

# Verde Independent

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## Green alternatives to the grocery

*What is a CSA?*

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Staff Reporter

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VERDE VALLEY - Back in the day, you could always find a produce stand at the roadside, especially in agricultural areas. But, as time has passed, both things have faded. Truck farms and those ubiquitous stands with vegetables and sometimes, fruit seem to have vanished.

Going green has come to mean a lot of things this decade. President Obama believes the cars we drive and how we get our power are issues the green revolution can fix. It has been rendered as "movement." But at the bottom line "green" was derived from vegetation and it is often what we eat.

The most common associations, however, are found in its ties to nature. Green is associated with regeneration, fertility and rebirth. Recent political groups have taken on the color as symbol of environmental protection and social justice, and consider themselves part of the "Green movement." This has led to similar campaigns in advertising, as companies have sold green, or "environmentally friendly, products.

Modern grocery chains won't like it, but there has been resurgence in the number of options to diving into the produce at the supermarket while avoiding the occasional shower that falls to keep the produce moist.

And you might be surprised at the increased variety available. Besides, wouldn't you prefer to know where your vegetables and fruit are grown and what is used to discourage those bugs and other diseases?

Everyone knows about health or natural food stores.

Mount Hope is an institution in Cottonwood. New Frontiers is developing a loyal following in Sedona.

Other options are less institutional.

Most familiar are farmers markets. This year there will be five such markets in the Verde Valley, all which will open within the next month. They include well-established markets in Camp Verde, Cottonwood and Cornville. But this year new opportunities are available in Sedona at the Posse Grounds and in Clarkdale,



VVN/Jon Hutchinson Diane Scantlebury admits her elaborate hydroponics system uses chemical supplements, but the sticky strips and ladybugs attest to the pesticide-free environment.



VVN/Jon Hutchinson Diane Scantlebury is a member of the Verde Valley CSA and a cornerstone of the Verde Valley Farmers Market.

at the old tennis courts just south of Su Casa.

Many food co-ops or food-buying clubs have come and gone over the years. Privately or group operated, cooperatives often offer organic produce that is grown by a regional farmer or things that may have come from a longer distance.

Bountiful Baskets is a Web-based co-op that now distributes every other Saturday to a number of public locations throughout Arizona and Utah. In the Verde Valley there is distribution in Camp Verde, two locations Cottonwood, Sedona and soon in Clarkdale.

The convenience is that fruit and vegetables are available at harvest time. You can choose to subscribe every other week or not. Usually a medium sized basket of fruit and a basket of vegetables are distributed to each family plus optional specialties are available. Everything is connected on line through [www.bountifulbaskets.org](http://www.bountifulbaskets.org).

Then there is also a new animal in the Verde Valley, the CSA.

CSA stands for a Community Supported Agriculture or Community Sustainable Agriculture.

The idea is a return to food that is grown locally, rather than 3000 miles away and preserved to make the trip. Local CSAs also give people a chance to have more naturally grown and organic food rather than what may be laced with preservatives and dripping with chemicals.

One CSA is operating in its third year and a second is coming on line this year. Typically, a CSA works by buying shares in the harvest of a farm. Like most harvests, the rewards depend upon what is available. It will be heavy on the greens early in the year and become more substantial as more produce as the season extends what is available.

Sandy Boyce is the director of the Verde Valley CSA. She lives in Sedona, had been a member of a CSA in Flagstaff and, every week, was driving to Flagstaff to pick up her "share."

Diane Scantlebury used to live in Flagstaff and will tell you that gardening there is a real challenge. "You have 90 days and that's all you get."

That's why the Flagstaff CSA has an agreement with Crooked Sky Farms in the Phoenix area, which grows pretty much year-round.

The idea of a CSA is that investors (read: consumers) have an investment in a farm and get to reap a share of the harvest. A typical subscription or membership is \$450 to \$500 per year with a 20-week distribution. The food is ultra-fresh with all flavor and vitamins remaining. Subscribers get exposed to new vegetables and can even develop a relationship with a grower and visit the farm.

The grower, on the other hand, gets an early investment in his or her crop and can concentrate on the crops rather than marketing

But Sandy questioned, "Why am I driving to Flagstaff for produce from Phoenix, when there is rich agriculture right here in the Verde Valley?"

She contacted people who were known for their supply of fresh goods, Diane Scantlebury, Denise Gould and Kelly Cathcart, growers based in Camp Verde.

They had principally been growing for farmers markets, where they still sell some goods. A CSA is a much more reliable market.

Three years later, those three growers remain the backbone of the Verde Valley CSA.

"We had 30 shareholders the in 2007; in 2008, there were 50; this year we have 66," Sandy says. "We

had our first distribution May 13.

"We had chard, green garlic, pecans, lettuce, sorrel, dill chives and roasting onions. Early in the season, we need to supplement with other products, but when the season kicks in there are zucchinis, tomatoes, watermelons and squash, winter squash and the usual things."

In addition to produce from key growers, the CSA also gets some specialty items from other suppliers such as peaches, apricots, pecans and watermelons.

Scantlebury can supply a lot of that early lettuce. She has expanded to a five-acre field, but she says her "bread and butter" is her greenhouse.

Inside, a large cooling unit and heavy shade cloth provide the kind of climate you just can't find in Central Arizona. She can grow lettuce year round.

"Right by that cooling wall, it gets treated better than anything else," she says.

Scantlebury admits her elaborate hydroponics system uses chemical supplements, but the sticky strips and ladybugs attest to the pesticide-free environment.

Outside in the shade, she has some new seedlings of tomatoes. The County Extension office gave growers some virus-free tomato seeds this year. Last year, they lost 70 percent to 100 percent of their tomatoes to a curly-top virus.

That is part of the risk with a CSA, that a subscriber shares in failures too. Being pesticide free can have its downsides.

This year Jamie Rongo of Clarkdale is helping Cathcart establish a second CSA. Subscriptions are already about 50 percent sold. Contact Jamie at [Jamie@asismassage.com](mailto:Jamie@asismassage.com) or call (928) 300-1132. Distribution starts June 4 though Oct. 15.

Kelly of K&B Farms, located off the freeway near Orme School, says, "I always say we grow everything from Armenian cucumbers to zucchini. That includes cole crops, spinach, radishes, potatoes, garlicks, onions, sweet corn, chilis. The distribution will also include some eggs, meat, honey, nuts and goat cheese.

"Growing organically is a challenge because of the bug pressure. We are not certified organic, but are very chemical conscious."

She has been distributing to the Verde Valley CSA and the [Prescott College](#) CSA, one of several in the Prescott area.

She has a large farm that is bristling with new crops.

CSAs have come to stay.

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