2007 Annual Report

CISA
Community Involved In Sustaining Agriculture
Dear Friends,

During two days in the spring of 1995, a very young organization called CISA invited a group of dedicated supporters of local agriculture to talk about their visions for a strong agricultural economy. It was my honor to be among those present. The report from those two days in March, “Sustainable Food and Farming in the Connecticut River Valley: A Vision” read, in part:

“We envision a Valley food and farming system that is economically, environmentally and socially sustainable, and that:  
Fosters economic viability for all farmers engaged in the commercial production of agricultural products;
Nurtures and sustains a healthy natural resource base;
Is supported by a strong, vital community informed about sustainable food and farming issues;
Values and promotes healthy food and a healthy environment;
Offers and supports opportunities for farming and agriculture-related enterprises;
Respects and supports farmers and farmworkers and assures food security.”

CISA will celebrate its fifteenth birthday in 2008. The vision is the same now as it was in 1995, but the list of names is longer. More farmers are involved with CISA. More community members support CISA. More partnering organizations reach out to CISA for collaboration. We have become a Community Involved in Sustaining Agriculture. Citizens are buying more local food and farm products, and are eating more seasonally. Low income seniors and school children are eating more fresh, local food. Hospitals, workplace and college cafeterias are buying from local farmers.

Let’s keep growing. Let’s keep making our region’s agricultural economy stronger and stronger. Let’s protect our environment and our food supply. Let’s make sure that CISA celebrates another fifteen years of vision and leadership. I will be there for the next adventure. I hope you will be there too.

Annie Cheatham
Executive Director
The local food movement surged in 2007. Farmers’ markets expanded, food blogs multiplied, and food and farming books were national bestsellers.

When you see a list of local greens featured on the chalkboard at the Black Sheep Deli or learn that Baystate Medical Center is serving local ground beef each week, do you wonder how these products made their way from pastures and cropland to the kitchen? For some producers, the path to the marketplace is relatively easy. For others, supplying the demand can be a challenge. The journey may be complicated by regulatory requirements or by limited options for processing, packaging, and distribution.

As more people seek local food, farmers are reaping the benefits of joint marketing with CISA. The challenge today is to shape and supply that demand to ensure that farmers’ capacities, community resources, and customers’ expectations are in sync.

As new markets evolve, such as large retailers, institutions, and busy restaurants, both the volume and the type of demand are changing. These consumers may require quality certifications, seek greater affordability, or ask for attractive packaging. In recent decades, food production and processing have been consolidated and industrialized. The result? Our local infrastructure—the systems, skills, and facilities needed to get agricultural products to our tables—has eroded. There are few remaining skilled butchers; milk processing facilities have consolidated; and area farmers must now transport their products across the Northeast to create finished products from their livestock or add value to their locally grown vegetables.

CISA works with farmers to research and test on-farm systems and processing options that can help make the farm-to-table journey a smoother one. Along the way, we’re asking these questions:
What is required to process salad greens according to institutional food safety standards, and does it make sense for local growers?
How can local livestock and poultry farms process their animals when they need to, and with the care they expect?
How can dairy farmers add the most value to their milk products?
As we work with local farmers, we hear many responses to these challenges. They voice clear concern about the limitations they face in processing products and meeting customer needs, but express decided optimism about the growth potential in these new markets.

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To Market, to Market...

Ben Barnhart

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Just a few years ago, a friend suggested that Gloria Holmes check out CISA’s Senior FarmShare program in Turners Falls. Now, she and her husband George enjoy fresh, locally grown fruits and vegetables—and lend a hand to others at the distribution site.

In over twenty communities, seniors whose needs are met by the program become shareholders at a local western Massachusetts farm. In return, they receive delivery of the farm’s varied harvest at no cost, for ten weeks during the peak of the growing season. In Turners Falls, fifty people take part in the program at the Powertown Apartments.

As volunteers, George helps unload the delivery truck every week and Gloria bags and distributes the organic produce from Red Fire Farm, in Granby. “Everyone thinks I’m the farmer!” jokes George.

For this couple, it’s a great benefit. They clearly relish retirement. High energy people with full lives, they both enjoy volunteering. In his spare time, George snowshoes, camps, and teaches rifle and handgun skills—and both are avid readers.

Before retiring, George owned and managed Manny’s Sport Shop, where hunters, trappers, and camping enthusiasts bought supplies and equipment. Gloria worked in the offices of the duMont Company in Greenfield.

With a sizable vegetable garden, Gloria canned and stored much of their produce. “She’d make 21 pies in a day!” George recalls. He still cares for their fifty-acre property in Gill, cutting “about 10 cords of wood a year.”

Since 2004, CISA’s Senior FarmShare program has offered a free share of the harvest to low-income seniors, with over 850 shares distributed to date. Local farmers have benefitted as well, receiving almost $100,000 for their produce.

The Senior FarmShare program is clearly a success. It feeds seniors nutritious food, and in Franklin County, it also brought together families, volunteers and farmers at a spirited Harvest Supper. “If it weren’t for the program, a lot of these people wouldn’t get fresh vegetables. I think CISA’s doing a great job,” says Gloria.
At 18, he began to work on farms in Vermont and Massachusetts, learning many approaches to growing food and closely observing the business of farming. Eager to own a farm of his own, Ben weighed his options. He developed a business plan and soon began to farm on leased land. He purchased the business operations of Ol’ Turtle Farm in Easthampton. With his wife, Liz Adler, he started Mountain View Farm, a small community supported agriculture (CSA) farm, in 2005.

Today, Ben sells produce to families who pre-purchase the vegetables and fruit before he even plants them, supporting the farm with an early infusion of capital each year. As part of an admittedly aggressive business plan, Ben joined CISA’s Local Hero campaign a year after launching Mountain View. His involvement with the program helped connect him to other farmers in the area and increased the number of shareholders in his farm—which now includes two other Local Hero businesses, Apollo Grill, a restaurant in Easthampton, and Abbondanza, a personal chef.

Through his participation in the Local Hero campaign, Ben made a highly productive connection with Baystate Health Systems, in Springfield. Unlike the typical CSA arrangement in which shareholders visit the farm, Ben delivers vegetables to hospital employees. The new shares allowed Ben to double the size of his business—previously impractical, since parking was limited at Mountain View. But more important, Ben tapped into a new market without risking his current operations. And he grew his business without putting pressure on other farms.

Today, Ben farms nearly 40 acres of land in Easthampton and Hadley, managing the logistics of moving equipment and staff to the appropriate fields. During the growing season, he employs two full-time and three part-time workers. Ten years into his career, he is proud of his accomplishments.

Ben knows that growing his business would have been harder and more time consuming without CISA. “CISA allowed me to hit the ground running … with my aggressive growth goals,” he states. He also appreciates the connection CISA offers to the larger agriculture community. His wife Liz emphatically notes, “CISA makes the culture of farming more visible in the Pioneer Valley.”
CISA appreciates every gift large or small. The most common way to support CISA is through an unrestricted gift of cash, securities, or personal property. Such gifts are immediately available for use to CISA’s Annual Fund:

2007 Annual Fund Donors

If you would like to make a gift to CISA, please contact our Development Office at 413-665-7100 ext. 11, or visit our web site at www.buylocalfood.com/supporters.
2007 Grant Support

CISA 2007 Year-End Income Sources

- Grants and government contracts
- Individual and business contributions
- Local Hero membership dues
- Rental income and program fees
- Advertising and merchandise sales
- Interest and other

Total income: $821,333

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CREDITS

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- Front cover photograph by Ben Barnhart
- www.bbimages.com
- Back cover photograph by Betsy Feick
- © Betsy Feick 2007 www.betsyfeick.com
- Mirrored Lisianthus—a bouquet from the Northampton Farmers’ Market

CISA gratefully acknowledges Annie Cheatham’s tenure as Executive Director from November 2001 through January 2008, and wishes her well in all future endeavors.
“One of CISA’s great strengths is that it involves producers, consumers, and everybody in between.”

Steve Goodwin, Dean of the College of Natural Resources and the Environment, University of Massachusetts, Amherst; CISA board member.