

growing FOR MARKET

Top 10 trends in market farming

Market farming is a constantly evolving business. Crops, markets, laws, products, consumer trends — nothing stands still in this line of work. Here are the top trends that are likely to affect market farmers this year. You can read more about these topics in upcoming issues of *Growing for Market* and there are additional resources at www.growingformarket.com/categories/trends.

1. Hoophouses change the face of market gardening

Tens of thousands of hoophouses have been built in the past decade, bringing profound changes to market farming: longer farmers market seasons, winter markets and CSA shares, new crops, higher quality produce. Nearly every successful grower we know has at least one hoophouse and we have never heard anyone say they wish they hadn't spent the money on it. USDA's Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) gave high tunnel grants to 2,300 farmers last year, and is expected to fund the same numbers in 2011 and 2012. But even if you don't get a grant, you can't go wrong with a high tunnel. Most growers find they can pay for the structure within two years; with high-dollar crops such as cut flowers and strawberries, the cost can be recouped in one year. *Growing for Market* has been a leader in covering hoophouse production, and you'll find plenty of resources on our website that will help you get started in this lucrative business.



Hoophouses are not just for salad crops anymore. In an upcoming article, *Growing for Market* will tell you about high tunnel production of perennials such as blueberries (pictured above in full autumn color), raspberries, tree fruits, and peonies.

2. Farmers scale up production

Growers who are in this business for the long haul are looking at mechanizing and increasing production. Three reasons for scaling up: For most farms, net income is about 30-40% of sales, which means you need to grow a lot of produce to make a living. Small-scale, intensive farming is hard on the body, too, so it makes sense to mechanize repetitive tasks. The third reason is demand. As the popularity of local food goes mainstream, there is demand from supermarkets,



hospitals, colleges, and other institutions. If we want to develop local food systems, we need more capacity — and that means more farmers growing more food.

One of the most crucial tasks in scaling up a small farm is choosing the right equipment. This year, GFM will focus intensively on equipment and management systems of farms that have made the jump to 10+ acres of vegetables. We'll also tell you about growers who are selling to institutions and forming marketing cooperatives.

3. Technology helps with planning, marketing

Local food is a passion for many talented people with tech skills, and the past few years have brought a flood of new online tools to help with every aspect of market farming, from planning your crops to getting them sold. These are as sophisticated as big-business technology, but inexpensive. Some of our favorites:

- Agsquared.com is free online recordkeeping software that helps you plan and schedule plantings, keep to-do lists, track yields and sales.
- Goodfoodjobs.com is a place to look for or post sustainable food and farming jobs.
- COG-Pro is an online recordkeeping service for certified-organic farmers.
- Member Assembler, Farmigo, and CSAware are new programs to make CSA signup, payment, and management more efficient.

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Letter from the editor

Dear Grower,

I created this brochure about market farming trends as a way of introducing you to *Growing for Market*, the national magazine for market farmers published 10 times per year. I hope you'll decide to start a subscription. I am so certain you'll find GFM worth your money that I guarantee a full refund if you don't. Why am I so sure? To put it simply, it's because of our writers. *Growing for Market's* writers are all smart, sophisticated market growers, researchers, and other farming practitioners. They have innovative ideas and hard-won experience to share. As growers themselves, they know

the kinds of details you need to be able to put ideas into action. I truly believe that reading GFM will help you make more money and enjoy farming more. But don't just take my word for it. Here's an unsolicited email I received recently from a subscriber, and I believe she summarizes the reasons to read GFM better than I could.

"A farming friend of mine showed me a copy of Growing for Market several years ago and suggested that I subscribe. I looked at your website and selected the electronic edition Full Access Plus. At the time I thought it was expensive, but I liked the issue I saw and thought I'd give it a try. I have a top-of-mind thought when I invest in anything that educates me about my farm that goes something like this: If I get a single \$1,000 idea (either makes me \$1K or saves me \$1K) it is worth doing. And I'd like to find 10 of those opportunities a year. In the few years that I have been a subscriber, Growing for Market has been the source of many of those types of ideas.

"Your articles are precise, engaging, and well written. The authors are brutally honest about their own mistakes and failures and share solid information on how to avoid the same mishaps. There are so many possibilities presented that I find it hard to choose which project(s) to test out on my farm each year. (I'm a CSA vegetable farmer, but the articles on flowers just suck me right in! Maybe in another life.) The ability to do an online search has been very valuable to me. When I have a growing or harvesting problem or I'm not sure about my options I can always find information for guidance, and a few that have saved me some heartache and cash as well. For that reason I make time to read each edition from cover to cover.

"Thanks for a great publication and thanks for all the thousand-dollar ideas!" —Cindy Nawiesniak, Freedom Organix, Illinois

If you're a serious grower like Cindy, I am sure you will also find a *Growing for Market* subscription to be a worthwhile investment. Please subscribe today!

Lynn Byczynski
Editor and Publisher

P.S. You can get GFM online or by mail. Please see the next page for details, or call us at 1-800-307-8949 if you have questions.

Top trends

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4. CSAs keep growing

The past few years have seen two trends in Community Supported Agriculture. The first is that CSA is spreading like wildfire. An increasing number of farmers have made CSA part or all of their markets. And many CSAs have grown to numbers they never imagined when starting out; a few years ago, a CSA with 1,000 members was unusual. Today, many CSAs are quickly growing beyond that level. That's very good news for farmers. The other trend is not so good for farmers: Many non-farm businesses are using the CSA name and model for marketing purposes. This year in GFM, you'll read about some of these programs and how some farmers are turning this competition to their advantage.

5. Farmers markets go mainstream.

The number of farmers markets in the U.S. has increased every year for the past 20 years. Although that's been a great trend for society at large, it's created some problems for farmers. In some places, there are just too many markets for the number of customers, and long-time growers are seeing sales decline. The popularity of farmers markets also has brought new scrutiny to farmers, new regulations, greater insurance demands, and more bureaucracy overall. GFM will keep you informed about market issues nationwide.



continued on inside back cover

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6. Farmers adopt food safety practices.

The Food Safety Modernization Act was signed into law in January with amendments to protect small, direct-market farms. Funding and implementation of the law lie ahead, and small farmers need to stay informed to defend their interests if necessary. Apart from the federal law, however, food safety continues to be a growing concern for both farmers and consumers. Good Agricultural Practices (GAPs) are not mandated by government — yet — but many buyers including some restaurants and supermarkets are requiring farms to get GAPs-certified. This may be the single most important issue you need to stay on top of this year, and GFM will keep you informed.

7. Produce variety expands

People are eating more kinds of fresh produce than ever before. Take spinach. U.S. consumption of fresh spinach has grown 500% since 1980. Or sweet potatoes, which were once eaten only at Thanksgiving and now are showing up everywhere (e.g., sweet potato fries). Crops that were once very minor on most farms are growing in importance and a lot of times they are surprisingly profitable. GFM keeps you informed about food trends and new crops so you don't miss any opportunities.



Coming up in GFM: Growing radicchio and other chicories for restaurants.

8. Demand for fresh produce will increase

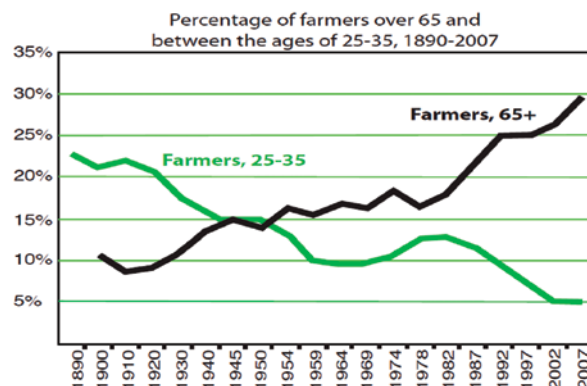
Okay, we admit we've been saying this for a decade now and the sad fact is that fewer than one-third of Americans eat the recommended five servings of fruits and vegetables a day. But there is a drumbeat of information about the importance of produce and it sounds like other drumbeats we've heard before that popularized local food, farmers markets, and organics. We think the time is finally upon us, and we predict that demand for fresh produce is going to grow quickly.

9. Growers put down roots in the city

It used to be that farming was synonymous with living in the country. Not so any more. Mini farms are flourishing in cities everywhere. Many are associated with nonprofit organizations and have a social mission such as providing jobs for youths or people with disabilities. But there are also for-profit farms providing a significant amount of food from small spaces. Urban farms have their own issues, such as lead contamination of soil, zoning laws, and security. Whether you're a city grower or a country grower, GFM covers your issues.

10. Demographics are shifting

Market farming's pioneers are reaching retirement age but, fortunately, there's a big crop of young people coming along behind them. Making the transition has stimulated much creative thinking among veterans and aspiring farmers. Some of the solutions you'll be reading about in GFM include farmers who are retiring into co-housing communities on the farm; donating conservation easements to their land so they can afford to sell it cheaply to young farmers; and creating various profit-sharing arrangements.



Source: National Young Farmers' Coalition

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