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Investing in gardens' bounty

On a blustery Sunday earlier this month, farmers at Sophia Garden in Amityville hosted a celebration of the spring equinox for fellow organic gardeners and their garden shareholders.

Most of the farmers came to salute spring and plant a few symbolic beet seeds. Most of them grow vegetables and fruits for CSAs, short for Community Supported Agriculture shares. The idea is that shareholders pay early in the season to give farmers a boost with expenses and then, during the season, receive produce every week. Just as in a home garden, some crops may do better than others (too many squash, not enough tomatoes). That's the risk farmers take, and shareholders take it with them.

Each farmer spoke briefly and contributed soil to a common pot. Then the soil from the gardens was mixed together and each farmer took some home.

"I could use about a ton of that," said Scott Chaskey of Quail Hill, a Peconic Land Trust farm in Amagansett, as he admired the rich, black soil from Michael (Mick) Makinajian's farm in Huntington. (Makinajian does not offer CSA shares but does sell organic vegetables and poultry.)

Chaskey read from his book "This Common Ground," and everybody sang "The Garden Song" by David Mallett: "Inch by inch, row by row, gonna help this garden grow, gonna mulch it deep below, gonna make it fertile ground."

Vegetables are just seedlings in greenhouses right now, so afterward, everybody ate cookies and cake.

Here is our annual list of CSAs. A growing season is generally 20 to 27 weeks. Some farms, such as Quail Hill, also offer winter shares separately. Prices range from about \$350 to more than \$700. Sophia Garden, Just Food and some others also provide shares to needy families.

Sophia Garden: This CSA, at 555 Albany Ave., Amityville, under the auspices of the Sisters of St. Dominic, has expanded this year and has some shares left. Contact Sister Jeanne Clark, 631-842-6000, ext. 307; to sign up and to see the pickup schedule, visit <http://members.aol.com/sophiagardens/home/>

Stacked pulled-pork sandwich at Jackson's in Commack

that Noah Jaques, chef at the future Mumbo Gumbo, recalls fondly from his childhood in Marion, Va. There, Jaques said, not all the cooking was done at the family home. "My uncle owned a smokehouse. They killed the deer and the turkey and then they smoked them. We used to have to call our order in a day ahead of time or else stand in line an hour and a half. Right after church, one person would pick up the food and everybody else would sit around the house. It was a big Sunday thing in Virginia."

Whether one's roots are in Virginia or Valley Stream, this kind of cookery seems, somehow, universally reassuring, easy to understand. "Southern food represents home and caring," said the Queens-born Goldgell, of Hog House Barbecue. "It may not represent my home, but it represents that same feeling of my home, of someone caring when they made food."

Coming Friday in Part 2

Restaurant reviews
Eats: Jackson's, in Commack
City Bites: Blau Gans, in Manhattan

their bread pudding."

Counting calories doesn't count for much in the world of Southern cooking. Al Horowitz, owner of Smokin' Al's Famous BBQ Joint in Bay Shore, concedes that barbecue — lately the hottest genre of Southern cuisine — "isn't the lightest food in the world." What matters, said the Brooklyn-born pit-master, is that "it's food that sticks to you and gives you that warm feeling."

'A big Sunday thing'

Barbecue's inherent warmth is rooted in old ways, ways

loaf. "We've all gone through our fads and trends," Bloom said. "These days, you go to a diner and see Asian fusion dishes on the menu. People want to go back to basics."

What they crave is comfort food, "food that people don't have to really think hard about," according to cookbook author, television personality and restaurateur Barbara Smith, whose eclectic Sag Harbor restaurant, B. Smith, always has Southern fried chicken on the menu. "It amazes me," Smith said. "People say that they're eating lighter, but they want

mystique." Then, she said, there was a certain colonel. "You've got to give credit to Kentucky Fried Chicken."

While Southern fried chicken has long been available in fast-food chains and casual takeouts nationwide, there haven't been many Long Island full-service restaurants offering homestyle Dixie cooking. "I did a lot of research on demographics," said Lillian Dent, co-owner of the new LL Dent in Carle Place. "We wanted to open a Southern-style restaurant with a nice atmosphere. We figured that this was a good niche and that there was a call for it."

She's right, according to Tim Zagat, publisher of the Zagat Survey restaurant guides, who said that with the rise of women in the workforce, there has been a growing demand by families for just this kind of dining spot. "Most like the idea of having homey hearty food in restaurants," Zagat said. "There is a continuing trend to dining out more as a substitute for eating at home — what we call 'b.a.t.h.' restaurants — an acronym for 'better alternative to home.'" Usually, such restaurants are also moderately priced.

It was this everyday market segment that Bloom was looking to attract when he changed his restaurant's name and format. These days, at Jackson's, Bloom serves pulled pork "sliders," barbecued chicken and turkey meat

Cost in calories

How many calories are in that Southern fried chicken dinner? Based on the USDA National Nutrition Database for Standard Reference, the calorie count of a typical Southern fried chicken dinner plate looks something like this:

1 chicken breast	260 calories
1 chicken thigh	190 calories
1 chicken drumstick	193 calories
1 piece corn bread	188 calories
1 cup mashed potatoes made with butter and milk	237 calories
1/2 cup gravy	94 calories
1 cup collards	50 calories
TOTAL	1,212 calories