

The view from the garden

By [VICKI BENNINGTON](#)

2011-02-07 17:21:48



GODFREY — Knowing the exact path food has traveled provides the assurance of healthier, fresher produce on the table and a smaller "carbon" footprint on the world.

By eliminating pesticides, processing, packaging, and miles and miles of transportation, the Community Supported Garden at La Vista in Godfrey offers shareholders a chance not only to be aware of the short journey of their produce, but also participate in its cultivation and enjoy the flavor of common and not-so-common vegetables, greens, root plants, strawberries — and in the near future, tree fruit — with all going straight from field to fork.

La Vista will offer about 120 shares of its bounty as it enters its ninth season this year, said the garden's farmer, Eric Stevens. Some 40 shares of spring greens also will be available for five weeks, beginning in March — a sign that winter is on the downhill swing.

Participants get the chance to eat a huge variety of different vegetables, including potatoes, several types of lettuce, greens, broccoli, cabbage, eggplant, radishes, peppers and about 20 kinds of tomatoes during the

season. Shareholders sometimes trade among themselves for more of their own personal favorites.

Shareholders are encouraged to volunteer with the garden when possible; organizers hope each can work about three hours a month. That help may be in the form of gardening, weeding (everything is hand-weeded), harvesting, sorting or other services, such as publicity, helping with educational materials or serving on the board.

Danette Watt, La Vista chairman of the board, said Stevens and his wife, Crystal, have brought great energy to the garden with their fresh ideas.

"Eric has introduced some new varieties of vegetables to garden shareholders," Watt said. "And with his encouragement, we have started an orchard, and he has planted 19 fruit trees. Besides helping her husband in the fields, Crystal is a master herbalist with an interest in growing medicinal herbs."

Watt said the garden continues its commitment to preserving the land, educating people about the health benefits of eating produce grown in a sustainable manner and how eating locally reduces overall ecological impact.

The garden over-produces, ensuring leftover produce to take to local food pantries, another bonus of having a community-supported garden while fulfilling its mission to help feed the poor. La Vista also offers 10 to 12 community outreach shares at a discounted price to low-income members of the community.

Stevens began working with community gardening in St. Louis about 10 years ago, while also visiting local farmers' markets, learning what sorts of produce can be grown locally and seasonally. He eventually became an apprentice-intern on a farm in Illinois, where he developed a passion for growing and learned about raising vegetables at a productive scale. Prior to becoming head farmer at La Vista, he was employed by AmeriCorps VISTA as a food development associate with the Dent County Extension in Salem, Mo., where he started a

community garden and held educational workshops for the community.

"Supporting local gardening has many advantages," Stevens said. "Shareholders are people who care about where their food comes from, knowing who grows their produce and knowing that organic methods are used in the growing process. They also care about nature and how the Earth is cared for."

In keeping with a more ecologically sustainable existence, La Vista purchased a 1948 Allis Chalmers Model G gas tractor and converted it into a "green" tractor by installing an electric motor with the technical help of Ranken Technical College and retired teacher Allen Davenport. La Vista board member Tom Bechtold did the painting and restoration work. A battery bracket was constructed and attached to hold three 12-volt batteries to power the motor. The end result is an orange "green" tractor that creates no air pollution and very little noise pollution.

Bechtold has been involved with the garden since 2008, taking care of the equipment, doing repairs as needed, changing oil and performing any required maintenance at the pick-up barn and surrounding buildings.

The Rev. Maurice Lange planted the original seeds for La Vista in 2001. The Oblate Novitiate on Levis Lane agreed to rent a portion of land, and Lange set out to help raise local awareness of the benefits of an organic, community-supported garden, gathering a few people who liked to "dig in the dirt," said Cindy Gelsthorpe, an environmentally conscious member of the garden since its inception.

Gelsthorpe said the group started with a small plot that volunteers had to "deer-proof" with 10-foot-high fences. Through the years, it continued to grow and expand.

"I love working in the garden in the company of like-minded people, knowing who grows my food, where it is grown and under what conditions (no pesticides)," Gelsthorpe said. "I also enjoy the peace and solitude of the area, where we can pick our own peas, beans, tomatoes, strawberries and flowers."

With all shares offered on a first come first served basis, potential shareholders are encouraged to apply by early spring. The cost for a full share is approximately \$20 per week for the 27-week growing season. Full shareholders pick up their share of the produce each week. The cost for an alternate share is approximately \$11 per week. Alternate shareholders pick up their share every other week. Individuals also can share their membership with another person. Regular produce distribution typically runs from mid-May through mid-November, depending on weather conditions.

The cost of spring greens is \$35 a week for shareholders, which includes 1 pound of greens for five weeks, beginning in late March. Spring green shares also are available to non-shareholders for \$50.

Applications for shareholders are available at www.lavistacsa.org or by calling (618) 467-8827.

vbennington@sbcglobal.net

© Copyright 2011 Freedom Communications. All Rights Reserved.

[Privacy Policy](#) | [User Agreement](#) | [Site Map](#)