

# Restaurants



## **MARKETING IS AN ESSENTIAL PART IN THE SUCCESS OF A SMALL FARMER GROWING FRUITS AND VEGETABLES.**

Although many people who join the farming industry are drawn to the production and growing tasks, the farm will have no sustainable success without marketing.

**Marketing is what sets apart some small operations from simply being a hobby.**

This marketing publication is intended to be used as a starting point for small fruit and vegetable farmers in Northwest Florida. It will help these individuals identify different steps that need to be taken in order for them to have the opportunity to pursue marketing in new, emerging, or traditional marketing channels.

# RESTAURANTS

Restaurants are some of the most lucrative markets for fresh produce growers but may also be one of the most challenging. The key to successfully selling produce to restaurants is to develop and maintain positive relationships with key players at each restaurant: chefs, buyers and managers. Generally, locally owned restaurants are more accepting of locally grown produce since they have greater control over their menu items. Customers of these restaurants respond favorably to seeing “locally grown produce” highlighted on the menu. Many of these restaurants will not need large volumes of produce and they will value freshness and uniqueness that local growers can provide.

## CHECKLIST

*Requirements and recommendations for starting a roadside stand*

**FOLLOW FOOD SAFETY PRACTICES**

**COOL PRODUCT DURING STORAGE AND DELIVERY**

**MAINTAIN POSITIVE RELATIONSHIPS  
WITH RESTAURANT PERSONNEL**

**UNDERSTAND PRICING**

**ALWAYS BE PROFESSIONAL**

**DEVELOP A NICHE**



## **FOLLOW FOOD SAFETY PRACTICES**

Foodborne illnesses are a serious issue that requires the attention of growers and buyers. Considering the complexity of the food system, there is potential for widespread foodborne illnesses to occur because of contaminated produce. Prevention of contamination is the key to reducing the risk of human pathogens appearing on fresh produce. Food safety plans are required to sell produce to other markets but are not required for most restaurants that buy from local growers. However, food safety plans are not difficult to make and will help prevent foodborne illnesses. This is extremely important for farmers who sell directly to restaurants since your goal should be to establish and maintain a good relationship with the owners, chefs, and buyers. (<http://bit.ly/1sdCTEY>).

## **STORAGE/DELIVERY COOLING**

Produce must be cooled, stored, and delivered appropriately to maximize the shelf life. This can be a difficult task for small growers because of the lack of essential equipment such as a refrigerated truck. It is important for these growers to choose lower maintenance crops that have lower respiration rates. Utilizing shade trees and canopy covered trailers, removing field heat without delay, and packing with crushed ice are some simple techniques that can be used to prevent the product from getting too warm. Good records must be kept to monitor the temperature of the product from harvest to delivery.

## **MAINTAIN RELATIONSHIPS**

Developing friendly relationships with chefs, restaurant owners, managers and others involved with buying produce for restaurants is critical. Host farm visits, farm demonstrations, or take sample produce to the restaurant for the restaurateurs to see your farms value. It is important to educate your buyers about the effort involved in production, harvest and preparation. This may lead to getting featured on a menu or having a display at a restaurant, which makes customers aware of the local produce being served. It is important that the grower sets their product apart from the produce received into the restaurant through distributors and other traditional markets. Once relationships have been established, coordinate with the restaurateur to plant what is desired for their upcoming menus.



## UNDERSTAND PRICING

Understand the local economy. Does the local economy have components based upon seasonality? If so, production quantity should mimic seasonal shifts in demand. It is advantageous to have multiple customers in the same area so that the delivery is worth the trip. Maintaining a local customer base will save both time and money. Focus special or unique produce products toward buyers that appreciate quality and novelty. Growers should strive to sell their product at a price that is sustainable for the farm's future operation. Set prices based on the cost of production and the uniqueness of the product. Utilize marketing strategies that emphasize freshness, local production, and the farm's production story to command the premium needed to be profitable. Some specialty chefs recognize quality and pay a premium to add quality and a story to their menu.

## DEVELOP A NICHE

Many growers believe it is important to develop a niche market. Grow and offer fruits, vegetables, or varieties that are not readily available through traditional wholesale distributors. It is good to grow different fruit and vegetable varieties and evaluate their marketability to restaurateurs. Brand development will often have chefs seeking out a specific grower's produce. Recognize that a small local farm will never be able to compete with wholesale produce suppliers on their terms. Niche growers have to define their own terms by offering a product that is fresher and more unique than the large wholesale entities can provide.

**FOR MORE INFORMATION  
REGARDING MARKETING  
FRESH VEGETABLES  
AND FRUIT, CONTACT  
YOUR LOCAL UF/IFAS  
EXTENSION AGENT.**



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