

Gust Farm's CSA Frequently Asked Questions

Who are we?

Gust Farms is a 1000+ acre farm in Riga Township, Michigan. 2016 marked our 100th year as a family farm owning the same homestead. In recognition of our farm's longevity, we received our "Centennial Farm" status from the state of Michigan. Through the years, our family has grown a wide variety of crops and animals. Pigs, sheep, chickens, and cattle have been raised on our farm and historically in the field, we have grown corn, soybeans, wheat, and vegetables. In 1989, we started to grow pumpkins, squash, gourds, and other fall décor and began selling them in our front yard. That business has grown into what is now Gust Brother's Pumpkin Farm.

As time has moved on, my wife Jessica and I have had a desire to stay involved in the farm, so we developed "Gust Farm's CSA" in 2013. We are now in our 6th year doing the CSA, and in the process, have learned lots about production practices as well as what our members want, and what they can do without. We hope that our business continues to grow and develop to serve the needs of our members.

What does CSA stand for and what is it?

CSA stands for Community Supported Agriculture. The idea behind CSA's are that members are directly connected with the farmer growing their food. This gives members the ability to ask about production practices, and in our case, actually see the field where the produce is grown. We love to develop a relationship with our members.

The other advantage of CSA's is that often time, it is difficult for direct-to-market producers to take the risks associated with producing a crop when there is no guaranteed market to sell their products. With our CSA, members sign a contract; the member will be guaranteed produce each week for the season, and the farmer can guarantee that they'll get paid. The deposit that is required up front allows the farmer to invest into required up front costs like equipment, seed, raising transplants, and labor.

What makes our CSA different from other CSAs?

The biggest difference between our CSA and others in the area is that we pride ourselves in a "mix-and-match" system. This is where members can select what they want to take with them each week versus being given a pre-packaged box full of produce assembled by the grower. This allows our members to take what they want to take; produce that their family will use, while having the option of taking produce that they may not normally purchase.

Many other CSA's grow lots of different types of greens and somewhat unconventional produce. We strive to grow the more traditional produce that people tend to purchase more of in the stores. We have an exceptional variety of produce and grow more than 85 varieties of 25 different types of crops.

What are the benefits/advantages?

- Build a relationship with the farmer growing your food & ask questions about growing practices
- Receive reasonably priced, fresh, local produce weekly or every other week
- Reduced pesticide use compared to commercial vegetable production
- Health benefits of eating more vegetables
- Will save you time and money if you don't want to grow a garden of your own
- CSA members receive a discount on canning/freezing bulk produce
- Cut your own flowers is included at the farm when you pick up your CSA share

What size share should I get? Can I change my share in the middle of the season?

We find that the average family of 4 best aligns with our ½ bag every week option or the full bag every other week. Larger families, families that share a CSA membership, or families that eat a higher percentage of vegetables often select the full bag every week option. If you select a share and you find that it isn't enough vegetables for your family, we are happy to upgrade you to a larger share size.

Do you offer larger portions for canning vegetables?

We are happy to sell produce by the bushel and the half bushel with advanced notice. By being a CSA member, you will get a discounted rate from our normal price.

What if I can't make a pickup?

If you are unable to make your scheduled day for your pickup, please contact us prior to that day. We can make arrangements to change the day or to combine two pickups into one during another week. For example, if you are normally a Monday 1/2 share pickup, we could change it to a Thursday pick up for the week or you could pick up a full bag the following Monday. We try to be very flexible with members as we know the summer can get very busy.

Do you offer a work-share program to offset prices?

At this time, we do not offer a work-share program. Our produce is picked by local high school students to encourage work ethic and responsibility, and to create income opportunities for youth.

Does your CSA offer any fruit?

By definition, fruit would include the fleshy, sweet product that contains seeds and can be eaten. So technically, tomatoes, peppers, eggplant, zucchini, squash, and cucumbers are all fruit. But we do offer cantaloupe and watermelon in the CSA for a few weeks near the end of the program. We also offer peaches that will be sold separately.

Is your farm organic? How do you compare to organic? What about GMO's? What are your chemical policies?

As far as organic production goes, we are not organic. But there are not that many differences between organic farming practices and conventional farming practices. Organic takes a certification process of three years, costs money, and the "organic" label has done a really good job of marketing their produce as far superior for you compared to the conventional produce.

One primary difference between organic and conventional involves GMO's. GMO's are not allowed in organic production. There are only a handful of GMO crops approved/grown in the US and very few of them are edible vegetables. There are a few varieties of GMO sweet corn and summer squash, none of which we grow.

A second primary difference between organic production and convention is the use of fertilizers. Organic producers can only use animal manure, compost, or cover crops to fertilize their crops. Our farm uses animal manure and compost, and we grow cover crops in between crops to uptake nutrients and reduce erosion. Cover crops pull up nutrients and then release them back to the soil when they are dug back into the ground in the spring. We also apply granular fertilizer to the soil to give our plants the correct nutrition. To determine that amount and type of fertilizer, we take soil samples and apply according to lab results.

The third difference in organic production and conventional production is the type of pesticides used. Farmers spray pesticides to prevent issues in their crops. Pesticides include herbicides to reduce weeds, insecticides to reduce bugs, and fungicides to reduce plant disease. A common misconception about organic production is that organic producers don't spray at all, when in reality, they do. Organic and synthetic pesticides are both effective at controlling their intended targets, but the difference is how they are made. Organic pesticides come from "natural" things. For instance, one organic insecticide comes from the mum leaf, called pyrethrum. It is labeled organic, organic producers can use it, but it is still toxic to insects. But because it came from the leaf of a plant, it can be organic. On the other hand, permethrin is a similar insecticide, but instead made synthetically in a lab. Both are toxic to insects but one was created in a laboratory.

Our spray program for the vegetables includes very little use of herbicide in comparison to larger scale commercial vegetable production (produce you would purchase from a supermarket). If weeds do become a problem, we cultivate (i.e. dig) the weeds out with a tractor or use manual labor to hoe weeds. Some years depending on conditions, insects and diseases may become a problem and require spraying a couple times of year to control. If not taken care of, the entire crop could be destroyed.

To cut down on the amount of spray our farm uses, we rotate crops. There are few insects specific to each crop and if the crop is moved to a new area, the number of insects and consequently spray used is less. Our farm uses chemicals that break down quickly and have a lower rate of toxicity. We strictly adhere to the label which is required by law. The labels dictate the amount applied and harvest timing after spraying. Pesticides are researched thoroughly before they can be released to market and much of the research goes into safety. Regardless, we always encourage everyone to wash their produce from any place that you get it, whether it was raised with conventional or organic practices.

Does Gust Farms CSA grow everything at the pickup location?

We grow most of everything we have at CSA pickup. We will, however, purchase extra produce if there is a need for it and our supply is short. Weather, planting ability, and some other factors may be the reason that we are forced to buy from another local grower that uses similar growing practices to fill a shortage.

I am interested in meat/eggs as well-do you offer a CSA for this?

In the past, we have offered an egg CSA. Unfortunately, due to our change in location for the 2018 season there is no electricity on site to keep eggs cool so it is something we are no longer able to provide. If you are interested in pork/beef, our family members are still producing high quality meat. Please contact them, Joe and Katy Gust at 734-347-4083 for more information.

What if I don't know what an item is for the week-what do I do with it?

First, if you don't know what an item is at a pickup, please don't hesitate to ask my wife Jessica or me (Jake) at pickup. Once you return home with your produce, feel free to pose a question on our Facebook page to see if other members have advice on what they do with their produce. Another option would be to go online and see what recipes you can find! Let us know if you have one you enjoy, so we can share with other members that may be wondering as well!

I have too many vegetables, what now??

Most of our vegetables can be frozen or canned to be saved for winter. Anything you can purchase bagged/frozen in the store has the ability to be frozen. Canning is another great option. For more canning/freezing information, visit the following site. <http://homesteadbasics.com/wp-content/uploads/2009/12/8078550-complete-guide-to-home-canning.pdf>. We also recommend using Ball Blue Book Guide to Canning.