

Markets and Growing Methods

What will we plant?

10

Mid semester check-in

By week seven students were starting to feel a little anxious and impatient with all the previous talking about vision, mission, partnerships, etc. and really just wanted to get their hands dirty planting seeds. We had greenhouse space which could be used to start seeds for the coming growing season. We had some seeds from various seed donations from various places (see appendix page 148 for some of our sources). The next question we needed to consider was what will we plant?

Our answer was two-fold. First, lots of seeds of various plants most of which would hopefully have a place in the farm by spring. Second, we needed to research specifics on crops, cropping systems, components and markets so that we could grow crops we knew we could both grow and sell.

We started this process by going back to the outline in the Building a Sustainable Business Plan which covers the areas of Human Resources, Finances, Operations and Marketing. In the area of Human Resources we surveyed the students in the course to get an idea of student interest beyond the class and potential involvement for the summer growing season. For the Finance area we started thinking about possible funding sources and assigned a student to look into ways in which we could function both as a student organization and as a business.

For marketing we briefly discussed the possible market options for the potential produce we would have to sell and assigned students to look in depth into each option and later had one student summarize the results. It's interesting to note that half way through the first season we abandoned our farm stand marketing approach on the St. Paul Campus and instead adapted a successful a la cart produce delivery model that we found being used by the Whole Farm Co-op in Western Minnesota (for more info see the sidebar on page 70).

Operations was a little trickier to tackle, we needed to research organic certification, cropping systems, methods, components and the actual design of the farm. We also needed to take into consideration numerous other operational strategy questions (see page 67 slide 18 of the power point presentation for more info).

All of the above was presented to the students in a power point presentation during week 7. Students then volunteered to assess various aspects and report back to the class. The goal of those assignments was to have students look at what options exist and research those options so that a well informed decision could be made as to what the final farm plan would look like and how it would function.

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Considerations for Markets

- Type of market
- Who / Where
- What produce do they want?
- How much do they want and when do they need the products?
- What distribution & packaging will be needed?
- Who is currently supplying them (competition)?
- Can we make a profit?

The above questions were answered by individual students for each of the brainstormed potential markets for the market analysis assignment. Once each individual assignment was complete one student summarized all of them into a table.

Markets and Growing Methods Time Table	
Week of Class	Activities
7 (35 minutes)	Introduction Power Point Presentation Brainstorm of markets, growing methods and system components
8 (10 minutes)	Quick update of markets, growing methods and system components
9 (5 minutes)	Delegate summary analysis for markets, cropping methods and system components
10 (10 minutes)	Presentation of Market Analysis Summary
11 (10 minutes)	Presentation of Growing Methods and System Components Analysis Summary

The results of this assignment can be found in the Master Plan Market Analysis Section.

Results:

Cropping Systems to Consider:

"Solar Gardening: Growing Vegetables year round the American Intensive Way" by Leandre Poisson
 "Lasagna Gardening" by Patrica Lanza
 "Square Foot Gardening" by Mel Bartholomew
 "How to grow more vegetables and fruits, nuts, berries, grains and other crops than you ever thought possible on less land than you can imagine" by John Jeavons
 "Gaia's Garden" by Toby Hemmingway
 "Four Season Harvest" by Eliot Coleman
 "The New Organic Grower" by Eliot Coleman
 "Forest Gardening: cultivating an Edible Landscape" by Robert Hart
 "The One-Straw Revolution: An introduction to Natural Farming"
 "Weedless Gardening" by Lee Reich
 "A Biodynamic Farm for growing wholesome food" by Hugh Lovel
 "Solviva How To Grow \$500,000 On One Acre & Peace On Earth" by Anna Edey

System Components Considered:

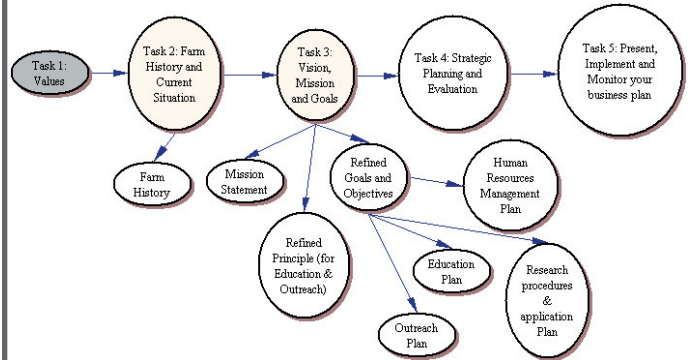
Chicken Tractors
 Companion Planting
 Compost Teas and Foliar Feeding
 Composting

There is some overlap between the cropping methods list and the system components list. Both are a result of a brainstorm done by students and instructors to both explore all options and hone in on more specifics in a few areas.

Week 7

Student Farm Planning Class

Where are we?



The Big Question:

What are we going to Plant?

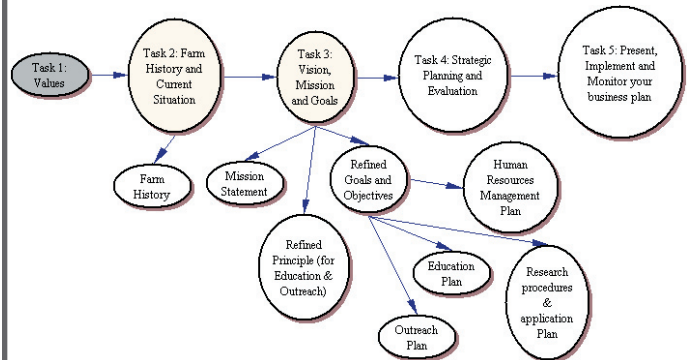
What are we going to plant?

$$\begin{aligned}
 &\text{Market Analysis} \\
 &+ \\
 &\text{Cropping Systems} \\
 &+ \\
 &\text{System Components} \\
 &= \\
 &\text{What we will plant in the field}
 \end{aligned}$$

What will we plant in the greenhouse?

- Lots of stuff, hopefully most of which we will plant outside
- However some of what we plant may never reach the student farm- we'll figure out what to do with those plants when we get to that point
- 2 person team: Planting List Manager & Greenhouse Coordinator

Where are we?



Strategic Planning



Human Resources

- Student Interest Survey Results from class
- Survey Students outside of Student Farm Planning Class
- Funding Availability

Strategic Planning



Finances / Business

Considerations:

- Funding Sources?
- Business set-up (as a student organizations, within existing or is a new group needed?)

Strategic Planning



Marketing Strategy

(From Building a Sustainable Business)

- Markets: Who are our target customers and what do they value?
- Product: What product will we offer and how is it unique?
- Competition: Who are our competitors and how will we position ourselves?
- Distribution & Packaging: how and when will we move our product to market?
- Prices: How will we price our product?
- Promotion: How and what will we communicate with buyers or customers?

Types of Markets

- Community Supported Farms: Member fee in exchange for a "season" of produce products
 - Farmers' Markets
 - Farm stands
 - Institutions: Schools, Day Care, Elder Care
 - Local Stores
 - Producers Co-op
 - Restaurant: Direct Sales
 - Restaurant: CSA
- (not included: Mail Order & Pick your own operations)

Considerations for Markets

- Type of market
- Who / Where specifically?
- What produce do they want?
- How much do they want and when do they need the products?
- What distribution & packaging will be needed?
- Who is currently supplying them (competition)?
- Can we make a profit?

Brainstorm List of Markets:

- University Trial CSA
- Joint CSA with other Farms?
- Minneapolis Campus Farmer's Market

(Already made connections with)

- institutions?
- Local Stores / Restaurants
- Others

Volunteer to figure out the following for each of the brainstormed markets:

Considerations for Markets

- Type of market
- Who / Where specifically?
- What produce do they want?
- How much do they want and when do they need the products?
- What distribution & packaging will be needed?
- Who is currently supplying them (competition)?
- Can we make a profit?

Strategic Planning



Operations Strategy

- What will we produce?
- What institutional requirements exists?
- What are resource needs?
- How will we fill physical resource gaps?
- Size & Capacity: how much can we produce?
- Storage & Inventory: How will we store inventory & maintain product quality?

Operations Issues:

- Organic Certification
- Cropping Systems / Growing Methods
- System Components
- Landscape Design

Cropping Systems to explore:

Square Foot Gardening
Intensive wide-row spacing
Intercropping
Successional planting or continual harvest
Vertical growing
Permaculture and the "layering effect"
Companion planting
Permanent raised beds
Bio-intensive
The American Intensive appliances
Four Season Harvest Method
Biodynamics

Cropping Systems

Description of cropping style
Type of cropping system
What crops does this style work for?
Does this style meet any of our principle requirements? (Attracts beneficial insects, perennial, experimental, etc.)
How much space is required to utilize these methods?
How much labor is required to utilize these methods?
What infrastructure is required for these methods?
Does this method address rotational issues? How?
What are the costs associated with this method?

System Components to explore:

- Companion Planting
- Chicken Tractors
- Compost Tea & Foliar Feeding
- Composting

System Components

Description of Component
What crops does this style work for?
Does this style meet any of our principle requirements? (Attracts beneficial insects, perennial, experimental, etc.)
How much space is required to utilize these methods?
How much labor is required to utilize these methods?
What infrastructure is required for these methods?
Does this method address rotational issues? How?
What are the costs associated with this method?

What's Next?

Volunteers... Go to it! Bring update next week (Get as far as you can)

Integrating:

- Market Analysis
 - Cropping Systems / Growing Methods
 - System Components
- into Crop List & Landscape Plan

Market Options

Venue	Marketing	Cost/Benefit Analysis Considerations	Issues
Community Supported Farms Member fee in exchange for a "season" of produce products	Very Interactive, membership limits make for very focused marketing and production.	Win/Win: assured sales, community development, interdependence, farmer/consumer equitability, and diversity. Possible farm-to-farm cooperation to enhance offerings, strengthen community. Must be organized, responsible to manage commitments to membership.	Must have confidence and experience in production. This is not the best start-up option, you must grow into it!
Farmers' Markets	Interactive, develop customer base through display, quality, education, consistency, diversity, and good signage!	Direct market means best price for product. Community involvement. Proximity to established grower markets is helpful. No assurances of sales, product quality and marketing imperative.	Can be exhausting: loading, hauling, set-up, selling "you," farm must be well represented. Charisma and enthusiasm are good for sales!
Institutions: Schools, Day Care, Elder Care	Single-contract sales. Important to manage relationships, issues.	Price subject to institution—scale, type, funding. Programs throughout the country working on ways to increase farm-institution interactions.	Consistency and quality important. Immature market, do your footwork.
Local Stores	Single-contract sales. Focus on local, fresh, high quality.	Wholesale prices. Uncertain demand and turnover can lead to quality control issues. Must be ready to deal with quantity, packaging, and certifications required, ASK!	Hard to receive best prices in conventional markets, check co-ops and health food stores.
Farm stands	Interactive to hands-off. Display, consistency, signage and promotion.	Direct marketing, best price for product. Owning and managing infrastructure gives self-determination but also more responsibility, cost.	Location and diversity of offerings is important in marketing considerations.
Producers Co-op	Cooperative sales for less individual marketing.	Infrastructure and management important. Effective distribution requires scale that supports costs.	Uniformity, packing and quality standards.

Adapted from:

Market Options Continued

Venue	Marketing	Cost / Benefit Analysis Considerations	Issues
Restaurant: Direct Sales	Single-contract sales, works closely with chef	Premium prices for highest quality, clean! Must develop relationship by communication, consistency.	Chefs are BUSY. Must take initiative to develop account.
Restaurant: CSA	Single-contract sales	Premium prices—demands responsibility, quality, and presentation.	Plan with chef, be reliable.
Mail-Order	Internet or promotional development key; Follow through a must	Premium price. Takes time and some overhead to develop. Issues: individual order-processing, packaging, timeliness and updating of materials	Research shipping methods, consider quality, insurance minimums and return policy.
Pick-Your-Own-Operations	Community promotion, signage, instruction.	Equitable prices with low labor input. Supports low-income community and food supply connection.	Consider safety of area and insurance issues.
Office Deliveries	Requires email list of potential customers (local listserv can get you started - make sure to get permission first). Send weekly emails of available produce to customers.	A la cart selection allows customers to get exactly what they want. Allows you to harvest from the field exactly what you're going to sell. Easy to limit delivery area to specific building or neighborhood.	Customers may have issues with purchasing produce sight unseen.

Whole Farm Coop Model

The Whole farm co-op is a group of 30 family farms that are committed to creating farms that nourish their families spiritually and economically, sustain the environment, and with providing eaters not only with safe wholesome food but with a clear sense of who and where their food came from (www.wholefarmcoop.com). This model successfully has direct marketed a wide variety of products from various farms to customers using the internet and deliveries to specific drop off and pick up sites.

We adapted this model by sending weekly emails of available veggies to a group of potential and previous customers, who in turn email their orders to us along with their location on the St. Paul campus. We then harvest, process and deliver their orders within 48 hours. The weekly emails typically go out the same afternoon each week, the products are sold first come, first served and with a cut off deadline pre-harvest. The staff at the University of Minnesota love this service and eagerly anticipate the weekly emails and deliveries.

Cropping System Questions

Source of info:

Description of Cropping System:

Includes: (Type of cropping systems, describe each ex. Permanent raised beds, mulching, intercropping, intensive wide-row spacing, polyculture, bio-intensive, etc.)

What crops does this style work for?

Does this style meet any of our principle requirements? (Attracts wildlife, perennial, experimental, etc.)

How much space is required to utilize these methods?

How much labor is required for this method?

What infrastructure is required for this method?

Does this method address rotational issues? How?

Are there any up front costs associated with this method?

Results:

The results of this assignment can be found in the Master Plan Cropping Systems Section.

System Components Questions

Source of info:

System Component:

Description of system component:

What crops does this component work for?

Does this style meet any of our principle requirements? (Attracts wildlife, perennial, experimental, etc.)

How much space is required to utilize these methods?

How much labor is required for this method?

What infrastructure is required for this method?

Does this method address rotational issues? How?

Are there any up front costs associated with this method?

Results:

The results of this assignment can be found in the Master Plan System Components Section.