



SHOULD I BE A VEGETABLE FARMER?

For Beginning Farmers



Virginia Tech • Virginia State University

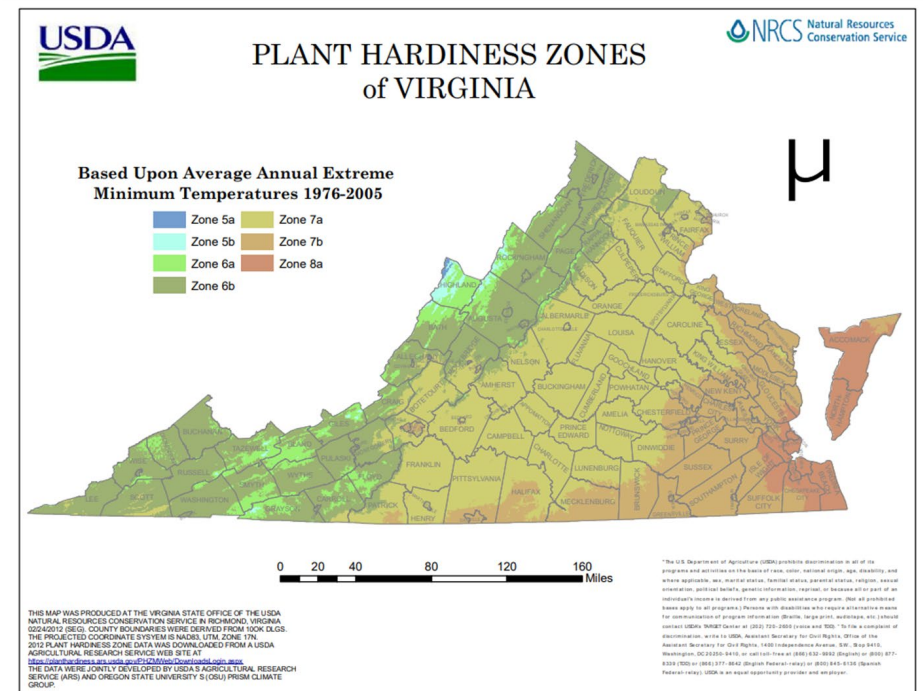
TOP 8 CONSIDERATIONS:

- 1. Location
- 2. Soils
- 3. Size of Operation
- 4. Crop
- 5. Equipment Needed
- 6. Labor Source
- 7. Food Safety
- 8. Marketing of Product



LOCATION & SITE FACTORS

- What Plant Hardiness Zone are you in??
 - Virginia ranges from 6a to 8a
- Site Selection
- Availability of Water



WHAT'S IN MY SOIL???

- Take a soil test!
 - pH – Does my field need lime? And if so how much?
 - Nutrient and Micronutrient Levels
 - Gives Nutrient Recommendations based on predicted crop
- Soil Testing Kits can be picked up at your local Extension Office



Lab ID: 21-43528 27-OCT-21 NORTHAMPTON / 131

Virginia Cooperative Extension Soil Test Report

Questions? Contact:
Northampton County Office
16392 Courthouse Rd
P.O. Box 457
Eastville, VA 23347
757-678-7946

Virginia Tech Soil Testing Laboratory
145 Smyth Hall (0465)
185 Ag Quad Ln
Blacksburg, VA 24061
www.soiltest.vt.edu

SEE NOTES:
1 2
at www.soiltest.vt.edu under Report Notes

O W N E R

C F O P R Y

SAMPLE HISTORY

Sample ID	Field ID	LAST CROP		LAST TIME APPLICATION		SOIL INFORMATION				
		Name	Yield	Months Prev.	Tons/Acre	SMU-1 %	SMU-2 %	SMU-3 %	Yield Estimate	Productivity Group
JPSB1	JPSBLSLURB	Corn (Grain), No Till (1)	185 BU	18+	0.1-1.0					II

LAB TEST RESULTS (see Note 1)

Analysis	P (lb/A)	K (lb/A)	Ca (lb/A)	Mg (lb/A)	Zn (ppm)	Mn (ppm)	Cu (ppm)	Fe (ppm)	B (ppm)	Salts (ppm)
Result	94	75	659	139	2.8	3.0	0.4	17.3	0.2	
Rating	H+	L+	L+	M+	SUFF			SUFF	SUFF	

Analysis	Soil pH	Buffer Index	Est.-CEC (meq/100g)	Acidity (%)	Base Sat. (%)	Ca Sat. (%)	Mg Sat. (%)	K Sat. (%)	Organic Matter (%)
Result	6.1	6.31	2.9	18.8	81.2	57.8	20.1	3.4	

FERTILIZER AND LIMESTONE RECOMMENDATIONS

Crop: Wheat (6)

Lime, Tons/Acre		Fertilizer, lb/A		
Amount	Type	N	P205	K2O
0		0	20	80

810. AT PLANTING, apply 15-30 lbs N/A. If in-field nitrate test was run and NO3 in top 6 inches is greater than 30 ppm, then no N is needed. DECEMBER-JANUARY: if October - December rainfall was heavy, there are less than 3 tillers/plant, crop is pale green and there are several days in Jan-Feb with temperatures greater than 50F, apply 30 lb N/A. Otherwise, apply no N. FEBRUARY-EARLY MARCH, SINGLE N application: count your tillers. If there are less than 100 tillers/sq. ft., apply 80 lb N/A. If there are more than 100 tillers/sq. ft., apply 30-40 lb N/A.

991. "Explanation of Soil Tests, Note 1" and other referenced notes are viewable at www.soiltest.vt.edu under Report Notes.

812. These soils are highly leachable because of thick sandy surfaces. We suggest that you follow a FEBRUARY-EARLY MARCH, SPLIT N application program that requires a plant tissue test. In February, count your tillers. If there are less than 60 tillers/sq. ft., apply 60 lb N/A. For 60-100 tillers/sq. ft., apply 40 lb N/A. For greater than 100 tillers/sq. ft., apply no N. Then in March, tissue test and follow lab's recommendations.

SIZE OF OPERATION

- Don't go to big to fast!
- Come up with a solid business plan and start small and build up as you go



VEGETABLE CROP SELECTION

- Plan based on Seasons
 - Spring/Fall Crops
- Vegetables grown in Virginia:
 - Tomatoes, Potatoes, Watermelon, Cantaloupe, Strawberries, Blueberries, Tree Fruit, Sweet Potatoes, String Beans, Cucumbers, etc.
- How much labor goes into the crop?
 - Tomatoes are “hand” labor intensive compared to Cucurbits
- When/How often can you Harvest
 - Fruit trees can take 5-7 years to fruit




EQUIPMENT NEEDED

Equipment costs can be significant. Plan ahead to anticipate these costs

- **Land Prep** – do you need a tractor and tiller?
- **Harvest** – Mechanical or hand?
- **Irrigation** – do you need a pump and irrigation unit?
- **Pesticide Applications** – How do you plan to spray/eradicate unwanted pests, diseases, or weeds?



LABOR

- Vegetable Farming is very labor intensive, do you have enough help?
- One of the greatest challenges most farmers face is finding labor
 - Mechanical Harvest
- Where do you intend to source your labor?
 - Family
 - Friends
 - Migrants (H2A, H2B)
 - College Students
 - Retirees



FOOD SAFETY

- Food Safety should be a priority when considering a vegetable farm
- FSMA – The “Food Safety Modernization Act”
 - Establishes minimum standards for growing, harvesting, packing, and storing produce
 - Any farm that has an average annual value of produce sold during the previous three-year period of \$25,000 or less
 - Focuses on:
 - Agricultural Water
 - Biological Soil Amendments
 - Domesticated and Wild Animals
 - Worker Training and Health and Hygiene
 - Equipment, Tools, and Buildings
- Covered Produce = fruits and vegetables that are typically consumed raw
- Enforced by Virginia Department of Consumer Services (VDACS)



FOOD SAFETY

- Good Agricultural Practices (GAP) Plans
 - Becoming an industry standard for vegetable buyers like Walmart, Wegmans, Kroger, etc.
 - Even for “non-covered” produce such as potatoes
- Different types of Plans
 - USDA Harmonized GAP, Primus, Global GAP



MARKETING PLAN

Things To Consider:

- What is your target market?
 - Farmers Markets
 - Farm Stands
 - CSA
 - Wholesale
 - Produce Broker
- How are you going to get your produce to your market?
- How will you store your produce until its ready to go to market?



OVERALL VIEW

- Vegetable farming is a big commitment with lots of moving pieces
- Key Pieces of Advice:
 - Start Small and work to get bigger
 - You can't grow everything, narrow down what you want to grow
 - Know your Soils
 - Consider all capital investments you may need, including Equipment, Crop Inputs - (fertilizer & pesticides, & Marketing)
 - Food Safety is huge!
 - Have a Marketing Plan

THANK YOU

