

## Veggies Go Farm to Cubicle

by Nancy Matsumoto

**K**ale, arugula and tomatillos are replacing fantasy football and real estate as water cooler talk in some city offices.

Workplace CSAs—community-supported agriculture shares in a local farm, with regular deliveries of just-picked organic produce—are cropping up in offices around New York, giving rise to veggie swapping, recipe trading and even culinary competitions.

From Goldman Sachs to kitchen-and-bath-supply company Davis & Warshow, some staffers say the high point of the week is their produce delivery. On a recent Wednesday morning, a Katchkie Farm van pulled up to Bryant Park architectural firm Kohn Pedersen Fox Associates' back entrance. Four KPF employees gathered 22 bags stuffed with 11 kinds of fruits and vegetables, including tomatoes, arugula and a watermelon. An excited horde of shareholders then descended on the company's 18th-floor kitchen.

Because the bags are large, splitting shares is common, a process the KPF group has down to a science. Cutting boards, knives and plastic wrap appeared, and pairs of employees began divvying up the bounty. Architectural designer Michael Young figured out how to cut a watermelon three ways while his colleague,

Nicole McGlinn, counted off green beans into two piles.

In hard-driving workplace cultures where employees can barely find time to microwave a burrito let alone shop for healthy groceries, the weekly or biweekly deliveries have been embraced as time savers, mood enhancers and an incentive to eat better. Another plus: "It's much cheaper and easier than going to Whole Foods," says KPF staff member Reilly Hogan.

Two organizations coordinate workplace CSAs in the city: Soho-based catering company GREAT PERFORMANCES, which owns the 60-acre organic Katchkie Farms in Kinderhook,

N.Y., and Just Food, a Midtown nonprofit that connects communities to local farms. Most office CSAs are initiated by employees and paid for by individual members (\$530 per share for a

22-week season from GREAT PERFORMANCES, and from \$550 to \$600 for 23 weeks from Just Food). GREAT PERFORMANCES went from four workplace CSAs in its first season last year to 13 this year at sites including WNYC and the Mayor's Community Affairs Unit.

For workers with erratic hours or demanding schedules, joining a workplace CSA might be the only way to ensure they make pickup time. "I looked at one CSA between here and my



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apartment...but it closed way too early," said Justin Burns, a Goldman Sachs associate.

Workplaces see their own benefits in encouraging participation. Rabobank, a cooperative bank specializing in food and agriculture, subsidizes close to half the cost of shares as part of a larger social responsibility initiative; Goldman Sachs sees it as a complement to its health center and wellness rooms.

Part of the fun, say CSA members, is getting produce that is new to them. Danielle Natoli, a Goldman Sachs vice president, says, "I love it because there are a lot of vegetables that I eat in restaurants that I've never cooked before, such as beets." Now, not only has she figured out how to prepare beets, she's improved her diet by adding kale ("you can't really taste it," she says) to her post-workout smoothies.

Many members say workplace CSAs have made for more fun offices. Davis and Warshow sponsored a mini-pickling

mandolin and another a blender. The secret ingredient was the whole share." The event, held in a break-out space, was so popular that "people were standing on tables and file cabinets to look over the cubicle," says Segal. The winning dish: "A trifecta of salads; the colors on [the winner's] plate really popped," recalls Segal.

Some companies have even set up intranet or social networking sites to share recipes, photos or other CSA-related business; a Pinterest page at WSP Flack + Kurtz, a Yammer account at Teach For America, and at Rabobank, an intranet blog where

employees can also negotiate one-week "sublet" of shares for other employees.



At Mayor Michael Bloomberg's Community Affairs Unit, where 27 staffers snapped up 25 Katchkie Farm

shares this year, Commissioner Nazli Parvizi says, "The great thing about workplace CSAs is that I spend more time here than I do at home, so the convenience of having bags come here means I always have staples."

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competition, while WSP Flack + Kurtz staged an Iron Chef CSA competition last season, says engineer and CSA organizer Lauren Segal. "Any equipment was okay, as long as it was approved, so I brought a Cuisinart, another person brought a

A former chef, Ms. Parvizi now sends recipes out to co-workers to help them navigate unusual produce. "I cook a ton and bring in food," says Ms. Parvizi. "We like to eat together."

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