

UT VSA Membership Information

Please read this carefully and keep for future reference.

Program coordinator: Samantha Flowers

Email: vsa@utk.edu

Phone (call or text): 865-719-9913

Farm Address: 7315 Government Farm Road Knoxville, TN 37920

What is the VSA?

The VOLunteer Supported Agriculture (VSA) program is a Vol-centric Community Supported Agriculture (CSA). CSA programs are mutual relationships between growers and subscribed community members in which the members have a direct relationship with the producer of their food and help share the risk associated with agriculture. Because the VSA is operated on UT property by UT student interns and marketed mostly toward UT community members, we affectionately coined the term “VOLunteer Supported Ag” to represent what we do.

When a VSA share is purchased, the fees collected go directly back into our program. They are used to help us purchase seeds, tools, and other supplies necessary to grow our produce, as well as to pay stipends of the student interns. In return for their support, members receive weekly shares of fresh, locally grown vegetables harvested from the UT Organic Crops Unit. The produce is distributed at a designated time and location on UT's Ag Campus. The VSA production area is located approximately 7 miles off campus at the East TN Research & Education Center's Organic Crops Unit, located off John Sevier Highway in Knoxville. Originally started in 2010, the VSA and internship programs have helped the UT Organic & Sustainable Crop Production Program to become one of the top land-grant organic agriculture programs in the nation.

Who are we?

The VSA is managed by UT student interns who are responsible for planning and maintaining the Student Organic Farm and VSA operations each season. In the fall preceding a growing season, up to five students are recruited for the UT Organic Farm Internship Program, which combines formal classroom education and hands-on experiential learning in organic vegetable production. Experiential learning serves students by increasing their understanding of agriculture systems, promotes problem-solving, critical thinking skills, teamwork, and allows them to better identify challenges, constraints, and benefits of organic agriculture. The interns are involved in all aspects of production on the farm from early spring through fall including: seed selecting, crop planning, field preparation, pest and weed management, equipment operation, harvesting, packing, and much more. Although popular among Plant Science and Soil Science students, this program is inclusive and serves to stimulate interest in farming and increase agricultural education for students of any background or major.

The effort, planning, and commitment of our student interns are vital components of a successful VSA season. The student interns plant and tend crops for months before members see them in

their shares. Each box represents the work and attention to detail required to seed, transplant, weed, grow and harvest your prepaid shares. VSA student interns work dutifully and in good faith to bring each member the freshest produce possible.

VSA Responsibilities:

We pledge to be consistent in providing you with a variety of high quality fresh produce on-time every week. Updates related to pick-up changes, events, etc. will be communicated via the email you provide to us. Occasionally, if warranted, we will contact you by phone. We will not use your contact information for any purpose that is not related to the VSA. We will communicate recipes, updates, and other tidbits from the farm via our newsletter, which will be emailed to members on their pick-up day. The newsletter also serves as a reminder to pick-up your share.

How much food will I get each week?

Members receive between 6 and 12 items each week. Members receive 1/2 bushel (by volume) of an array of vegetables including kale, radishes, green onions, broccoli, cabbage, peas, and herbs. As the season progresses, the diversity of vegetables in the share increases and will include tomatoes, zucchini, cucumbers, okra, eggplant, melons, peppers, cut flowers and more. The type and variety of vegetables included will depend on the seasonal availability. Box weight will vary depending on the types of produce harvested.

Member Responsibilities

To receive the freshest produce possible from the VSA and with a recognition that your share will be available to you as agreed upon, it is important that members make timely payments for their share and pick up their boxes every week on their appointed day and time. It is our policy that any abandoned shares be set back for donation by noon the following day, unless those members have contacted us and received confirmation to pick up at another time. If you are unable to pick up your box, please contact the VSA by emailing vsa@utk.edu or contacting Samantha directly via text or call at 865-719-9913 as soon as you know you will not be able to pick up. Preferably, we would like at least 24 hours notice. It can be very laborious to harvest and pack shares and it saves a great deal of time, energy, and waste when members contact us ahead of time.

In the event of your absence, we encourage you to allow a friend or family member to pick up your share in your place! This is a great way for members to share the CSA experience. Please explain to your family or friends where and when to pick up your share. Members may also notify the VSA if they would prefer to donate their week's share in the event of their absence.

What if I need to change my pick-up day?

If given advance notice, we may be able to schedule your box for another day (i.e. Thursday instead of Monday). If you need to change your pick-up day, we ask for 48 hours advance notice, but one week is preferable. Email vsa@utk.edu to change your pick-up day.

Risk

One aspect of any CSA is that members support their farmer. To do so, the members share in the inherent risks of agriculture (poor weather, drought, disease, late frost, crop failure and so on) and also share in the rewards (the bounty from a good season). Occasional crop failure or reduced yields are an inevitable part of farming, but the VSA tries to plan for such contingencies by using growing techniques that protect the harvest, minimize risk to members and optimize the rewards. In the extremely unlikely event that severe weather, disease/insect damage, or other natural disaster results in a level of crop destruction that prevents the farm from continuing its weekly distributions, the VSA will notify members immediately via e-mail. Members assume the risk should the VSA be unable to provide a portion of the shares due to any inherent risk of farming.

Feedback

Because we care about our members and continually strive to improve in all areas, the VSA always welcomes feedback and constructive criticism. You are free to tell us your thoughts in person or via phone or email. We also plan to offer brief mid-season and end of season feedback surveys as an opportunity for members to anonymously voice their opinions and offer suggestions.

Thank You for Your Support!

