

## Becoming a Community-Supported Agriculture Drop Site

**St. Paul Jewish Community Center  
St. Paul, Minnesota**

The St. Paul Jewish Community Center (JCC) is located in the southwest corner of St. Paul, Minnesota. The Center's mission is to “strengthen the greater St. Paul community by nurturing physical, intellectual, social and spiritual growth in an inclusive environment defined by Jewish values and culture.” In light of this mission, it is fitting that the only self-identified Jewish community-supported agriculture (CSA) farm in Minnesota collaborates with the JCC to improve the diets of people in the community.

### History

In early 2006, JCC Program Director Penny Schumacher decided to launch an experiment. At the time, Penny was a member of a local CSA farm called Easy Bean Farm, located west of the Twin Cities. The farm is unique because farmer Mike Jacobs and his family base their farming practices on two Jewish beliefs: *Tuv Ha'Aretz*, meaning good for the land and best of the land, and *Tikkun olam*, meaning repairing the world. Mike also practices *Peah*, or leaving the corners of the field for the poor.

### The motivation

These values resonated with Penny, who felt that members of the JCC should have the opportunity to learn about CSAs and take advantage of acquiring healthy food while also directly supporting a family farm. Penny enjoys reminding people that their food was not grown in a grocery store!

### The project

Beginning in February 2006, Penny began promoting the idea of purchasing shares of the Easy Bean Farm CSA to members of the JCC. The concept of a CSA farm was unfamiliar to many people, so she invited Mike Jacobs to speak to interested members. Penny also spread the word through their JCC newsletter. “Whether they joined or not, they learned something new,” says Penny. By the time that Easy Bean Farm was ready to begin making deliveries, 30 families had signed up. A room at the JCC was designated as a drop-off/pick-up location and Mike made deliveries every Friday during the growing season. CSA members appreciate the Friday delivery, as the Jewish Sabbath begins Friday evening.

Included in every basket is a newsletter from Easy Bean Farm detailing which fruits and vegetables are included, and what to expect in future deliveries. Everyone's share basket contains the same produce, but some folks like certain fruits and vegetables more than others. This led to the “leave a veggie/take a veggie” box, where members could leave veggies they did not like in exchange for something they did.



In 2007, Penny applied for a grant from Hazon, a national Jewish organization whose vision is “to create a healthier and more sustainable Jewish community—as a step toward a healthier and more sustainable world for all,” and became a member of Hazon's national *Tuv Ha'Aretz* community. Penny further promoted the CSA by writing a story about Easy Bean Farm that was published in the local Jewish newspaper, as well as in the National JCC newsletter. As word spread, the number of CSA shares purchased more than doubled. However, a severe drought lasting through much of the growing season made for a shortage of available produce. Penny sees this as the most difficult time since the project's inception, and some families decided not to purchase shares for the following year. Everyone discovered that when you purchase a CSA share, you are taking a risk alongside the farmer.

Following the drought of 2007, Penny was compelled to fill the empty spots and in 2008 signed up 73 families, an increase over the previous two years!

### Lessons learned

There has been tremendous positive feedback from CSA members. Not every CSA member is a member of the JCC and others are not Jewish, but all are learning important Jewish values that Penny sees as “international values.”

Also important is the notion of “eating with the seasons.” Eating food while it is in season is not only fresher and healthier, but also easier on the environment and beneficial for local farmers. A fresh, locally grown strawberry in July tastes much better than a store-bought strawberry in December! Penny also loves the idea that CSA members have the opportunity to taste new vegetables. According to Penny, CSA members can trust that their food is safe. “I am proud that we support a farmer in their livelihood and I know our CSA members feel the same,” says Penny. “I’ve learned that we can help repair the world, and eating fresh and healthy food from a local family farm is a great start.”

### Web resources

St. Paul Jewish Community Center CSA page:

[www.stpauljcc.org/jewish/green\\_csa.lasso](http://www.stpauljcc.org/jewish/green_csa.lasso)

Easy Bean Farm: [www.easybeanfarm.com](http://www.easybeanfarm.com)

