

Frequently Asked Questions:

1. *I want to grow _____ and need numbers to see if I can make a go of it.*

In several states, ag economists have teamed with vegetable specialists to create crop enterprise budgets. Many of these are now available over the internet. Extension publications from many land-grant universities are accessible over the internet at E-answers <http://www.e-answersonline.org/> where you can search using the key words "vegetable crop budgets" or "vegetable enterprise budgets" or "cost of production".

For Nebraska conditions, the budgets from Kansas State University are a good place to start. Be sure to adjust the numbers to correctly represent your costs and look at each report to see what expenses were included and what were left out. For example, cooling costs are often not included, yet these are essential for wholesale marketing of fresh produce. Go to <http://www.oznet.ksu.edu/library/> for Kansas State Extension publications. Look under "Crops-Other" or use the search feature to go to specific crops.

A resource I particularly recommend are the crop spreadsheets prepared by the University of Kentucky because they can be downloaded to your computer in either Excel or Quattro format and modified to reflect your costs and returns. <http://www.uky.edu/Agriculture/AgriculturalEconomics/pubs/software/baledhortbugetinstr495.html>

Wholesale prices for vegetables, culinary herbs, and cut flowers/ornamentals are available through USDA Agricultural Marketing Service (AMS) wholesale terminal market reports. <http://www.ams.usda.gov/fv/mncs/terminal.htm> For Nebraska, Chicago or St. Louis prices are worth checking. Prices are listed FOB and reflect the price that wholesale buyers are paying at the terminal market, not what the grower receives. For wholesale prices growers received at the shipping point, see the FOB shipping point reports. Be sure to read carefully the description of each report to understand what the numbers represent.

2. *I want to grow/am growing _____ and need to know where to market it. Should I just talk to grocery stores and restaurants?*

You should decide what type of market you want to participate in – wholesale to groceries and supermarkets, wholesale to restaurants or food service facilities, retail on-farm sales, retail at farmers' markets, Internet or corporate gift-packs, etc. Each market channel has advantages and disadvantages. An overview of opportunities can be reviewed in the University of Nebraska NebFact NF404, "Income Generation Using Alternative Crops" available on the Internet at <http://ianrpubs.unl.edu/horticulture/nf404.htm> or from Nebraska County Extension offices.

3. I want to grow _____. How do you grow it?

First checking to see what information is available through Nebraska Cooperative Extension <http://ianrpubs.unl.edu/horticulture> and the public library. Other extension information is available through E-answers, <http://www.e-answersonline.org/> Always be aware of the publication date or revision date of material you read. Some old material is still useful, while in other cases such as pesticides and commercial cultivars , only the most current information is valid.

An excellent way to learn about production and marketing of crops is to attend state, regional, or national conferences. Taking the time and devoting some financial resources to attend conferences will be well spent. Conference sessions provide factual details concerning production and marketing. Other growers and trade show exhibitors will be resources you will want to contact later as your plans develop. Getting multiple perspectives on your proposed enterprise is important. The Great Plains Regional Vegetable Conference is held in early January each year in St. Joseph, Missouri. The Nebraska Sustainable Agriculture Society often includes specialty crop production and marketing sessions in its annual meeting, typically held in late February. Other important nearby vegetable conferences are in Michigan, Iowa, and Oklahoma. Several states also hold conferences or workshops specifically on direct marketing. Ask your local extension educator or state horticulture specialists to help you obtain information on future conferences and workshops.

A third suggestion is to subscribe to appropriate trade magazines or bulletins such as American Vegetable Grower and Growing for Market. These are generally less than \$50/year. A feature of the trade publications is the paid and classified advertisements allow you to become familiar with the specialized equipment used by successful growers. Used equipment is always available and is recommended for those beginning a new enterprise.