

DIRECT MARKETING STRATEGIES

U-PICK

FACT
SHEET
3.10



U-Picks are operations where the customer comes to the farm and harvests their own products for purchase. U-Picks are a type of Agritourism, a venture that is generally gaining in popularity and revenue potential. (See *Fact Sheet 3.3 Agritourism for more information*). Customers may be drawn to U-Picks partially for potentially reduced prices (since the farmer is not paying to harvest or transport the products), but generally customers are attracted to the experience of being on the farm.

DESIGN CONSIDERATIONS & EQUIPMENT NEEDS

A U-Pick varies significantly from a standard farm, and preparing the site will be necessary for a successful venture. Some things you'll need to consider include:

Posted Policies & Rules

When operating a U-Pick operation, it is important to set clear expectations for U-Pick customers. These expectations ought to be clearly stated on your farm website and posted at the main entrance to your U-Pick operation. As a U-Pick operator, you will need to direct people to picking supplies (containers, harvest tools), areas to pick (and not to pick!), handwashing stations and clearly explain food safety expectations (handwashing, where to put used containers), sampling policies, monitoring of children, and pet policies, etc.

Bathrooms

Have a plan for customers needing to use the bathroom while at your site and a handwashing station with potable water, soap, single use paper towels, and waste bins. Consult with your city or county clerk if you plan to build a permanent bathroom structure. Many U-Picks rent port-a-potties and

handwashing stations for the height of the season. Make sure to account for this expense when making your season budget.

Parking

Clearly designated and ample parking lots near to or on the property will be necessary for the success of your U-pick. Depending on your site location, this may take some conversations with your neighbors to enact a plan that works well for everyone. Zoning regulations may affect your parking options. (See *Fact Sheet 1.4 Registering with Government Entities for more information*).

Sales Area & Supplies

Unless you are selling produce by the flat or individual item, you will need at least one legal for trade scale and a clearly designated area to pay before leaving, plus the staff for the registers or clearly posted directions and a self-pay station. Many U-Picks also have fencing (permanent or temporary) surrounding the area so customers must enter and exit through the sales area. This area is a great place for an on-farm stand to increase sales (See *Fact Sheet 3.8 Farm Stands for more information*).

Signage & Advertising

Your road sign identifies your business and directs customers to your farm. Signs must be easy to read, even from a distance, so keep the message short. If you can, include the hours of operation on the sign(s). Six words are about all that people can comprehend while zooming by in a car. Focus on what appeals most to your customers, especially the most appealing products. Use selling words like "homegrown," "organic," "fresh," etc. that apply to your products. (See *Fact Sheet 3.3 Agritourism for more details on signage requirements*).

When you're looking to attract customers, consider many methods of advertising including, but not limited to, social media. Running an advertisement in the local newspaper, listing with your local extension office, running radio ads, and listing with a local farm directory are just a few ideas to help get the word out. Consider having a dedicated phone line listed with these advertisements that runs a recording of harvest times, hours of operation, directions to the farm, and any other pertinent information.

Staffing

Though U-picks reduce harvesting expenses, they have the added expense of customer management and site maintenance. You will need to have someone to welcome guests and provide instructions, as well as someone to handle sales. Additional staff requirements could include staff to transport customers to and from the fields, someone to manage the fields and harvest anything overripe, supervise customers in the fields, clean and manage any provided harvest bins, etc.

U-PICK CROPS

The best crops for a U-pick are those that are easily harvested and whose ripeness is easily determined. Some of the most common U-Pick products are included below.

Berries

Perhaps the most common of U-Pick adventures. Strawberries, blueberries, blackberries, raspberries, and other small fruits are all examples.

Cut Flowers

While many of the others listed can be harvested by hand, this venture will likely require the loan of snippers, harvest buckets and on site water and bags to ensure the picked flowers last.

Christmas Trees

Fantastic opportunity for an on-site stand for other evergreen or seasonal products, including wreaths and table displays.

Tree Fruits

Popular options are apples, peaches, pears, and plums. On-site apple presses and orchards go together swimmingly!

Vegetables

If the crop's ripeness is easily determined. Some options include beans, corn, greens, peas, pumpkins, and tomatoes.

SAFETY

Your visitors' safety is largely your responsibility and should be your first priority. It is important to assess your own farm or ranch operation for potential hazards and to prepare for a safe, enjoyable visit to your farm, ranch, or nature operation. (See *Fact Sheets 2.2 Insurance and 2.3 Liability for more information*).

RELATED FACT SHEETS IN OTHER CHAPTERS:

1.4 Registering with Government Entities

2.2 Insurance

2.3 Liability

