

Organic farm gains Juneau following

More than 450 residents buy shares in Washington outfit

Jan Beauchamp and more than 450 Juneau residents pick up boxes of organic food shipped every week by a grower in Washington through a subscription program.

"What a great idea," she said. "I love having someone else doing the shopping for us."

It started when fisheries biologist Sue Walker heard about community-supported agriculture clubs and found on the Internet the closest one to Alaska:

The farm agreed to send nine boxes to Juneau by barge in February.

"We had no idea it was going to grow to its size today," said the farm's general manager, Matt Ewer.

Such growers exist throughout Washington and Oregon using the model of the community buying shares of the farm and getting produce in return.

Full Circle Farms has no membership fees, but is run through subscriptions with members receiving a box each week or every other week, priced between \$33 and \$54, depending on size.

Inside are various quantities of seasonal fruits and vegetables. Food is harvested on Tuesdays, packaged on Wednesdays and shipped on Thursdays.

"Every time I open up the box, it's like Christmas," Walker said.

Subscribers say part of the fun is getting something a person wouldn't normally buy at the grocery store, such as celery root. Walker said her family members' meat intake has dropped because their mouths are too busy trying to finish all of the box's contents.

A small army of volunteers makes this possible by picking up the load and distributing the goods to nine drop-off points in Juneau, which are mostly in people's garages.

"We don't have any problem finding volunteers," Walker said.

The company and its customers say the food tastes better because it is harvested at its peak and delivered within days of the harvest.

No pesticides, herbicides or fungicides are used in the natural composting, tilling techniques and pest management systems. Because of the absence of chemicals, Walker said the farm is one of the few where wildlife still roams.

Some scientists believe organic foods have more nutrients than chemically treated foods, and that eating them can reduce the risk of cancer and other diseases.

"Your body doesn't know what to do with these chemicals," said Suzanne Williams, organic and natural food buyer for downtown grocer Alaskan & Proud.

The availability of organic food has corresponded with the growing demand in Juneau over the last five years.

"We have a lot more selection now," she said. From potatoes to socks, the Alaskan & Proud store carries a variety of organic products.

The subscription craze spawned by Full Circle Farm has taken a bite out of Juneau's health food retail store Rainbow Foods, said manager Rosemary Slotnick.

But Slotnick said, in general, the interest in organic produce and products is healthful for business as Rainbow offers goods that Full Circle Farms cannot - such as organic turkeys at Thanksgiving.

- Andrew Petty can be reached at andrew.petty@juneauempire.com

Click here to return to story:

http://www.juneauempire.com/stories/112405/loc_20051124003.shtml