

Where Does Your Food Come From?

By Wendy Lovas

Do you know where your food comes from? Hint, the answer I'm looking for isn't Tom Thumb or even California. Even if we know the name of the manufacturer of our food, we have no way of knowing what really goes into it. Reading the ingredient's label sounds like a list from a chemist's lab rather than something edible. There are so many layers and processes in getting our food from "farm" to table, that it's next to impossible to know where it all came from.

Well, last year, I was lucky enough to hear about Oak Ridge Valley Farm Organics and how they were transitioning from selling their produce at various local farmers markets to forming a Community Supported Agriculture (CSA). In addition to the fresh produce, another benefit of this relationship is that you actually know the person who grew your food - how crazy does that sound in this day and age? Gene Holmes owns Oak Ridge Valley Farms and I get to talk to him every week when I pick up my share and discuss how all the crops are doing. Often he'll send an email to us with updates and photos. It kinda blows your mind if you think about it.

This year, we wanted to share information about CSAs in general and Gene's in particular at the Live Green Expo that was held in April. So, I drove out to Grand Saline to visit the farm where my vegetables are grown and meet the hens that lay the delicious pastured eggs I eat every week. Volunteers **Victoria, Jan and Paul Gandy, Susan Whitaker, Megan Lang and Sid Sambashivan** joined me.

That's right. We walked through the fields where there were plants growing that would produce vegetables that I would be eating this year. We saw his green houses with seedlings still to be planted. We sat in the room that serves as their Friday staging area to wash and sort that week's harvest before it is packed into coolers to be delivered Saturday morning. We were able to see every stage of production for food that would nourishing my body. We saw the hard work and dedication that goes into growing and harvesting by Gene and his family. How many people can say that they've done that?

At the Expo, we had the pleasure of talking to lots of people about our experience and the concept of a CSA . We received lots of positive response. Obviously, we can't obtain all of our food this way, but for about nine months out of the year, I'm getting quite a bit of what I eat from Gene and am secure in the knowledge of where it came from and how it was grown. It contains no pesticides, herbicides or other harmful chemicals. It's fresh and hasn't been sitting on a truck as it's transported halfway across the country to my grocery store (or flown in from another country). There is a growing interest in locally grown, organic produce in this country and I hope to see more and more small farmers cropping up like Gene who can form a personal relationship with the people eating their food. I hope, too, that each of us gets the opportunity to experience this even if it's only by shopping at a farmers market.

For more information about Gene's CSA, please go to www.oakridgeorganics.com. If you are interested in becoming a subscriber for the 2012 season, I would highly recommend getting on his wait list now. The photos for this article were provided by Victoria Gandy - more can be found at www.victorialgandy.com.