



# Virginia Cooperative Extension

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## Are you a Beginning Farmer?

You are likely asking yourself, “Where do I begin?” The purpose of this tool is to help you gather a solid basis of information as you consider your “start-up” situation. Once you have completed as much as you can of this worksheet (or if you have any questions along the way), please bring it to your local Virginia Cooperative Extension office to get guidance on where to go next: <http://www.ext.vt.edu/offices/index.html>. Good Luck! We look forward to helping you bring your farm vision to life!

### First: Envision your Farm!

- What is your vision? Your goals? <http://pubs.ext.vt.edu/AEE/AEE-67/AEE-67.html>
- Visit planning process: [http://www.misa.umn.edu/prod/groups/cfans/@pub/@cfans/@misa/documents/asset/cfans\\_asset\\_354163.pdf](http://www.misa.umn.edu/prod/groups/cfans/@pub/@cfans/@misa/documents/asset/cfans_asset_354163.pdf)

### Next: Map out your Potential Market Channels and Resources

- Think about the marketability of your proposed product - Is there demand for it? Is there a gap your product would fill? Visit: <http://casfs.ucsc.edu/education/instructional-resources/teaching-direct-marketing-and-small-farm-viability> and <http://www.attra.org/marketing.html>
- Map your Marketplace:
  - This exercise will help you to get an idea of the proximity and location of various established markets, as well as to canvass potential new market opportunities.
  - Obtain a map of the region (make sure the scale is such that you are able to clearly identify specific locations—you may need several maps).
  - Identify and denote all possible venues to market your product(s) (be specific)
    - Direct Markets – farmers markets, CSA, roadside stands, U-pick, restaurants, groceries ...
    - Wholesale – auction, cooperatives, institutions

### Follow up with: Conduct a Resource Assessment and Inventory

- Develop a map which highlights all the farm site’s important features. This will be used to develop your farm design. <http://www.extension.org/pages/58505/how-to-create-a-farm-resource-inventory>
- Conduct a soil test of potential field locations. Talk to your local Extension Agent!
- Locate your farm on the NRCS Web Soil Survey and determine your soil types. Bring a copy of the map this program generates. <http://websoilsurvey.nrcs.usda.gov/app/HomePage.htm>
- Become familiar with the land’s history. Crop Production? Former pesticide use (i.e. orchards)?
- Take note of environmental factors on your farm:
  - Sun and Shade Exposure/ Location and Features of Micro-climates
  - What is the annual average precipitation in inches? What is the seasonal distribution?
  - Temperature and Cold Hardiness & Heat Tolerance - <http://www.usna.usda.gov/Hardzone/>
  - Seasonal Wind Patterns/What is your source of irrigation water?

### Now: Think About What You'll Produce

- What crops/livestock/other enterprise are you considering?
- What production practices will guide you – organic, IPM, permaculture, conventional?
- Is the production scheme a good fit with all of your resources, knowledge, and skill level?
- Resources to explore: <http://www.ext.vt.edu/> and <http://attra.ncat.org/> and <http://www.nal.usda.gov/afsic/pubs/altlist.shtml>

### Next Step: Check In On Your Capital

- How much capital/resources are you reasonably able to invest?
- Do you own or rent your land? If rented, are there any restrictions?
- If you own the land, are there any factors that are important to consider related to legal issues?
- [http://www.cfra.org/files/BeginningFarmer\\_%20Financing\\_Strategies\\_0.pdf](http://www.cfra.org/files/BeginningFarmer_%20Financing_Strategies_0.pdf)

### Important to: Determine If You'll Have the Time, Energy, and Labor

- Do you work off farm? If so, how many hours will you be able to devote to the overall farm enterprise? To production? To marketing? To sales? To “growing” your knowledge base?
- When will you work at the farm (i.e. evenings, weekends, seasonal, etc.)?
- Do the time and energy demands required fit your personal availability and abilities? If needed, do you have the available capital and time to hire and manage help?
- Review: <http://pubs.ext.vt.edu/AEE/AEE-67/AEE-67.html>

### Try this: Create A Farm Budget Estimate

In order to get a better estimate of the farm budget for your specific enterprise, build a budget of all input costs and expected income:

- <http://extension.psu.edu/business/ag-alternatives/farm-management/enterprise-budget-analysis> - a good overview and starting point for creating enterprise budgets
- <http://www.hort.cornell.edu/hightunnel/business/index.htm> - high tunnels
- <http://www.clemson.edu/extension/aes/budgets/index.html> - forage, livestock, vegetables, agronomics
- <http://extension.umd.edu/grainmarketing/crop-budgets> - corn
- <http://plantsforhumanhealth.ncsu.edu/extension/programs-resources/enterprise-budgets/vegetables/> - vegetables
- <http://pubs.ext.vt.edu/category/enterprise-budgets.html> - agronomic crops and livestock

*The best we can do is size up the chances, calculate the risks involved, estimate our ability to deal with them, and then make our plans with confidence. ~Henry Ford*

As you consider a specific enterprise idea, this inquiry process will help you assess whether or not your resources and goals fit well with the proposed enterprise. If there is a good fit, then this foundational work can offer a valuable starting point on which to create a business plan for your venture.

**For more information and resources, look us up at the Virginia Beginning Farmer and Rancher Coalition Program: <http://www.vabeginningfarmer.aee.vt.edu/>**



The Virginia Beginning Farmer and Rancher Coalition Program is a collaborative effort represented by beginning farmer stakeholders across the Commonwealth of Virginia. It is housed in Virginia Tech's Department of Agricultural and Extension Education and a program of Virginia Cooperative Extension. The program is sponsored through the Beginning Farmer and Rancher Development Program (BFRDP) of the USDA-National Institute of Food and Agriculture (NIFA), Award # 2010-49400-21720.