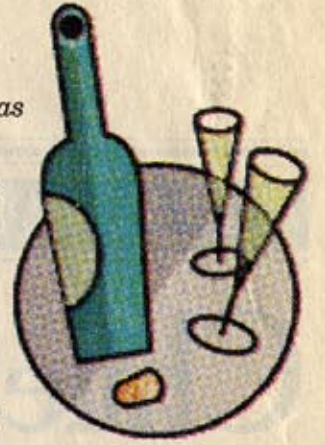


# EPICURE

**Bob Thompson:**  
*The pedigree of a Cotes du Rhones is as indefinite as a French appellation of origin can get, but you don't have to give it a second thought. [Page 2]*



COOKIT LIGHT 5



Subscribers  
take  
delivery  
on produce  
harvested  
the day  
before

**Fragrant** garlic does not languish in a warehouse or get hauled long miles to a grocer. With the middleman eliminated, it is taken home by individuals who pay in advance to feast on direct-from-the-farm produce throughout the season.

# fresh from the farm



By ZILLAH BAHAR  
SPECIAL TO THE EXAMINER

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OR those of us who fancy our palates enlightened, farmers' markets and natural-food grocery stores offer an exciting alternative to the limited variety of produce in most conventional supermarkets.

It's a thrill to go a-foraging among their earthy-smelling stalls and bins because the merchants always are wowing us with exotic choices, such as the oddly odoriferous boletus mushrooms or the puzzlingly pendulous Chinese longbeans (do I cut these things in half or what?) — never mind that most of us shrink from actually buying the stuff. Yet an ecologically conscious consumer can't count on these fundamentally commercial sources to represent the seasonal harvests faithfully. Even so-called health food or natural-food grocery stores offer tomatoes and eggplants year-round, although you wind up paying a hefty premium for the privilege of eating them after the first frost.

#### Growing farm-to-city movement

You can derive a truer sense of the connection between food and the rhythms of the earth through Community Supported Agriculture, a growing, 10-year-old movement in which organic farmers sell directly to

[See FARM PRODUCE, Page 3]



*At Our Farm in Woodside, from top: Andrea Amdall checks a strawberry; farm partner Raynie Lave picks fresh dill; Andrea helps her mom, Veronica Amdall, load vegetables into their shopping bag to take home; and volunteer Burkhard Zeh brings in fresh-picked garlic.*

EXAMINER PHOTOS BY KATY RADDATZ



EXAMINER/KATY RADDATZ

**Farmer David Blume** discusses garlic recipes with Cindy Faffumi.

◆ FARM PRODUCE from 1

### Fresh from the farm

the urban consumer. In the CSA model, shareholders or subscribers pay in advance for a portion of farm produce delivered to their area throughout harvest time, which in some areas in California is year-round.

The fruits and vegetables, which vary according to the season, are picked no more than a day before delivery, so they're typically fresher and more nutritious than what's available in any grocery stores, according to CSA advocates. The cost is comparable to what you find

at natural-foods groceries and farmers' markets. However, delivery schedules, billing arrangements, quantities, and mix of vegetables and fruits vary widely. (See Resources on Page 1 for information.)

In addition to getting higher quality produce, CSA membership enables urban consumers to reestablish a connection with the land that sustains them, while taking a financial stand for the environment.

CSA farmers go out of their way to keep customers informed about what it really takes to make a meal.

"Every week in the box there is a farm note that tells what's being

[ See FARM PRODUCE, 4 ]

◆ FARM PRODUCE from 3

## Fresh from the farm

grown and describes the challenge of farming" (such as this year's torrential rains), says Beth Levine, East Bay coordinator for Full Belly Farm in Guinda, Yolo County. "People are very in touch with how their food is grown.

"It's a way for people to do something to protect the environment, because (a CSA) farm uses sustainable agricultural methods," she adds. "They don't use pesticides. They're building up the soil, not destroying it."

### Farmers gain operating funds

Farmers benefit most obviously by having operating funds avail-

able at the start of the growing season and guaranteeing a market for their crop. CSA farmer David Blume of Our Farm in Woodside champions this approach to marketing as the key to preserving the viability of independent farms in the next century.

"A lot of farmers are younger and the capital hurdle is pretty incredible," he says. CSAs enable these farmers to establish a mechanism of self-financing. "It takes the corporations and banks out of the loop."

But consumers can lend support in more subtle, rather surprising ways, too. Blume credits loyal subscribers for helping him be the only supplier of Osaka purple mustard in the United States last year. The previous season the farmer had

[See FARM PRODUCE, 7]

◆ FARM PRODUCE from 4

## Fresh from the farm

given these customers seedlings of the green, which they grew in their own gardens.

A cyclone hit Japan soon after, making Osaka purple mustard seeds commercially unavailable for the next planting season. But Blume's customers had let their own plants go to seed, so they were able to return the vestiges of the fortuitous planting back to its source, Our Farm.

### Selection more varied

For consumers with a penchant

for gourmet cooking, CSAs are a boon because the factors that determine the commercial viability of a particular variety of produce — shelf life and ability to withstand shipping — don't figure into the equation. That means the farmer is freer to expand the selection of crops by introducing exotic varieties and reintroducing heirlooms.

Thanks to a trip to Central America, Blume provides his customers with chile de cera and chile de siete caldos (a soup seasoning), both hot peppers with 8-foot stalks.

Blume grows 25 heirloom or noncommercial varieties of toma-

[See FARM PRODUCE, 8]

◆ FARM PRODUCE from 7

## Fresh from the farm

atoes, including Black Krim of Russia, with pink flesh so delicate it must be harvested with gloves. His Mississippi silver beans were originally brought by African slaves who popularized them in the

South.

This flexibility in selecting non-commercial varieties also can mean getting genuinely seasonal organic produce at times when you'd least expect it — refrigeration has nothing to do with it.

Blume grows a winter squash from Zaire with flesh that's crunchy, nutty and sweet and skin that's thin and edible. "You can eat

it just like an apple," he says.

### Culinary inspiration

The unusual produce from a CSA farm can serve as a point of departure for culinary creativity and discovery. The "farm-urban partnership" is a "marvelous conduit of education," notes Capay, Yolo County, CSA farmer Kathy Barsotti, owner of Farm Fresh to

You.

"The produce that he provides — I wouldn't have been familiar with it or have access to it at local grocery stores," says Our Farm subscriber Mary Alice Rodriguez of San Francisco. Some of produce with which Rodriguez has just recently become familiar includes sorrel, daikon and kohlrabi. "These are things I wouldn't typically

buy," she notes. "I use recipes I would have never used before. It's actually a learning process for me as well."

Jesse Cool, owner of Menlo Park's Flea Street Cafe, which specializes in organic food, credits CSA farming for reviving a more traditional — therefore resourceful — approach to cooking that is inherently life-enriching. "If they

(CSA customers) get these boxes, then they really tap into the magic of cooking," says Cool.

"I still really lust after the little magic we have left in our lives, that is really manifest in what is harvested in each specific season. This is a very Old World way of bringing fresh food into your kitchen, and that is what CSA farmers are bringing to us."

