

# UT VSA Membership Guide

Please read this carefully and keep it for future reference.

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## What is the VSA?

The VOLunteer Supported Agriculture (VSA) program is a Vol-centric Community Supported Agriculture (CSA) program. 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 buy seeds, tools, and other supplies necessary to grow our produce, as well as to help pay stipends of our team of student interns. In return for their support, members receive weekly shares of fresh, locally grown vegetables harvested from the UT Organic Crops Unit. Our team distributes the shares to members 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- Organic Crops Unit in South Knoxville. The program started in 2010 and has since helped UT Organic & Sustainable Crop Production 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 selected to participate in the UT Organic Farm Internship Program, which combines formal classroom education with 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, and teamwork, and allows them to better identify the challenges, constraints, and benefits of organic agriculture. The interns are involved in all aspects of production on the farm from early spring through fall. Their involvement includes seed selecting, crop planning, field preparation, pest, disease, and weed management, equipment operation, harvesting, sanitation, packing, and much more. Although this program is popular among Plant Science and Soil Science students, we are inclusive and serve to stimulate interest in farming and increase agricultural education for students of any background, experience level, or academic major.

The effort, commitment, and passion shown by our student interns are vital to a successful VSA season. They plant and tend crops for months before members see them in their shares. Each individual share is a culmination of the hard work and attention to detail required to seed, transplant, weed, grow, and harvest that week's produce. VSA student interns work dutifully and in good faith to bring each member the freshest, highest-quality produce that we possibly can.

**VSA Responsibilities:**

We pledge to be consistent in providing you with a variety of high-quality fresh produce on-time every week. We will also be communicative regarding pick-up changes, events, and other pertinent information. We will communicate via the email address you provide to us.

Occasionally, if warranted, we will contact you at the phone number you provide. We will not use your contact information for any purpose that is not related to the VSA. We will also communicate recipes, updates, and other fun or informational tidbits from the farm via our e-newsletter, which we will send to members on their selected pick-up day. The newsletter also serves as a reminder to pick-up your share.

**Member Responsibilities**

To receive the freshest produce possible from the VSA and with a recognition that shares will be available as agreed upon, members must make timely payments for their share and pick-up their boxes every week on their appointed day and time. Members also agree to take on some of the inherent risks of farming in order to share in the rewards. Risk is explained in more detail below.

**Risk**

One aspect of any CSA is that members support their farmers. To do so, the members share in the inherent risks of agriculture such as poor weather, drought, disease, late frost, crop failure, etcetera. The benefit is that as a member, you also share in the rewards (the bounty from a good season). Occasional crop failure or reduced yields are an inevitable part of farming. The VSA tries to plan for such contingencies by using growing techniques that protect the harvest, minimize risk to members, and optimize the rewards. However, members assume the risk should the VSA be unable to provide a portion of the shares due to any inherent risk of farming.

In the unlikely event that severe weather, disease/insect damage, or other natural disasters result in a level of crop destruction that prevents the farm from continuing our weekly distributions altogether, we will notify members immediately.

**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, anonymous mid-season and end-of-season feedback surveys as an opportunity for members to voice opinions and offer suggestions.

**Frequently Asked Questions:****How much and what type of food will I get each week?**

Members receive 1/2 bushel (by volume) of an array of vegetables that will change with the season. We strive to provide 8-12 different items each week. In the spring, members can expect to see vegetables such as kale, radishes, green onions, lettuce, broccoli, cabbage, and peas. As the season progresses, the diversity of vegetables in the share increases and will include main season favorites like tomatoes, zucchini, cucumbers, okra, eggplant, melons, herbs, peppers, cut flowers, and more. The type and variety of vegetables included will depend on what is in season. Box weight will vary depending on the types of produce harvested.

*What happens if I accidentally miss the pick-up?*

If you miss a pick-up, please contact us before noon the following day. We will try our best to work with you so you can receive the missed share. However, if you do not pick-up and do not contact us by noon the next day, your produce share will be donated at that time.

*What if I am unable to pick up?*

Preferably, we would like at least a 24-hour notice. It can be very laborious to harvest and pack shares, and it saves a great deal of time, energy, and food waste when members contact us ahead of time. If you realize you are not going to make it to the pick-up site on time or will be unable to pick-up for whatever reason, please call or text Samantha directly at 865-719-9913 as soon as you can. We will then work out a way to reconcile the missed produce, as mentioned above, as long as we are contacted before noon the following day. In the event of your absence, we encourage you to allow a friend or family member to pick up in your place and participate in the CSA experience. Please explain to your family or friends where and when to pick-up your produce share.

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

If given advance notice, we may be able to schedule your pick-up for another day (for example, Thursday instead of Monday that week). If you need to change your pick-up day, whether permanently or temporarily, we ask for 48 hours advance notice. Contact [vsa@utk.edu](mailto:vsa@utk.edu) or 865-719-9913 to change your pick-up day.

***Thank You for Your Support!***