys, three girls--I was the youngest, along with my twin sister. We had a small farm and it was not going to be divided six ways. In part, because I was the youngest, farming was not to be in my future and I was groomed for a different pathway--academics. Undergraduate degree in biology from Truman State University (nee Northeast Missouri State University), Masters in Entomology from University of Missouri and a Ph.D. in Entomology and Pesticide Toxicology from the University of Missouri. From an idyllic life in academia in Columbia, Missouri, I went to work for the Environmental Protection Agency in Washington, D.C. as an analyst on pesticide/insecticide issues. While that was a great experience for me, it was difficult to work within a large federal agency in a large metropolitan area.

There was a job opening in the Department of Entomology at Washington State University, I applied for the job and got it (way back in 1993). I worked as the

Agrichemical and Environmental Education Specialist from 1993 through 1997. Again, working at WSU was a tremendous experience for me, but, again, working in a large stage agency was not for me.

In 1998, I left WSU and went private. I formed my little company to do privately what I had done at WSU, EPA and at the University of Missouri--the focus was on entomology, pesticide, pest management, and environmental issues with a very special emphasis on working with small crops in which no one else worked. I grew up on a farm with three of the four most boring crops in the world ... field corn, soybeans and alfalfa (wheat is the fourth). I grew up pining for do something with more exotic crops ... my grandmother had a one-acre garden; I remember following her around an asparagus bed, dill, kohlrabi, and on and on and on....

From 1998 through 2005, I ran an agricultural research and consulting company. [Time for full disclosure ... about the time I was leaving WSU, I met Tanya Wojtowych, who was then Director of Research and Information for the U.S. Dry Pea and Lentil Council; she was leaving her job. We started "a relationship". It was personal at first, but while I was a science and technical type, she had business skills. Our personal relationship blended into a professional relationship. When I started the business, I was the technical person and she was the business manager. As the relationship deepened, we sort of traded a business relationship for marriage. Now she advises me on a daily basis from a more informal position. She is still the most important advisor that I have.]

I always grew something like a Noah's Ark of crops on the farm as sort of a hobby. Tanya, the boys and I love going to the farm and walking around looking at what is growing, what is in season, what is fresh and what is ready to eat right now. Instead of calling home and asking, "What can I get at the grocery store on the way home from work?" I ask her "what do I bring home from the farm today?"

Early in 2006, the pastor of Tanya's church and his wife, John and Mary Kaye Hergert of the Pasco First Lutheran Church, engaged us in a conversation. Mary Kaye took the lead in the topic; she was looking for a new way to source food for her family. She lamented what I called "the food lifestyle" she led. She wanted better food, local food, seasonal food. I am not short changing John's role in this, but Mary Kaye had the fire on this topic. She brought a book and some other literature about the concept of a CSA--something that was completely foreign to me.

I read everything she gave me and more about the concept of CSAs and the entire local movement.

There was something about the idea of connecting the actual consumers of food with who grew the food that had an overwhelming impact on me. I grew up in very rural, very agrarian area of Missouri that was slowly becoming impoverished. There were more people living in the county I grew up in during the Civil War than when I graduated from high school in 1980. Since I left for college that year, the county

population has declined by 10%. The single biggest employer is agriculture, the three largest sources of income, however, are employment outside the county, welfare and government jobs. The subsidy based crops of corn, soybeans and wheat have led growers to poverty.

Life rarely works out like you expect. I have no brothers and sisters that farm, my parent's farm is now rented out. When I grew up, my father and mother, every aunt and uncle, every cousin as well as my grandparents derived the majority of their income from farming. As I mentioned earlier, I was groomed for a different pathway...go to school, do well, get a good job, something other than farm, the pay is better, the work is easier.....so I did. Now, I am in the only person in my entire family that is in agriculture. My great, great grandfather and his wife came to this country in 1855, ever since they came to this country, we farmed. Growing corn, soybean and cattle, pigs and sheep and now every last person in family is now out of farming. I am in the only one left. Okay, so I have a chip on my shoulder about this.

Back to the Hergerts. They lifted the scales from my eyes (if I lost you-that is a biblical reference). Suddenly there was this huge connection. My family became impoverished and left farming because of the seduction of subsidized farming. Now I saw a new pathway. Reconnect with those who buy the food.

Why should you buy tomatoes grown in Florida, Mexico and California when you can get them from 16 miles down the road? Instead of paying the grower 12 cents a pound for a melon, his broker 2 cents a pound, the trucking company 8 cents a pound, the buyer 20 cents a pound and the grocer his cut, why don't you buy it from someone down the road. Keep the money in the Tri-Cities. If you buy spinach (or bagged salad) in May, you are buying something that was harvested a month ago. Trust me on this, the closer you buy something to the time it was harvested you get better taste, longer shelf life and more nutrition.

Enough of the advertisement. If you are reading this, you are already on board.

Back to *Know Your Farmer*. In 2006 our company did three things. First, my primary source of income was agricultural research. Second, because of all of the research we do and the experience that I have had at EPA and in academia, we consult on agricultural and environmental issues. Third, we do association management; I am the Administrator of the Washington State Commission on Pesticide Registration, the Director of Washington Blueberry Commission and the Executive Director of the Washington Asparagus Commission. Due to the combination of the diversity of crops that we grew as part of our research efforts and our interest in growing crops that are not commonly grown, starting the CSA did not seem like a stretch for us. In 2006, the CSA seemed like a fun little side project, kind of like a hobby.

So in 2006, we started the CSA. The Lutherans set us up with the members the first year. We started with 8 members (mostly Lutherans). In 2007, we grew to 44 members.

In 2008, it jumped to 259 and this year we are probably heading to 400 members. I guess we are now past the hobby phase.

Thank you for being with us on this endeavor.

**Shared Risk.** I have not talked a lot about the philosophy of a CSA. In this update I want to go over a core CSA value; that of shared risk. When you buy a membership, you are buying a share, not in the legal sense like a share of stock in a business, but rather a share in the produce from the farm. In sense, you are a co-producer, as a member you are an investor. Like a stock there is risk involved. If the harvest is poor, you receive less, if the harvest is bountiful, so too, will be your box. I suppose there is a worst case scenario where a hail storm could come through right before harvest and take out most everything and there could be little to nothing in the boxes.

The expectation is that our harvest will be successful and the boxes will carry their usual array of bounty, color and flavors.

When I was interacting with the CSA's advisory group, it was suggested that the members be reminded that buying into a CSA is a shared risk venture. This came up when I was expressing my concerns about the lateness of the season and whether we should move forward on schedule. The board was nearly unanimous that we should proceed with the schedule as planned and if the boxes do not have as much as planned it is part of the shared risk of buying into the CSA. Bear in mind, if not all of the produce is available in the first week or two as planned, it is not lost to you, it just means the later boxes will contain more than usual.

Please be patient and stay tuned.

Your Farmer,

Alan Schreiber