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### Living Soil Community Farm

For Lisa and Jeff Bartig, the owners of Living Soil Community Farm, what started as a large garden in their backyard has grown into a successful CSA farm. Gardening blossomed from a hobby to a career opportunity after family and friends convinced Lisa and Jeff that the fruits and vegetables they produced were worthy of being shared with others. Becoming a CSA farm seemed like a perfect fit for these farmers who are dedicated to producing sustainable, locally grown produce. Throughout this transformation, Living Soil Community Farm has remained a small family-run farm in which a love and knowledge of gardening has resulted in the production of a healthy variety of flavorful fruits and vegetables, such as tomatoes, peppers, and cucumbers.

Due to the extreme seasonal changes occurring in Wisconsin, the optimal and favorite season for farming at Living Soil Community Farm is late summer into fall. Lisa describes this season as an exciting time in which “all sorts of things are growing in the gardens.” During this period of prosperous growth, the daily routine often begins with the rising of the sun. Each morning, Lisa must monitor what occurred the night before and plan the tasks, such as hoeing and weeding, that she will complete throughout the day. Thursday mornings are particularly busy as this is the designated day of the week for harvesting and delivery. Lisa begins working at six in the morning and is later joined by two other employees who assist her in picking, cooling, rinsing (in her own kitchen sink), and sorting the fruits and vegetables. According to Lisa, this hard work ensures that the fruits and vegetables remain healthy and flavorful by allowing delivery to occur on the same day the produce is harvested. Although each year the

growing season inevitably comes to an end, Lisa and Jeff continue working into the winter and spring as they spend time reading seed catalogues and progressing their education of effective gardening techniques.

Lisa and Jeff also strive to produce healthy and flavorful fruits and vegetables through the implementation of natural and sustainable farming practices. By enriching the soil with a mixture of composted chicken manure, micronutrients, and macronutrients, they are able to develop nutrient-rich soil within their gardens. This nutrient-rich soil allows Lisa and Jeff to avoid the use of potentially harmful chemicals and pesticides as they are able to produce healthy plants solely through the utilization of water and sunlight. Lisa and Jeff also attempt to support the healthy growth of their fruits and vegetables by using natural soil amendments like compost and rock powders to create strong plant roots. As Lisa says, “if you can get a healthy root system, you can get a healthy plant.” When a plant has a strong root system, it is able to fight off disease and stand strong during periods of inclement weather.

The commitment to creating nutrient-rich soils and producing healthy plants has resulted in Living Soil Community Farm being able to offer its members a variety of fruits and vegetables within its genetically diversified gardens. From blue potatoes to edible flowers to lemon cucumbers, the gardens seem to grow just about every known variety of fruit and vegetable. Common vegetables and fruits produced include beans, cucumbers, peppers, summer squash, asparagus, tomatoes, strawberries, raspberries, pumpkins, and celery. Many of the members of Living Soil Community Farm also enjoy the availability of fresh herbs, such as basil and parsley. These seasonal and locally produced fruits and vegetables are good for cooking and a healthy addition to any recipe. Unlike the fruits and vegetables purchased in grocery stores, in which the quality, variety, and health have often been compromised by the implications of food

transportation, the fruits and vegetables at Living Soil Community Farm are picked when ripe and carefully delivered to ensure that the members experience the wonderful flavors and health benefits they have to offer.

Although Lisa emphasizes that “whatever I’m planting [on a particular] day is what I am thinking about most,” she claims to particularly enjoy growing tomatoes and peppers. This enjoyment is the result of the “visual beauty and variety in taste” that tomatoes and peppers are capable of offering. Lisa describes the tomatoes she grows as ranging in color from yellows and greens to deep reds and blacks. These tomatoes differ not only in taste and appearance, but also in the types of leaves the plants produce. When harvest has been completed, Lisa and her fellow employees take the time to enjoy this visual variety by displaying all the produce on her kitchen table before separating them into their designated shares. Sorted by variety, color, shape, and size these harvested fruits and vegetables create a natural spectacle that is unlike anything you would find in the produce section at a supermarket. Lisa sorrowfully states that viewing the beauty of this genetic diversity is “the part that the members don’t get to see.” While a member of Living Soil Community farm may not be able to witness this genetic diversity, they are certainly able to taste the variety among the fruits and vegetables they are offered and appreciate the environmentally friendly ways in which such variance and flavor are created.