

Colchester Farm

Community Supported Agriculture

2009 Annual Report



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Dear Friends,

As part of the community supported agriculture model, we ask you to invest in our farm, to share in the risk as well as the bounty. The CSA model is reliant upon a supportive relationship between the farm and community, and integral to cultivating that relationship is open, thorough communication.

The Colchester Farm CSA staff prepared this annual report to maintain the connection we seek with our members. In the past, annual reports have contained in very general terms the make-up of our organization as a non-profit. But we're not just a non-profit; we're a non-profit *farm*. Our central purpose is to grow produce for the members of our CSA and local community and to farm the beautiful land at Colchester Farm well.

Thus, in this year's report, we intend to provide you, our members, with greater detail about what we did this past season from the perspective of a grower.

The 2009 report provides detail about the people involved who make the daily operations of CFCSA possible: CSA staff and interns, work share members, volunteers, donors, and our board of directors. We summarize CSA member end-of-season feedback, report on local food projects and special farm activities. We also share more about the nitty-gritty of our operation including other outlets for our produce, our apprenticeship program, and details about production: what grew well and what didn't, equipment issues, new vegetable varieties we tried, and much more.

We hope this report will help give you a better sense of what it takes to get the produce from Colchester Farm CSA's ten acres to your dinner table. We thank you for your past and continuing support of our community supported agriculture project.

Thank you,

Theresa Mycek, Manager
Aaron Shier, Assistant Manager

2009 Staff

Theresa Mycek, CSA Manager
John Arbuckle, part-time CSA staff
Amanda Formica, Intern
Tess Jones, Intern
Shelby Laubhan, Intern
Aaron Shier, Intern

Contact Information:

Phone: 443.282.1409
Email: manager@colchesterfarm.org
Address: P.O. Box 191
Georgetown, MD 21930



Content

— Page 2 —
2009 Season Summary

— Page 3 —
Member Survey Results
Pastured Poultry Project
Financial Statement
Farm Market and Restaurant Sales

— Page 4 —
Internship/Apprenticeship Program
New Intern Housing

— Page 5 —
Farm Visits, Volunteers & Work Share Members
Events

2009 Season Summary

What kept us busy at Colchester Farm CSA during the 2009 season? Growing vegetables for you, of course. We spent our time seeding, transplanting, hoeing, hand-weeding, mulching, trellising, composting, irrigating, managing pests through a variety of means, mowing, cultivating, plowing, digging, harvesting, washing, weighing, packing, storing, and distributing.

In 2009 we grew a lot of old favorites, but we also experimented with a few new crops including kohlrabi, watermelon radishes, celery, okra, white sweet potatoes, and tomatillos.

In general, we were pleased with the 2009 harvest, but it was far from a perfect growing season. Weather, compared to an average season on the eastern shore, was cool and wet. We grow a wide variety of crops, and some respond well to the cool, wet weather while others struggle. Weeds thrived this past year and perhaps even more so because the rain kept the soil wet and difficult to cultivate. This weather slowed down many of our heat-loving summer crops, created strong weed competition and encouraged the spread of disease.

To improve our chances of harvesting a variety of produce, we often plant several successions of the same crop throughout the season. Some of these plantings did well while others succumbed to the aforementioned setbacks. So, we were able to offer a variety of crops but not in the quantities we hoped for.

Despite some of the aforementioned weather setbacks, we had some good sweet corn harvests and identified the cultivar we like the best: brocade, a bi-color variety (which we hope to plant more of next season). Most of our summer squash/zucchini plantings fared well throughout the summer, though the weeds usually fared well too, despite the large canopy squash plants provide. As summer turned to fall, longer season radishes (which we cannot plant in the spring) such as watermelon radish and daikon performed well. Bok choy and spinach were plentiful. Arugula was superb in the autumn.

Our garlic crop was successful again in 2009, despite a ground at times too wet during the curing stage. The ground eventually dried out, though perhaps too much so; by the time we were ready to harvest the garlic in late June, the parched soil made the garlic challenging to dig (we accomplish this task by hand pulling and using digging forks). We hung and cured our garlic in a few sheds on the farm and had plenty for our membership this season. We harvested garlic "scapes" in late May/early June, so members received a taste of the garlic to come later in the summer at the first CSA pick-up (garlic scapes are the flowering stalk of hard neck garlic, which we harvest because they're delicious, but also to promote better bulb development).

Returning to the negative: there were a few notable disease and pest issues this season including late blight, the prolific Colorado potato beetle, the Mexican bean beetle, and the harlequin bug.

Late blight (a factor in the Irish potato famine in the mid-19th century) is a plant disease that mainly attacks potatoes and tomatoes; it wreaked havoc across the northeast and mid-Atlantic in 2009. It is caused by a pathogen that survives from one season to the next in infected potato tubers. It normally doesn't spread widely, but under the wet weather conditions of 2009, the fungus produced a large quantity of spores, which were then easily transported by the wind. The disease can be introduced into a field or garden on infected seed potatoes, from volunteer plants growing from diseased potatoes that were not harvested the previous season, from infected potatoes in cull piles (rejected potatoes), compost piles, or infected tomato transplants brought into the area. The outbreak in 2009 was traced to infected tomato transplants. The disease had no impact on our potatoes or our first succession of tomatoes (which began to ripen around mid-July, producing enough by early August to open

the field for CSA members to glean); the second planting of tomatoes showed signs of blight. The plants produced less fruit, and fruit quality and keeping quality suffered. Compared to many farms in the northeast and mid-Atlantic this year though, our tomatoes did very well.

We were able to manage the Colorado potato beetle well enough to ensure a decent, though not abundant, potato harvest; we pick the beetles, or their larvae, off the leaves of the potato plant by hand, pushing them into cups of soapy water (those who can stomach it simply squish them between their fingers). The Mexican bean beetle impacted our bean harvests; our late season planting of green beans was a resounding failure on account of the beetles. The harlequin bug did a lot of damage to our late season brassicas (broccoli and cauliflower, especially), but we managed the bugs sufficiently well that we were able to harvest some broccoli and cauliflower (primarily for the late season farmers market, since the CSA season ended in 2009 before abundant broccoli and cauliflower yields were tenable).

While a lot of our farm work is done by good, old-fashioned human power, we do rely on a small, 22hp Kioti (and effective operation of that machinery) for many tasks: mowing, incorporating cover crop, soil or bed preparation, cultivation, transplanting, laying plastic mulch, planting, hilling, and digging potatoes, turning compost piles, and other odd jobs. We like our little Kioti, but it is only useful as long as it is in good working order, and this season we suffered a few setbacks on account of tractor problems and tractor implement failure.

Our rototiller, which we use primarily for bed preparation, was in for repair in early April, which made it impossible to get our early plantings in as early as we hoped (though very wet soil due to high rates of rainfall made it difficult to prepare our beds as well). Ultimately, we were able to get the earliest plantings of bok choy, onions, shallots, kale, cabbage, broccoli, and more in the ground in time. By the end of the season, the bearings in the same rototiller that caused us early-season stress had failed on us; we were advised by the equipment repair folk to purchase a new rototiller, so we did. We're reevaluating our soil preparation methods to ensure better tractor implement life. We did add a chisel plow to our soil preparation inventory this year, but despite this tool, our rototiller still received heavy use.

While nobody at the farm has the know-how to fix a tractor or a rototiller, with some help, we were able to inexpensively and resourcefully respond to the collapse of our little greenhouse (attached to the veggie shed) following the first major snowstorm of the season in mid-December. Carl Schaumann, a member of our board of directors, deserves much credit for helping us rebuild the greenhouse in January, just in time before we required its use in early February to start early season transplants. This is technically material for the 2010 annual report, but we are so thankful for Carl's help, we'd like the opportunity to thank him twice.

About the same time in December when our greenhouse collapsed, we completed some repair work on our high tunnel, which included replacing the plastic covering.

This past December, it felt like our growing season came to a screeching halt with the first major snow of the season. We quickly shifted from harvesting for the farmers' market and cleaning up the fields and preparing them for winter to evaluating the season, reading member surveys, reviewing harvest record data, and planning the seed order and planting schedules for 2010.

And now, seeds have arrived and planting has begun; it's spring, and we've already started onions for the 2010 season, even though there's still a little bit of snow on the ground. Here's to agreeable weather in the season ahead, and here's to you, for your support of Colchester Farm CSA.

Member Survey Results

At least 120 CSA members took the time to share their thoughts about the 2009 season with us by responding to our end-season survey, distributed in early November. We greatly appreciate members taking the time to share their experience with the CSA; your feedback helps us reflect critically on the season past, providing some indication of what we did well, while pointing the way to improvements or changes we could make to better serve the needs of our members.

For example, 78% of survey respondents in 2008 indicated an interest in an extended season. We took this matter into account for the 2009 growing season and tested the viability of growing a larger amount in the autumn (and growing crops well that time of year). Based on yields in the fall the past few years, we believe we could support the entirety of our membership base through late October and early-to-mid November, so we've extended the season from 22 weeks to 26 weeks in 2010.

We've also used survey responses to help us make decisions about u-pick produce. In the 2008 and 2009 surveys a significant number of members expressed an interest in u-pick produce at the farm. However, a majority did not express interest. To satisfy the needs of interested CSA members, we will grow some plots of green beans specifically for u-pick in 2010 to test actual member interest during the season.

We always enjoy hearing about the vegetables you liked and didn't like, and what changes you might like to see next year. Some vegetables we didn't grow in 2009, which we plan to grow in 2010 based on member request, include fennel, mustard greens, and lemongrass.

We're pleased to announce that the majority of respondents were satisfied with the 2009 season. Approximately 93% of respondents rated the quality of produce received as excellent or good (the majority selecting excellent); 90% rated the presentation and distribution process of produce as excellent or good (the majority selecting excellent); 87% rated the variety of produce received as excellent or good (the majority selecting good); and 87% considered their CSA share an excellent or good value (the majority selecting good).

Nearly all survey respondents looked positively upon the weekly e-mail (if they were receiving it) explaining projected vegetable availability for the week, as well as vegetable use and storage tips and recipes. In the past, members have expressed interest in hearing more about farm happenings and our work throughout the season; though fieldwork always takes precedence over all else during the growing season, we intend to expand our efforts to keep you informed in 2010, perhaps through a blog, or an expanded weekly e-mail.

Pastured Poultry Project

John Arbuckle, a former Colchester Farm CSA intern, continued the pastured poultry project he began in 2008 here at the farm. In 2009, John offered eggs for sale at both on-farm and off-farm CSA pick-ups, and at the Chestertown Farmers' Market. John also raised pastured meat chickens and heritage turkeys. Customers purchased chickens and turkeys through John (marketed at CSA pick-ups and the farmers' market) prior to slaughter for pick-up post-slaughter and processing at the farm.

John is moving to Missouri with his wife, Holly Arbuckle, and son Noah. John and his family have been an important part of the Colchester Farm CSA community and they will be missed. We wish them well.

Financial Statement

Carry-over from 2008		21,683.67
2009 Revenue		
CSA Memberships	42,074.50	
Sales (Farm Market, Restaurant, Other)	15,826.49	
Charitable Donations	6,290.00	
Fundraising Event	2,058.59	
Other Income	97.25	
Total Revenue		66,346.83
2009 Expenses		
Personnel	36,879.98	
CSA Operations	25,627.20	
Capital Purchases (truck and rototiller)	9,863.25	
		(72,370.43)
Reserve for 2010		15,660.07

Thank you to the following people for their generous support:

Rob & Suzanne Etgen	Stu and Alexa Cawley
Charlotte Staelin	John Duggan and Andrea Kay Bjorklund
Bob Bennett	Ress Family Foundation
The Doyles	Clemence and Mark Overall-Wotherspoon
Jane Hukill	Carl Schaumann and Beth Renzulli
George Clinton	Kathleen Bailey and Vikram Krishnamurthy
Carla Gerber	Nancy and Gary Robson
Jen Dindinger	June and Ford Hall, Sr.
Carl Gallegos	



Farm Market and Restaurant Sales

In 2009, CFCSA participated at the Chestertown Farmers' Market for its fifth year.

We also added a second market to our schedule and began the season participating in the new Middletown Farmers' Market. We withdrew from the market in early August due to low customer turnout; most vendors left and the market is on hold for now.

In the fall of 2009, Aaron, one of our interns, inspired by an abundance of arugula and interested in working with local restaurants, made some connections in Chestertown and started us on the path of selling to restaurants.

Our emphasis is on the CSA, but we also rely on additional income from donations, farmers' market sales, and restaurant sales to supplement the CSA's income. The nature of farming and our need to ensure we grow enough for the CSA means sometimes we have excess produce following a pick-up. Sometimes we donate this excess produce to a food pantry or homeless shelter when there is a need. And, sometimes we will sell this extra produce at the farmers' market or to restaurants. However, our priority is the CSA, and we only sell either what we have in abundance or have too little of to fairly distribute to members.

Internship/Apprenticeship Program

In 2009, Colchester Farm CSA continued its farm apprenticeship program, the primary educational program at Colchester Farm CSA and also the CSA's main source of labor. The Colchester Farm CSA apprenticeship is a working/learning opportunity in which the interns work side-by-side with the CSA manager in the field. Interns receive a stipend, furnished housing accommodations, and access to the food we grow in exchange for their commitment and hard work in the field.

At Colchester Farm CSA, interns learn about many facets of vegetable production. Interns are engaged in planting, seeding, weeding, hoeing, harvesting, and post harvest handling of vegetables. They learn about greenhouse management, tractor operation and can become more involved in planning activities depending on their level of interest. They assist with vegetable distribution at CSA pick-up/drop-off locations and sell produce at the farmers' market.

Colchester Farm CSA also supports their interns in pursuing off-farm learning opportunities. Interested interns participate in programming developed by SAITA (Sustainable Agriculture Intern Training Alliance), PASA (Pennsylvania Association for Sustainable Agriculture), and other farm-related educational opportunities as they arise. Through participation in off-farm workshops, Colchester Farm CSA hopes their interns can increase their knowledge of sustainable agriculture principles, gain exposure to a variety of farming practices, and network with other farmers and interns. In 2009, interns attended the following workshops:

- June 5: PASA – Transitioning to Organic Production at the Rodale Institute, Kutztown, PA
- July 11: SAITA – Urban farming at Greensgrow and Weaver's Way, Philadelphia, PA
- July 14: PASA – Successful Restaurant Sales at Liberty Gardens, Coopersburg, PA
- July 17: SAITA – Incorporating honeybees into farming systems at Two Gander Farm in Oley, PA
- August 8: SAITA – Integrating livestock into production at Sankanack Farm CSA in Kimberton, PA and Seven Stars Farm, a biodynamic dairy
- September 26: SAITA – Community Started Agriculture at Pennypack Farm & Education Center in Horsham, PA

Four interns worked alongside CSA Manager Theresa Mycek (in her fourth season as manager). Aaron Shier, our full-season apprentice, worked from the beginning of April through the end of 2009. He came to CFCSA with experience as a work share participant at Clagett Farm CSA in Upper Marlboro, Maryland. Aaron was interested in developing gardening and farming skills, and exploring how Colchester Farm CSA fits into the bigger picture of the system of food production in the United States. He will continue his apprenticeship in 2010 as Assistant Manager of the CSA. Tess Jones, a native of the Chestertown area and an undergraduate at Wheaton College in Massachusetts, joined CFCSA from mid-May through the end of July before returning to school. Tess learned to garden in her youth and was interested in pursuing an opportunity to work outdoors during the summer. Amanda Formica joined CFCSA in late-May and worked through late August, before returning for her final year as an undergraduate at The George Washington University in Washington D.C. Amanda serves as President of the Food Justice Alliance and worked to develop "The GroW Community Garden" at GWU; she hoped to develop her gardening skills to help get the garden up and running at GWU and learn more about the CSA model. Shelby Laubhan joined us at the beginning of July after leaving her position as an Environmental Protection Specialist in the Watershed Protection Division with the District Department of the Environment in D.C. She worked with us until late-October; shortly thereafter, she moved abroad, entering the Peace Corps program in Thailand.



Old Barn



New Housing

New Intern Housing

In October 2009, Yerkes Construction Company began work converting an old cow barn (only a few years prior, cows grazed certain fields here at Colchester Farm) into housing for CSA interns, including an office for the CSA. Construction continued throughout the winter despite difficult weather conditions and project completion is slated for late March or early April 2010. Charlotte Staelin, owner of Colchester Farm LLC, funded the project.

As the CSA grew, the internship program grew along with it and the need for consistently available on-farm housing for interns became apparent. In the past, Charlotte Staelin and various CSA members opened their homes to interns for the summer. The CSA is grateful for their generosity. From a logistical standpoint, it was challenging to rely on such provisional arrangements; it was time-consuming to locate suitable housing options, coordinate timing and transportation, and match the needs of the host families and interns. We hope the newly renovated structure will provide secure, comfortable housing for interns conveniently located on the farm.

Farm Visits, Volunteers and Work Share Members

Volunteers and work share participants are crucial members of the farm team; we can always use extra help in the field. We greatly appreciate people donating their time and expertise to our operation, and we enjoy sharing the process of growing vegetables with people interested in what we do.

We would like to thank the following people for volunteering their time and labor to the farm in 2009:

- The Betley family, Nuha Ahmed and family, and Wen Chin Liu and family for their assistance with fieldwork, washing, and packing vegetables.
- Ivey Mask for coordinating and often transporting boxes to the Dover distribution group.
- Elizabeth Barbato of Purple Sage Herbs and Gifts for making her store the drop-off point for Middletown, DE shares.
- Suzanne Etgen, Dave Wheelan and everyone else who helped make the Food Inc./ Local Food Cocktail Hour a success.
- Our garlic planting crew: Wen Chin Liu, Nuha Ahmed, and Carl Schaumann. Planting garlic by hand is a laborious task. We planted 8162 cloves in a ¼ acre (twenty 200-foot rows). Each clove is planted by hand, pushed down into the soil with vigor; soil is then raked over the planted rows to bury the cloves deeper.
- The Chance Family for their generosity in sharing fuel, straw, their time and tractors in tilling our fields when our little tractor fell short.
- Carl Schaumann, a member of our board of directors, was an integral part of our harvest crew from September through our last harvest in mid-December. He also helped us rebuild our small unheated greenhouse in which we start transplants. His contribution was indispensable; he also donated equipment and supplies to the project.

Organized farm visits in 2009:

Colchester Farm CSA, in order to advance its educational mission, welcomes visitors to the farm for tours and working/learning opportunities:

- In early April, Alix, a teacher at **St. Andrews School**, Middletown, DE, brought a group of students to help us with some of the day's work and tour the farm. They helped us transplant bok choy in the very cold weather; it flurried that early spring day.
- Also in early April, Tara Shannon Holste, Research Associate at the **Center for Environment & Society at Washington College** (and also the college's recycling coordinator), brought a group of students in an environmental writing class to the farm for a visit.
- In late May, John Arbuckle led a group of **Master Gardeners** on a tour of our fields.
- In June, visitors from the **Delaware Horticulture Society** came out to visit the farm and helped the farm crew with the massive task of hand-picking the Colorado Potato Beetle off our potato plants while we chatted.
- We had two visits of **Girls Scouts** from **Camp Grove Point** who fit a visit to our farm into their week-long camp focused on food and cooking. We had about 38 Girl Scouts visit in late June and another group in mid-July.
- On November 11th, 9 children and 2 adults from the **Echo Hill Outdoor School** toured the farm.
- In early November, **Washington College** Students participating in the **Chesapeake Semester** visited to learn more about Colchester Farm.

Events

Local Foods Cocktail Hour and Screening of Food Inc.

The Chestertown Spy (or The Spy) (www.chestertownspy.com), a new (in 2009) online newspaper, focusing on Chestertown and surrounding communities, and a reincarnation of the first newspaper printed in Chestertown in 1793, presented the film Food Inc. as a benefit event in support of Colchester Farm CSA on September 24, 2009 at the Prince Theater in Chestertown, MD.

Food Inc. is a film critical of the "food industry" in the United States. Despite the film's controversial content, and in part because of it, Colchester Farm CSA was interested in screening the film to indicate its willingness to be part of a discussion about the food system in the United States and on the Delmarva Peninsula. Preceding the film, there was a brief video presentation explaining our work at Colchester Farm CSA produced by The Spy. Following the film screening, a panel discussion was held to engage the audience in a conversation about the film, resources for locally produced food, and our food system in general. The panel was moderated by the late Spy Green Editor Marty Fujita, and included panelists Nancy Robson, Garden Editor for the Spy, Owen McCoy, Chestertown Farmers' Market Manager and farmer and John Keller, teacher of Culinary Arts at Kent County High School.

In conjunction with the film screening, Colchester Farm CSA held a "Local Foods Cocktail Hour" at the Emmanuel Episcopal Church in Chestertown. A \$25 minimum donation included access to the cocktail hour and a ticket to the film. Suzanne Etgen planned and coordinated the event with help from the CFCSA Board of Directors. Food was prepared with locally

sourced food by: Sisters By Chance Caterers, Kent County High School Culinary Arts Program, Judy Crow, Suzanne Etgen, and Stu Cawley. Food was sourced from Crow Farm, Eve's Cheese, and Colchester Farm CSA. Play It Again, Sam donated coffee. Pip's Liquors and Riverview Liquors, located in Chestertown, supplied wine produced on Maryland vineyards, and a representative from Fordham Brewery in nearby Dover, Delaware poured samples of their beer.

The cocktail hour and film screening raised \$2,058 for Colchester Farm CSA. We extend a warm thank you to all participants in the planning and coordination of the event, and all attendees.

Other events in 2009

- CSA Sign-up Party** (March 28): Some returning members and new members alike gathered to share food and drink with the farm staff and board of directors, and sign up for a CSA share (if they had not already).
- 4th of July Potluck**: an opportunity for CSA members and other Colchester Farm CSA supporters to gather at the farm, share food and drink, and admire the fireworks over the Sassafras River.
- Farming, Food, and Fun - Kids Activity Week at Colchester Farm** (June 29-July 3), conducted by Colchester Farm residents Rob and Suzanne Etgen, with the aim to expose children to vegetable production on Maryland's Eastern Shore and involve them in the harvest, preparation and consumption of those vegetables.
- Recurring events throughout the season included silent walking meditations led by Rob Etgen, and yoga classes conducted by Ronni Diamond.