



A Beautiful Harvest Close to Home

A career can be about more than just sitting in front of a computer in a cubicle all day. For one Lubbock woman, a career is in the shape of a head of broccoli and in the form of an ear of corn. Sherry Pullen has made a career of providing fresh produce for her local community.

Pullen, owner of Pullen Produce, located at Tree Grace Farms, sells chemical-free produce and operates a community supported agriculture (CSA) program. Pullen has operated a CSA program for three years.

According to information obtained from the United States Department of Agriculture website, CSA programs link local residents, or “shareholders,” with nearby farmers. Shareholders buy into an operation at the beginning of a year, and throughout the growing season go to the farm and receive fresh produce.

Pullen began selling produce to the public in 2004 at a different location. Some time later, Dr. Lillian Chou, the owner of Tree Grace Farms, asked Pullen if she would be interested in living and working at the farm located just west of Lubbock. Pullen jumped at the opportunity. Farming and gardening is something that she has had an interest in her entire life, Pullen said.

“I love my job,” Pullen said. “I grew up out in the county in East Texas, and we had a garden then; it’s something that I’ve always loved.”

In the first few years of her produce sales, Pullen said she relayed heavily on word-of-mouth for new people to learn about her.

A website for CSA programs in the United States, Local Harvest, has more than 120 CSA programs listed in Texas. This website exists to help consumers find CSA programs close to them, allowing them to possibly become shareholders.

As shareholders, consumers get several advantages, including one that Pullen described energetically.

“[Shareholders] know exactly where their food came from; they can see the gardens where it grew,” Pullen said. “Which I think is important- you know, ‘My food came exactly from this spot, this person picked it.’”

Aside from knowing exactly where produce came from, one participant in a CSA program in Lubbock shared why being a shareholder is important to her.

“I’m convinced that the stronger our regional food shed is, the stronger we’re going to be as communities,” said Rita Chamblin, a shareholder with the CSA program at the South Plains Food Bank. “We can put more people to work; we can have fresher produce and better access to certain things.”

The South Plains Food Bank has operated a CSA program for the past nine years. Its program started as a

means to pay for a program for at-risk teens. The farm sells 100 shares each year; this number, along with a substantial wait list, led to the creation of other CSA programs in and around Lubbock. Three years ago, Jenifer Smith, director of the CSA program at the South Plains Food Bank, reached out to others in the area that she thought might be interested in operating CSA programs.

“[I] said, ‘It’s not like we’re in competition with each other; we have more demand than any one of us can handle,’” Smith said.

“‘This is what we’re doing, y’all should do it too.’”

Smith contacted Sherry Pullen to potentially start another CSA program in the area.

Just like the operation at the South Plains Food Bank, which began with 25 shareholders, Pullen started her operation small, and it has grown each year.

In her first year of operating a CSA program, Pullen sold 15 shares. The next year she doubled it to 30 shares, and this year she plans to sell 60 shares.

The growth of Pullen Produce is not an isolated case. According to the 2007 Agriculture Census conducted by the USDA, there were 12,549 CSA programs in the U.S. A study conducted by the University of Massachusetts and the University of Wisconsin – Madison found that there were approximately 840 CSA programs in the U.S. in 2001.

CSA program shareholders get a much different experience with their fruits and vegetables than most grocery store patrons, which is something that Chamblin enjoys most about being a shareholder.

“It’s different than going to the store,” Chamblin said. “When you go to the store, you buy the things you know, the things you grew up with. It’s way different than picking up your box, and every Friday, it’s like Christmas.”

Pullen also thinks that her operation has something to offer patrons that they cannot get in a super market.

“I think it’s fun, just to come out to the farm,” Pullen said. “It’s more fun to come here and see the farm and

fresh air than going to the grocery store.”

Although Pullen said that she could not imagine doing anything else, she knows that

“Shareholders know exactly where their food came from; they can see the gardens where it grew.”

the support of the local community is what has enabled her to continue in a career of providing fresh produce.

“I enjoy doing this very much, and without the support of the community, I wouldn’t be able to continue doing it,” Pullen said.

The fruits of Pullen’s career can be felt and tasted throughout the Lubbock community.

 Melissa Waggoner | Sanger, Texas