

Benefits of Selling Farm Products Directly to Consumers

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As Florida's population continues to grow, there's little doubt many newcomers arriving from other states are accustomed to buying products from local farmers.

As a result, there are increasing numbers of potential customers you can reach directly, and numerous ways you can reach them—farmers' markets, U-pick sales, roadside or farm stands, Internet sales, community supported agriculture programs, local restaurants and grocers, and agritourism.

Selling products directly to consumers requires time, effort, "people skills" and some marketing know-how, but it can be a rewarding option.

Here are 10 good reasons why a producer should consider direct sales:

1. **Increasing your profits**
When you sell produce to wholesalers, typically they set the price you'll receive, in effect determining your profit margin. In direct sales you set the price, and you may be able to achieve a higher profit margin.
2. **Bridging the gap**
Direct sales help urban and suburban communities connect with rural residents. You'll be helping your neighbors, which potentially increases their understanding and appreciation of farming and rural life.
3. **Gaining satisfaction**
You'll feel good about providing healthy, fresh food products to your own community.
4. **Meeting a demand**
Many consumers prefer local food and will pay a premium price to obtain it.
5. **Building your business**
By consistently offering quality products you'll build a loyal customer base; in turn, prices and sales for your products will become more stable.

6. Providing family employment
Because direct sales don't require you to harvest your entire crop at once, you can provide steady employment for family members.
7. Increasing your visibility
When nearby residents, restaurants and grocers buy directly from you, it demonstrates that you're important to the local economy. This can lead to greater support from local and state government.
8. Diversifying your marketing
When you have multiple marketing strategies you're not "putting all your eggs in one basket," so you enhance your economic viability.
9. Diversifying your products
Because you'll speak directly to consumers you can learn their needs. This creates opportunities for you to offer value-added products or new crops to an eager market.
10. Keeping your farm
The bottom line is, direct sales can improve your chances of staying in business and providing for your family.

Sound good? You can learn more about direct sales, marketing, local food systems, Florida rules and regulations and many related topics at the Small Farms and Alternative Enterprises Web site, <http://smallfarms.ifas.ufl.edu/>.

On Aug. 1-2, 2009, the first Florida Small Farms and Alternative Enterprises Conference will be held at Osceola Heritage Park in Kissimmee. The event will feature exhibitors, educational sessions and more. All Florida farmers are invited to attend. Visit the conference Web site at <http://smallfarms.ifas.ufl.edu/floridasmallfarmsconference/index.htm>. For information on conference sponsorship or being an exhibitor, contact Bob Hochmuth, 386-362-1725 or bobhoch@ufl.edu.

Photo: A customer buys vegetables at the weekly farmers' market in downtown Gainesville. Direct sales to consumers can offer farmers new opportunities to earn income, diversify their operations, increase visibility and build a sense of community. Photo by Tyler Jones.

