

## U-Pick CSA Garden Is “A Great Way To Go”

The Beyer family in Winnebago, Ill., has figured out a way to eliminate some of the labor-intensive work involved with operating a Community-Supported Agriculture business, where veggies are picked and delivered to customers. They've started a subscription U-pick garden. In 2011, they had 60 subscribers harvesting produce from between 5 and 6 acres.

“We don't have to pick, clean or market,” says Jill Beyer, who owns Harrison Market Gardens with her husband, Bill, and their son, Ben. The family decided to give the idea a try when they had a 5-acre hay field available after their horse died. They had never farmed, but had always raised a big garden.

“The first time customers come, we train them how to pick,” Beyer says. For example, pickers learn to remove the outer leaves of lettuce and other greens so that the center continues to produce more leaves.

Each week, subscribers receive a list of what produce is available and where it's located in the garden's numbered rows. Based on the amount of produce available the Beyers suggest each subscriber's “fair share” such as a dozen carrots, a couple of cabbages, and so on. After picking, subscribers can use the Beyers' wash station to clean off the vegetables before taking them home.

Some of the vegetables are picked up in the farm's packing shed.

“We do a bit of pre-picking,” Beyer says with all the vine crops, potatoes and mature onions. It eliminates the problem of pickers stepping on plants and picking produce too early.

Subscribers have a couple of options: \$475 for a weekly visit for about 25 weeks or \$325 for biweekly visits. A couple of families work 4 hours a week for their subscription fee. Some pay the subscription and volunteer to work because they enjoy it.

Beyer appreciates that customers call it “their farm,” and she thinks more entrepreneurs should give it a try.

She offers a few tips:

- It's important to be located near a large population area. Most of the Beyers' customers live within 12 miles.

- Start small, and get feedback about what to grow. Each year the Beyers try a couple of novelty crops, but drop them if customers don't care for them. Asparagus, strawberries and sweet corn seem to be the most popular produce. Edamames (edible soybeans) are also growing in popularity.

- Get subscriptions early. The Beyers contact former customers in February and ask for the first payment and post dated checks for June and July, which helps cover costs and simplifies bookkeeping.

- Set up a website. The Beyers have their own and are on [www.localharvest.org](http://www.localharvest.org), which has been great for attracting new business.

- Stay focused on agriculture and not



Beyer family started a subscription U-pick garden where 60 subscribers harvest their own produce.

entertainment to avoid the need for extra insurance. The Beyers' agent advised them not to even add a slide or swing.

“We just think it's a marvelous way of getting families into the country,” Beyer says. “It's a worthwhile venue to come to even though we are not an entertainment venue.”

She says she can't think of any disadvantages, and that it's a good alternative to farmer's markets. When there is excess

produce, the Beyers donate it to the local food pantry. In addition to the U-pick operation, they are looking at ways of selling to restaurants and developing other markets so that Ben can make it his full-time job.

Contact: FARM SHOW Followup, Harrison Market Gardens, 9024 Harrison Rd., Winnebago, Ill. 61088 (ph 815 980-0589; [www.harrisonmarketgardens.com](http://www.harrisonmarketgardens.com)).

## Have Horse, Will Travel

By Rex Gogerty

Cow catcher Chet Peugh is everyman's cowboy. He works cattle just about anywhere his horse and his pickup can take him. Peugh specializes in rounding up escaped cattle – cows on the run from busted fences, tipped over trucks, or tenderfoot rustlers. No gentle old cows here, just cattle on the loose that are hard to find and harder to corral.

Peugh's “Wild Cattle Catching Service” can be a godsend, sometimes a last chance, for cattlemen with lost or scattered herds. When his phone rings, he loads up his horse, and a half dozen tracking dogs and heads out to corner cattle on any range.

“Finding and driving cattle in heavy timber or tall corn is a whole lot different from roping calves on an open range,” Peugh says. “It takes a tough horse, smart dogs, and a little cow psychology to bring 'em in.”

On a recent roundup in Iowa, Peugh and his “crew” brought in 25 steers, one or two at a time, roaming corn and soybean fields across a 20-mile area. He used his standard recovery procedure, which includes collecting basic information from clients about numbers, breeds, size and search area. Next, he checks sightings from farmers and motorists and concentrates each drive on a suspected section of land. He releases two or three dogs to pick up the scent and ultimately to flush the confused cattle (in this case, 900-lb. black-baldies) down the row and out to the road. Peugh then ropes each steer and drives or drags him into his trailer.

“Tracking cows in standing corn is a little like hunting raccoons,” he says. “The dogs pick up the cattle scent best when there's a dew on. Once they lock onto a cattle trail, it doesn't usually take the dogs long to bring them to a catch area.”

Sometimes escaped cattle keep on running with the dogs in pursuit. When that happens, Peugh follows on horseback until the cattle come out into the open. He uses a hand-help GPS unit to monitor the location of his dogs. “We used to track the direction of the roundup mostly by the sound of the dogs barking,” Peugh says. “A little technology sure makes the job easier.”

Roping a 900-lb. steer in a road ditch isn't a job for drug store cowboys. Peugh, who once roped a stray 2,000-lb. bull, relies on skill and equipment. His heavy-duty saddle and trail-smart Morgan make the job easier and safer, but there have been close calls. On a recent chase, the dogs and horse held a steer at bay while Peugh hobbled the big guy. When a second steer charged and knocked him to the ground, he was able to mount his horse and rope and tie the second steer. He says it's times like that when he needs his cell phone as much as his spurs.

“It's a rough and tumble business, not only for me, my horse and dogs, but also for the cattle,” Peugh says. “But it's better than finding them on the hood of a schoolbus.”

Illinois' wild cattle catcher answers up to 100 emergency calls per year from desperate farmers and ranchers. Some calls involve spooked new arrivals, poor fences, and coyote attacks. Other escapes are caused by storm-damaged barns or truck rollovers when a speedy response reduces the chance for cattle-car accidents. His busy season is usually late summer when dense crop cover provides longterm food and shelter for cattle on the lam. Drivers on foot and in pickups are no match for camouflaged cattle.

“Too many cowhands can spook cattle,” he says. “Sometimes it's better to do some detective work rather than form a posse. A little extra planning also helps me take better care of my horse and dogs as well as the



Chet Peugh relies on his horse, his dogs, and plenty of cow savvy for his wild cattle roundup.

customer's cattle.”

Being patient can also extend a roundup over a period of several days, so Peugh doesn't travel light. His trailer contains feed and water for his horse and dogs. He carries food and camping equipment in the pickup cab.

Peugh has kept accounts of his over-the-road cowboying career. Besides working with beef producers, he's dealt with attorneys, debated with insurance adjusters, and cooperated with safety and law enforcement people. He served as an expert witness in court for several “cattle damage” lawsuits. “Sometimes,” he says, “people are more unpredictable than cattle.”

Peugh's years of cowboying in all kinds of weather and terrain, along with a professional

approach to handling escaped animals, have helped him chalk up a great “save record.” “Once in awhile a wild one gets away,” he says. “He becomes a ‘free runner’ and winds up on the loose or maybe over some hunter's campfire. But for me and my horse and my dogs, the goal is to get 'em all.”

Peugh charges clients according to mileage to the search site, time on the job, and number of cattle recovered. But he says there's also a lot of plain old satisfaction watching a guy lock the gate on a pen of strays he helped round up.

Contact: FARM SHOW Followup, Chet Peugh, 24459 Clark Rd., Chadwick, Ill. 61014 (ph 815 225-7810; [www.wildcattle-catcher.com](http://www.wildcattle-catcher.com)).