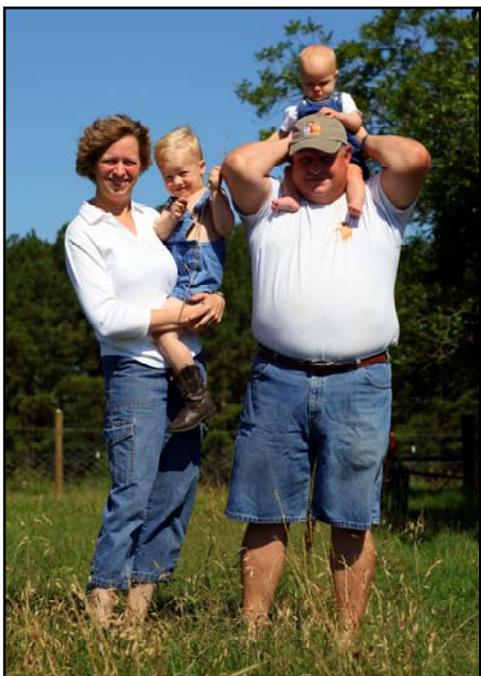


## Spotlight on Big Moon Farms



**John and Catherine Oxner and family  
Big Moon Farms - Leesville, SC**

Interest in Community Supported Agriculture farms (or CSAs as they are commonly called) is steadily picking up around the state. The concept is a partnership between community members and farmers which allows CSA program members to pre-pay for a share of the season's harvest in single, small or family-size quantities. While the concept is not new, what is new is the numbers of people who are joining for the first time.

Community Supported Agriculture (CSA) is an idea in farming that has been gaining momentum since its introduction to the United States from Europe in the mid-1980s. The CSA concept originated in the 1960s in Switzerland and Japan, where consumers interested in safe food and farmers seeking stable markets for their crops joined in economic partnerships. By direct sales to community members, who have provided the farmer with working capital in advance, growers receive better prices for their crops, gain some financial security, and are relieved of much of the burden of marketing.

With a renewed interest in the origin of their food, consumers are finding the CSA option a great way to meet the farmer and even tour the farm where their food is grown. John Oxner, owner of Big Moon Farms in Leesville, likes it that way. In fact, Oxner enjoys meeting his clients and wants to have a one-on-one relationship with them. That's why he won't go above 60 shareholders for his CSA.

Oxner isn't new to farming or agriculture, but Big Moon Farms is fairly new. Oxner worked for years with Clemson Extension Service. He retired from Clemson Extension after more than 25 years as an extension agent for Aiken, Lexington, Richland, Kershaw and Allendale Counties. He got the idea to start a CSA after a successful gardening year where he sold the excess at a roadside market. A friend at SC DHEC suggested a CSA and he began researching the concept.

"I liked the idea," he said because it afforded him the opportunity to stay at home with his small children.

The land he farms has belonged to Oxner's family dating back three generations. Today Big Moon Farms offers a wide variety of fresh, seasonal produce and grass and grain-fed beef and pasture-raised heritage pork and chickens and holiday turkeys. Oxner said at Big Moon Farms they are dedicated to providing fresh, locally-grown produce and meats. His crops are grown as naturally as possible, using minimal, if any, chemicals and pesticides. He also has farm-raised meats for sale as well.

"I'll plant most everything that can grow in this area," he said.

In the summer months shareholders will find their boxes filled with tomatoes, squash, and corn. In the fall it may be kale, collards, pecans, onions, and arugula. There are tips on storing and cooking the food provided by John's wife, Catherine.

"We want to keep it a small family farm," Oxner said. "Anything our shareholders get from us comes from us."

Oxner added that his approach is to provide the same things he would want for his own family and knows many others are looking for the same things.

During the spring Big Moon has around 30 shareholders and that number increases to 60 during the summer and fall. Their customers come from the greater Columbia area including Lexington, Chapin, Irmo, and Columbia. Big Moon currently has drop-off locations at two sites in the Midlands – one in Lexington and the other in the Harbison area. And Oxner said he grows all produce with limited pesticides and most of the produce is delivered within 12 hours of harvest. Members then receive a weekly box of fresh produce.

In addition to the CSA and growing food for his own family, Oxner said he is currently in talks to provide pork to several Columbia-area restaurants.

For more information about Big Moon Farms, visit their website at: [www.bigmoonfarm.com](http://www.bigmoonfarm.com) or call them at 803-422-4718. Currently, there are 20 CSA programs throughout the state in 11 different counties. More information about all CSAs located around the state at: <http://agriculture.sc.gov/CSA>