

Garden to Go

By Alexandra Reau



My name is Alexandra Reau and I am in middle school from Monroe County, MI. I have been very busy since May of this year with my new business called Garden to Go. It is part of Community Supported Agriculture (CSA), which is a simple idea that is sweeping the country. CSA is where a community supports a farm and in return the farm supports the community. It is a creative way for people to get to know the person who is growing their food. People become members of the CSA and pay for their share of the season's produce early in the season so the money can be used for planting expenses. Each week they come and pick up a supply of fresh produce.

Garden to Go is the only CSA in Monroe County. I had to explain how it worked to people so they would agree to sign up. I made brochures and gave them to all of my teachers at school. I acquired three members from the brochure and five more members by having my information posted on www.LocalHarvest.org.

I grew 21 different kinds of vegetables, including some heirloom varieties, and eight herbs. I had 74 tomato plants in 8 different varieties. I use sustainable growing methods, which appeals to many customers because it protects the environment. These include natural pesticides and rabbit manure on my growing areas from the rabbits I raise.

I assigned my customers to come on five different days to pick up their produce, which helped me spread my harvest out. People signed up to get six weeks of produce that they picked up each week in a reusable plastic basket. Each week they also received several recipes that included the produce they were getting in their basket.

I learned a lot about running a business with Garden to Go. There were a lot of days that were hard work with weeding and picking the produce. It was fun to get to know my members; some came from quite a distance to be able to get fresh picked, local produce. Three of my members were engineers, which was interesting to me because I want to be a biosystems or environmental engineer.

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In March, the IGNITE Youth Entrepreneurship Team, an action team in the Prima Civitas Foundation's Moving Ideas to Market Entrepreneurship initiative, held a business plan competition for youth in the Mid-Michigan area. I won first place in the 6th – 8th grade division and the prize money I received from the competition went towards starting up my business. I used it for hoses, seeds, plants, baskets and promotional materials. I also used some of it for my business filing fee. My goal was to earn enough money to buy a laptop computer, which I was able to do.

I had enough extra produce that I was able to donate it to help others. I gave produce to a teacher who gave it to families she knew that needed food. I also donated produce to the 4-H Green Growers Market.

Next year I plan to expand my number of members to twelve and plant more produce. I am also planning on doing a survey with this year's members to see what improvements I should make next year.

I have had a lot of help in making my business successful. Henry Lievens, my county commissioner, is an attorney and he donated his services to help me get my business organized and registered. My dad helped with the plowing and planting of the garden areas. My mom helped me with promoting my business and developing recipes for all of the produce I grew. □

