## A COMMUNITY FOOD SYSTEM

Community Supported Agriculture (CSA) as a model to organize a locally-based regional food system Food throughout the world today exists in an industrial paradigm. Farms are sources of ingredients, which are shipped to storage, refrigeration or warehouses, then to processing plants (for washing, cooking, making convenience products, packaging). Finally, the products are labeled and advertised, then moved through central distribution systems.

When unknown farms provide ingredients for brand-name foods, the average person equates those farms with factories. Consumers rarely consider all the energy and resources involved in the products they buy. Since most of us are three generations away from making a living from the soil, we don't feel compelled to know about the farms that produce our food.

When such awareness arises, as it has through the organically grown movement, consumers become more concerned about where and how their food is grown. Soon, they demand organic standards for all their food and are increasingly concerned about the soil, air, water and workers involved in its production. They want standards that outlaw synthetic chemicals and genetically engineered inputs, increase biological soil amendments, enhance air, water, and soil, and provide fair wages for all involved in farm work.

Such demands can and should be met in all industrial food production. But, as we know, they are not. It's essential that these demands become the foundation of our contracts with farmers and market gardeners as we organize locally based regional food systems.

We already know how to organize a dynamic local food system. Community Supported Agriculture (CSA) principles can be used to organize participants in local farm or market garden production. The following CSA elements can be useful organizing tools:

•Willing people trade work hours on farms or in market gardens for part of their food

•Those who cannot trade work for food may be willing to invest money in a secure community food system in exchange for all or part of their food

•Community organizers can contribute time doing local food assessments in exchange for some or all of their food

•Those involved in community distribution can trade hours, space or vehicles for part of all of their food

The CSA model can also be used to organize a local food-processing web. Community Supported Processing (CSP) is not widely organized or practiced, but I see the following as elements of such an organized system:

•Foods grown to acceptable standards by contracted growers are moved into predetermined, contracted channels. Categories are: fresh, stored (dried, refrigerated or processed for convenient

## consumption)

•Organized food communities use a product-by-product database. These communities are comprised of households, institutions and restaurants in a given locale. Each is given a yearly food needs assessment form. Responses are collected in the database, revealing a tally of the community's requirements for each product. Contracts are set with participating growers/producers based on expressed need.

•Food processing facilities and storage facilities are built, staffed, and maintained as part of the CSP process

•Participants can trade hours and/or money for part of all of their particular food needs

•Processed food prices reflect incentives to growers/producers, processing costs, organizational costs, etc.

The following example follows one food--black beans--through the assessment/growing/distribution process. Contracts would be made with the following community customer examples after assessments determine the annual needs of each:

Institutions- collectively 1000 lbs per month

= 3,600 lbs

Restaurants 100 lbs of black beans per month (dry)

X 12 months X 24 restaurants = 28,000 lbs of beans X 12 months X 10 institutions (hospitals, schools, nursing homes, university living units, etc.) = 12,000 lbs of beans households 300 households at 1 lb per month X 12 months

Thus, growers would be sought to provide the 43,600 pounds (22 tons) of beans, assessed as needed by the community. Given the black bean yield on my farm last summer, we would need 10 to 12 acres of black beans. (I purposely do not include retail stores in the example.)

To meet the black bean demand for a three county area of over 300,000 people, we would need much more acreage. After the annual local contracts are met, contracts could be made with other areas that are organized in a similar fashion, but are unable to grow the beans in their locality. Most large metropolitan areas within a hundred-mile radius would be in our sphere of community organization – Salem, Portland & Eugene, for example.

The organizing tools of CSP are key. Industrial agriculture and food processing in Linn, Benton and Lincoln counties have disappeared because of the costs of labor and facility maintenance in

today's competitive world market. To organize a new locally based regional food system requires dedicated involvement and community support. Why do we need to organize quickly now? Petroleum, obviously. But we also need to identify and contract agricultural land close to populated areas for food before it is taken for bio-fuels or lost to housing through challenges such as the current Measure 37 claims. Agricultural easements need to be set up so that land will be available in the future.