



# Do You Want to Grow and Sell Flowers?



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Growing and selling cut flowers from cut flower farms is gaining interest and practice in the U.S. Many gardeners who want to sell flowers have some of the key components, including land, farming experience, and other important resources.

What we find in our Extension outreach is that cut flower farmers sometimes fail to consider what happens after harvest, which can lead to difficulties and even business failure. For a better chance at success, begin with the most important aspect of growing and selling flowers: knowing who will buy your flowers and what they want to purchase.

## Identify Potential Markets

Many flower farmers begin at what should be the end point. They develop a cut flower farm and have success growing some crops of cut flowers. But once these plants produce blooms, farmers find themselves scrambling to locate buyers quickly. This is a major challenge when transitioning from being a flower gardener to a professional flower farmer.

It can be difficult to sell an abundance of in-season flowers in a marketplace saturated with products from other sources. The competition to sell flowers becomes very real and will always be present. Before you sow

the first seeds, begin to differentiate your products and services in the marketplace.

Understanding your local market is essential. Conduct surveys, attend farmers markets, or collaborate with florists to see which flowers are in demand. Stay attuned to trends, especially through social media or customer feedback, and adjust your planting accordingly.

There are many channels for the sale of fresh cut flowers and foliage to potential buyers, either through *bulk sales* or *value-added products*. Bulk sales refer to

flower sales by the bunch, such as sunflowers in 5- or 10-stem bunches, gomphrena bunches by weight, or zinnias in solid-color or mixed-color bunches of 10 or 25 stems. Value-added products include mixed floral bouquets, fresh floral arrangements, dried wreaths, and other designs. Potential sales markets include U-pick farms, roadside stands, farmers markets, retail florists, event florists, wholesale florists, supermarkets, local businesses, CSA-type subscriptions, and social media.

## U-PICK FARMS

Some farmers find success with U-pick operations where consumers select their own fresh product from the field during business hours. Customers pay a fee and are allowed to harvest flowers according to stem count or by the bucket. This can be an effective way to sustain the farm enterprise because the consumer does much of the labor. A downside to this model is that consumers do not always have the knowledge to carefully select, harvest, and process cut flowers, which may result in losses.

You can have several areas of the farm with ready-to-harvest flowers through succession planting. For example, sow sunflower seeds in separate locations every 2 weeks to have fields in continuous bloom.



Basic, hardy crops such as sunflowers and zinnias are a good starting point for U-pick farms. Many customers want to take photographs at the farm and are willing to pay hourly rates to do so, which can be an additional revenue stream.

## ROADSIDE STANDS

Roadside stands do well in busy, high-traffic areas. Typically, these types of stands are left unattended. It is best to offer more than one price point. Check with your city hall to find if licenses or permits are required to operate in town.

Consider setting up near local retail shops such as clothing stores or coffee shops. To be successful, you will need a prime location, business license, stand, signage, and lockbox. To help prevent theft, install a camera and post a warning sign against stealing.

## FARMERS MARKETS

Flower sales at farmers markets can be profitable for flower farmers. There are key features to consider. The market should be active, with plenty of consumers with disposable incomes who want to purchase flowers. The market should have responsible management that is fair and proactive.

At farmers markets, flowers can be sold as:

- ▶ **Bunches of flowers or singular stems.** Bunches of flowers should be made in standard stem counts, so that customers know what to expect. Ten stems per bunch is standard for most flowers. Large blooms, such as sunflowers, are often sold in bundles of five stems, whereas specialty flowers like dahlias are sold individually by the stem.
- ▶ **Bouquets.** Mixed bouquets are a great way to sell different varieties of flowers based on availability. Customers may prefer to see flowers in either bright colors or subdued palettes. Therefore, attention to what typically sells and what does not in the area is necessary.
- ▶ **Mini arrangements.** Miniature arrangements can be made in simple vases during quiet moments at the market.

If other flower farms are selling at the market, do not undercut them with lower prices. Rather, sell several



types of flowers and value-added products so that all products from the farm complement each other.

Remember, the U.S. needs more domestic flower farms, but the key is finding the right markets for your flowers. Optimal farmers markets can be challenging to find.

If you are interested in selling flowers at farmers markets, be aware that the management may require a copy of your business license, federal tax identification number, and proof of business insurance when you complete the vendor application. You may be required to use a credit card reader for transactions.

Selling flowers at farmers markets presents an excellent opportunity to educate customers on the different varieties of flowers, their harvest stages, and post-harvest care.

## **DO-IT-YOURSELF CUSTOMERS**

Some flower farmers sell seasonal collections of cut flowers and ornamental foliage for the do-it-

yourself customer. These products appeal to brides and event hosts for use in decorating bridal showers, wedding celebrations, or other special occasions. These sales require coordination, which depends on a bit of flexibility between the grower and the customer.

One approach is to offer packages at different price points containing specific flowers based on guaranteed availability at the farm. The rest of the order will be sold as "grower's choice," following the customer's preferred color palette and budget.

For example, a farm might offer three packages retailing at \$100, \$200, and \$300. Each package contains one bunch of cream 'Limelight' hydrangeas, zinnias, and gomphrena because the farm grows them in abundance. The additional materials to complete each package are chosen from the freshest flowers and cut foliage ready for harvest at the time of pickup or delivery, with attention to the customer's color preference.

## RETAIL FLORISTS

Retail florists are often open to the idea of purchasing locally grown flowers; however, do not assume they will purchase from you. First, the florist's customers are highly discerning in what they purchase because the floral gifts they create are tied to human emotions. Florists create arrangements that convey thoughts that are difficult to put into words. Next, florists purchase their flowers from numerous, reliable sources such as wholesale florists, floral brokers, auctions, and farm-direct sales.

World floriculture has over 150 years of well-established production, harvesting, and shipping methods with refined varieties and continuous sales. Florists can easily get by without purchasing your flowers and can find greater diversity and lower costs already on the market. Do not be disappointed by this! You can still sell products that surpass what they can easily find, and your big advantage is "locally grown," which suggests that your flowers are fresher and that purchases from you help grow the local economy.

Every florist shop is different, and the differences reflect the owner/manager, so it is a good idea to get to know them. The percentages of what a shop sells will vary from store to store. For example, some shops sell more funeral flowers than wedding flowers and may value flowers like gladiolus, dahlias, and snapdragons over ranunculus, orlaya, or sweet peas. This tends to hold true for long-established shops serving generations of clients. On the other hand, shops that concentrate on wedding flowers look for unusual patterns and textures, opting for delicate fillers, bulb flowers in season, and trendy flowers that are popular on social media.

## EVENT FLORISTS AND DESIGN STUDIOS

Some retail florists specialize in wedding flowers and do not have brick-and-mortar storefronts or showrooms. They meet with brides at their ceremony and reception locations because the floral designs will be tailored to these locations.

Many of these businesses do not have daily or weekly needs for flowers, so their buying may be sporadic. When they do make purchases, the sales ticket can be large, requiring many bunches of flowers in specific colors, sometimes by the hundreds.



These florists also seek unique types of cut ornamental greenery. Cut ornamental foliage is often popular with event designers, who see a branch of uncommon foliage as being just as important as a premium flower stem. Many flower farmers who sell to wedding florists state that white flowers, whether line, mass, filler, or distinctive, are always in demand.

## WHOLESALE FLORISTS

Conduct an online search for wholesale florists within your area. Note that their locations may require a few hours of driving time from your farm and will become a regular part of your delivery route. This search and subsequent visit will provide insight into the market needs of the retail florists they serve.

Make a point of scheduling an appointment with the location manager, preferably in the afternoon before they close. Wholesale florists usually open to customer sales early, at 6 or 7 a.m., and can begin their

work early in the morning, from 4 to 6 a.m. Their sales staff are busy gathering flowers, foliage, and supply items and preparing them for delivery. If you arrive without an appointment and/or in the morning, they may not have time to talk with you. While visiting, note the types of flowers they are selling, as well as the varieties of cut ornamental foliage.

Be forewarned that you will step on the toes of your wholesalers if you also sell to the retailers they serve. It is best to sell to one level of the industry rather than multiple levels (wholesale, retail, or consumer) because they may interpret this as unfair competition.

## **SUPERMARKETS**

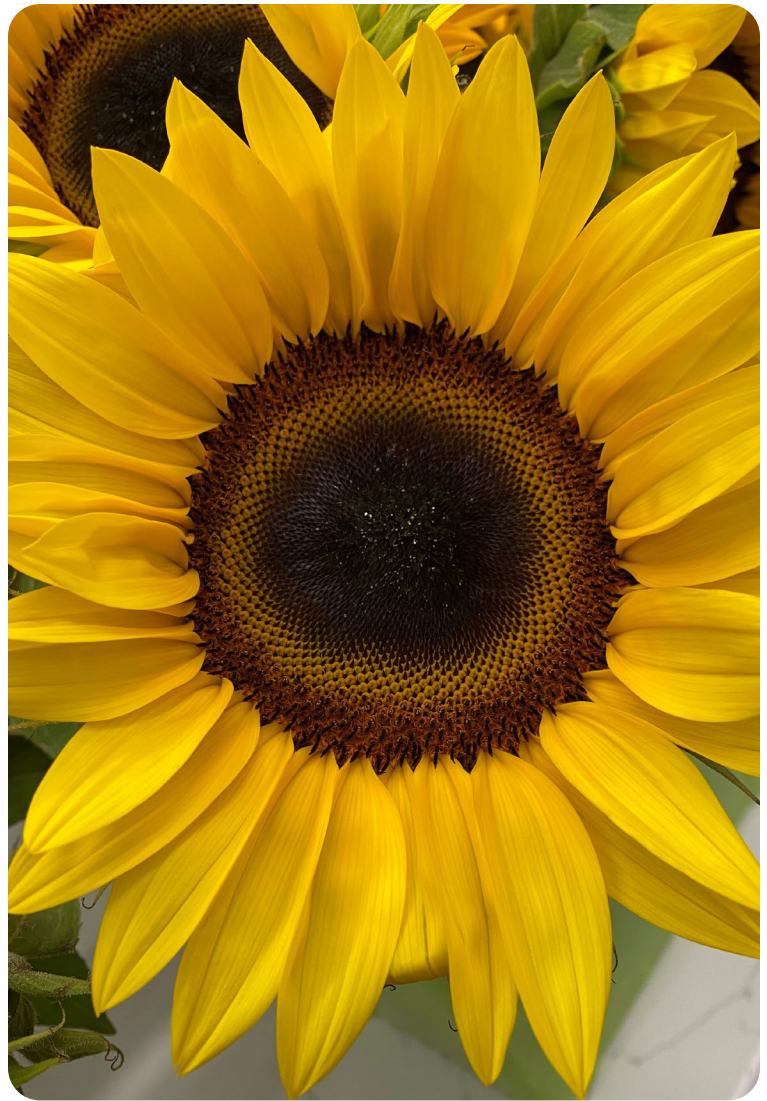
Many supermarkets sell large volumes of flowers, but establishing an account with them can be difficult. To find the right store, you will need to do your homework. Start by looking for supermarkets that already buy from local vegetable growers, as they may be more likely to purchase locally grown flowers. You will need to provide information on the quantity of product you can supply and how frequently. Supermarket managers will expect you to provide delivery, a display, bar codes, and sleeves for the flowers.

## **BUSINESSES, RESTAURANTS, AND HOTELS**

Selling to businesses and restaurants is a wonderful way to increase sales while also increasing brand visibility. To sell flowers to businesses, restaurants, and hotels, you will need a reliable delivery method and vases. To make it convenient, consider offering a weekly vase-lending service along with the flowers they contain. Each week, collect used vases, clean them, and return them with flowers. When scoping out businesses to sell to, be sure to bring sample arrangements.

## **SUBSCRIPTIONS, CONTRACT GROWING, AND CSAS**

Flower subscription services offer scheduled bouquet deliveries, often with upfront payments, like the community-supported agriculture (CSA) model. Another option is to partner with companies to create unique flower arrangements for corporate gifts.



These could be seasonal offerings or designs tied to holidays, product launches, or special events. This approach provides farmers with early-season capital and guarantees that customers will receive products regularly.

Flower subscriptions allow flexibility in delivery frequency and duration, typically lasting 10 weeks but adjustable based on market demand. To succeed, you will need a delivery plan, a clear sales page, and proper display equipment such as buckets or stands. Flower growers can also partner directly with established CSA programs.

## **THE INTERNET AND SOCIAL MEDIA**

The internet has become a key marketing tool for flower growers, allowing them to reach new customers at low cost. Over 6 percent of online transactions involve flower sales.

Create a list of available flowers, including quantities, colors, prices, and high-quality pictures. The pictures should show flowers in bunches since most florists are accustomed to seeing flowers in bundles as opposed to field flowers. Take photos under natural, indirect lighting to accurately capture the flowers' colors. Update the list weekly to drive customers to your website.

Email is useful for building relationships, sharing product availability, and taking orders. Growers can also list their products on third-party websites or create their own websites to expand their market.

You can learn about trends in flowers and foliage through social media images, but you should be aware that such posts can be misleading. Odds are that the local clients you want to serve do not publish everything that they sell or create. Further, social media posts are often made by designers who want to promote specialized designs of which they are particularly proud.

Many florists believe that social media has ruined the wedding flower business. Why? Because social media posts often idealize specific types of flowers and designs using expensive flowers in massive quantities that are beyond an average bride's budget. Note that floral designs in social media posts are rarely accompanied by a price estimate. This leads brides to believe there may be little difference between flower types and floral designs.

The optimal way for a florist to sell flowers is to sell a theme, a color palette, or a season, whether for a single floral arrangement or a multi-day social event requiring dozens of arrangements.

## OTHER NICHE MARKETS

Seasonal blooms like sunflowers or dahlias make a beautiful backdrop for photo shoots. Offer paid "photo days" for local photographers or the general public to book time on the farm to take pictures with your flowers either in the studio or in the field.

Consider teaming up with local artisans to create gift sets that combine flowers with locally crafted items like handmade candles, soaps, or pottery. These sets can be sold at local artisan shops, pop-up markets, or online. For example, a "spring bloom gift set" could include a fresh bouquet and a locally made candle with

floral scents. You could also try finding local artisans specializing in dried goods to create products like dried floral wreaths, framed pressed flowers, and potpourri. These items have a longer shelf life than fresh flowers and can appeal to customers interested in home decor.

Local hospitals, clinics, and wellness centers are potential selling points. Flowers have a well-documented positive impact on mental health and recovery, and these facilities often welcome arrangements for lobbies, reception areas, and patient rooms. Additionally, many funeral homes look for local sources of flowers for memorial services. Work with funeral homes to create a supply agreement for regularly needed flowers, particularly those used in sympathy arrangements.

## Pricing

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Establishing the retail prices of cut flowers and ornamental foliage should involve several inputs. First, the prices should be competitive with flower farms in the area. They do not have to be the same price for each type of flower, but they should not be significantly less or more than what other farms are charging.

An important consideration in pricing any product is to charge whatever the market will bear. Assign prices based on the quality and demand for every product offered by the farm. Find wholesale florists online and in your area, and research their price lists. Check the prices found in the [\*USDA Agricultural Marketing Service's Ornamental Wholesale Market Report – Boston, MA\*](#).

## Business Strategy and Expansion

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As your flower business matures, consider expanding through more advanced business practices such as scaling production, managing risk, and increasing sustainability.

Once you've established a market, consider increasing production. Experiment with growing specialty flowers or unique varieties that may fetch higher prices. Look for niche markets such as organic flowers or rare heirloom varieties.

Consider purchasing crop insurance or business liability insurance, particularly if you offer U-pick services or host events on your farm. Weather events, pests, or crop failure can severely impact your business, so having a risk-management plan is vital.

As sustainability becomes increasingly important to consumers, implementing eco-friendly practices, such as reducing water use, composting, and using biodegradable flower sleeves, can make your farm more appealing.

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