

Tips for Developing a Production / Growing Plan as part of the Community Farmer Application Form

The Application Form asks: **What vegetables do you plan to grow?** It will be easy to answer this question if you already have both a Labour Plan as well as a Marketing and Sales Plan. Before developing a Production / Growing Plan, it is helpful to have already clarified a Labour Plan, and developed a basic Marketing and Sales Plan. Both of these Plans will have a significant impact on the Production or Growing Plan.

It is helpful to first develop a Labour Plan because the amount of time dedicated to working in the plot will have a very real impact on how much food can realistically be grown. It will also influence how many different crops you can properly care for, and it will influence the types of growing techniques you choose to use. The more different vegetables you grow, the more complicated and difficult it will be to manage your plot. A plot growing 40 different vegetables and herbs will be much more difficult to manage than a plot with only 10 different vegetables. Each vegetable has its own time for seeding and weeding, it's own water requirements and pest & disease control measures, and its own time of harvest. So it will be more complicated to track and care for 40 different vegetables than only 10 different vegetables. Of course, it is possible to grow 40 or more different vegetables & herbs, but just make sure that you have the knowledge, skill, and labour capacity to properly care for your plot.

It is also helpful to first develop a basic Marketing and Sales plan because there is no point in growing something that cannot be sold. Having a sense of how you are going to sell the harvest will make it possible to figure out what you are going to grow and how much of each vegetable you should grow. For instance, if you are selling to wholesale customers, then you would be discussing with them which vegetables they would be interested in purchasing, and how much they want; then you can figure out how much space you need to dedicate to each vegetable. But, if you are growing for custom orders, or for a subscription program or CSA program, then you would need to have a small amount of a wide variety of vegetables available continuously, so you would need to figure out what to grow to achieve these harvests. If you are selling at the farmers market, then everything is more flexible because you can just sell whatever you were able to harvest each week. But you probably still want to think about if you want to focus on growing vegetables that you already have lots of experience growing, and/or vegetables that can't easily be bought elsewhere, and/or standard vegetables that you know your customers want.

The Application Form also asks: **How much space in your plot are you dedicating to each vegetable?** You can answer this question by providing a map of your proposed plot and/or a chart to explain. This is probably the most fun part of the Application Form: you get to dream your plot!

This section is also asking you to consider the growing methods you will use in your plot. Would you be growing many different vegetables in the same garden bed? Would you grow only one or two different vegetables in a single bed? How many rows of each vegetable would you grow in each bed? If you want to grow lots of different vegetables in the same garden bed, which vegetables would you grow together? Would you try to grow as intensively as possible to maximize your yield and income from the space you have available? Would you try to grow in ways that will be more efficient so that even though your yield and income are less, you still earn more income for each hour you spend in the garden?

There are many methods of growing food. In general, there are two main types of methods:

1. Some methods focus on getting the most harvested out of every square foot of a garden, even if it requires a lot of work.

2. Some methods focus on reducing the work required, but are not as concerned with maximizing yield per square foot.

In general, community gardeners tend to focus on the first set of methods: how to grow as much as possible in the limited space available. Assuming they don't have unlimited free time, Community Farmers will need to seriously consider the second set of methods: how to get the most overall yield from the limited time available to spend working in the garden. The second set of methods still strive for high yields, but there is an acknowledgement that the time it takes to grow the food is a factor that needs to be considered.

You may already have lots of farming or gardening knowledge, skills, and techniques. But if you are interested in learning more about growing methods that focus on reducing the work required while still achieving high yields, then you might consider reading or reviewing one or more of the books available from the Community Farmer Resource Library. Books that might be particularly helpful include:

- *The Market Gardener: A Successful Grower's Handbook for Small-scale Organic Farming*, by Jean-Martin Fortier.
- *SPIN-farming Basics: How to Grow Commercially on Under an Acre*, by Roxanne Christensen and Wally Satzewich
- *The New Organic Grower: A Master's Manual of Tools and Techniques for the Home and Market Gardener*, by Eliot Coleman.
- *Farming While Black: Soul Fire Farm's Practical Guide to Liberation on the Land*, by Leah Penniman.
- *Lean Farm Guide to Growing Organic Vegetables: More In-Depth Lean Techniques for Efficient Organic Production*, by Ben Hartman.

There is no "perfect" or "correct" way to grow vegetables. Besides the methods described in these books, there are certainly other methods of growing food that will result in high yields without excessive work. You also already have your own skills, techniques, and knowledge. These books are just one option available to you to consider. We will all always be improving our micro-farming skills and knowledge.

Conclusion

Applicants to the Community Farmer program need to demonstrate that they have thought about what they want to grow, how much of each vegetable they want to grow, and how they are going to grow it. The Application Form is not asking for a detailed Crop Plan with a detailed list of the number of seeds or transplants needed, and all the seeding and transplanting dates. It is not asking you to have already figured out exactly what your growing methods are going to be. But it is asking Community Farmer applicants to have a good idea of what they are going to do with their plot, if they are accepted into the Community Farmer program.