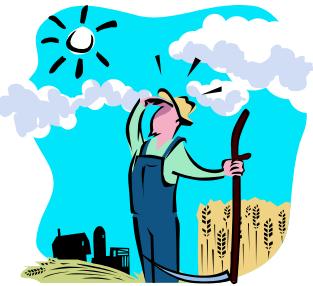


Growers are continually trying to find new varieties and products to bring to the market. This helps markets grow and provides a variety of produce to the consumer, making them into repeat customers. However, your edge in the market with a new or novel variety is only for a season or two at most. So, instead of switching varieties each year, consider changing your timing to take advantage of market windows.



A Snapshot of Availability

What is a **market window** and why should you care? It is a snapshot of that particular period of time, showing what is available, and more importantly what is not available – the opening or “window of opportunity.” For example, there may be a market window for green beans in early summer because it is too early for many growers. There may not be any green beans in that market or such a small supply that they sell out very early. Customers will pay premium prices for those fresh green beans because of the limited supply. Even with a higher cost of production from protecting an early crop with low tunnels, the crop can bring a good profit.

A Strategy for Competitive Advantage

There is always competition in the market, especially in mid-summer for common commodities such as tomatoes, peppers, and squash. If you are a tomato grower, and are having trouble selling your tomatoes, consider analyzing open market windows in your primary markets. Evaluate earlier varieties, starting plants in protected cultivation, or building a cold frame or hoop house for late fall and winter tomato production.



Farmers' markets work on the principles of supply and demand just as larger national and global markets do. Growers who do not use those principles are missing critical opportunities. It is good marketing, not price gouging. Customers are accustomed to buying any kind of produce all year in the grocery store, and understand that when the product is out of season it will cost more. The same should hold true in farmers' markets.

Assess Your Farm for Opportunities and Advantages

In addition to analyzing the market for windows of opportunity, you should also assess the market advantages of your particular farm. With the variety of microclimates in the foothills, you may have another advantage. Your farm may have a microclimate that allows you to get warm season crops to market a week or two earlier than other growers in the market, allowing you to charge a premium price because there is not yet an adequate supply. Conversely, if you are at a higher elevation, with cooler summer weather, or with a cool area on your property, you will have a later production season. You may be able to produce cool season vegetables into the summer, when growers at lower elevations cannot.

Do Your Homework

What it comes down to is doing your homework on your primary markets. You need to know the period of time that each product you are interested in growing is available in that market and how the price varies throughout its period of availability. Then look at your production location, and identify what is unique about its climate, location, or growing potential. This would be your market advantage. Which desirable commodities can you produce, and will they be available when needed in the specific market you are targeting? Plan your growing strategy so you can fill open market windows in specific markets that suit your farm.



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