

The Market Gardening Model

“Making a Living” on a Small Piece of Land



What is a Market Garden?

- Less than 3 acres of cultivated land (most just 1 1/2 acres or less).
- Characterized by intensive beds and multiple high value crops/bed/year
- Takes advantage of season extension and often goes year round.
- Usually very diverse - eggs not in 1 basket.

Is This the Only Model?

- No! There's no "one size fits all"
- If you have access to lots of land and tractor availability, then go for it!
- But, I think the Market Gardening model fits very nicely with the SOP model:
 - Families working together (not a need for lots of outside help)
 - Agricultural Evangelism, etc.

Advantages:

- Less land needed
- Less water needed
- Less equipment needed
- Less STRESS needed (not so overwhelming)
- More people can make a living off the land



Keys to Success:

- Intensive production -
(multiple crops each year)
 - tight spacing
 - beds rather than rows
 - focus on high value crops





Keys to Success (cont.)

- Highly fertile soil
 - get soil tested
 - amend as recommended
 - grow cover crops
 - make compost
 - Put more in than you are taking out



Keys to Success (cont.)

- Season Extension
 - row covers
 - low tunnels
 - hoophouses
 - transplants (most everything transplanted)

Keys to Success (cont.)

- Efficiency
 - Use specialized tools
 - functional layout - standardization of space and materials.
 - work smarter not harder



Keys to Success (cont.)

- Direct Sales
 - Eliminate the middlemen
 - Farmer's Market
 - CSA (Community Supported Agriculture)
 - High-end restaurants (Pre-COVID)
 - Some finding success with wholesale (local grocers, etc.)





Keys to Success (cont.)

- Planning

- Know how much money you need to make
- Know how much you need to plant
- Know when it needs to be planted
- Have a succession of plantings to keep a continuous harvest.

Size of Garden:

- “Always tend the smallest amount of land possible, but tend it exceptionally well.”
- At least one full-time worker per 1/2 acre
- Income potential of \$100,000+ per acre!



Location

- Ideally within 1 hour's drive of a major metropolitan area - if growing perishables
- Good water source
- Good sun exposure
- Good soil
- Fairly level

Garden Layout:

- Beds 30" wide & 100' long (or something that easily goes into 100)
- Pathways 12"-18" wide
- Blocks of beds - for crop rotation purposes. We like 8 beds per block/pad





High Value Crops:

- Curtis Stone's Crop Value Rating (CVR)
 - Short days to maturity (60 or less)
 - High yield per linear foot (1/2 lb.)
 - High price/pound (min. \$4/lb.)
 - Long harvest period (4 month min.)
 - Popularity (high demand/low market saturation)

Crops With High CVR:

- Arugula - CVR 5/5
- Beets - CVR 4/5
- Carrots - CVR 4/5
- Kale - CVR 4/5
- Lettuce - CVR 5/5
- Microgreens - CVR 4/5
- Radishes - CVR 4/5
- Baby Kale - CVR 5/5
- Salad Mix - CVR 5/5
- Turnips - CVR 5/5
- Spinach - CVR 5/5
- Tomatoes - CVR 3/5

Infrastructure Needs(?):

- Heated greenhouse for seed starting
- Washing area - cement slab with roof and 3 bay sink or feed troughs
- Walk-in cooler
- Hoophouse (or 2 or 3)
- Water for washing area and irrigation
- Deer fencing



Specialized Equipment:

- Broadfork
- BCS with attachments (or small tractor)?
- Wheel hoe
- Quality hand tools
- Precision seeders
- Greens harvester

Start-Up Costs:

- Eliot Coleman - \$15,000 (1995)
- Jean-Martin Fortier - \$39,000 (2014)
- Daniel Mays - \$30,000 yr. 1, \$70,000 for yrs. 2-4 (2020)
- Whatever God gives you....



Where Do You Go From Here?

- Read/Watch/Listen to recommended resources.
- Spend time working with people who are making a living doing this. (Ideally a few years!)
- Tour farms
- Go to conferences
- Start growing
- Make sure God is leading you!