

2014 Farming For Profit Workshop Series
Commercial Fruit Production

Essential Commercial Fruit Production Decisions

The questions in this document are intended to help you make the key decisions necessary to establish and operate a successful fruit business. Ideally, these questions should be answered before you put a single plant in the ground. Some of the questions can be answered right away, others will require considerable research and consultation with your Extension Agent or other professionals. This is by no means an exhaustive list of questions that need to be answered. Instead, these are the primary questions that need be answered to operate a successful fruit business.



Section 1. Commercial Fruit Production and You

Successful commercial fruit production depends largely on you. How much time, energy, and money you are willing to put toward a fruit business will largely determine what kind of fruit business you can have. These questions are intended to help you envision a fruit business that works for you. The answers will also help your consultants and others you enlist do a better job helping you.

1. Why are you growing fruit?

Don't know As a hobby Fruit for my family To make money

2. How many hours per week are you willing to spend on your fruit business?

3. How many hours per week are required to operate your fruit business?

4. When are you not available during the summer months? Vacations? Fishing?

5. How much money do you want to make each year from your fruit business?

6. How many pounds of fruit will you need to sell and at what price to make that much money?

7. In what year will you first harvest that many pounds?

8. How many plants or row-feet do you need to grow that much fruit?

9. When will you harvest your first crop?

10. How far in the red can you go? In other words, how much are you able or willing to invest in your fruit operation for each of the years listed?

2014 2015 2016 2017 2018 2019 2020

Section 2. Site and Fruit Crop Selection

Matching the right crop to the right site is crucially important to commercial fruit production. If you currently own property, first understand your site and then choose a crop. It's possible that your site isn't suitable for any fruit crop.

- 1. What is the slope of the field you will be planting in?**
- 2. What is the aspect of the field you will be planting in?**
- 3. What is the soil type?**
- 4. What are the pH, organic matter, phosphorus, and potassium levels?**
- 5. Is there ever standing water in your field? If so, how long does the ponding last?**
- 6. What fruit crop(s) do you want to grow?**
- 7. What fruit product(s) can you sell?**
- 8. What fruit crop(s) is best suited to your property?**
- 9. Do you have neighbors that will be concerned when you are spraying pesticides?**
- 10. Does local zoning allow you to grow and sell fruit from your property?**

Section 3. Essential Infrastructure

Irrigation and post-harvest handling are required for any fruit crop you might grow. As you develop a production plan for your specific crop you'll also need agricultural equipment and infrastructure to carry out the site preparation, planting, pruning, mulching, fertilizing, and harvesting specific to the crop.

- 1. How will you water your plants?**
- 2. How much water will your plants need in a drought year in gallons per day?**
- 3. What is the flow rate of your water supply?**
- 4. How will you remove field heat from your harvested fruit?**
- 5. How will you store your harvested fruit until it is sold?**
- 6. What equipment, if any, will you need to manage the soil (tractor, plow, rototiller, disk, seed drill, etc.)?**
- 7. What equipment, if any, will you need to control weeds (mower, sprayer, cultivators, etc.)?**
- 8. What equipment, if any, will you need for planting (auger, backhoe, plow, etc.)?**
- 9. What equipment, if any, will you need for installation of fencing, trellis, irrigation lines, etc.)?**
- 10. Will you rent, borrow, trade, or purchase the equipment you need?**

Section 4. Pest Management

Commercial fruit production requires pest management. If you aren't able to limit damage from deer, birds, insects, and disease you will never make money. These questions are just a start to those you'll have to answer as you develop a pest management plan specific to your operation.

- 1. How will you prevent deer from eating your plants?**
- 2. How will you prevent birds from eating your crop?**
- 3. How will you prevent raccoons and other wildlife from eating your crop?**
- 4. What are the major insect and disease pests that will affect your fruit crop(s)?**
- 5. What is your preferred pest management program?**
Wing it Broad-spectrum pesticides IPM IPM with only organic pesticides
- 6. What equipment will you use to apply pesticides?**

Section 5. Marketing

Don't bother growing a crop unless you can eat it or sell it. Here are some basic questions to answer before you plant.

1. What are your target markets?

2. What fruits and in which form will you sell to your target markets?

3. How much of each fruit can you sell to each of your target markets? How do you know?

4. How will you package your fruit for sale to the customer?

5. How much will you charge for your fruit?

6. What licenses do you need, if any, to sell your fruit?

Section 6. Labor

As any commercial fruit grower will tell you, growing fruit takes a lot of work. You'll need a labor plan and if it includes employees you'll need to know what it takes to hire, supervise, pay, and protect your employees.

- 1. Will you have employees or do everything yourself?**
- 2. If you have employees what work will they do and when?**
- 3. Will family members help you do the work? How much time do they have? How do you know?**
- 4. Who will harvest the crop? If not you, how will you pay them and how much will it cost?**
- 5. Do you have liability insurance sufficient to protect your assets in case of injury or sickness incurred by workers or customers?**
- 6. Are you familiar with labor laws as they apply to minimum wage, social security withholding, worker's comp., worker protections standards, etc.?**

Section 7. Year 0 – The Site Preparation Year

All commercial fruit production requires starting one or even two years before you plant. What do you need to do before you plant?

- 1. What drainage issues need to be fixed in your field(s)?**
- 2. Does the pH need to be adjusted? If so, what is the target pH and how will you get there?**
- 3. What are the phosphorus and potassium levels? What are the target pre-plant levels and how will you get there?**
- 4. What perennial weeds are in the area you plan to plant? How will you kill them?**
- 5. How is the soil tilth? Do you need to add organic matter? What will you add and how will you add it?**

Section 8. Education, Knowledge, Skills

Hopefully, the questions in this worksheet help identify the things you know and the things you don't. How will you acquire the additional knowledge and skills you need?

- 1. What knowledge and skills do you most need in order to grow and sell fruit?**
- 2. How will you acquire that knowledge and those skills?**