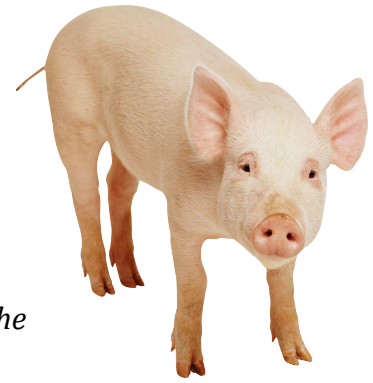


So, You Want to Be a Farmer?

A Quick Guide to Getting Started in Oregon

Oregon Department of Agriculture



en-tre-pre-neur/,äntɹəprə'nöör/Noun - a person who is willing to launch a new venture or enterprise and accept full responsibility for the outcome.

Yup, that pretty much describes someone with a passion about food and agriculture as a way to earn a living.



But throw on top of this passion and business responsibility the unpredictability of weather, the constant appetite of insects, the threat of disease and fungus, the temperamental nature of soil, the intricacies and fickleness of mechanized equipment, the tedious long days of physical hard labor, and the vacillating preferences of consumers about food – and you have the need for a person with a very high tolerance for risk, dirt and manure!

Of course there are the pleasant things -- the smell of fertile soil, the outdoor air and beautiful vistas, the delicacy of plants, the magic of new-born animals, the sweet joys of harvest, and the pleasure of bringing a smile to a customer's face with delicious produce or beautiful flowers. Many people are drawn to these connections with the land, and some even favor this setting for raising a family.

While some people are born into farming, others are drawn to it. Regardless of your background, you can successfully start and operate a farm business with careful preparation and planning.



If you're going to give it a try, follow the same guidelines you'd follow to start any other type of business. Start small, go slow, use the resources you already have, learn as much as you can from other growers, access Extension Service and small business resources, understand the risks, and expand gradually. Below are a few more *Dos* and *Don'ts* to help you get started.

1. Q. Where do I start?

DO THIS:

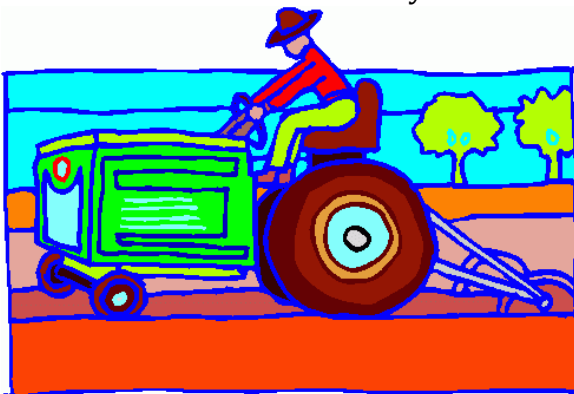
- **Develop a Business Plan.** What do you think you want to produce? Where will you sell it? What resources do you need to accomplish this? What resources do you currently have?

What technical knowledge and skills will you need and which do you currently possess?

Answering these questions **FIRST** is always the first advice given by business professionals to any entrepreneur, and that goes for farmers too!

Resources for developing a business plan – possibilities on small acreage:

<http://smallfarms.oregonstate.edu/beginning-farmers>



Think about what you are selling. Is it a product, an experience, a sense of place, a commitment to something, or ... This sort of strategic thinking helps you “brand” or identify what you are promoting to those who you want to influence and sell to.

Basic business plan – keep it simple but as detailed as possible and functional to accomplish your goals. http://oregon.gov/ODA/grants_business_plan.shtml

SBA’s small business plan templates and information:

Lots of ideas for new or young producers: http://oregon.gov/ODA/new_small_farms.shtml

NEXT:

DO your homework on the requirements to start and operate a farm business in Oregon.

2. Q. Do I need to register with the state of Oregon to be a farmer?

A. No, there is no registration or license to be a farmer. However, you may need to register with the [Secretary of State](#) if you use an assumed name for your business. You may also need to obtain a license from the Department of Agriculture depending on your activities, such as selling produce by weight ([need to license a scale](#)), using restricted crop protectants that require special knowledge and handling ([pesticide license](#)), applying for a [brand](#) to identify your animals, and so forth.



DO: A good place to start looking to determine whether a license is required is the [Oregon Agripedia regulations section](#). Evaluate the activities you plan to do for any licensing requirements and who to contact.

http://www.oregon.gov/ODA/pub_agripedia.shtml - Regulations section online

3. Q. **WHERE** do I do “it”?

Agriculture is about land, water, and nutrients. So you have to have somewhere to do something.

A. Land Options:

DO:

- Start small** with the resources you have, whether a 4x8 raised bed or a planter on your porch. Learn what you can do with this area. Optimize it. Look around your yard. Expand your garden. Do as much as you can here before moving to bigger areas.
- Learn to grow different crops** of vegetables and fruits, and animals if you have the capacity and ordinances allow.
- Look for areas to expand**, perhaps a community garden plot or empty lot. See what you can do with this expanded area.
- Only after you’ve maximized your ability and knowledge with your available resources should you consider **moving on to lease or rent small acreage** or plots, avoiding long-term arrangements until you have the capacity to assume payments. Find a grower nearby and work out an arrangement to gradually work a larger plot.



DON'T DO:

- a. Look for a farm to purchase right away – be patient! Wait until you have at least 3 years of experience and earnings, learning and marketing under your belt.
- b. Go into debt trying to finance a farm – until you're ready. You'll end up with interest and land payments eating away at any profits.

Land resources:

There are no grants to purchase or rent property. So in most cases you'll need a loan or be able to finance the rent payments from your earnings.

- a. First, build a resume of production skills, management experience, marketing ability, and resource understanding before applying for a loan to finance an agriculture operation. Pair this with your business plan when you are approaching an entity for a loan.
- b. Sources of Agriculture Credit in Oregon:
http://oregon.gov/ODA/pub_credit.shtml
The USDA Farm Service Agency and the Farm Credit Services are the primary starting places for new operations. You might also finance through a bank or credit union, or even an equipment dealer for such purchases. Again, be aware of your ability to carry and repay debt.
- c. Other financing resources and grants... <http://www.oregon.gov/ODA/grants.shtml>
- d. Farms/land for sale or rent:
<http://www.friendsoffamilyfarmers.org/ifarm/index.php?action=searchpage>
- e. Classified farm listings:
<http://www.capitalpress.com/Classifieds/results/?CategoryLink=REAL%20ESTATE&ClassificationID=0380&operator=search>
- f. "Six Ways to Secure Farmland," <http://www.attra.org/attra-pub/PDF/finding.pdf>
ATTRA—National Sustainable Agriculture Information Service



4. Q. Where can I find out how to grow this or that?

Obviously, there's a lot to learn.

- Gain experience on a farm as an intern, employee, or apprentice.
http://attra.ncat.org/attra-pub/internships/search_results.php?State=OR
- The pros and cons of internships: http://oregon.gov/ODA/farm_internships.shtml
- Help wanted listings: <http://www.capitalpress.com/classifieds/Help%20Wanted/>

LEARNING RESOURCES:

For a younger audience:

- Agriculture in the Classroom: <http://aitc.oregonstate.edu/commodities/index.htm>
- 4-H: <http://oregon.4h.oregonstate.edu/things-do>

High school: FFA

The greatest connection in high school to hands-on learning about agriculture, horticulture, food, and animals is FFA – talk to a high school counselor about availability of classes:

<http://www.oregonffa.com/>



Community College Ag Programs:

- Linn-Benton CC:
<http://www.linnbenton.edu/go/agricultural-sciences>
- Chemeketa CC: <http://www.chemeketa.edu/programs/agriculture/>
- Clackamas CC: <http://www2.clackamas.edu/pathways/pathway.asp?pathwayID=2>
- Lane CC: Agricultural Business Management Program (ABM) is designed for local farmers and agricultural professionals who want to build and improve the business side of their enterprise and increase their horticulture capacity. For a program syllabus or more information contact Casey Foltz, instructor/advisor, at 541.463.4623 or foltzc@lanecc.edu.
- Blue Mt. CC (Pendleton): http://www.bluecc.edu/depts_ag
- Klamath CC: <https://www.klamathcc.edu/students/catalog/2010-11/pg38.aspx>
- Treasure Valley CC (Ontario): <http://www.tvcc.cc.or.us/Academics/Ag/index.cfm>

Agriculture Career Pathway info: <http://www.pcc.edu/pavtec/pathways/nr-agriculture/>

Oregon State University/Extension – Oregon’s premier agriculture university:

Online resources: <http://extension.oregonstate.edu/catalog/results.php?cat=Agriculture>

Campus classes/degrees: <http://agsci.oregonstate.edu/about/teaching>

Other Internet resources...

<http://extension.oregonstate.edu/catalog/html/grow/grow/planting.html>

<http://extension.oregonstate.edu/gardening/how-grow-vegetables-oregons-colder-regions>

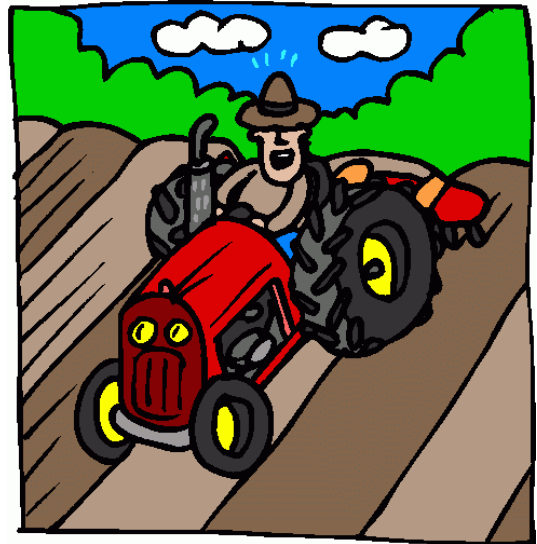
President Abraham Lincoln summed it up real well in 1859 during a speech at a county fair:

“...no other human occupation opens so wide a field for the profitable and agreeable combination of labor with cultivated thought, as agriculture. I know of nothing so pleasant to the mind, as the discovery of anything which is at once new and valuable -- nothing which so lightens and sweetens toil, as the hopeful pursuit of such discovery. And how vast, and how varied a field is agriculture, for such discovery. ... Every blade of grass is a study; and to produce two, where there was but one, is both a profit and a pleasure. And not grass alone; but soils, seeds, and seasons -- hedges, ditches, and fences, draining, droughts, and irrigation -- plowing, hoeing, and harrowing -- reaping, mowing, and threshing -- saving crops, pests of crops, diseases of crops, and what will prevent or cure them -- implements, utensils, and machines, their relative merits, and [how] to improve them -- hogs, horses, and cattle -- sheep, goats, and poultry -- trees, shrubs, fruits, plants, and flowers -- the thousand things of which these are specimens -- each a world of study within itself.”

5. Q. It sounds risky. How do I manage it?

A. **RISK MANAGEMENT:** DO --

1. **Diversify:** putting all your eggs in one basket, to use an ag metaphor, increases all types of risks associated with a single crop, single market, etc. By diversifying into a variety of crop or livestock enterprises – within your ability to manage and finance – decreases the risk that your entire operation will be subject to price downturns, pests, disease, and so forth.
2. **Insure:** Even small operations should consider risk exposures and examine insurance. A general liability insurance should be the minimum to protect against accidents; auto insurance is mandatory for vehicles; and workers' compensation is mandatory if you have hired workers:
http://www.oregon.gov/ODA/pub_regs_emp.shtml#Workers_compensation
For ideas, strategies, and information on whole farm revenue insurance, see:
http://www.oregon.gov/ODA/risk_mgt.shtml
3. **Integrate** (value-add): To do more diversification, you might try adding value to your raw products, such as creating jams, salsa, cheese, or non-food products as well. Generally this requires more investment in equipment or labor, but it can increase the breadth of your products and depth of your expertise in a specialized area. Contact ODA's Food Safety Division for questions on home kitchens and food preparation:
http://egov.oregon.gov/ODA/new_small_farms.shtml#Small_scale_meat_and_other_food_processing
The Food Safety Division has two specialists who are dedicated to helping small/new producers and processors with food safety related questions. If you don't know what to do next, give them a call! Please contact Will Fargo or Sarah Schwab as the primary contacts. They work primarily in the field and may not be able to answer the phone immediately but will call you back as soon as possible.
[Northern Oregon & Willamette Valley: Sarah Schwab 503-508-6028](mailto:Sarah.Schwab@oda.oregon.gov)
[Southern & Eastern Oregon: Will Fargo 503-432-7092](mailto:Will.Fargo@oda.oregon.gov)
[Slaughter/sale of poultry questions: Will Fargo 503-432-7092](mailto:Will.Fargo@oda.oregon.gov)
[For further assistance our Salem office number is 503-986-4720](mailto:Will.Fargo@oda.oregon.gov)
4. **Move upstream:** If you have the interest and desire to market directly the prices you receive will generally be higher -- but you will have to spend more time finding markets, negotiating contracts, working with partners, and traveling to deliver product depending on arrangements you can work out.



6. Q. **MARKETING:** Where to sell it?

A. Anywhere you can think of! Some ideas:

- Farm stands (on your farm)
- Direct sales (off-farm selling directly to buyers)
- Internet sales (create a webpage and tell your story)
- Farmer's markets, http://oregon.gov/ODA/ADMD/farmers_markets.shtml
- Community Support Agriculture (CSA, subscription sales)
<http://www.nal.usda.gov/afsic/pubs/csa/csa.shtml>
- Restaurants – join a farmer-chef collaborative if there is one near you
<http://sassafraskitchen.com/wordpress/>
<http://chefscollaborative.org/>
- Public facilities (schools, hospitals, etc.)
- U-pick operations (share the joy of harvest)
<http://www.pickyourown.org/howtostartapyo.htm>
- On-farm agri-tourism,
<http://www.aglink.org/agbook/agritourismworkbook.php>
- Get listed in directories:
<http://www.oregonfresh.net/buylocal/buylocal.php>
- Ads in your local newspaper or the Capital Press:
<http://www.capitalpress.com/classifieds/>
- Join the Food-Hub.org <http://food-hub.org/>
- Get approved to accept the seasonal Farm Direct Nutrition Program (Farm Direct) checks, also known as “Farmers’ Market coupons”, and the new WIC Fruit & Veggie Program (F&V) vouchers:
http://www.oregon.gov/ODA/ADMD/farm_direct.shtml



7. Sustainability:

Natural resources stewardship and economic sustainability often go hand in hand. Below are some resources that may help lower your operating costs or offer marketing benefits, in addition to protecting the environment.

DO -- Find your local Soil and Water Conservation District.

<http://egov.oregon.gov/ODA/SWCD/index.shtml>

Conservation Districts work with landowners to meet their natural resource goals by implementing irrigation efficiency measures, streamside restoration projects, erosion control measures, and many other projects.



Visit ODA's Agriculture and Energy page.

<http://egov.oregon.gov/ODA/energy.shtml>

The page provides ideas to use energy as efficiently as possible and offset some of your energy use with renewable energy.

Learn about ODA's environmental regulations for Confined Animal Feeding Operations, Pesticide applications, and water quality protection.

- CAFOs information:

http://egov.oregon.gov/ODA/NRD/cafo_front.shtml

- Determine if you need a pesticide applicator license:

<http://egov.oregon.gov/ODA/PEST/licensedescr2.shtml>

- Insect Pest Prevention: <http://egov.oregon.gov/ODA/PLANT/IPPM/index.shtml>

- Water quality and land management:

http://egov.oregon.gov/ODA/NRD/water_quality_front.shtml

Learn about Oregon's noxious weeds and other invasive species.

<http://egov.oregon.gov/ODA/PLANT/WEEDS/index.shtml>

<http://oregon.gov/OISC/>

Are you interested in sustainable certification programs? Learn more about some of the types of sustainable certifications that you may wish to consider.

<http://egov.oregon.gov/ODA/sustainability.shtml>