

## “Locally-Grown Organic Veges Served and Sold in Seaside”

By Susan Vallee  
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Shana Wolf, owner of Off the Vine Produce, is a bit like a cheerleader for organic produce and the people who grow it. I recently had the pleasure of eating her dust as we barreled down dirt roads in northern Bay County on the way to Robert Wheeler’s certified organic farm.

After several wrong turns (and more than a few curious glances from goats and horses) we pulled into an unassuming grass driveway, passing cows, calves, horses, foals, geese and chickens. As I stepped out of the car I was pleased to meet Wheeler, who operates the only certified organic farm in the area. He was straight from the field, having spent the morning picking snow peas and tending to his pear trees. A quick walk led us to his field where he proudly pulled sweet carrots from the ground, pausing to polish them with the end of his shirt before offering us a bite. Coriander seeds, plump snow peas and rosemary were also sampled before he and Wolf got down to business, discussing the number of people signed up to receive boxes of his produce throughout the summer.

Wolf has been hand delivering boxes of certified USDA organic produce to homes in the Southeast for years, but she and her business partners are excited to expand the business and hope to help local farmers in the process.

Referred to as a Community Supported Agriculture program, a CSA connects local farms to the end consumer. Produce is delivered on a weekly, bi-weekly or monthly basis and customers of Off the Vine choose which size box best suits their needs (small, medium or large). Along with the fresh produce, Wolf includes a helpful recipe.

“We pre-determine and pre-sell the CSA boxes so he (Wheeler) can be profitable and continue his farming,” Wolf explained. “He needed help selling his produce. He was loading up his truck and driving down to 30A and was getting really discouraged at the amount of time and energy he was wasting.”

She also sells direct to many restaurants, and is proud to note that Modica Market, Bud & Alley’s, PIZZA BAR, Lake Place and Fish Out of Water all purchase Wheeler’s produce.

Modica features his produce up front and PIZZA BAR tops their pizzas with his produce.

“The more we can get the word out that locally grown organics are available, the better. This isn’t the cheapest produce, but it is the best. We have to pay a little more for local produce because it is hand grown, handpicked and pesticide free. To me, a commercial pesticide produce is a damaged product. People don’t realize how hard it is to grow organic produce and sell it for a fair price.”

Wheeler just shakes his head when asked about the process it took him to become a certified organic farm.

“You know, people laughed at me when I told them what I was doing,” he said. “They didn’t understand why I was going the organic route. I told them I am just growing vegetables like their daddy and grandfather used to. This is how it used to be done.”

To learn more call (850) 374-2181. Join the fun at the Seaside Farmer’s Market every Saturday morning in the amphitheater.