



# San Bernardino Co.

## Community-supported agriculture delivers fresh, local food



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The Press-Enterprise

**Video:** [Visit Tierra Miguel and Rancho Papagallo](#)

Every Friday morning, a truck drives north from San Diego County to deposit about 20 boxes of vegetables on Renee Hill's porch in Riverside.

Over the next few hours, other members of the Tierra Miguel Foundation farm come by her house and check their names off on a whiteboard as they pickup their weekly share of salad greens, berries, corn, herbs or honey.

The constantly rotating mix of products and improvised central pickup spot are typical of community-supported agriculture farms around the country that allow customers to pay a set fee for a share in the crop.

Story continues below



Ed Crisostomo / The Press-Enterprise  
Mil Kreco is the manager of Tierra Miguel Foundation farm, about 20 miles south of Temecula. The farm, established in 2000, delivers 184 boxes of vegetables each week to 33 locations throughout Southern California. It has 48 members in the Inland area.

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Conceived in Japan, common in Europe and introduced in the United States two decades ago, such farms are making headway in the Inland area as consumers gain interest in eating locally grown food.

"I used to have to make sales pitches to convince people," said Hill. She said she begged her friends and family to join four years ago when she organized Tierra Miguel's first Riverside County pickup point.

Hill, 45, said she sought out Tierra Miguel after her personal trainer advised her to improve her diet. In the program's early years in Riverside, she e-mailed recipes to her recruits and held cooking classes using the farm's products.

"Now I don't really have to do that. It just sustains itself," she said.

Hill said she has lost 85 pounds since organizing the Riverside pickup point. The once-a-week arrangement forced her to map out her meals, she said, and she found herself eating more fruit and vegetables.

The food tastes better, she said, and doesn't result in as much air pollution from being trucked or flown from distant farms.

"It would be different if it were truffles from Italy. But when it's a bad-tasting strawberry, and you've polluted so much air to get it, it's like, why am I doing this?" Hill said.

### **Sharing the Harvest**

According to the U.S. Department of Agriculture's National Agricultural Library, the community-supported agriculture movement began in Japan and Switzerland in the 1960s and expanded to the United States in 1985.

The system allows customers to buy shares in a farm at a set price, with payment due ahead of time on a seasonal or monthly basis. Farmers get paid whether the harvest is good or bad, and customers get a steady supply of fresh and local fruits and vegetables.

There are now more than 1,000 community-supported farms in the U.S., according to the Santa Cruz-based Web site [localharvest.org](http://localharvest.org).

The idea is generally popular in affluent communities where there is a demand for such foods, and residents like the idea of land staying in agriculture, said Milt McGiffen, vegetable specialist with UC Riverside's Cooperative Extension, an information source for local farmers.

Though the concept has gained popularity in the United States in the past decade, there are relatively few in the Inland area, McGiffen said.

The region's citrus-farming history may be part of the reason why, said Bob Knight, director of the nonprofit Inland Orange Conservancy, the largest Inland community-supported agriculture organization.

In 2006, about 1,200 members paid dues of \$65 for a 14-week season of oranges, grapefruit and other citrus, eating 167 tons and donating 84 tons to charity.

Community-supported agriculture farms have traditionally been small farms oriented toward row crops such as lettuce, vegetables and corn, Knight said. But small farmers around Riverside and San Bernardino County's East Valley have traditionally grown citrus, he said. Row crops are mostly grown locally on large corporate farms in the Coachella Valley.

"When we started, we were really worried because no one had really had a single-crop CSA (community-supported agriculture farm) before. That was our big risk factor," Knight said.

Luckily, he said, they found people willing to eat a lot of citrus from what he and others call the Napa Valley of navel oranges. About 1,000 people signed up for the first season in spring 2005.

"If we were the Napa Valley of broccoli, we couldn't be moving this much broccoli," Knight said.

A visit to Tierra Miguel shows the more traditional community-supported agriculture setup: 85 acres of squash, cucumbers, melons, beans, summer carrots, eggplant, peppers and tomatoes next to lettuce being allowed to go to seed for next year. Members pay \$133 a month for 15 to 25 pounds of produce delivered weekly or \$66.50 a month for biweekly delivery.

"It's not cheap," Hill said. "But for the ease of delivery, for the localness of it, for the flavor, and for the fact that it's organic, I feel I'm willing to pay for it."

Ten students of Peter Dukich, a composting expert, founded the nonprofit farm in 2000 in the Pauma Valley, about 20 miles south of Temecula.

"It all started from a philosophical approach. All of us had concerns about food quality," said Mil Krecu, the farm's manager.

Though it started out serving coastal counties, the farm now puts 1,000 miles on its delivery truck each week to drive 184 boxes of vegetables to 33 locations throughout Southern California. Riverside deliveries began in spring 2003, Murrieta in summer 2004 and Redlands last December. There are 48

members in the Inland area.

Story continues below



The farm hosts school groups to teach children where food comes from. Krecu demonstrated an action that gets their attention each time: pulling a feathery plant out of the ground to reveal a bright orange bunch of carrots.

"It's only recently that we've become so distant from our food sources," Krecu said.

### **Locally Grown**

State Secretary of Food and Agriculture A.G. Kawamura praised the community-supported farm movement when he spoke June 11 at a Redlands screening of "Orange Sunrise," a Peter Coonradt documentary about Inland citrus. Calling the farms "edible landscaping," he pointed out that 15 million people live within a 1 ½ -hour drive of his family's Orange County farm.

"I'm a great believer in this movement," Kawamura said.

State officials don't track the number of community-supported agriculture farms in California, said Jay Van Rein, a spokesman for the Department of Food and Agriculture.

But commercial farmers have recognized that customers respond to a local label, Van Rein said. California began a "California Grown" ad campaign in 2002.

"I bet I turn down five clients a week," said Lynne van Dyke, who expanded her vegetable garden last summer in Warner Springs, on Highway 79 southeast of Temecula, into a community-supported agriculture farm called Wingshadows Hacienda.

Van Dyke delivers to just seven clients in Temecula each week, charging \$20 a week, but said she has at least 25 people on a waiting list.

Depending on the season, a typical box might hold a selection of tomatoes, peppers, squash, eggplant, six or seven herbs, free-range eggs, lettuces, spinach, carrots, radishes and garlic, onions and plums, peaches, pears or persimmons. Van Dyke said she and her husband plan to plant more next year.

The changing tastes of customers are fueling the demand, said the Inland Orange Conservancy's Knight.

"We are getting more sophisticated in our tastes," he said. "There's a disappointment with what's out there through the world supermarket chain, the worldwide distribution chain."

And at the same time, he said, people see supporting local farmers as a way to protect land from development that feels as if it's out of their control.

"I like to know where my food's coming from," said Jill Mann, 34, of Temecula, a local-food devotee who sells eggs from her farm, Rancho Papagallo, by subscription.

"When I deliver them, they're laid within a two- or three-day period," Mann said. "When you buy them from a grocery store, they're already a couple of weeks old."

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## **online information**

### **General information:**

[www.nal.usda.gov/afsic/pubs/csa/csa.shtml](http://www.nal.usda.gov/afsic/pubs/csa/csa.shtml)

[www.slowfoodusa.org](http://www.slowfoodusa.org)

[www.eatwellguide.org](http://www.eatwellguide.org)

### **Tierra Miguel Foundation:**

[www.tierramiguelfarm.org](http://www.tierramiguelfarm.org)

### **Inland Orange**

**Conservancy:**

[www.inlandorange.org](http://www.inlandorange.org)

**Wingshadows Hacienda:**

[www.localharvest.org/](http://www.localharvest.org/)

csadrops.jsp?id=11467

**Rancho Papagallo:**

[www.ranchopapagallo.com](http://www.ranchopapagallo.com)

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