



1551 S. 2nd Street Lincoln NE 68502
(402) 474-9802
www.communitycrops.org



**HELPING PEOPLE WORK TOGETHER TO GROW
HEALTHY FOOD AND LIVE SUSTAINABLY**

Growing Farmers Training Program Frequently Asked Questions

Q: How much land do I need to start a farm business?

A: You can start out small. Even a standard city lot at 50' X 100' (5000 sq.ft.) can produce a surprising amount of produce. For example, you could grow several hundred pounds of spinach and lettuce in the spring, over 1000 pounds of tomatoes in the summer, and several hundred bunches of radishes and a few hundred pounds of baby spinach in the fall.

Q: What if I don't have any land?

A: Crops has a training farm site just northeast of Lincoln where you can rent an eighth acre plot to start out. You can also just start asking around to find someone with space in town or in the country. An average backyard is 1500 sq.ft., and many people in the country have an acre or two to spare.

Q: My friend has some land I can use, but how do I know if it's good for vegetable production?

A: Here are the questions you need to answer before you start growing vegetables:

- Where will your water come from (and what is the quality)?
- How fertile is the soil (and what amendments will you need to purchase)?
- How does the land drain (to avoid erosion and flooding)?
- Are there windbreaks (to prevent wind damage)?
- Where will you store your harvested veggies?
- Where will you sell your veggies?

Q: How much money does it take to get started?

A: This depends on your scale of production. For a 50' x 100' plot, expect to invest at least \$500-\$1000. Bigger purchases like tractors or greenhouses may not get used enough on a small scale to justify the expense. Plus, you can rent equipment or hire a neighbor to come with a tractor, and avoid the headache of repairs. Over an acre or two, you may want to purchase some of these larger items.

Q: How much money can I make in small-scale direct-market production?

A: Profits depend on how intensively you farm, what crops you grow, and where you sell your products. Crops like cut flowers, berries, or salad mix are higher value than sweet corn, melons or potatoes. Farmers can get higher prices for their produce through farmers' markets and CSAs, but they can sell higher volumes through grocery stores and other wholesale accounts. Most new growers in our program earn \$1,000-\$2,000 in their first season. With experience and a LOT of hard work, you can gross in the range of \$5000-\$8000 per season on a 100' x 100' plot of diverse vegetables. On an acre, you can make between \$10,000-\$25,000.

Q: How much time does farming take?

A: Starting any new business takes time. Soil with low organic matter added will take a few years to reach optimum fertility and structure. Also, establishing your customer base takes time. Plan to spend at least 15-20 hours per week on planning, production, marketing and record keeping.

Q: Can my kids participate?

A: Definitely! Helping run a farm business is a great way for kids to learn how to handle money, communicate with customers, manage responsibility, and enjoy the outdoors.

Q: What if I don't have much experience growing things?

A: Production is one part of starting a direct-market farm business, but many other skills are needed as well. For example, customer relations, financial planning, marketing and bookkeeping are all essential skills to running a successful direct-market farm enterprise.

To gain skills in production, as well as other important skills for running your farm business, sign up for the Community Crops Growing Farmers Winter Workshop series at www.communitycrops.org