



## Local farmers deliver

### Residents order home-grown food

Louis Cooper • lcooper@pnj.com • May 21, 2010

Christine Bilbrey's family has dined this week on potato salad made with local spuds and fruit salad made with blackberries just days off their branches.

"The faster it comes from field to table, the more nutrients it contains," said Bilbrey, who lives in Pace with her husband and three children. "I think that's important."

The Bilbreys and 72 other families are subscribers to the Panhandle Fresh Marketing Association's new Community Supported Agriculture program.

The CSA is a subscription-based program through which customers prepay for produce then receive deliveries brought to central drop-off spots every Saturday in Santa Rosa and Escambia counties. It's made up of farmers in Santa Rosa and Escambia counties as well as other areas of Northwest Florida and southern Alabama.

The first delivery was Saturday. In addition to potatoes and berries, it included yellow squash, zucchini, rosemary, oregano, local honey, a mixed flower bouquet and spinach.

Andrea Sutrick, marketing coordinator for Panhandle Fresh said the first drop-off went well. She said there was plenty of variety of products though not enough quantity.

"CSA programs are a shared risk between the community and its farmers," she said. "Mother Nature has a way of sneaking in unsuspecting late frosts, torrential rains, hurricanes, droughts and more. This year, we had a late winter, which is pushing the season out later."

Bilbrey said she hopes the quantity increases, but she's happy for the fresh food.

Most of the produce distributed Saturday was harvested within the previous 48 hours.

"It was less than we expected, but I want to give them a chance since they just started," she said. "I

always have a garden, but I never can grow all we want to eat."

The CSA has divided subscriptions into two 13-week seasons. Although customers had the option of committing for the whole summer, Bilbrey and 54 other subscribers signed up for the first season.

She said she may continue through the second season depending on her experience.

The squash delivered Saturday came from Richard Beck's farm in Walnut Hill. Although he's farmed sod for more than two decades, he added produce three years ago. He advocated getting a CSA started locally after seeing friends in Pennsylvania enjoy success with a similar program.

"The idea is to help the local farmer as well as the consumer," Beck said. "Instead of coming out of Mexico or all the way from California, it's locally grown, fresh produce."

The CSA provides farmers with guaranteed customers, he said.

"I know (that business) is coming," Beck said. "I've got customers waiting on me, and that's what I like."

Sutrick said most of the farmers who will be contributing to the CSA this year have signed up. But he said, "We are always looking for new farmers to back up supply or to offer new or unique items,

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such as bok choy, brussels sprouts and kohlrabi."

The Panhandle Fresh Marketing Association also supplies locally grown produce to many area grocery stores and businesses. It's a project of the TEAM Santa Rosa Economic Development Council.

**Want to subscribe?**

The Panhandle Fresh Marketing Association's Community Supported Agriculture program provides subscribers with weekly deliveries of local produce, flowers and other products.

The summer is divided into two seasons: May 14 to Aug. 20, and Aug. 21 to Nov. 26.

Subscribers pay \$390 for one 13-week season or \$780 for the entire summer. Those who prepaid for the entire summer got a 5 percent discount, paying \$741.

Subscriptions for the first season are closed, but a waiting list is available. Subscriptions for the second season will be accepted later this summer.

Details: Visit [www.panhandlefresh.com](http://www.panhandlefresh.com).



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