



— *Small Market* —

FRUIT AND VEGETABLE FARMING

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EXTENSION

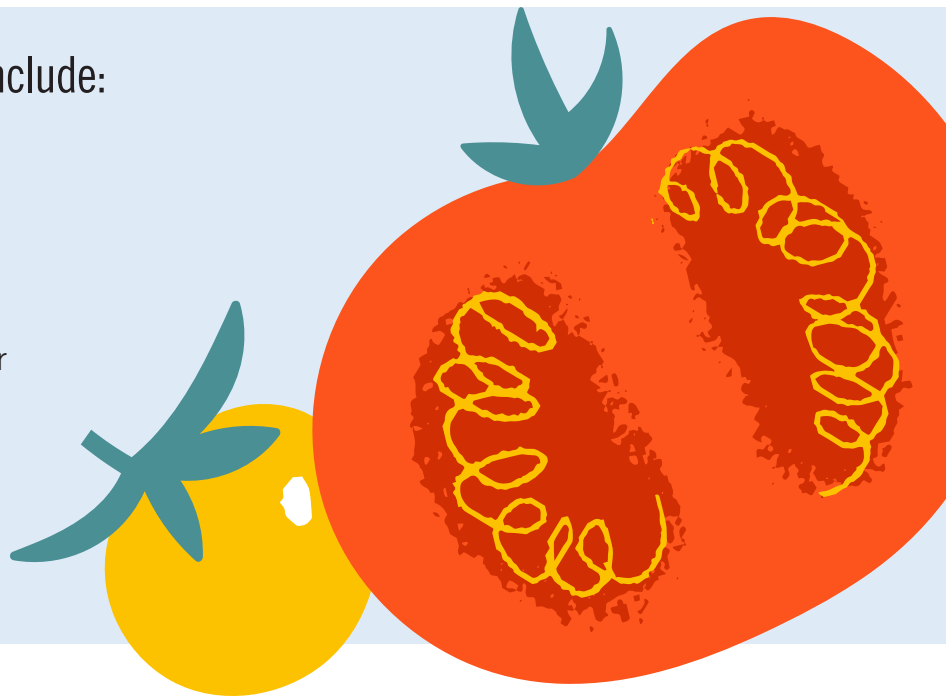
Over the last decade or so there has been a tremendous consumer interest in locally grown produce. While some folks have ventured into home gardening, many have filled their desire for locally grown fruits and vegetables from nearby farmer's markets. While large grocery stores can provide an abundance of produce, it's harder to find locally grown products. There is a need and opportunity for small-market fruit and vegetable growers to take advantage of the demand. However, before someone dives into growing fruits and vegetables for profit, they need to consider many important factors.

Market and demand

Just as in any business venture, the produce farmer needs to be sure they will be able to market and sell their product before they ever plant it in the soil. It makes good sense to come up with a realistic business plan that considers not only expenses but also how the product will be sold. While there is a great demand in Georgia for locally grown produce, advertising and getting the produce into the hands of the consumer still requires effort.

Possible avenues to sell produce include:

- **Local farmers markets**
- **Direct sales on the farm**
- **Community Supported Agriculture (CSA) sales**, where local clients purchase a portion of the harvest each week directly from the farmer
- **Online sales**
- **Restaurants**
- **School systems**
- **Selling wholesale to other farms**



Licenses, insurance, and taxes

Where you live and what you are selling will determine what licenses you need. Some counties in the state require a business license to sell any goods. Others are more lenient and may not require a business license unless you have a storefront. If any processed foods such as jams, sauces, pies, or breads are to be sold, a cottage food license will be required from the Georgia Department of Agriculture. Kitchen inspections are possible, and specific minimum requirements typically apply whenever food is prepared on-site. The Georgia Department of Agriculture is the regulatory agency that oversees food safety rules and regulations and can answer questions about them.

Another concern is whether you need a Georgia pesticide applicator license, which is required when a producer purchases or uses restricted-use chemicals. Your local county Extension agent can help you with questions on this license, as well as offer training to help you obtain it.

Insurance is an important consideration for the grower, whether they have labor or consumers on-site (such as on the property of a you-pick operation). At a minimum, potential growers should talk with their insurance companies to discuss additional liability coverage to protect themselves against lawsuits. Insurance also may be needed to cover equipment that is purchased to support the farm operation.

Any farm revenue must be reported as income on your taxes. You also will be able to deduct many of the costs of equipment, supplies, and other items associated with production. New growers should consult with a certified accountant who is familiar with farm taxes. The tax laws change frequently and it's difficult to stay up-to-date with them on your own. It is well worth the money to pay an accountant to help you.

Labor

Perhaps the greatest shock to new fruit and vegetable producers is the amount of labor needed in production. Even a smaller garden, an acre or less in size, can take many hours each day to maintain properly. The new grower must decide whether they are going to do all the labor in house or hire farm help to assist. Fruit and vegetable gardening is rewarding but also involves working outside for long hours, often in unpleasant weather. Reliable labor can be difficult to find and keep. Hiring labor also involves following federal and state laws, rules, and regulations.

Equipment and other material needs

To get started in producing fruit and vegetables for profit you either need to own or purchase certain equipment and materials. Obviously, you need land for any growing operation. This may be your own existing property, or perhaps leased or purchased property. Land typically is one of the biggest expenses associated with a produce farm. The type of equipment you may need will depend on how big your operation is and what you want to grow. In general, the following list of equipment can be helpful in small fruit and vegetable operations.

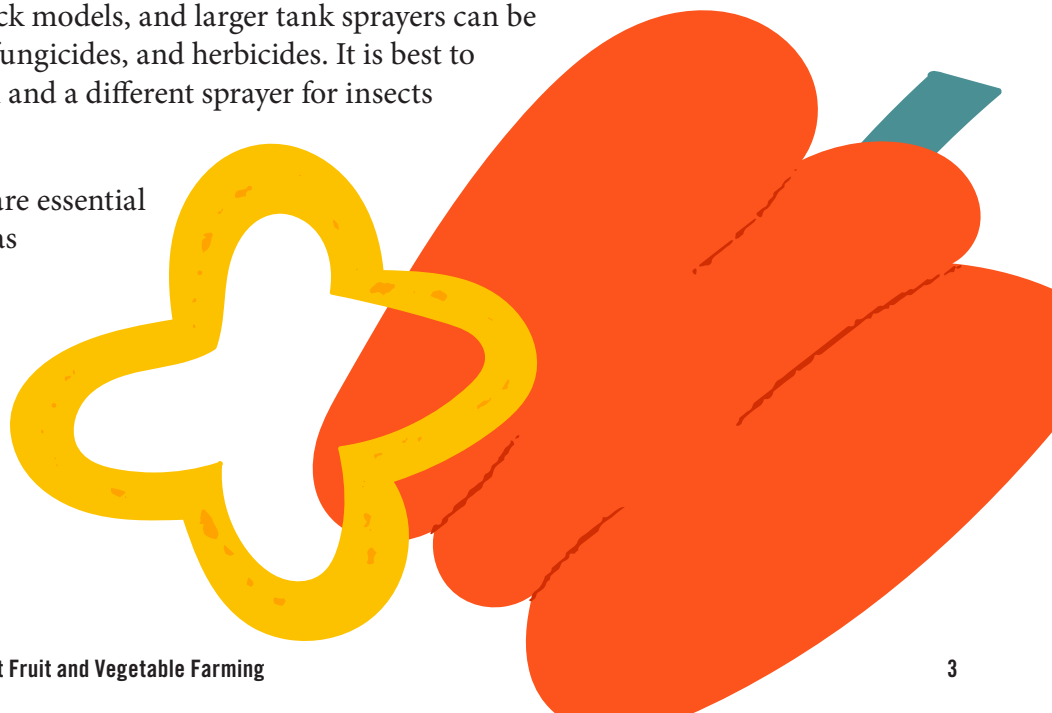
Fencing: Fences not only define the boundary of your garden, but also they can be helpful in keeping out pests, such as deer and other mammals that might eat the produce. Fencing might be quite expensive, but a high-quality fence that is built well can be a long-term benefit to the producer.

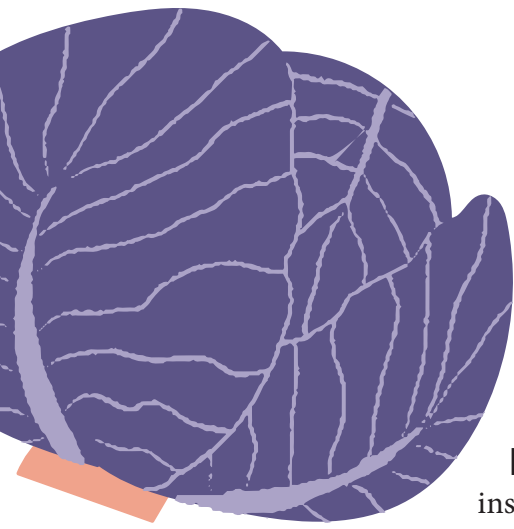
Hand tiller: Hand-operated tillers that range from 3 to 15 horsepower can be quite useful in gardens up to about three quarters of an acre. Some high-end tillers, also called walk-behind tractors, have multiple attachments capable of doing different gardening jobs.

Small tractor and implements: As gardens approach an acre or more in size, a small tractor can be a big help in maintaining the soil. For the small grower, a small farm tractor of 20 to 40 horsepower should handle most jobs. One of the most useful implements to put behind the tractor is a garden tiller. This saves a lot of time and labor over the use of a hand tiller. If possible, purchase a small tractor that has four-wheel drive and a front-end loader, both of which are extremely helpful in farm operations.

Sprayer: Handheld sprayers, backpack models, and larger tank sprayers can be very helpful in applying insecticides, fungicides, and herbicides. It is best to maintain one sprayer for weed control and a different sprayer for insects and diseases.

Assorted hand tools: Hand tools are essential even if you own powered equipment, as there are times when you will need a shovel, rake, hoe, or hand clipper. Buy quality equipment, preferably with fiberglass handles that will last a long time. Keep them in dry storage when not in use.





Garden shed or barn: It's important to have a dry place to store equipment and other necessary items. Place your storage shed close to the garden for convenience and build one that's a little bigger than you think you will need. Sheds always seem to fill up quickly.

Seed planter: A handheld seed planter can speed up the tedious job of putting seed in the ground. Models are available with different capabilities, and they range in price from about \$100 up to \$600. Seed-planter attachments may also be available for your garden tractor.

Fertilizer spreader: Fertilizer spreaders can be handheld, hand-pushed, or installed on the back of a small tractor. They are useful for applying large volumes of fertilizer or lime into the garden area.

Irrigation supplies: A successful fruit and vegetable garden will need supplemental irrigation. Both overhead and drip irrigation systems are used in fruit and vegetable operations. Before you start planting, be sure you have an adequate water supply for the size of your garden.

Refrigeration: Fresh produce can spoil quickly if not taken care of properly. Some type of refrigeration system should be available on the farm to store the harvest. Larger farms may need several dedicated commercial refrigerators or coolers to hold produce until it goes to market.

Greenhouse: Consider whether you prefer to purchase or grow your own transplants. If growing your own transplants, you will need a small greenhouse with temperature-control capabilities. Producers often find it easier and more affordable to purchase transplants wholesale from another producer.

Weed-control materials: Weed control is a huge problem for growers in the state of Georgia. Many producers grow on plastic to control weeds while reducing their use of herbicides. A plastic-layer implement normally is needed to lay plastic in the garden, but these can cost several thousand dollars. Permeable mesh landscape fabric, which is available in many different widths and lengths, also can be used to help keep weeds under control. This material usually is pinned down using large landscape staples.

Chemicals: Depending on your setup, you may need many different chemicals to support your operation. You may need to spray insecticides, fungicides, and herbicides routinely to keep things running well. Even organic operations use many organic chemicals to help control problems in the garden. Producers should have a separate lockable storage shed to store their chemicals. It should be well-vented and placed out of direct sunlight.

Truck or trailer: If your operation requires you to transport your produce to another location, you will need some type of truck or trailer. A refrigerated trailer may be needed when transporting produce more than a couple of hours away from your operation.

Growing organically



Growers must determine whether they want to grow their produce organically. Certified organic produce usually demands a higher price at the market, which can mean more profit for growers. However, growing organically is more demanding and more difficult than growing using more traditional methods. To sell produce labeled as organic, a grower must first be certified as an organic farm through the USDA. There's a fee for this certification and it requires meticulous record keeping. Visit the USDA Organic website for more information: <https://www.usda.gov/topics/organic>. Growers also may want to pursue Certified Naturally Grown certification (<https://www.cngfarming.org/>), which is quite popular in Georgia.

Summary

Anyone getting into the production of fruit and vegetables for a profit will soon learn that it is not as easy as they thought. Just like with the restaurant business, many small farm operations come and go quickly. The most successful growers — the ones that tend to stay in business long-term — all have the following things in common:

- They love producing their own fruit and vegetables and enjoy consuming them at home as well as selling them.
- They have researched their market well and have no problem finding consumers to purchase their goods.
- They have developed a strong business plan and know the true costs of production, including all materials and labor.
- They are versatile, and make changes to meet the demands of the market.
- They grow and market year-round, always having something available.
- They have a true thirst for knowledge and continue to learn about how to be more successful by reading and attending educational programs.



Resources

Free access to UGA Extension publications, with many topics relevant to fruit and vegetable growers: <https://extension.uga.edu/publications.html>

Georgia Extension personnel (listed by county) can help you with advice and farm visits: <https://extension.uga.edu/county-offices.html>

Georgia Department of Agriculture for licensing, rules, and regulations: <https://agr.georgia.gov/>

USDA Organic certification: <https://www.usda.gov/topics/organic>

Certified Naturally Grown: <https://www.cngfarming.org/>

Georgia Organics website, which contains information on growing organically: <https://www.georgiaorganics.org/>

Irrigation supply companies:

<https://www.dripdepot.com>

<https://www.dripworks.com>

BCS tillers and accessories for the commercial garden: <https://www.bcsamerica.com/>

Please note: UGA Extension does not endorse specific brands or companies mentioned, and the use of a trade or brand name does not imply approval of any product to the exclusion of others that may also be suitable.

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