

Information for new horticulture producers in North Coast NSW

Julie Dart

Senior Land Services Officer (Sustainable Agriculture)
North Coast Local Land Services

Establishing a new horticulture enterprise is a popular dream among landholders that move to small farms in our region. This fact sheet is an overview of things to consider before starting a new horticultural enterprise.

Experience level

Do you have any qualifications or relevant experience in production horticulture? It is beneficial to get some work experience on a horticultural farm/orchard/nursery to see if the work is really what you expect it to be. Running a commercial enterprise is very different to gardening at home.

You can gain formal qualifications in horticulture at your local TAFE or vocational college. Certificate 3 and higher-level courses require significant “on-the – job” experience. This is usually done as part of an apprenticeship/traineeship at an established business.

www.tafensw.edu.au/courses

Observe & reflect

It is good practice to observe your new farm in the first year. Are there places on the farm where the following are observed?

- Overly wet soil
- Flood prone
- Frost prone
- Aspect/ shade
- Shallow/Rocky soils
- Slope
- Water runoff after storms
- Direction of prevailing wind

Observing the farm will help you plan where to grow your crop and help to select the most suitable crops for your climate and soil types.

Climate information (rainfall, temperature & evaporation records) can be obtained from the Bureau of Meteorology.

www.bom.gov.au.

Packing shed & growing area

You may need a packing shed with cool-rooms and an area to pack produce. This often requires an extension of your plumbing and electricity services; and possibly an upgrade to three-phase power. Site selection will be important to minimize costs for utilities.

Similar requirements will occur if greenhouses are to be constructed for hydroponic production. For greenhouses aspect is important to optimize growing conditions.

Field growing areas should be planned on a flood free, well drained fertile soil that receives plentiful sunlight and minimal frost. Seasonality of rainfall should also be considered when choosing which crops to grow.

Infrastructure and plantings must not infringe on easements required for powerlines and other services.

Development consent

Some local government areas require a development application to be lodged for intensive horticulture enterprises and structures including greenhouses, nurseries and orchard netting.

Contact your local council for more information, as it will depend on your land zoning and the Local Environment Plan (LEP).

Clearing land

Rural zoned land in NSW is subject to the Biodiversity Conservation Act 2016 and the Local Land Services Act 2013. There are rules around what vegetation can be cleared under current legislation.

You can get advice from a NCLLS Land Management officer on how the native vegetation act applies to your property.

www.lls.nsw.gov.au/help-and-advice/land-management-in-nsw

Soil resources

It is important to determine the soil types present in the area that you intend to farm.

Some basic physical and soil health tests can be done at home. The Northern Rivers Soil Health Card is a useful tool. It was developed by SoilCare Inc.

www.soilcare.org/soil-health-card.html

Soil Chemistry (nutrient) tests are conducted in specialist laboratories. For best results use a NATA and ASPAC accredited laboratory, preferably with a company that can also provide an interpretation of the test results.

Many agricultural supply stores have agronomists that can assist with soil and plant nutrient testing and have links to testing laboratories.

Using water

Town water can be used for irrigation, but it is expensive for large volumes required for horticulture.

“Stock and Domestic” entitlements from streams can only be used for stock water and household use on a rural property. It can't legally be used to irrigate commercial crops.

Usually the entitlement amount (harvestable right) will not be enough to grow commercial crops and you will need to obtain more water from a stream, bore or dam.

Contact the Office of Water to determine what you can extract and to obtain the relevant permits and irrigation licenses.

www.water.nsw.gov.au/water-licensing

What to grow?

Our subtropical climate gives a broad range of opportunities. You will need to thoroughly investigate your options by either engaging a private consultant or doing your own research. You will need to consider end markets and what your farm resources will enable you to produce.

There are some web pages with introductory information. One of these is from AgriFutures Australia. AgriFutures is a good source on information on niche crops and industries.

www.agrifutures.com.au/

The NSW Department of Primary Industries web page has information on different crops and agricultural topics.

www.dpi.nsw.gov.au/agriculture

Selling and marketing

There is no point growing a crop only to find that nobody wants to buy it, or the returns are poor. Talk to your potential buyers/customers to find out what is in demand. These may be:

- wholesale market agents

www.sydneymarkets.com.au/

www.brisbanemarkets.com.au

- local foodservice companies
- local greengrocers,
- restaurants
- farmers markets

www.farmersmarkets.org.au/markets#nsw

- or subscribe to “Food Box” services/
Community Supported Agriculture services.

Talk to retailers who might sell your product. Is there a window in the market that is undersupplied that you can fill?

Do you need to be part of a quality assurance or food safety scheme to be able to sell the product to them?

Selling interstate

If you plan to sell produce into other states, there are likely to be regulatory requirements to keep out certain pests and diseases. This may require certification, monitoring, spraying and record keeping. You will need to talk to the relevant importing state agriculture department, preferably before you plant your crop.

Grower associations

Investigate if there is a grower association for the crop you want to grow. Often, they are a good source of information.

Vegetables: www.ausveg.com.au

Fruit and Nuts: www.horticulture.com.au

Nursery & Garden Industry: www.ngina.com.au/#

The associations above are also responsible for administering research and development levies. A small amount of money is deducted at the point of sale for many crops.

This money is used to fund research and development, or marketing activities for the crop. Research and development funds are matched by the government.

Going organic?

Organic production can provide an opportunity for premium prices through niche markets.

Membership of an organic farming association can also give access to production and marketing advice services.

If you wish to sell your produce as Certified Organic, you will need to register with a certifying body and work through the conversion process. After the conversion period has finished, you will be able to sell your product as Certified organic.

The Organic Federation of Australia is the peak body for Australian Organic farmers. They can provide a list of Certifiers in your area.

www.ofa.org.au/becoming_certified

Using chemicals

If you plan to use chemicals (even organic ones) for insect, weed or disease control you will need to do a chemical user training course at your local TAFE or private training company.

It is the law in NSW that users of agricultural chemicals are trained to a minimum AQF3 level and keep appropriate records of chemical use.

Attending training helps you comply with the laws associated with purchasing, storing & using chemicals. Certification is valid for 5 years.

More information

Julie Dart
North Coast Local Land Services
Phone: 02 6659 9406
Email: julie.dart@lls.nsw.gov.au

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