

# Growing food and community: La Vista CSA preparing for this year's season

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**GODFREY** - A drive down Levis Lane past where it forks toward The Nature Institute will lead to a right turn toward the La Vista Community Sourced Agriculture (CSA) Farm.

The farm was founded more than 15 years ago on four acres owned by the Oblate Fathers, a group of Catholic priests who have taken an additional vow of poverty. The priests live in a monastery environment on the top of the Riverbend's majestic limestone bluffs, and the garden is on the property adjacent to their dwelling place. They allow the four acres to be utilized for the CSA in exchange for some of the produce it generates.

Founding member, and chairperson of its core group, Cindy Gelsthorpe, said the garden is nearly entirely community-supported, with the board consisting entirely of volunteers, and many workers in the fields doing labor voluntarily as well. In fact, she said the only person paid is the head farmer, Phil Beile, who was preparing to do some more work in the fields Tuesday afternoon. Another paid worker is joining the team May 1.

Gelsthorpe said the farm costs as much as \$72,000 a year to operate, between payroll, seeds, equipment maintenance and bills. The money to pay these expenses is generated through selling "shares" to members of the community. Currently, La Vista CSA has as many as 65 shares, and Gelsthorpe said they need to sell about 20 of those at this time.

Shares are \$600, and include pickups every week from mid May until October. Partial shares are also available for \$340, and include every other week pickups.

According to La Vista CSA's [website](#), the shares will provide enough produce each week for the diet of a "vegetable-loving" household of two, or enough to supplement the diets of a vegetable loving family of four each week. Vegetables include bok choy, radishes, spring greens, lettuce, potatoes, sweet potatoes, squash, raspberries, blackberries, strawberries and even fresh herbs such as dill and cilantro.

"We grow sustainable produce here without pesticides," Gelsthorpe said. "We cannot say we're 'organic,' because we are not government-certified to say that."

To showcase its facilities, produce and farm implements, La Vista CSA will be hosting an open house on Sunday, May 7 from 2-4 p.m. featuring a free tour, free yoga classes and demonstrations of equipment. Gelsthorpe said "light refreshments" will also be offered, including the possibility of fresh greens sourced from a greenhouse.

The greenhouse at La Vista CSA was furnished more than a decade ago by the Alton-Godfrey Rotary Club. Other organizations, such as Ranken Technical College, have also assisted with the garden, with the technical college providing work on some implements, including an electric, battery-powered tractor.



La Vista CSA will also be present at the upcoming Earth Day Festival this Saturday, April 29, which has been relocated from Piasa Harbor to inside Old Bakery Beer Company due to weather concerns. Besides shareholders, La Vista CSA is constantly looking for volunteers.

"During harvest days, we can have anywhere from zero to 10 volunteers," Beile said. "On average, we have two to five."

Besides shareholders, La Vista CSA also delivers to Green Earth Grocery in Edwardsville on Tuesday evenings and St. Louis Garden Heights Nursery on Saturday mornings, with delivery costs being \$35.

Another fundraiser being championed by La Vista CSA is a large rummage sale to be held on Saturday, June 10 in the parking lot of St. Ambrose Catholic Church.

More information can be found at the La Vista CSA website, [lavistacsa.org](http://lavistacsa.org).

