

# Direct to Consumer Marketing 101

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# Center for Crop Diversification

## Ag Economics & Horticulture

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# **What can we NOT achieve today?**

- **Thorough individual reflection on strengths and weaknesses**
- **Establish relationships with buyers to assess interest/demand**
- **Provide a simple roadmap for “how to sell to X channel”**
- **Turn you into a master marketer**

# **What CAN we achieve today?**

- **Provide you with a few tools to begin some self-assessment**
- **Make sure you know about key people & resources that can help you**
- **Discuss how to evaluate different markets (and products for those markets)**
- **Identify key variables to consider**

# What we're talking about

**market channel decision making**

**advantages & disadvantages of  
direct-to-consumer channels**

**questions to guide you**

# 5 WAYS TO MARKET CHANNEL DECISION MAKING

## 1. VALUE YOUR TIME

As a farmer & business owner, you should place value on your own time when evaluating market channel opportunities.

## 2. KEEP RECORDS!

Take the time to keep records, even if only for “snapshot” periods, so you can make informed decisions about your business.

## 3. USE THE 6 FACTORS OF PERFORMANCE

Evaluate a channel for its: Weekly sales volume, profit, labor requirement, risk, associated costs, and lifestyle compatibility.

## 4. RANK & COMPARE

Rank each channel for each performance factor (give a a”1" to the best), add them up, and the channel with the lowest total is the best.

## 5. MULTIPLE CHANNEL STRATEGIES

Combine channels to maximize sales. Have at least one “steady” channel and one that is flexible in its volume demand.

# Farmers Market





### **No requirement for sales volume**

Flexible marketing opportunities for inexperienced producers or for trying out new items.



### **No standard pack/grade**

Allows flexibility in quality and the methods of selling.



### **Access to market information**

Can see prices, demand, consumer preferences, and willingness to pay in real-time.



### **Opportunity Creator**

Can establish a customer base with some built-in customers too.

# Advantages



## **Selling face-to-face**

Requires customer service skills & good representation of farm



## **Many small transactions**

Can be a lot, especially if processing credit card transactions



## **Market Schedules**

Travel time, set-up time, early mornings, etc. can be exhausting

# **Disadvantages**



## **Limited vendor space**

May have booth fees, space limitations depending on market

# Farmers Market Price Data



Fact Sheet  
CCD-FS-38  
January 2026

## 3-year Average Weekly Prices at Kentucky Farmers Markets: 2023-2025



Table 1. Seasonal Average Prices for Urban  
Kentucky Farmers Markets, by year 2023-2025

Crop	2023	2024	2025
Apple (lb)	\$3.14	\$3.29	\$3.67
Asparagus (lb)	\$6.75	\$7.85	\$6.29
Beans (lb)	\$3.59	\$4.16	\$3.50
Beets (lb or bunch)	\$3.46	\$3.59	\$3.98
Blueberries (pint)	\$6.00	\$6.39	No Data
Broccoli (lb)	\$4.31	\$4.05	\$3.60
Cabbage (each)	\$3.96	\$3.49	\$4.70
Carrots (lb or bunch)	\$3.05	\$3.54	\$4.16
Corn Sweet (dozen)	\$9.25	\$9.02	\$9.57
Cucumber (each)	\$1.28	\$0.98	\$2.58
Garlic (each)	\$2.99	\$2.95	\$2.92
Greens (lb)	\$5.35	\$7.15	\$4.19
Lettuce (lb or head)	\$8.55	\$7.68	\$4.36
Peppers (each green or 2 banana)	\$1.10	\$1.11	\$2.17
Radishes (bunch)	\$2.69	\$2.71	\$3.20
Strawberries (qt)	\$8.13	\$7.88	\$8.43
Tomatoes (lb)	\$3.75	\$3.66	\$3.91



# Roadside Stand





### **No requirement for sales volume**

Producers set expectations for grade and sales volumes



### **Test market for products**

Offer new/experimental products with low risk



### **Producer sets schedule**

Regular days/hours still important for producer and customer



### **Location Improvement**

Can be a good way to sell product in a higher traffic area

# **Advantages**

# Disadvantages



## **Selling face-to-face**

Customers generally interested in quickly stopping, but still need customer service skills



## **Many small transactions**

Marketing costs of transporting product to roadside stand



## **Location challenges**

Needs to be safe & easy for customers to access; Need property owner permission (may have a fee/permit)

**High prices, opportunities for direct customer interaction**

**Limited sales volume potential**

**Marketing is time intensive**

**Lower barriers to entry**

# Roadside Stands & Farmers Markets

Category	Considerations	Stats
<b>Production and Marketing</b>	Difficulty to Entry	Low
	Time Requirement	High
	Compatible with off-farm employment	Yes
	Row Crop, Tobacco, Livestock	Yes
	Quality and Shelf-life importance	Med-High
<b>Investments</b>	Commitment Level	Low-high
	Management Level	Low-High
	Initial Capital	Low
	Facility Investment	Low
<b>Income and Potential</b>	Prices	High
	Price Stability	High
	Volume	Low
	Potential Sales Volume	Low-Med
	Development Potential	Excellent

# Community Supported Agriculture (CSA)



# Advantages



## Can reduce risk & capital needs

Many customers pay at least partially up-front & provides cash flow before season ; helps estimate product need



## May reduce customer sensitivity to cosmetic defects

Due to farmer relationship, customers care less about aesthetics



## Can help build community around farm brand

Typical CSA customers are very interested in knowing about their farmer/farm operation



## Reduces marketing time during production season

Most marketing happens in off-season; focus on farming during season



## **Extensive out-of-season marketing**

Required each year due to annual member turnover



## **Heavy reliance on word-of-mouth marketing**

Smaller customer demographic; bad interactions have bigger consequences



## **Requires careful crop planning & season extension**

Attracting members requires early and late season offerings and highly diverse product selection

# **Disadvantages**



## **Season-long commitment**

CSA membership agreements are time intensive; reduces price flexibility

# Community Supported Agriculture (CSA)

## Product

Highly Diverse Product Mix (production complexity)

May want credence attributes, want quality

## Price & Volume

Typically higher prices per unit, Paid up Front

Growth means more shares, more commitments

## Promotion

Year-round (recruitment, retention, engagement)

Finding & retaining the right customers

# Helpful CSA Resources



## CSA Marketing Discussion Group

Private group · 7.8K members



+ Invite Share



## CSA (Community Supported Agriculture) in Kentucky

Public group · 12.8K members · AI enabled



+ Invite Share

Discussion Featured Events Media Files People

Write something...

Feeling/activity Check in Poll

Featured Add

### About

CSA in Kentucky is a Facebook group for anyone interested in learning more about CSA (community supported agriculture) offerings in the bluegras... See more

### Public

Anyone can see who's in the group and what they post.

Discussion Guides Featured Members Events Media Files

Write something...

Live video Photo/video Poll

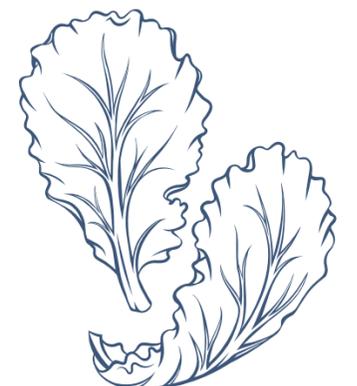
Featured 2 new

Most relevant

### About

This group exists to specifically share and discuss marketing strategies and resources to help CSA farmers sell their product and clarify their ... See more

- Private: Only members can see who's in the group and what they post.
- Visible: Anyone can find this group.



**U-pick**



# Advantages



## **Reduces harvest & handling labor**

Can eliminate time needed to pack, grade, or prepare crops for sales



## **Lower equipment costs**

May not need equipment like cold storage, when customers take it home right then



## **Potential for larger transactions to sell lower-quality product**

Customer experience is part of the product

# Disadvantages



## **Requires good location or superior advertising**

You need people to come to your farm!



## **Liability**

Customers likely to venture to unsupervised areas; need to reduce customer exposure to hazards



## **Staffing/supervising concerns**

Must be on-site to supervise customers; may also affect crop yields due to uneven harvesting

# U-pick resources

[University of Kentucky](#)
[CCD Home](#)
[CCD Crop Profiles](#)
[College of Agriculture, Food and Environment](#)


**COOPERATIVE EXTENSION SERVICE**  
 UNIVERSITY OF KENTUCKY — COLLEGE OF AGRICULTURE

## Agritourism

### Introduction

Agritourism is any commercial enterprise that combines agriculture and tourism on a working farm, ranch, or other agribusiness operation. The Commonwealth of Kentucky defines agritourism as “The act of visiting a working farm or any agricultural, horticultural, or agribusiness operations for the purpose of enjoyment, education or active involvement in the activities of the farm or operation.”

Also referred to as “entertainment farming” or “agritainment,” agritourism is a means of diversifying the farm and adding value (i.e. the farm experience) to products already produced on the farm. This is a hospitality business that requires strong public relations skills. It also necessitates the cooperation of the entire farm family and a willingness to take risks.

### Agritourism Opportunities

The opportunities for agritourism are virtually endless and can take the form of providing accommodations, entertainment opportunities, educational activities, and/or outdoor recreation. A myriad of farm activities, special events, festivals, and demonstrations

sales opportunities exist in the form of U-pick, roadside stands, farm stores, and food services. In addition to standard fare, on-farm sales can include specialty crops and products, as well as agricultural gift and craft items. Providing visitors with something to see, something to do and something to purchase is a sound strategy.

Examples of agritourism opportunities include:

#### Accommodations

- Bed and breakfast
- Farm vacations
- Guest/dude ranch
- Retreat centers

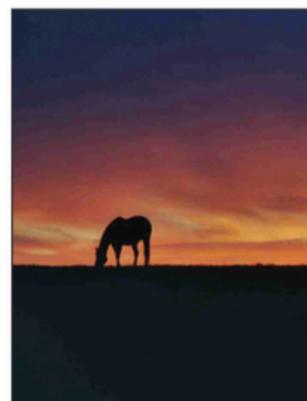
#### Educational/Entertainment

- Agricultural tours
- Barn dances
- Cook-offs/baking contests
- Concerts/musical events
- Cultural/heritage tours
- Exotic/domestic animals
- Farm demonstrations
- Festivals
- Historical re-enactments
- Holiday events (e.g. Christmas, Halloween)

- Host special occasion events (e.g. weddings)
- Horse farm tours
  - Pony rides
- Mazes
  - School tours
- Petting zoos
  - Seasonal festivals
- Winery/distillery tours/events/wine-tasting

#### Outdoor recreation

- Bird-watching
- Bonfires
- Camping
- Fee fishing/hunting
- Horseback riding
- Picnic grounds
- Scenic/nature trails



## Pick-your-own (U-Pick) Marketing

Matt Ernst<sup>1</sup>

### INTRODUCTION

Pick-your-own (PYO), or U-Pick, occurs when farmers “invite the public onto the farm to harvest their own food.”<sup>1</sup> Pick-your-own has existed for nearly a century as a distinct farm marketing channel in the U.S. Early forms of pick-your-own marketing, called self-harvesting, developed during labor shortages or periods of severely low prices and often functioned on an informal or as-needed basis:

Self-harvesting...is sometimes practiced in areas close to towns or cities. In periods when fruits or vegetables are at their best for harvesting, some farmers arrange to have buyers come to the farm and do their own harvesting of berries, peaches, apples and vegetables. The practice saves the farmer considerable labor, although harvesting by inexperienced persons might damage the plants. The consumers often like to do it because it saves money and gives them an outing. (USDA, 1954 Yearbook of Agriculture, p. 27-28)

Pick-your-own farm offerings include fruits and vegetables, as well as “U-Cut” flowers, Christmas trees and other ornamental crops. Pick-your-own was once the main reason for consumers to visit a farm; it is now more often one activity out of many on-farm agritourism activities. Farms have also offered activities incorporating principles of PYO, such as “cut your own bouquets” of cut flowers, on-farm classes that include harvesting and arranging herbs and ornamentals, and using products harvested on the farm to make crafts, like Christmas wreaths.



Photo by Zen Chung, Pexels.com

...but demand considerable harvest labor per acre are especially suited for PYO marketing in Kentucky.

These include tree fruits, berries, tomatoes, beans and pumpkins. U-Cut Christmas trees also continue, but many tree farms offer customers the option of se-



# On-farm retail





### **No transportation costs**

Reduces marketing costs (no need for fuel or transportation)



### **No standard pack/grade**

But do not overlook product presentation and attractiveness



### **Experiential buying**

Creates destination for customers, adding value over a typical retail transaction



### **Provides credibility for “locally grown”**

Establishes immediate rapport with customers

# **Advantages**



## **Selling face-to-face**

People are hard.



## **Stretched boundaries**

Customers may show up on days/hours the store is not open- how will you handle it?



## **Location challenges**

Good location is VITAL- can be overcome with good marketing, but its difficult

# **Disadvantages**



## **Can be capital intensive to develop**

Depending on what kind of farm retail store you want



## **Liability**

Assess risk and develop a risk management plan; talk to your insurance agent

**Low-Medium Potential Volume**

**Can be time-intensive**

**On-farm retail**

Category	Considerations	Stats
<b>Production and Marketing</b>	Difficulty to Entry	Low-Med
	Time Requirement	Med-High
	Compatible with off-farm employment	Yes
	Row Crop, Tobacco, Livestock	Yes
	Quality and Shelf-life importance	Med
<b>Investments</b>	Commitment Level	Low
	Management Level	Med
	Initial Capital	Low-Med
	Facility Investment	Low
<b>Income and Potential</b>	Prices	Med-High
	Price Stability	High
	Volume	Low
	Potential Sales Volume	Low-Med
	Development Potential	Good-Excellent

# On-farm retail resources



## Farm Retail (Part 1): Small Scale

CCD UKY • 231 views • 2 months ago



## Farm Retail (Part 2): Mid-Scale

CCD UKY • 224 views • 2 months ago



## Farm Retail (Part 3): Large Scale

CCD UKY • 450 views • 2 months ago

@ccduky on YouTube

## Become a Certified Farm Market

The Certified Farm Market (CFM) program is a directory of farm market operations that are committed to providing customers with locally grown, quality products, and service. Participating markets adhere to program requirements and have developed a reputation for meeting the highest standards of quality, freshness, and market appeal set forth by Kentucky Farm Bureau, an industry leader with 100 years of agriculture experience.

[ENROLL A MARKET](#)



# Online Sales



# Advantages



## **Can have low overhead costs**

No need for a storefront. Many online platforms are pay-per-transaction, not upfront payment.



## **Provide convenience for customers**

Can make you competitive with other grocery options.



## **Can be flexible for you and customers**

Does not have to include shipping if that doesn't work for your business/time.

# Disadvantages



## **Problem-solving delivery/pick-up**

Are you a logistics person?



## **Learning curve of an online platform**

Can be a challenge- but there is some good training out there for popular platforms



## **Customer service for any problems**

Need to be “on call” for issues

# GUIDING QUESTIONS

## Customer Characteristics, Values & Preferences

**Producers considering a direct marketing channel should ask themselves questions that help identify the consumer demand for their products. Such questions include:**

- » Where are your customers or potential customers located?
- » Where or how far are they willing to travel to purchase products?
- » Where do they currently shop for similar products?
- » How frequently do they purchase similar products?
- » How much product do they typically purchase at one time?
- » How much do they value convenience? How convenient will it be for customers to purchase through a particular market channel?
- » How much do they value an experience on the farm?
- » How much are they willing to pay for products with various characteristics?
- » Would customers value products with “organic,” “locally grown” or other niche characteristics?
- » Which methods of communication will be most likely to effectively reach potential customers?

## GUIDING QUESTIONS

# Product

# Characteristics

**Questions producers should ask themselves about their products related to choosing a direct marketing channel include:**

- » How much product do you plan to have available for market?
- » Are you prepared to supply an appropriate quantity of products for the market?
- » Are you able to employ season-extension techniques?
- » What will it take to harvest and prepare the products for the market?
- » Is it possible for customers to harvest the products themselves through U-Pick?
- » Are the products easily transportable?
- » What, if any, special equipment is needed to transport or market the products?
- » What, if any, special labor skills are needed in transport or marketing?
- » Are there any special regulatory requirements for marketing your products through specific channels? If so, can you meet those requirements?

## GUIDING QUESTIONS

# Land

### Questions producers should ask themselves about their land resources related to choosing a direct marketing channel include:

- » Where/how far is your operation located in relation to your target customers?
- » Is your operation easily accessible to customers (easy to find, good roads, etc.)?
- » What facilities or equipment do you have available for use in marketing?
- » Does your farm match the image you want customers to have of your business?
- » Is your farm aesthetically pleasing?
- » Do you have adequate space for customer parking?
- » Are there any extraordinary safety issues that would increase risk of inviting customers to the farm (ponds, farm equipment traffic, etc.)?
- » Are you comfortable taking on the risk of having customers visit the farm?
- » Are you able to offer an experience at the farm?

## Questions producers should ask themselves about their labor resources related to choosing a direct marketing channel include:

- » How much labor and which skills are required for the direct marketing channel(s) being considered?
- » How much time is available from existing labor sources (family and hired labor)?
- » What skills are possessed by available labor related to production, marketing and customer service?
- » What are the costs of available labor?
- » Which skills need to be sought from other labor sources?
- » If additional labor is needed, what is the expected cost?

**GUIDING QUESTIONS**

**Labor**

## Questions producers should ask themselves about their capital resources related to choosing a direct marketing channel include:

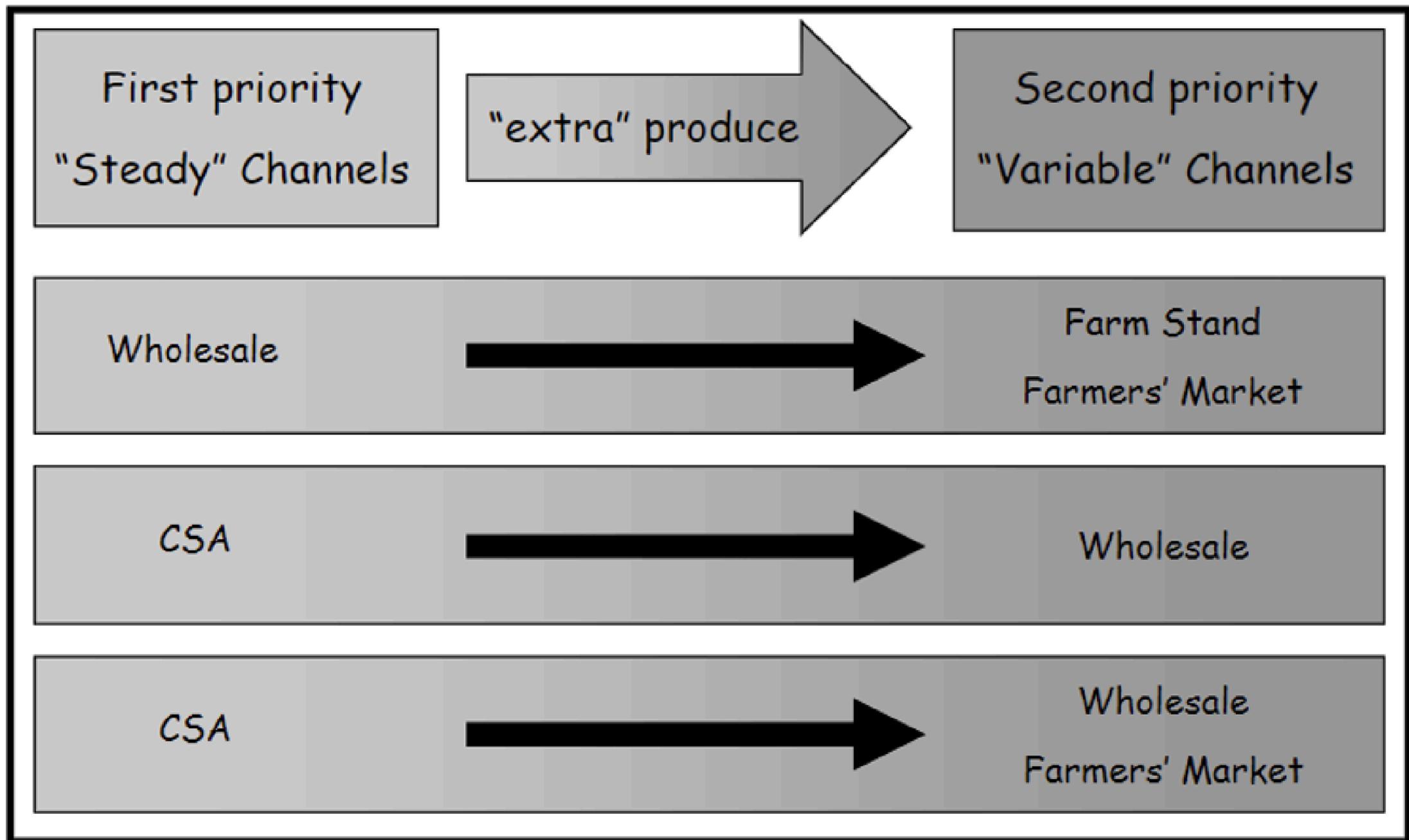
- » Which types of infrastructure and/or equipment are necessary for the direct marketing channel(s) being considered and how much is the total estimated cost?
- » Which type of marketing (communication/advertising) will be needed to initially reach out to potential customers and how much is it estimated to cost?
- » How much capital do you have or have access to for necessary infrastructure, equipment and marketing expenses?

Producers should compare answers to these questions related to available resources to the characteristics, advantages and disadvantages of the various market channels.

## GUIDING QUESTIONS

# Capital

# combining market channels



**Figure 3 : Examples of marketing channel combination strategies.**



University of Kentucky  
College of Agriculture,  
Food and Environment  
*Cooperative Extension Service*

Center for Crop Diversification Fact Sheet

CCD-FS-2

# What to Think About Before You Plant

*Marketing Considerations for Kentucky Specialty Crop Growers*

Tim Woods, Extension Professor, Agricultural Economics  
Matt Ernst, Independent Writer, Center for Crop Diversification

## Introduction

Commercial fruit and vegetable production in Kentucky increased from \$15 million in farm sales in 1997 to more than \$30 million in 2011. Transition from tobacco production spurred the growth of Kentucky's commercial produce industry in the early 2000s.



This publication poses questions that can benefit farmers who are considering planting a new crop. Long-time commercial farmers and diversifying tobacco producers, as well as those newer to farming will find the questions, considerations, and

helpful resource



**key takeaways**

## **EXPANDING YOUR MARKET**

### **STRENGTHS & WEAKNESSES**

- **what energizes and drains you?**
- **what can you outsource?**

### **OPPORTUNITY COSTS OF NEW MARKETS**

- **what do you need to give up to take on a new market and what will that “cost” you?**

### **WILL YOU HAVE TO HIRE HELP?**

- **do you have procedures for optimizing their time?**

## Sources

**SELLING DIRECTLY TO RESTAURANTS AND RETAILERS BY GAIL FEENSTRA, JERI OHMART, AND DAVID CHANEY. UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA SUSTAINABLE AGRICULTURE RESEARCH AND EDUCATION PROGRAM (2003).**

**GUIDE TO MARKET CHANNEL SELECTION: HOW TO SELL THROUGH WHOLESALE & DIRECT MARKETING CHANNELS. TOMPKINS COUNTY COOPERATIVE EXTENSION, CORNELL UNIVERSITY (2010).**

**CHOOSING DIRECT MARKETING CHANNELS FOR AGRICULTURAL PRODUCTS. MEGAN L. BUNCH AND MATTHEW D. ERNST. UNIVERSITY OF TENNESSEE CENTER FOR PROFITABLE AGRICULTURE.**

**CORNELL SMALL FARMS PROGRAM, GUIDE TO FARMING: 26: DIRECT MARKETING OPTIONS**

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# Reach out!

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