
MIZZOU

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Around the Columns

Think globally, plant locally

On any given day, it'd be tough to say whether Andrew Van Engelenhoven is learning more from his sustainable agriculture courses or from the full-scale project that has grown out of them.

In February 2009, the Fulton, Mo., native and his partners planted the first vegetable seeds for their community-supported agriculture (CSA) experiment. The idea: Grow enough to sell 20 to 25 subscriptions to members of Olivet Christian Church at 1991 S. Olivet Road in Columbia. Subscribers would pay in advance for 15 to 20 pounds a week of six to eight varieties of vegetables to be delivered during the May-to-October growing season. (See [“The Producers” in Spring 2009 MIZZOU](#) for details.)

It was a beautiful dream to bring nutritious local food to eager buyers, and they planned it from the ground up. But then economic reality struck: Since the University of Missouri had instituted a hiring freeze in November 2008, there was no way to create new positions for students to do some of the early greenhouse work.

“To have produce to sell, you first have to have plants started in the greenhouse. We came up short in getting that accomplished,” Van Engelenhoven says. His team had to scramble by working long hours and they started some early-harvest crops, such as lettuce, cabbage, cucumbers and beets, growing toward maturity. They also planted the next wave of veggies that ripen in






Sally Mayo is a member of the student group Tigers for Community Agriculture, which grows and sells produce to the Columbia community. Photo by Clay McGlaughlin

midsummer. With only three unpaid part-time workers, they were unable to plant sufficient quantities to serve 25 families. So, they came up with “Plan B”: Sell on a weekly basis, first-come, first-served.

The small team also found an answer to the hiring freeze — get the CSA recognized as a student organization. That required enlisting a faculty adviser, seeking various approvals and the attendant paperwork. But they got it done, and Tigers for Community Agriculture was born.

So, Van Engelenhoven et al. will still deliver on their dream of providing local food in Columbia. But it looks a little different than they thought it would. Rather than selling subscriptions, they bring vegetables to the church on Thursday afternoons and sell by the bag. As a student group, they can also set up a sales stand on campus.

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