



BUILDING YOUR FARM

Six Keys for a Successful Operation

GROWING
FARMERS

HOW DO YOU PICK A FARM?

When we started farming we had no idea what we were doing. **We thought if we buy land we can make it a farm, right?** Well, yes and no. Sure it can be a farm, but will it have the features and attributes that allow you to easily turn it into a profitable, sustainable venture? As we talk to farmers all around the world, there are six attributes which come up again and again as key components for success of a farm.





ACCESS



Farms are usually rural, which can mean limited access to needed utilities and infrastructure. As our farm scaled, we started to have tractor trailers deliver compost and growing supplies. Our farm was on a main route and those tractor trailers often caused traffic issues.

When we wanted to change our compressors to 3 phase power, as it's much more efficient, it would have cost twenty thousand dollars to bring it several miles from the closest access point. Several resources your farm might need access to might be:

Having roads rated for large delivery trucks year round is important. In the spring, many rural roads are posted against large trucks. This might limit bringing in necessary supplies. In addition, having bridges that are rated for large trucks are important as well. Also, think about where you are going to get deliveries. On our farm, our driveway was too steep and tight for tractor trailers to be on or turn around at the top, so we had to unload pallets on a busy road and almost caused an accident or two!

ROADS & DELIVERY ZONES

UTILITIES

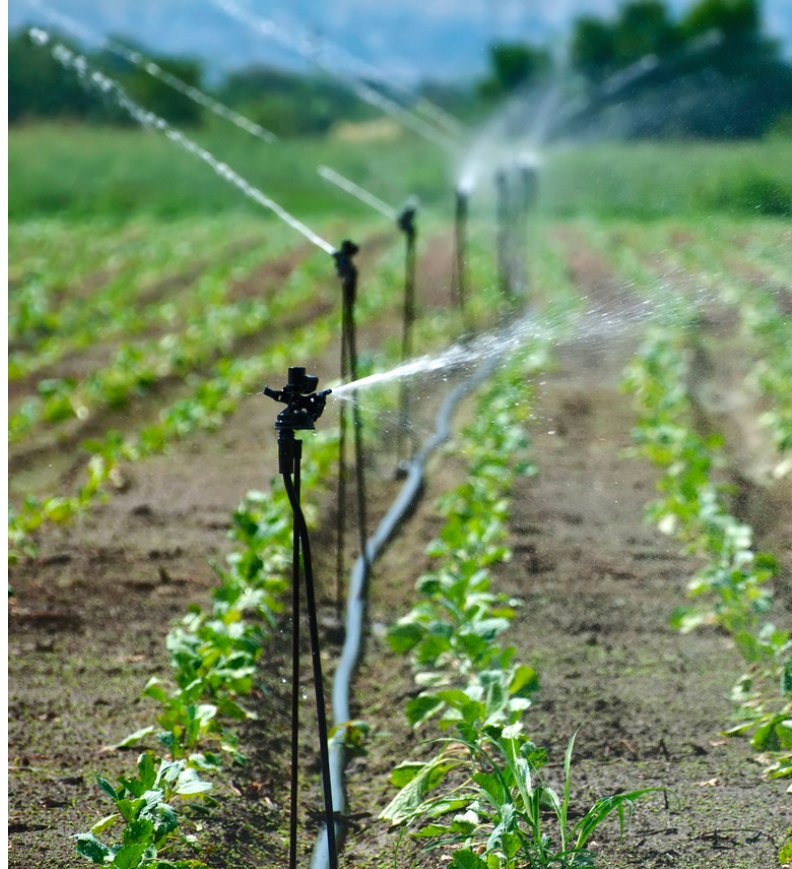
Utilities are another important consideration. As you set up your farm, you might want to be near hookups to natural gas, 3 phase power, or a city water supply. Having these available can make the difference in being able to set up a farm that works effectively or having to constantly be hobbled by systems that don't meet your needs.



WATER



Water is the lifeblood of agriculture. From growing crops and livestock to helping with processing and sanitation, water is essential for every farm. It's absolutely necessary for you to thoroughly check out the water capacity for a property before you buy. Look at the problems that the western states are experiencing now with drought!



In our area, the water situation is so bad that some homeowners actually haul their water with a truck and trailer. Every week or so they go to town and get 1000 gallons. Now try to imagine if you are farming. Just an acre inch of water (the amount of water needed to put down an inch on an acre) is 27,000 gallons. Try hauling that each week. A lactating cow can drink between 30 and 50 gallons of water each day!





There can be many sources of water on a property including wells, ponds, springs, streams, rainwater capture and city water.

Knowing the capacity of your sources and the consistency is important. For example, on a farm we were on, there was a great well, pumping 20 gallons a minute. At least when they drilled in a wet January that was the case. During a dry August, when we were trying to wash vegetables and keep crops and animals alive, it would barely put out 3 gallons per minute.

Knowing the catchment capacity of your watershed is important, as well as where to locate the infrastructure to store water. Your goal is high enough in the landscape to allow gravity flow, but low enough to capture sufficient water to run your farm.

You can find out the average rainfall for your area here: <http://www.usclimatedata.com/>





MARKETS

Selling your Product



When we farmed in Upstate NY, we were thirty minutes from two communities of fifty thousand plus and ninety minutes from a metro area of one million plus. These were also upscale communities that were looking for the types of products that we were producing.

If you are selling commodity crops such as grain to the elevator, milk to a cooperative, or even wholesale medicinal herbs, being near a large population center may not be as important. However, it may increase trucking fees which are eating into your profits.

Maybe you are looking to sell off-farm at farmers markets or through a delivery system. Being an hour or two, or even three, from markets may be doable. I always enjoyed the long drives which afforded me the opportunity to make business calls or listen to my audiobooks and podcasts. However, if you forget a case on the farm for an important customer, or if you are trying to build traffic to on farm events, being that far removed will call for a slow cash register.




SOIL

4




Although many regenerative experts would have you believe, “Oh, you can make great soil out of bedrock, just add a few coffee grounds and worm castings,” here’s the truth: that takes years and thousands of truckloads of organic matter to pull that off. It’s always better to start with good soil, as your goal is to start making money on your farm immediately. There are three main types of soil (and hundreds of combinations) out there:



Silt soils are pretty great. They hold water and nutrients relatively well


and are easy to work. Many of the world’s most fertile areas are based on silt soils.

A few downsides are the stickiness when wet, ease with which they erode, and frequent proximity to rivers which could cause flooding.



Sandy soils are known for their ease of working with machinery although they can be droughty.

Unfortunately they leach (or lose) nutrient quickly because their large particle size which allow nutrients to wash out easily. Some annual crops, such as carrots and sweet potatoes, really do well in sandy soils.



Clay soils can be pretty challenging and are many farmer’s worst nightmare.

Although they can hold nutrients well because of their high Cation Exchange Capacity (CEC), they are hard to work for annual crops such as vegetables and grains. Many times clay soils require drainage tile or they will hold too much water, limiting access and delaying planting. Clay soils are best suited to perennial cropping and pasture.

All soil types can be improved by adding organic matter. It will loosen up clay soils and increase the water capacity of sands. You can see the official USDA soil classification and rankings on the easy to use Web Soil Survey. It is available [Here](#)



WEATHER




There's an old saying,
**"farming was hard, and
then God added the
weather."**

From winter storms
snowing you in, to blistering,
dry summer droughts, to
tornadoes and hail storms,
the weather is no joke!



As you pick a location to farm, it's important to be aware of
the different characteristics of the area. Believe it or not,
weather can vary widely in just 15 or 20 miles.





For example, our farm in upstate NY was to the east of a mountain range. It blocked, or at least slowed down, many major weather events, reducing the occurrence of summer hail storms and the amount of snow we usually got each year.

This gave us an advantage over farms just 20 miles to the south, which suffered from higher occurrences of heavy weather events.



Where we are located in Ohio now, the weather 15 miles north of us is known for its tornadoes and straight-line winds, while we live in a protected pocket.

How do you find out the weather characteristics of an area?

Look online at the area's history. Talk to the locals at the diner and farmers at the feed store. Does everyone own a snow blower? Good chance the snow is no joke. Are their cacti growing in the fields? It's probably hot and dry.



You can look up basic weather information [HERE](#)



COMMUNITY

6

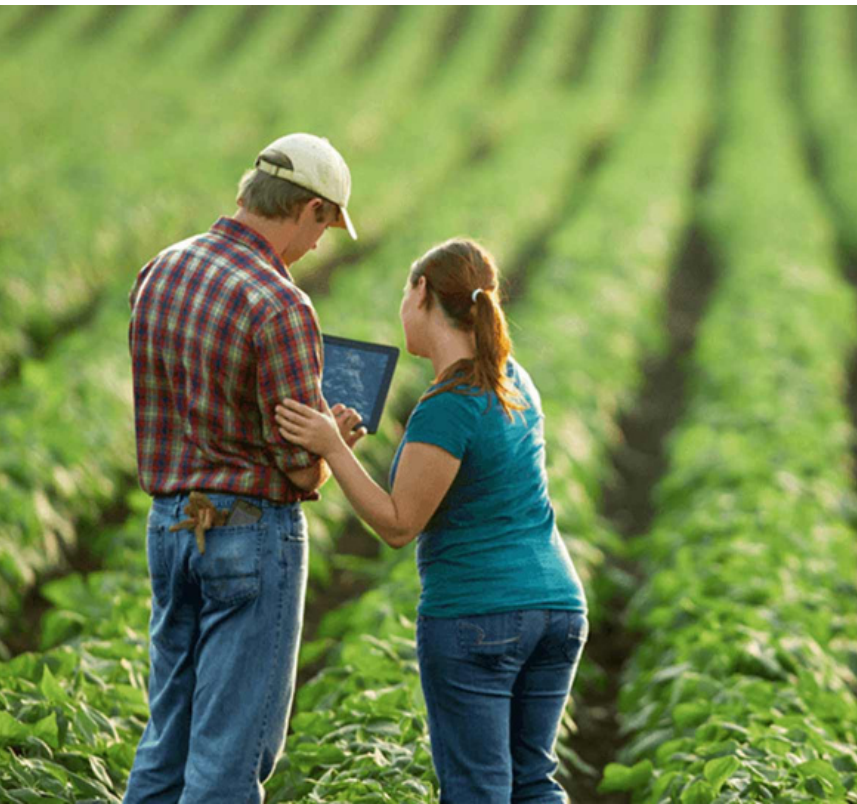
Being a part of a caring farming community is incredibly important for the long-term viability and success of a farm. From knowing who to have fix your equipment, who can come drive your fence posts, or who might know the history of your farm and where that old, lost spring is, it's incredibly important for any new farm.



Don't come in and tell all your neighbors how you are going to "heal" the land and how they are poisoning the water supply. Even if you move into a farming community that doesn't seem to share your values, you still want to develop good relationships with community members as they are your support network.



Stop in and throw a few bales with the neighbor when they are trying to beat the rain storm. Spend some time chatting at the local diner. Purchase your supplies at the local feed store and chat up the clerks.



It is good, however, if you can move into a community where similar agriculture is being done.

Having the ability to group order supplies for lower prices, share high priced equipment or grab an extra roll of rowcover or fencing can be an invaluable asset.

Rarely will you find a farm that meets all of the requirements that you desire. Spend the time to figure out what you need, identify a property that meets most of those, and then thoroughly vet the land.

Sometimes bringing in an outside expert to look over the property is money well spent because a farm is probably the largest purchase you will make in your business.

Starting with the right property is key to your success.

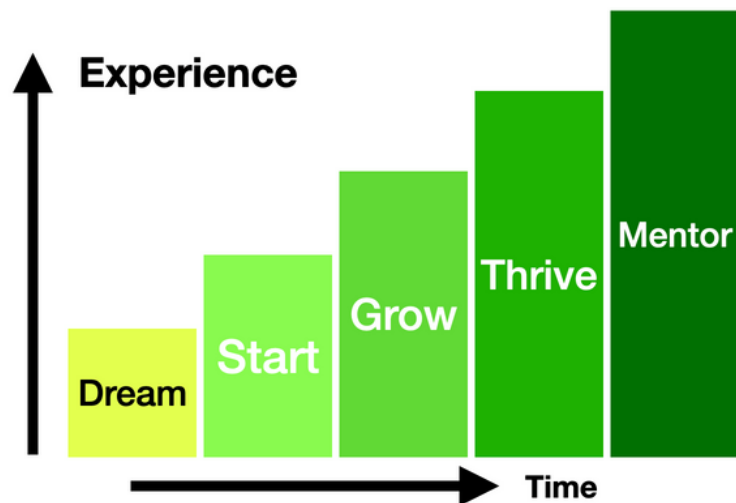


WANT TO LEARN MORE?

Growing Farmers has a huge wealth of courses and resources for your farming journey!

Not sure what resources you need? Take our free assessment to find out what stage you're at!

[Take Assessment!](#)



OUR DEDICATION TO FARMING EDUCATION



FREE FARMER STORIES



THRIVING FARMER
PODCAST