



Tiny vegetables, big dreams.
Farm Business Plan, March 2012

PRODUCTION STRATEGY

Refer to attached excel files: vegetablelist.xls and plantingplan.xls for detailed production information. These documents have all of my production information organized by vegetable including seed information, planting dates and amounts, and expected harvest timelines. My estimates are based on my best educated guess as to when things will happen.

I have numbered each of the weeks of the season starting with the first week of April (week #1) and finishing with the last week of October (week #31.) The last frost for this area in the spring is normally around May 21 and the first frost is typically around September 26. My planting and harvest schedule was created with these in mind. Expected harvest dates have not yet been included on this calendar, but I will be making an expected harvest date calendar this month.

A few notes about production:

Organic Certification

Originally I had planned to certify with Mapleton's, but have decided to certify independently of them this year, but with the same company: EcoCert. I spoke with Simon Jacques (the Ontario Sales Representative for EcoCert, and the inspector who does Mapleton's organic certification) and he recommended this option because there is a 15-month pre-certification period. I can apply for certification this year and by next year be fully certified. Then, when I change locations in a few seasons, there will not be a waiting period for my certification, provided that the new land meets all eligibility requirements. The certification will follow the business.

Because of who I am selling to, certification is necessary in order to distinguish myself in the market and reassure my customers. However, I intend to farm beyond current organic certification standards.

Labour

I will try to keep my workweek to 60 hours this year (or 6 ten hour days) including all administrative tasks. This might increase during peak season closer to 70 hours per week, but I will try to regulate this as best I can. I intend to take at least one day per week off for non-farm-related activities whenever possible. I do not intend to pay myself the equivalent of an hourly wage this year – it will be something to consider in the future.

I will budget time as best I can to ensure that I am not planning for more activities than is physically possible. I am planning potential work bees when I invite friends and family out to the farm to help me tackle some big tasks. I will also be sure to ask people to help when I need it – with as much warning as possible.

It will be very important that I maintain good records this year as to how my time is spent. At the end of this season (or whenever necessary) I will reassess and make any necessary changes.

Irrigation

This is an area that I am worried about. My water source is not close to my fields. However, Martin is confident that we can make arrangements work, so I will work with him to figure out a solution very quickly in the spring. I intend to irrigate with low-pressure sprinklers and/or soaker hoses. This will be dependent on the solution to the distance from the water source.

Pest/Weed/Disease management

The primary method of pest control will be row cover. I will be using ProtekNet whenever possible (i.e. when not being used for heavy frost protection/heat) as opposed to traditional row cover because of its durability and because it does not heat crops as much traditional row cover. I have not farmed in this area before, so I am not sure what other pests and diseases I might encounter. I will monitor crops closely and react as necessary with organic methods of pest control. Some methods that I will experiment with include compost teas to prevent fungal disease (i.e. powdery mildew) and inter-planting/companion planting to encourage beneficial insects and plant behaviours.

The land that I will be growing seems to have its weeds fairly well-managed. Cover cropping and my own successful weed management will ensure that this is the way it stays. Weed control will be done manually – hand tools and hands. I will also use black mulch for some crops for weed control and warmth.

Greenhouse

I am going to be building a small 16' wide by 16' or 24' long greenhouse to be heated by an electric or propane heater this spring. I will do my starts in soil blocks in this greenhouse this year. I will make my own potting mix.

If my greenhouse is delayed in construction, I will be starting my first seedlings in trays in my apartment. I have a south-facing window, and will keep them warm and lit. This is a *very* back-up plan, but it exists.

Record-keeping

It is going to be very important that I keep accurate records this year. The area, the land, and the business are all new – I need to make sure I am recording my yields, time spent on each crop, and all other pertinent information. This will help guide my future planning so that my planning is not always based on educated guesses.

Harvest

I have not yet put together my harvest calendar. I will be working on a framework for this over the next couple of weeks, but it is more difficult to predict as my vegetables are all harvested to order, except for the farmers market. I will put together a schedule of approximately when things should be available. This will be helpful when communicating with restaurant customers, as well as for predicting income.

Field Map

I am in the process of creating my field map, though it will be a very flexible document.