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Organic farmer cultivates health in the community

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Special to The CJN

Are you craving cucumber? Salivating over spinach? Aching for asparagus?

Then Daniel Hoffmann is the man for you.

Hoffmann, 35, is a social worker and organic farmer who established The Cutting Veg (TCV), a community health promotion enterprise with a focus on organic farming.

"[The Cutting Veg] cultivates personal, social, environmental and economic health through organic agriculture. We're really trying to impact the community in a variety of positive ways," he said.

One of the ways Hoffmann is doing this is with The Cutting Veg's Community Supported Agriculture (CSA) program. In the program, founded in 2008, people become members in the farm for a season, giving them access to a weekly share of the harvest, all grown at TCV's farm in Brampton, Ont.

A regular share costs \$27 a week and a large share is \$37. The produce changes depending on what's in season, and consists of veggies and fruit that were harvested that day. The program runs from June to the end of October each year.

Produce pickup locations include the Pri Adamah CSA at Temple Sinai; the Holy Sprouts CSA at Holy Blossom



Volunteers on The Cutting Veg farm in Brampton, Ont., harvest lettuce.

Temple and the Kavanah Garden CSA on Lebovic Campus Drive, near Bathurst Street and Rutherford Road.

"[The produce] is whatever's in season. So, in spring, you're getting the cool weather crops, things like peas and green onions and swiss chard and kale. As the summer comes, you get into the heat lovers, the tomatoes and corn and cucumbers and zucchini and peppers and eggplants. And then when the fall comes, that's when you move back into the cool weather crops."

Jewish CSAs are pretty common, Hoffmann said, with more than 60 in North America and four in Toronto. The impact they have on people, he added, is significant.

"I'm really proud of how we've been able to touch people's lives, whether it's through the CSAs, where their quality of life is improved through having a relationship with the farm and making eating locally and organically more part of their daily lives, or by coming out to the farm and participating in the growing process," he said, referring to TCV's interns and volunteers.

Hoffmann, who has been farming since 2000, started doing it because he wanted to grow his own food.

"When I was doing my degree in social work, I realized that if I wanted to make a difference in the world, the best way to start was with myself. I needed to be the healthiest person I could be," he said.

"Part of being the healthiest person I could be is to be self-reliant and self-sustaining."

Hoffmann enjoyed growing his own food so much that he decided to make a career of it. He also feels good knowing that he is making a positive impact on the local community.

"I'm really driven to participate in tikkun olam, or repairing of the world. From my professional life, I wanted to be part of something that was really healthy at its roots. Having an organic farm really does cultivate health in the community.

"For me, being Jewish is largely participating in tikkun olam. So if I can connect Jewish folks with simple ways to have a healthy relationship with food and thus enrich their quality of life while making a difference in the world, that's really meaningful for me."

Altogether, The Cutting Veg has four different community programs.

There's the organic produce, which is distributed through the CSAs and farmers markets. The Brampton farm's Global Garlic Project involves growing about 20 varieties of garlic from various places in the world, including Israel, Ukraine and Russia.

TCV also offers food coaching, working with individuals, families, groups and organizations to develop their relationship with food, and does workshops as well.

The Cutting Veg provides wellness

counselling, drawing on Hoffmann's experience in counselling and social work. "[It's] basically one-on-one counselling with individuals to help them cultivate more health and wellness in their life," he said.

"Those four streams of programming are all geared back toward that one mission of cultivating personal, social, economic and environmental health."

Hoffmann is pleased that so many people are getting involved with The Cutting Veg and the CSA program, mentioning the growing membership.

"The first year we did the CSA there were 55 members. Last year [we had] 175 members, and this year we're anticipating between 400 and 500 members."

As TCV continues to grow, he hopes that more of the Jewish community will get involved.

"I really want the Jewish community to know about this opportunity to get involved with the Community Supported Agriculture."

For more information on the CSAs and how to become a member, visit www.thecuttingveg.com.



Organic farmer Daniel Hoffman hopes his farm will help Jews have a healthy relationship with food and enrich their quality of life.



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