



I WANT TO GO PRO – WHERE DO I START?

We've heard many reasons to go pro, and none yet have been bad ones. Recently, we received this request for advice from an experienced gardener whose situation is becoming more common. "My husband's employer just announced that they wouldn't be giving any raises this year. As my husband just became licensed (architecture), we had been counting on a raise. Well, I figured one way to make some money is to start a market garden. I don't know where to begin or if it's even feasible. But, I figure people always need food. Just wanted your thoughts on the matter." She came to the right place. Master SPIN farmer, Wally Satzewich, suggests that aspiring SPIN farmers start by answering these 10 questions.

1) How will you sell your produce?

HINT: More and more people are willing to pay the real cost of real food, and demand for locally growing food is increasing. SPIN-Farming is based on direct marketing, which means all sales go directly into the farmer's pocket. For the beginning farmer who has yet to demonstrate consistent production capacity, the recommended sales channels are farmer's markets or onsite farm stands. CSA programs and restaurants require reliable production of a wide variety of top-quality produce that can only be achieved by having paid your dues.

2) What is the number of your marketing weeks?

HINT: Marketing weeks is the number of weeks for which you are going to have produce for sale. Beginning SPIN farmers plan on 20-30 marketing weeks because that period accommodates most climates and most new farmer's energy levels. The number of marketing weeks is determined solely by you based on your level of expertise, markets, time availability and resources. Once you have mastered the basics of SPIN you can choose to operate year-round.

3) How much total income do you want to make?

HINT: Farmers don't achieve Trump-size bank accounts, but the perks (health, self-reliance and good fellowship) are priceless. With the SPIN-Farming system, beginning farmers should target \$500 average gross weekly sales for a 20-30 marketing week period. Advanced SPIN farmers can reach levels of \$1,000-\$2,000+ average gross weekly sales.

4) What average level of sales do you need to generate each week?

HINT: It's the total income divided by the number of your marketing weeks.

5) Do you need a reality check?

HINT: If your targeted income is \$40,000 and you are only planning on 20 marketing weeks, you need to average \$2,000 in sales every week. Can you do that based on your expertise, resources and market? If not, you need to lower your income expectations or extend your marketing weeks. You can start to see how this planning exercise provides a framework for managing your business, cashflow and expectations.

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6) What crops can you grow without too many problems that are in demand?

HINT: High-value crops like golden and candy cane beets, carrots, fresh herbs, garlic, radish, salad mix, scallion, specialty onions, and spinach are steady sellers for many SPIN farm. Break down what crops you will be offering on a weekly basis. By doing this, you will be getting into the mindset of offering a variety of produce each week. SPIN farmers aim to have different choices and a wider variety of crops than conventional larger scale growers. This is known as your crop repertoire.

7) What is the size of your land base and how will you be allocating it?

HINT: SPIN-Farming is based on allocating whatever size land base you have to different areas of production intensity using the 1-2-3 layout. The 1 area of your farm is the least intensive and is devoted to lower value single crops per season. The 2 area of your farm is devoted to bi-relay crops, in which 2 higher-value crops per standard size bed are grown sequentially throughout the season. The 3 area of your farm is where you are doing your intensive relays in which 3 or more high-value crops per standard size bed are grown sequentially throughout the season. Each of these areas contributes a different amount to your total income, with the 3 high-value area obviously contributing the most.

8) What is your labor pool? Can you do most of the work, or will you need help?

HINT: Labor is the single biggest expense in any farm operation, so SPIN farmers aim to minimize or even eliminate the need for outside labor. It carries on the tradition of tapping into the low-cost, no-cost network of family and friends and barter labor for produce when possible. There is no such thing as specialization in the SPIN-Farming system. SPIN farmers do it all, from planning, planting, recordkeeping, weeding, watering, harvesting, post-harvesting, marketing, bookkeeping. You will never be bored!

9) What kind of refrigeration capacity do you have?

HINT: You'll have better success in the SPIN-Farming system if you can invest in a commercial cooler. By processing and cooling your crops as quickly as possible after harvesting, you lock in their nutritional value, taste, appearance and prolong their shelf life, which supports premium pricing. A cooler also allows 5 day a week harvesting, giving you better control of your workflow. Usually leafy greens are harvested a day or two before market, while other crops can be harvested earlier in the week. In spring, when spring vegetables are in high demand, a typical harvest schedule might be: Monday: Scallion; Tuesday: Green garlic; Wednesday: Radish bunches; Thursday: Spinach; Friday: Lettuce, baby greens, salad mixes; Saturday: Market day

10) What type of infrastructure and equipment do you have in place right now?

HINT: SPIN-Farming requires minimal infrastructure – cooler, post-harvesting station, shed, irrigation, farm stand. Apart from a few specialty tools and a rototiller, most of the gear is standard issue garden grade/hardware store variety. You might already have a lot of what you need. The point is to source locally and use your ingenuity and industriousness more than your wallet.

A final suggestion: DON'T GO IT ALONE. Help and support are a click away at www.spinfarming.com. There you will find a community of beginning and experienced farmers, suppliers and government agencies who regard SPIN as part of an exuberant, expanding experiment whose contributors thrill to the notion that they are engaging in something momentous and historical. They are using SPIN to provide a whole new sense of what you can be doing and how you can get it done and want to share in creating a bright future for farming. Join in.....

How can I learn more?

More free pass-along downloads showing SPIN-Farming in action are available at www.spinfarming.com

SPIN-Farming Makes Agriculture Accessible to Anyone, Anywhere!