

DOWN ON THE FARM

By Kelly Wolfgang

Two words: bucolic and beautiful. That'll be the best bet to describe a visit to Snipes Farm in Morrisville, Pa. to your friends during a chit-chat on how to save some money on groceries while taking in nature all at once. Apple trees span for acres and crop lines are interrupted only by the occasional wandering, feather-footed chicken. And what better way is there to warm up to the changing of the seasons than by shopping for produce outside with the children instead of in the friendly, but sunless aisles of supermarkets?

Amongst the sprawling fields the kids can weave their way through a Celtic Labyrinth where legend holds that all mindful queries can be answered just by winding your way through the paths. You can shed some light to your children on the world's new eco-friendly ways in the solar-powered barn that contains a huge cider press. The farm even outsmarted the foxes that are hunting for a free meal by creating a chicken coop that moves, allowing the animals to roam free while still finding protection from those red tailed predators. There is even a child education program that features produce tasting and summer camps that teach cooking and art classes.

But, aside from all the beauty, learning and fun (which isn't exactly easy to find in one place) Snipes bought itself some bragging rights by helping to grow the size of your change purse with the Community Supported Agriculture, or CSA, program.

Community Supported Agriculture is a great opportunity for members of the community to support local farms while enjoying fresh produce and gaining hands-on farm experience. At Snipes Farm, members of the CSA receive one share of pesticide-free crops throughout a 25-week period from June to November for \$575. These crops, grown on 150 acres of organic farmland, include everything from strawberries and apples to broccoli and chards, and much more in between. Each week, a half of a bushel of one of the 35 varieties of vegetables is included in the crop share pick-up at Snipes, amongst the other seasonal produce. There is also an opportunity for pick-it-yourself blueberries, peas, blackberries, cherry tomatoes, and pumpkins that is available to public-at-large; not just CSA members.

Along with the share of crops that Snipes Farm CSA members receive each week, families also get a newsletter that keeps them updated on happenings at the farm and informed about the quality and quantity of various crops. The newsletter also includes recipes for great dishes to make with the family using a wide spread of your fresh produce.

Membership in the CSA requires four hours of volunteer service at the farm. Volunteering is the perfect opportunity for those who would love to know more about where their food originates and how a farm operates. Susan Snipes-Wells, the friendly co-



manager of Snipes Farms, believes that volunteering and tours are both exciting and educational.

"Sometimes the children help us spread woodchips around the apple trees," she said. "We want them to learn what's involved in plant nutrition."

Snipes Farm also offers potluck dinners and gathering times throughout the 25-week CSA period so members have a chance to interact with each other and make some new friends.



"Snipes likes to introduce people to the world of good friends and good eating," Snipes-Wells said. "Families get involved by coming to volunteer. On any given day they could plant crops, move produce from the greenhouses, or help harvest apples in the fall."

Families can also get involved by funding a summer scholarship program that allows local high school students to intern at the farm. You can also help by donating a share of the CSA to the Bucks County Housing Group. Currently, five shares of the Snipes Farm CSA are being donated to the Housing Group, which provides a range of housing and other social services to homeless and low-income families throughout Bucks County.

Membership in a Community Supported Agriculture program like the one at Snipes Farm can be a great way to give back to local farmers while enjoying the rich taste of naturally grown produce. It is also a valuable opportunity to learn more about farming through volunteering and gives you a chance to meet families just like yours

in your own community. By joining a local CSA, you are not only feeding your family the highest quality fruits and vegetables, but you are helping the environment by supporting sustainable living. CSAs are a growing phenomenon so if Snipes isn't exactly a gas-friendly drive, you can find one near you at the Alternative Farming Systems Information Center's Website, afsic.nal.usda.gov.

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