



AGROFORESTRY NOTES

Direct Marketing for Agroforestry Producers

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Introduction

Agroforestry can enable producers to generate income through the sale of high-value conventional and specialty products. The greatest challenge, however, is often marketing rather than production. For small to mid-sized agroforestry operations, direct marketing can provide pathways to profit.

Direct marketing is a process through which producers sell products and experiences directly to consumers. It differs from wholesale marketing, whereby producers sell at low prices to bulk buyers who then resell the goods to retailers. Unlike wholesale or marketing through intermediaries, direct marketing enables producers to build relationships with consumers and receive a significant portion of the retail price for each product sold. Some direct-to-consumer market channels include farm stands, farmers markets, “pick-your-own” and agritourism experiences, on-farm stands/stores, Community Supported Agriculture (CSA), and internet sales.

While it may have benefits, direct marketing comes with its own set of unique challenges. To be successful, the producer must invest time and money to develop market channels and make decisions about every aspect of marketing and sales. This involves—among other things—testing the product, setting prices, and educating consumers.

Objectives

This Agroforestry Note is intended as a resource for technical assistance providers, agricultural advisors, and producers interested in marketing agroforestry products. It provides information about direct marketing channels for tree crops and other goods produced from agroforestry systems, as well as questions to consider when developing a marketing plan. While not a step-by-step guide for developing a marketing plan, this document is intended to assist with getting started and provide additional resources for further learning.

Citation

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Benefits and Challenges

The specialty crops grown in agroforestry systems, such as pawpaw (*Asimina triloba*), black walnut (*Juglans nigra*), elderberry (*Sambucus* spp.), ramps (*Allium tricoccum*), mushrooms, and other nontimber forest products, may have small markets or be unfamiliar to consumers, which can make direct marketing more challenging. Often, agroforestry producers choose to grow higher value, less common tree and shrub species to offset the costs of the agroforestry system. They believe they can receive a higher per-unit return for chestnuts, for example, than for apples, because it is challenging to compete economically with larger orchards or farms. Producers can also cultivate non-specialty products such as timber in agroforestry systems and use marketing strategies that fall outside of the methods discussed here.

Compared to wholesale marketing, direct marketing channels can offer multiple benefits to agroforestry producers. For example, they may:

- Give higher financial return per unit sold.
- Enable producers to set their own prices and maintain control over the marketing plan (i.e., when, where, and how to sell).
- Allow producers to interact directly with consumers.
- Give producers the chance to trial new products and receive feedback before making a significant investment in the product (i.e., selling small batches of value-added products such as jams before committing to making hundreds of jars or buying specialized equipment).

However, direct marketing also comes with challenges. When implementing a direct marketing strategy, producers may consider that:

- Markets for specialty crops can be small, localized, and/or volatile.
- Consumers may be unfamiliar with products, and the producer may have to educate buyers or offer samples.
- Direct marketing methods may require more time, energy, and skill development than selling through intermediaries.
- Given the long-term and successional nature of agroforestry systems, the marketing plan may change over time.
- Direct marketing may leave producers with unsold products.

Direct Marketing Channels

Agroforestry producers may want to perform market research and analysis when developing their marketing strategies. This involves assessing existing marketing channels, the customers within those markets and their preferences, competitors and pricing, sales potential, and other factors. It is often advantageous to market products through multiple channels, such as farmers markets and online sales, to reach new customers. Producers should consider the unique challenges and opportunities of each direct marketing channel. Some common direct-to-consumer marketing channels are described below.

On-farm stores or stands: On-farm stores or stands accounted for nearly 42 percent of direct-to-consumer sales in the United States in 2020, according to the U.S. Department of Agriculture's (USDA) [2020 Local Food Marketing Practices Survey](#) (USDA NASS 2022). This broad category includes operations as simple as passive self-serve roadside stands and as elaborate as fully staffed farm stores. Sales in this category may rely heavily on factors like location and customer preferences. On-farm stores can be an effective and low-cost way to market the farm itself and potentially educate consumers about agroforestry practices and products. Producers can benefit from building relationships with the customers who visit the farm by asking what products they would be interested in purchasing and building a product selection based on customer suggestions.

Farmers markets: The term "farmers market" is used to describe a market where producers (and often other types of vendors) sell their products directly to the consumer. Farmers markets effectively connect local producers of generally low-volume, high-value products with customers who prioritize local products and value the direct connection with producers and their staff. Sponsorship of farmers markets may come from communities, State or local community service agencies, extension or education programs, and private citizens.

Community Supported Agriculture: Community Supported Agriculture (CSA) is a growing and purchasing partnership between producers and members of the local community. The producer grows food for a group of shareholders (subscribers) who pledge to buy a portion of the farm's crop or products that season, often paying for their shares before the growing season or in installments during the season. Given this agreement, it is important for producers to be clear up front with subscribers about how the CSA will work and how the amount of crops and products subscribers receive will vary based on how well the crops grow. This may be an opportunity for agroforestry producers to engage with and educate customers about how their agroforestry system functions.

Typically, CSAs work best for farms that produce a variety of products. While not all agroforestry operations feature a wide range of crops, the diversified nature of some agroforestry systems may make CSAs viable for some producers. Certain arrangements of perennial crops, annual crops, nonperishable goods, and value-added products may enable producers to improve cash flow over the course of the year by selling products during different seasons (e.g., meat, row crops, tree crops, syrups, medicinal plants), potentially during a wider seasonal window than other CSAs.

The CSA approach secures consumers who, in turn, share the risks and benefits of the growing cycle with the producer. It may require significant time and experimentation to establish CSA terms. Agroforestry producers can also seek opportunities to sell their specialty products such as decorative woody florals, mushrooms, meat, syrups, jams, and more at another farm's CSA to diversify its offerings.

Online sales: The internet and social media have fundamentally changed the way people shop for food and farm products, both fresh and value added. Value-added processing can make some crops more shelf stable and easily marketable. The recent proliferation of online sales platforms and services presents producers with a range of options to promote and sell their products. Some producers use web-based platforms to sell products and allow the customer to pick up their purchase at the farm or another location. Others use e-commerce platforms as a full-service digital storefront, allowing them to process payments, manage memberships and subscriptions like CSAs, and even ship products to broaden the range of their customer base and expand their market access.

Note that some platforms offer integrated services that go beyond online sales, including point-of-sale technology and processing, website development, and even whole farm accounting. Because of this broad range of options, it is important for producers to evaluate their own goals and needs against the services that these software platforms provide, as well as their costs.

“Pick your own” and agritourism: Pick-your-own or “U-pick” operations can offer several advantages for agroforestry producers, including reducing labor costs related to harvesting, washing, and packing. Agritourism includes a broader range of activities that can attract visitors onto a farm for the purposes of entertainment and/or education while generating income. Farm tours and farm stays may be an effective way of informing new consumers about lesser known forest products and agroforestry practices. However, producers should strongly consider logistical, legal, and administrative details, including parking and other site upgrades for public access, liability insurance, and labor needs.

Community Considerations and Opportunities

Each direct marketing channel offers producers the chance to engage with communities to share knowledge about agroforestry while building a viable direct marketing enterprise. Beyond CSAs, farm stands, and farmers markets, increasingly popular direct marketing channels such as farm to school and farm to institution (e.g., companies, hospitals, prisons) offer producers a chance to foster connections to local community. USDA’s [2023 Farm to School Census](#) (USDA Farm to School Census 2025) provides a picture of where—and to what extent—schools are incorporating local foods into their menus. These marketing approaches are sometimes not considered “direct to consumer” because the schools or institutions technically act as intermediaries between producers and the final consumers. However, depending on a producer’s capacity and interest, selling to local schools or institutions can be a valuable part of a direct marketing strategy. Producers can build awareness of their brand and even expand to engage with the community through farm tours, field trips, and other educational opportunities.

These channels may be viable for agroforestry producers, particularly if the institution has an interest in local food or if its other suppliers do not offer the more regional or specialty crops that can be grown in agroforestry systems. Farm-to-school/institution programs may require consistent production volume and thus favor farms that can provide that. This predictability of demand—often specified in forward contracts—can be beneficial to the producer, who can plan production and costs accordingly. Some university extension programs or other statewide offices offer farm-to-school directories where producers can indicate that they have products available for sale. See the USDA Food and Nutrition Service lists of [State farm-to-school agency contacts](#) and [regional farm-to-school specialists](#) for more information (USDA FNS 2025).

The planning, labor, and marketing to run a CSA or sell products through farm-to-school/ institution programs can be extensive and require an understanding of local interest and demand. Agroforestry producers just beginning with direct marketing may prefer to start small, first establishing connections in the community and tapping into existing, local market opportunities such as farmers markets. Building relationships in the community can facilitate awareness of and access to different market opportunities.

Online marketing can be another highly impactful way to engage with both local and geographically distant communities and cultivate customers, particularly for producers who are not located near population centers or are selling products for which existing local demand may be small. Websites or other online engagement such as social media also present opportunities to share more information about farm practices, connecting with consumers and educating them about the origins of their food or goods.

Direct Marketing Channels: Takeaways

Each direct marketing channel comes with its own unique challenges and potential benefits for producers. Table 1 outlines some of these characteristics, though it is not an exhaustive list. Common labor expenses are excluded as they may apply across all channels.

DIRECT MARKETING CHANNEL	COMMON EXPENSES	KEY BENEFITS	DRAWBACKS	AGROFORESTRY-SPECIFIC CONSIDERATIONS
FARM STAND	Signage, advertising, supplies and infrastructure, additional hired labor (if stand is staffed)	Easy to test products, start small, and expand; producer sets hours of operation	Location dependent, potential for low customer turnout	Opportunity to let customers see the agroforestry system if near the farm stand
FARMERS MARKET	Market fees, signage, supplies and infrastructure, transportation to market, additional hired labor (if needed)	Many customers in a short time; easier entry point for new producers; opportunity to test products, gather market insights, and advertise and promote products	Unsold product, competition with other vendors, travel to market may be far with early setup times	Opportunity to differentiate from the competition by selling lesser known crops or value-added goods
COMMUNITY SUPPORTED AGRICULTURE (CSA)	Packaging, supplies and infrastructure, advertising	Up-front payments, customers share production-related risks	Customers may expect a diversity of products (usually vegetables)	Opportunity to educate customers about lesser known products, share recipes and/or a farm newsletter, and build community; requires careful planning and communication of production timelines

DIRECT MARKETING CHANNEL	COMMON EXPENSES	KEY BENEFITS	DRAWBACKS	AGROFORESTRY-SPECIFIC CONSIDERATIONS
ONLINE SALES	Packaging goods for transport, costs associated with online marketplace and payment systems	Vastly expands market access	Potential for complicated shipping logistics and significant additional online fees (website platform, email marketing, service and credit card fees)	Can work especially well for less perishable goods such as preserves, tinctures, nuts, seeds, and craft items
"PICK YOUR OWN"/ AGRITOURISM	Signage, advertising, picking/harvesting supplies for customers, additional liability insurance; may require staffing and customer supervision	Reduces harvest labor needs	Weather dependent, liability risks, requires adequate parking and facilities, must attract customers at harvest times	Potential for different "pick-your-own" crops at different times of year or over a period of years as the system matures
FARM TO SCHOOL/ INSTITUTION	Packaging (often larger volumes), transportation/delivery	Consistent, predictable demand and forward contracts, can sell in larger quantities, potential to help build brand awareness	Potential liability risks (food safety), lower per-unit price than other direct-to-consumer sales	May suit agroforestry producers if institutions are interested in goods not offered (or offered at a higher price) by their traditional suppliers, may be a good market for seconds/B-grade products

Whether starting a CSA, applying to be a vendor at a farmers market, or erecting a roadside farm stand, each market channel involves its own list of considerations (labor, legal and administrative requirements, applications, etc.), many of which must be initiated months or even years in advance. Once enough information has been gathered about each market channel, it may be helpful to break each direct marketing strategy into immediate, medium-term, and long-term tasks and goals.

The USDA Agricultural Marketing Service maintains [local food directories](#) where producers and consumers can connect with markets in their area sorted by channel. USDA also implements several programs to support local and regional food businesses generally and direct marketing specifically. For help navigating those programs, producers can consult the [USDA Local and Regional Food Systems Resource Guide](#).

Developing a Direct-to-Consumer Marketing Strategy

A direct marketing strategy most often starts with an assessment of one's current business plan, personal and business goals, and crop plan and production system. While the potential benefits of direct marketing may suit many agroforestry businesses, success often requires significant time, labor, cost, and development of new skill sets that may or may not be a good fit for every agricultural business or producer personality. A marketing strategy, therefore, should be informed by each producer's specific goals and weighed against their skills, interest, and capacity.

In some agroforestry systems, the type and volume of crops available to sell may change over the years as the perennials within the system mature. This can require careful planning, since marketing strategies and harvesting, processing, and packaging may need to change over time. It can be beneficial to "begin with the end in mind" by creating a multiyear marketing plan that accounts for the growth and succession of species within the whole farm system. For example, newly planted trees in an alley cropping system will be small during the early years, allowing for more space and sunlight in the alleys. A producer could plan to grow and market high-value, full-sun annuals during this time, eventually transitioning to other more shade-tolerant species in the alleys as the trees grow larger. Other opportunities may arise throughout the life of the system as well, such as selling seeds, cuttings, or nursery stock to other interested growers.

Agroforestry systems often generate multiple marketable products. This diversification can help mitigate some of the financial risks inherent to direct marketing. If the price for one crop (such as tree nuts) drops one year, or the crop fails, this loss can be offset by other products like annual crops, livestock, or nontimber forest products. Yet, with multiple marketable products, producers will also need to plan the timing of their marketing strategy. For instance, it is important to consider harvest schedules for the various elements of the system. Will multiple crops come into harvest (and thus need to be processed and/or marketed) at similar times? Can some crops be stored for long periods of time (e.g., hazelnuts [*Corylus* spp.]) or do they need to be processed quickly (e.g., elderberries)? If availability of labor or equipment is a concern, should the producer select species or varieties that come into harvest at different times? If the farm has grazing livestock, how do harvest windows interact with grazing periods?

Other questions that may arise depend on the producer's chosen products and marketing channels. For example:

- Is value-added processing desired or needed for any crops or products? If so, with what equipment, and where and when will it take place?
- If doing a pick-your-own operation, is the planting adequately spaced and laid out for crowds? Will visitors be able to reach tree crops?
- If selling at a farm stand, where will the stand and signage be placed to ensure visibility and accessibility to buyers?

It is helpful to consider such questions early in the planning stage and develop an annual and multiyear marketing plan in tandem with the initial agroforestry site design, if possible. Some planning tools exist to help producers estimate expenses and income across multiple perennial crops and may be useful when selecting market channels and setting prices. These include the [Forest Farming Calculator](#) (National Agroforestry Center), [Fruit and Nut Compass](#) (University of Wisconsin-Madison's Center for Integrated Agricultural Systems), [Specialty Mushrooms Business Planning Guide](#) (Cornell Small Farms Program), and many crop-specific enterprise budgets and financial decision-support tools.

After initial market research and analysis, producers can begin to develop a marketing plan. Given that the fruits, nuts, and value-added products from agroforestry systems may not be familiar to some consumers, it is important to have a well-conceived marketing plan. Each direct marketing channel, market segment, or even individual product may call for a specific marketing strategy. Common elements and considerations for a marketing plan include:

- **Customers:** Who are the target customers for each market channel and what is important to them?
- **Product and packaging:** What products will be offered at which markets? What makes them unique? What is the best way to describe, present, and package them to customers? What volume or unit (e.g., per pound, per ounce, per bunch) is most marketable and profitable for each product at each market? Producers may also consider to what extent customers might value third-party or Government certifications such as organic on product labels; in some cases, producers are eligible for marketing support to qualify for and use those certifications (see [USDA's financial resources for organic farmers and ranchers](#)).
- **Pricing:** What factors, from seed to harvest to market, impact the price of each product? What is a sustainable, profitable price for each product? How price sensitive are customers to a potentially novel product? For reference, [USDA's farmers market fruit and vegetable price reports](#) (USDA AMS 2025a) are available for a number of States and regions from the USDA Agricultural Marketing Service.
- **Branding and promotion:** What is unique and compelling about the farm's story, the production system, land, and products that customers may respond to? How will the producer communicate that to the customers for each market channel and on which platforms?

When setting prices and developing a marketing plan, producers will benefit from careful analysis of the costs of production and marketing relative to potential profit. Profit, or net revenue, can be understood as gross returns minus production and marketing costs, which include both fixed and variable costs (Bruch and Ernst 2010). Here are a few key terms that are helpful to understand when conducting budget analysis:

- **Gross return:** This is the price received for each product multiplied by the number of units sold.
- **Fixed costs of production:** Also known as overhead, examples include insurance costs, property taxes, rental payments, interest costs, and capital expenditures, such as for new or upgraded equipment. These costs do not change in relation to production or sales volume.
- **Variable costs of production:** These costs do change in relation to production or sales volume, and include seed/plant stock, labor, fertilizer, fuel, packaging, and more.
- **Marketing costs:** These include all the costs involved in marketing and transporting products to customers and may include packaging, fuel for transport to market, marketing labor, advertising, licensing, permits, and fees.

Labor Needs

Direct marketing often requires a wide array of skills and expertise, from product development to market research to sales, just to name a few. Responsibility for all aspects of marketing can fall on the shoulders of producers whose expertise and experience may skew instead toward production. It is important for producers to know when and how to seek assistance.

Marketing labor needs will vary depending on the size of the operation and the direct marketing channels the producer pursues. The choice of which products to grow and sell—and whether they require value-added processing—will also impact the work and expertise required to turn a profit. Producers interested in value-added processing may be eligible to apply for USDA's [Value-Added Producer Grant Program](#), which supports planning activities such as feasibility studies and business plan development for processing and marketing (USDA Rural Development 2025). More information on value-added processing is available from the [Agricultural Marketing Resource Center](#) (AgMRC 2025).

Labor needs will change over time as the operation grows or contracts. From a production standpoint, labor requirements in an agroforestry system may be high during establishment years but decrease over time as the system matures (McRae 2024). When planning for marketing-related labor needs, it is important to work out ahead of time how the cost of additional labor will compare to the expected returns from increased sales volume, marketing new products, or branching out into new direct marketing channels. Changes to the production system or marketing strategy may require new team members with specific skills in production, marketing, management, and customer relations or may require time for existing team members to develop these skills.

Evaluating and Adjusting the Strategy

While it is important to have a direct marketing strategy in place before sales begin, it is valuable and often necessary to evaluate and adjust the strategy as time goes on. It may be helpful to allow flexibility for unexpected costs, increases in expected costs, market fluctuation, and production-related changes when developing the marketing strategy.

Diligent recordkeeping is invaluable to producers beginning with direct marketing, especially if engaging consumers across multiple market channels. Understanding which products sell, for how much, to whom, and when they sell in the greatest volume can help producers evaluate the success of their strategy. Without detailed records, it is difficult to effectively evaluate progress or take advantage of new opportunities.

Agroforestry may allow producers with a diversity of crops—or crops that can provide multiple products—to have a flexible marketing strategy based on the growing conditions of a particular year. Some seasons may bring crop failures or reduced yields. Getting creative with the products that can be marketed from a single crop can reduce risk. With black currant (*Ribes* spp.), for example, in addition to the berries, producers can market cuttings, leaves for tea, oil from the buds, and wood for smoking foods. To complement berry sales, producers growing elderberry can also market flowers and cuttings from the plant. Such approaches may help agroforestry operations remain competitive and resilient in the face of unpredictable environmental conditions. The success of such strategies may depend on the producer's understanding of consumer demand and preferences, as well as their willingness to use creative approaches to educate consumers about unfamiliar products.

Understanding and monitoring trends in consumer preferences—and staying ahead of them—will help ensure the long-term success of a direct marketing operation. One way to ensure consumers' needs are being met is to seek their feedback. The opportunity to interact directly with consumers can work to the producer's advantage if they are willing to listen to suggestions, build relationships, experiment, adapt, and learn as they go. This can lead to unexpected opportunities.

Legal Considerations

Producers selling products directly to consumers should obtain liability insurance and must follow the U.S. Food and Drug Administration (FDA) [Food Safety Modernization Act \(FSMA\)](#) rules (U.S. FDA 2025). Among the FSMA rules, the [Produce Safety rule](#) (U.S. FDA 2015) outlines minimum standards for the safe growth, harvest, packing, and holding of fruits and vegetables for human consumption. Farms with an average annual value of produce sold of \$25,000 or less (adjusted for inflation) are not covered by the rule. To determine if the farm in question is subject to the Produce Safety rule, see FDA's [Standards for Produce Safety flowchart](#) and review [FSMA inflation-adjusted cutoffs](#). Not all produce is covered by the Produce Safety rule, including goods not identified as "raw agricultural commodities" or goods identified as "rarely consumed raw." See FDA's [frequently asked questions on FSMA](#) for more information.

It is important to ensure proper food storage, safety, and hygiene; obtain land use or zoning approval; and follow regulations for public restroom availability. Good roadside signage for farm stands that complies with local zoning regulations allows visitors to stop safely. If marketing pick-your-own experiences or farm tours, or selling from a farm stand, producers should secure appropriate liability insurance for their operation. Basic property insurance or general liability insurance will not cover many direct marketing activities. Producers should be clear with their insurance agent about the specific activities taking place on their farm to ensure their policy covers all associated risks. When a new activity is added, revise the policy to reflect new risks.

It is important to understand State and local regulations around farm business coverage and liability. If the site operation has livestock, producers may need coverage for accidents caused by animals. In the event of an emergency, it is important to have protocols in place so that employees can respond swiftly. Proper signage, regular recordkeeping, and routine property and equipment inspections can help to prevent accidents from happening and avoid negligence charges in the event a visitor files a claim.

Producers interested in direct marketing may register their business as a limited liability company (LLC) or other limited liability business entity. This involves registering the operation with the State as a business, paying a registration fee and attorney fees, and filing annual reports. Registering as a limited liability entity can significantly reduce personal risk and liability. In the case someone is injured on the farm, or the operation is subject to other legal judgements or debt, only business assets—rather than personal assets—can be used to pay. However, operating an LLC requires clear recordkeeping that separates personal and business assets, as well as careful adherence to State reporting requirements (Anderson Brekken 2016).

If the point of sale is off the farm, such as through CSAs or farmers markets, or directly to restaurants, grocery stores, or institutions, it is important to hold adequate liability and property insurance, follow [Good Agricultural Practices \(GAP\)](#) (USDA AMS 2025b), and meet any State and local requirements for selling specific products. Farmers markets may require proof of liability insurance or other paperwork as part of the vendor application. Products sold online or through the mail are subject to the customs regulations of the States or countries to which they are shipped (Adam et al. 1999).

Some legal considerations may be particularly relevant to agroforestry producers. Certain crops, including some nontimber forest products, are marketed for their therapeutic value as dietary supplements and medicines. To label these products as drugs or medicines, however, requires testing to meet FDA standards. If the products do not meet these strict standards, producers must market them as food items and make no claims of medical benefits. The harvest and sale of some plant species commonly used in agroforestry systems are also subject to additional regulation. For example, American ginseng (*Panax quinquefolius*) is regulated by the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species (CITES) due to concerns about overharvesting of wild populations. Lists of CITES and Endangered Species Act (ESA)-regulated plants are available from the [USDA Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service](#). CITES imposes no controls on shipments between U.S. States and territories, but rules about the harvest and sale of certain species may vary between States (U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service 2012).

Examples

The following examples showcase creative approaches to direct marketing by agroforestry producers in different regions of the United States.

Wild Hudson Valley, Cairo, NY

A forest farm and educational organization, Wild Hudson Valley engages with the public in a variety of ways including nature walks and workshops, “eco-camping,” a seasonal CSA of wild and forest-farmed foods, and an online store, through which they offer a range of products including American ginseng seed, root stock, ramp bulbs, and more. This mix of direct marketing strategies allows Wild Hudson Valley to educate the public about their practices and products and diversify their income sources.



A springtime Wild Harvest Box from Wild Hudson Valley. Ingredients include (clockwise from upper left): ramps/ wild leeks (*Allium tricoccum*), black birch twigs (*Betula lenta*), honeysuckle greens (*Cryptotaenia canadensis*), wild golden oyster mushrooms (*Pleurotus citrinopileatus*), woodnettle greens (*Laportea canadensis*), damselflower (*Hesperis matronalis*), and Virginia waterleaf greens (*Hydrophyllum virginianum*). Courtesy photo by Wild Hudson Valley.

Spencer Shadow Ranch, Eugene, OR

Doug McCarty and his family manage every aspect of their silvopasture operation at Spencer Shadow Ranch, from cattle breeding to tree thinning to marketing. They use a type of direct-to-consumer sales called private treaty, by which customers purchase live cattle in whole, half, and quarter cow options and are put in contact with a butcher directly. The McCartys encourage the community to tour the ranch to see how the land is managed and how livestock are treated. They have relied on social media, a newsletter, and word of mouth to build a reliable customer base.



Cattle under partial shade in a silvopasture paddock at Spencer Shadow Ranch. Courtesy photo by Mitchel Davidowitz.

Integration Acres, Albany, OH

Integration Acres sells a variety of food products using native plants like black walnut, persimmon (*Diospyros* spp.), spicebush (*Lindera* spp.), ramps, and pawpaw. They also sell pawpaw seeds and seedlings and creative value-added products such as ramp crackers, soaps, and frozen fruit pulp. Their main marketing channels are a year-round farmers market, online sales, and on-farm sales by appointment.



Ramp crackers for sale at a farm stand. Creative value-added processing can allow producers to reach new customers, increase net profit, and extend the marketing season. Courtesy photo by Steve Gabriel.

Waipā Foundation, Hanalei, HI

Waipā Foundation stewards a 1,600-acre ahupua'a, a Native Hawaiian political-ecological land division stretching from the mountains to the sea. The foundation works to restore natural ecosystems while inspiring healthy, thriving communities. They engage in direct marketing in creative ways that encourage visitors and the local community to learn about Hawaiian history, cultural practices, and food production. In addition to farm stand sales of value-added, seasonal products and a farmers market that provides opportunities to local producers, the foundation also offers tours and hands-on experiences through their Cultural Foodways Program. Visitors learn about traditional Hawaiian food systems and current agroforestry practices through a food and farm tour that includes harvesting, food preparation, and shared meals.



Agroforestry crops for sale at Waipā's farmers market including Indigenous crops 'ulu (breadfruit; *Artocarpus altilis*), 'ōlena (turmeric; *Curcuma longa*), 'ōhi'a 'ai (mountain apple; *Syzygium malaccense*), and more recent introductions okra (*Abelmoschus esculentus*) and lime (*Citrus* spp.). One of the foundation's goals is to introduce the broader community to a diversity of traditional and adapted crops. Courtesy photo by Waipā Foundation.

Conclusion

There are advantages and disadvantages to any marketing strategy. Whether a direct marketing strategy is suitable for a particular situation will depend on the size of the operation, the variety of crops grown, available labor, and the producer's goals and personality. Many producers use more than one marketing strategy simultaneously to maximize profit and operational efficiency, and others use different strategies at different times. Some markets may be well established for the unique products of agroforestry systems, while others remain to be created by enterprising producers. Direct marketing may offer unique benefits to agroforestry producers—particularly those with small to medium-sized operations. Understanding customer preferences, competitors, and production timelines and anticipating marketing costs early in the planning process can sow the seeds for a successful enterprise.

Additional Information

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