



# OPERATING A PROFITABLE SMALL FARM

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FACT SHEET 3

## *Guidelines on Selecting "The Land"*

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### I. Air Drainage

Growing plants utilize fresh air for healthy growth. A low area with restricted air movement is not preferable for most high value crops. These areas are best suited for field and forage crops. The air flow into these areas collects dampness, pollutants, and stays colder on frosty mornings. Locating fields with better air drainage will provide a longer frost-free growing period.

### II. Water

The land needs to be evaluated for the availability of water. Excess water is a flood and not enough water is a drought. Research the site for any history of flooding. An untimely flood during the growing season can be devastating. It may be necessary to establish an irrigation system, so investigate the possibilities of an available and reliable water source. Check on the water-holding capacity of the soil. Lighter and more shallow soils will need irrigation for consistent production. Irrigation is also used to protect sensitive crops against frost damage, it may therefore be a part of your future expansion.

### III. Geographic Location

The main consideration here has to do with the proximity to market. Frederick and the surrounding counties are located near the large Baltimore/Washington markets. Most farmers in the region are not taking advantage of this

situation. Access to major highways should not be a problem. Individuals considering pick-your-own and bed & breakfast enterprises will need to consider location and accessibility.

### IV. Access

If customers are going to be expected to come to your farm to purchase the fruits of your labor, they need to have easy access to your farm. It should be easy to find, with decent roads, and have plenty of parking. The routes into the farm should be wide enough to accommodate large equipment if needed to support farm production. This would include having field gates wide enough for equipment to pass through.

### V. Security

Security is something that too many farmers fail to think about until it is too late. Theft of equipment, crops, and cattle rustling are not uncommon. Even cut-your-own Christmas tree operations periodically suffer from theft. Off-road vehicles have caused serious damage to crops. Evaluate the area's proximity to dwellings/ developments. Look to see if the fields are visible from the farmhouse. If the farm has fencing, is it adequate?

### VI. Wildlife

Some species of wildlife are very destructive to crops. Deer, geese, birds, and groundhogs head a list of animals that can be very frustrating to control, since most of them are protect-

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ed by law. Some thought should be given to the ability of the surrounding property to support wildlife. If the farm is next to a tree farm or state park, the deer population will never be under control. The same thing can be said for a farm next to a body of water that supports waterfowl. The farm will provide a food supply for a resident flock of geese.

## VII. Acreage

The ultimate availability of land, along with money, will be the limiting factors in future growth of the farm operation. Some long-range planning of potential enterprises and personal goals may help to determine what size farm to purchase. Sometimes the size of the farm can be misleading. While a farm will

be listed as having several acres of farmland, be sure of the number of acres of good cropland. Unless you are going to pasture livestock, marginal land is less suitable for producing high value crops. Break the farm down into the number of acres of tillable land, pasture, and woodland. If you are not going to use the pasture, it can be rented. If the woodland looks to be mature, it can be appraised and select cut. There may even be enough money from this sale for you to begin your new farming operation. While rented farmland can help to support expansion, it is not always reliable and should not be counted on in long range planning.

Reference: Schwenke, K. "Successful Small-Scale Farming: An Organic Approach."