

May 2013

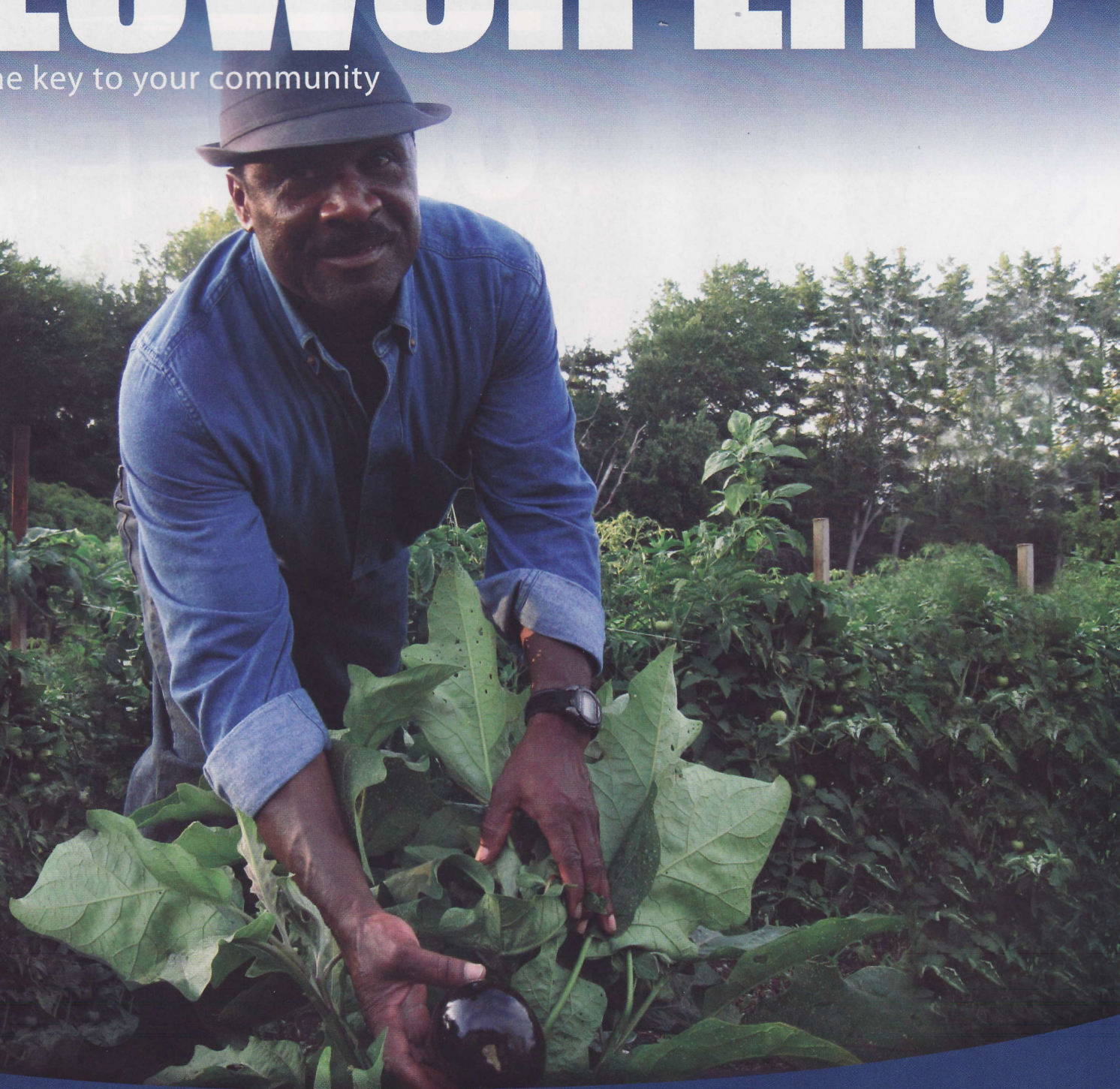
Arbor Day in  
**TREE CITY USA**

'Historic Milestone' at  
**UMASS LOWELL**

Fun Facts About  
**MOTHERS' DAY**

# Lowell Life

The key to your community



## A World of Fresh Flavor

Local Farms, Global Farmers in Unique Lowell Program



# Inside

## Feature Stories

### 14 Local Farmers, World Flavors

The community-supported agriculture movement is exploding and Lowell is home to one of the most unique programs around.

### 18 Q&A: Moving up the Ranks

UMass Lowell is making the jump to Division I athletics. What does Chancellor Marty Meehan have to say about the change?

### 21 A Day for Moms

Brunch is a hallmark of Mother's Day. Find out where to take your mom, and learn some interesting Mother's Day facts.

Cover Photo courtesy of Adrien Bisson



Rechhat Proum, a Cambodian immigrant, is a producer for World PEAS.  
Photo by Adrien Bisson



River Hawks to Division I athletics.  
Photo courtesy of UMass Lowell



National Park Week is April 22-26.  
Photo by Jesse Roman

## Departments

### 5 From the Editor

Welcome to the first issue of Lowell Life, a place for the community to share news, photos, ideas and information.

### 7 Around Town

Planting Trees this Arbor Day  
Three Local Women Honored for Service

### 23 Gotta Go!

Boston Calling Music Festival  
Crafts in the Park  
Massachusetts Poetry Festival  
May Calendar of Events

### 30 And Another Thing...

A lovable pit bull named Biggie is Lowell Life's first Pet of the Month! Maybe your pet will be next.

## Get Involved!

[lowell@hibu.com](mailto:lowell@hibu.com)

Want to contribute to your magazine? We need your help! If you've got a news release, a story tip, a great photo or want to write for us, send a note to the above email address and we will be in touch! Please visit [yellowbook360.com/release](http://yellowbook360.com/release) to read the terms for submissions.

**Interested in Advertising?** Contact us at [yellowbook360.com/advertise](http://yellowbook360.com/advertise) or call 800-929-3556.



**hibu**<sup>TM</sup>

©2013 hibu Inc. • All rights reserved.  
hibu<sup>TM</sup> is a trademark of hibu (UK) Limited.



# Local Farms, Global Farmers Produce a World of Flavor

*Lowell-based program brings immigrant farmers and consumers together.*

by Jesse Roman  
Editor

**W**hen Adison Toussaint was forced to immigrate to the United States in 2005 for political reasons, he worried that he would have to give up his career.

It was a legitimate concern. He has an

agricultural degree and extensive experience as a farmer and agriculture teacher. In Haiti, his home country, farming was a way of life, but Massachusetts?

“When I came here the first question was ‘how can I continue to practice my profession?’” said Toussaint, who now leases 1.5 acres of farm land in North Andover. “I like nature, I like plants.

I feel uncomfortable when I can’t be around those things.”

Like so many other immigrants in the Merrimack Valley who hope to continue farming as they had in their native land, Toussaint quickly discovered the New Entry Sustainable Farming Project, based in Lowell. The non-profit, which is affiliated with Tufts University, helps new farmers of all kinds gain access to the skills and infrastructure they need to begin.





"There are lots of barriers to getting into farming and what our program tries to do is address those barriers, namely access to land and access to equipment," said Kate Petcosky, the manager of the World PEAS community-supported agriculture program.

CSA programs, as they're called, have exploded in popularity across the nation over the last decade. In the model, customers buy shares of the farm's yield in advance, directly from the farmer, and receive a bounty of fresh fruits, vegetables and more at wholesale prices once per week.

World PEAS was founded in 2005 as a natural extension of New Entry Sustainable Farming Project. However, unlike most CSA's, where a single large farm pre-sells its yearly harvest to members, World PEAS is a multi-producer model, consisting of as many as 25 different very small farms, mostly operated

by immigrant farmers such as Toussaint.

The relationship makes World PEAS one of the few CSA programs where members can look forward to lemongrass, long beans, Chinese broccoli, hot peppers or Thai basil in their crop share basket. World PEAS CSA offers up to 70 different crops — much more than your average CSA program.

"We incorporate ethnic crops into each CSA share, but we don't want to overwhelm customers with it," Petcosky said.

Each farmer in the program first must participate in a farm business training course then must craft a suitable business plan. After, each farmer has the opportunity to rent a small parcel of land and equipment from the program for three years at minimal cost. About 40 or so new farmers take the course each year, increasingly many who are native-born citizens.

The training course proves important to even the most seasoned immigrant farmers because it addresses topics such as "what it's like to grow in Massachusetts, which is certainly different than growing in a place like Cameroon," Petcosky said. "Some lack English language skills, some lack transportation, accounting skills or things like how to address customer concerns. All of that can be a challenge for them."

The program has been popular among immigrants — many from far-flung places such as Cambodia, Thailand, Haiti, Africa — because many had been subsistence farmers in their home country, and farming here gives them a chance to reconnect with their previous life.

"It's a great skill set they bring here, that they know and understand," Petcosky said. "Going back and getting reconnected to something they under-

*Continued on next page*



Heidi Reinhard and Bruce Talley at work on their farm in Concord. They are among 25 or so local producers that contribute to the World PEAS CSA. Many, but not all of the farmers in the program are immigrants, making for an eclectic mix of local produce distributed to members.

Photo by Adrien Bisson



# 4K

According to the website LocalHarvest.org, there are now about 4,000 community-supported agriculture farm programs in the United States.

## THE CSA SCENE

- **World PEAS CSA**, based in Lowell, offers a wide array of fresh produce for members throughout the summer, while also supporting local and immigrant farmers. Volunteer opportunities are also available. Info: 978-654-5733, or email [worldpeas@comteam.org](mailto:worldpeas@comteam.org).
- **Farmer Dave's**, based in Dracut, is one of the largest CSA programs in Massachusetts. There are many options to choose from. Info: 978-349-1952, or email [farmerdaves.net](mailto:farmerdaves.net).
- **Cape Ann Fresh Catch** delivers fresh local fish and other seafood shares to Chelmsford and other locations each week. Info: [info@capeannfreshcatch.org](mailto:info@capeannfreshcatch.org), or call 978-283-2504.



**Dave Dumaesq of Farmer Dave's CSA shows off some of last season's tomato bounty.**

Photo courtesy of Farmer Dave's CSA



**Adison Toussaint poses in front of an impressive crop of tomatoes he harvested from his farm in North Andover. Toussaint came to the U.S. from Haiti in 2005.**

Photo by Adrien Bisson

*Continued from previous page*

stand can be really empowering."

Most in the program only make on average \$6,000 to \$7,000 per year farming. It's not enough to live and so nearly all have other full or part time jobs, which makes belonging to the CSA all the more important.

"It is very important. I only farm part time and I have a full-time job so I don't have time to do any marketing," Toussaint said. "Through the CSA I have a contract in January and I know already what kind of vegetables to grow and how much I have to spend. I try to go to farmers' markets, but sometimes they are good, sometimes they are bad; sometimes they fail, sometimes they don't. The CSA is reliable."

Most of the immigrants in the program have been in the United States for several years, and most either rent land from the program, other farmers, or private landowners who like the idea of their land being used in food production.

Many of the immigrant farmers don't just sell to the CSA, but also have a robust market in their fellow immigrant communities, who long for fruits and vegetables native to their home countries. A few farmers have a stream of reliable customers lined up throughout the summer to buy some of the more hard-to-get items.

Most of the immigrant farmers in the program come from Lowell, Lawrence

and other parts of the Merrimack Valley, and grow on small 1-acre parcels close by, Petcosky said. Many long to return to the days when farming was their only job.

"My goal is to become a full-time farmer and at this time I'm trying to save enough money to buy the land I need," Toussaint said. "It is very important to me. I feel more comfortable doing this; this is my profession. When I get in my field, everything is OK. I feel OK."

### Growing popularity

Community-supported agriculture used to sound like some kind of science experiment, but it is now how thousands of people in Massachusetts and beyond get their fruits, vegetables and meats. Consumers love the freshness and quality and farmers love the up-front cash.

"The greatest benefit for me is it allows me to take my focus off growing my market and focus more on growing food to feed people," said Dave Dumaesq, of Farmer Dave's CSA based in Dracut.

Farmer Dave's had about 1,100 members in his CSA last year, compared to just 62 in 2007. World PEAS CSA has seen a similar boost in interest. The program expects 500 members this spring, about 80 more than last year.

"The culture has definitely shifted,"



said Petcosky, who expects 500 members this year. "When we started in 2005, we struggled to get 20 CSA members."

That skyrocketing interest is the result of a confluence of cultural trends, including the desire to eat healthier, the trend to buy local and the rise in farmer's markets, many farmers said.

"People want to eat better and there has been a huge increase in interest of where the food is coming from," said Jamie Cruz, who owns SpringDell Farm in Littleton. "If this were happening in the 1980s we would have seen a lot more farms saved. I am very lucky to be doing this now."

Many CSA programs are sold out or have waiting lists, however, World PEAS does still has spots available, Petcosky said.

## More options

The rise in the quantity and popularity of CSA farms has led to a boon in variety and convenience for the paying public. Most farms have numerous pick-up dates and sites scattered around the area. In addition to longer share seasons — farmer Dave began in 2007 with a 20 week season; he now offers CSA vegetables to members 39 weeks out of the year — CSAs are also now offering more interesting and diverse products such as honey, flowers, herbs, meats and cheeses and even fresh seafood.

Cape Ann Fresh Catch in Gloucester was one of the first community-supported fisheries in the country when it opened in 2008. It delivers to its 800 or so shareholders local cod, haddock, hake, flounder, sole and other varieties of freshly caught fish, as well as the occasional lobster and shrimp.

"The benefit for fisherman is they are paid a higher price for the fish than at the docks, and the consumer gets hyper-fresh fish," said Steve Tousignant, the operations manager at Fresh Catch. "Even if you get it from a local fish store, the supply chain is usually three of four days from when it arrives on the boat to when it's in the display counter. With us, 24 hours after it's caught it's on your plate. ... It's a win, win."

As with most CSAs, the company has customer pick-up locations throughout eastern Massachusetts, including in Chelmsford.

Others, such as Lilac Hedge Farm in



**The World PEAS CSA offers members an eclectic mix of fruits and vegetables all season long, from the typical to the exotic.**

Photo by Adrien Bisson



**This Atlantic Cod is just hours away from somebody's dinner plate thanks to Cape Ann Fresh Catch of Gloucester, one of the first community-supported fisheries in the country.**

Photo by Steve Tousignant

Bolton and SpringDell also offer meat CSAs year round, that include beef, poultry, eggs, and even goat.

Some CSAs, including Sterns Farm in Framingham, require its members to work on the farm several hours per season, which helps keep costs low and also builds a kind of camaraderie.

"A lot of people like belonging to the farm and the whole community aspect of it," said Susan Peters, the farm manager at Sterns Farm. "A lot of CSAs around Boston help to bring the community out. People use it as a gathering space, one of the few left these days. People, in

general, seem so isolated now, with all of their technology."

First Light Farm in Hamilton doesn't mandate work on the farm, but you can barter work for food — just like in the good old days. WORLD PEAS also has a robust volunteer program that pays off handsomely with fresh produce.

Despite all of that, if you're still not sold on the CSA idea, but do want to try to eat healthier consider this pitch:

"A CSA forces you to eat fruits and vegetables, because you've already paid for them," Dumaresq said. "It's almost like buying a gym membership."