

Exploring Specialty Crop Production

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Question 1: Is this site suitable?

The first step in assessing a site for potential specialty crop production is to evaluate the following factors. Start with California Farm Link's [Farmland Assessment Field Guide](#) which includes these considerations:

- Legality: permits, zoning, regulations, value-added processing, farm stands, tours, etc.
 - Consult with county departments such as [Permit Sonoma](#)
 - UCCE Agricultural Ombudsperson: Kerry McGrath for Sonoma County (kamcgrath@ucanr.edu), Vince Trotter for Marin County (vtrotter@ucanr.edu)
- On-site infrastructure: current and required infrastructure including water access, fencing, cold storage, etc.
 - Conduct infrastructure inventory
 - Well assessments conducted by professional consultants
- Soil and water quality
 - Sending samples to a lab provides site-specific information, [UCCE List of Labs](#)
 - The [Web Soil Survey](#) provides big-picture information
- Microclimate
 - The closest [CIMIS Station](#)
 - Historical weather data
- Access to farm labor
 - Consider how to find skilled farm labor
 - Consider if you'll hire or contract
- Market opportunities
 - Consider where you will sell crops: farm stands, farmers markets, Community

Supported Agriculture (CSA) subscriptions, local aggregators and distributors, groceries, restaurants, etc.

Consider talking to growers, farmers market managers, and distributors in your area to better understand these dynamics. If these factors are conducive to support economically and environmentally sustainable specialty crop production, then ask....

Question 2: If so, which specialty crops are most appropriate?

The next step is to match site characteristics, constraints and opportunities with crop needs:

- Match site factors with appropriate crop types, varieties, rootstocks, etc. Here are examples of specialty crops that are commonly grown in the North Bay Area:
 - Annuals: lettuce, kale, spinach, other greens, tomatoes, peppers, squash, cucurbits, onions, garlic, cut flowers
 - Perennials: apples, olives, pears, plums, lemons, mandarins, peaches, strawberries, blueberries, blackberries, raspberries
 - [UCCE North Bay Specialty Crops website](#)
 - [UC ANR Catalog](#)
- Match your production scale with available labor, market constraints and opportunities, lease/mortgage rate, and cost of infrastructure investments within a sound business plan
 - [UC ANR Specialty and Minor Crops Handbook](#)
 - [UC Davis Cost & Return Studies](#)