

## **Farm Decision Making**

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Kilpatrick Family Farm is a mixed vegetable, fruit and poultry farm located in Middle Granville, NY zone 4b. The majority of our sales are through a 200 member CSA as well as several farmers' markets in Saratoga Springs and Glens Falls, NY. We also sell a limited amount of items wholesale through Co-ops, restaurants, and to other CSA's. The farm is approximately 500 acres of owned, rented and leased land, 40 tillable acres, 100 pastured acres, and the balance woodlot and scrub. We plant between 12-14 acres of vegetables and fruit every year.

Early on in our farming career, we knew that we needed to make a plan, and then work towards that goal. Thus, every year, we start with a strategy session. We lay out what our idea of what the next 3 years will look like. We look at our current markets, what is changing, and how we are going to change our business based on those factors. We create several scenarios and directions the farm could go, analyzing the land base it would necessitate, the equipment and personnel that it would require, and how every aspect would fit into our life and farm vision.

Specifically, in regards to marketing, we cost out all our expenses for each channel. For example, CSAs have to cover our CSA coordinator's salary, brochures, and any expenses specific to the CSA. A Farmer's market has to cover the fees of that market, the mileage, the employees that staff the market, etc. Even though our wholesale orders are on the same truck as our farmer's market, it is still responsible for its own mileage.

Kilpatrick Family Farm is made up of 6 different rented/leased properties. Therefore, when analyzing land acquisition, we are looking at several qualities: 1. Soil type, quality, and track size. 2. Water availability. 3. Proximity to current worked properties. 4. Track record of landowner - we vet them seriously. 5. Security of land i.e. is it fenced, gated, or would that be easy to accomplish. Our goal is for at least a 5-year, rolling lease, but we will sign as short as a 3 year rolling lease if the land scores very high in all other categories. We only use the soil maps as a resource, and check the property thoroughly ourselves.

We make a list of the equipment we are looking to buy that year, as well as the next year. If we are going to buy it new, we make sure to order it during the winter with plenty of lead time so that we can get it set up and tested before the busyness of the season begins. Other equipment we watch for and then buy when the right machine comes along. We maintain a 5-10 K rainy day fund for equipment that might not be on our current list, because sometimes a good deal may become available and is too good to pass up. We check places like Craigslist, eBay, machinefinder.com, tractorhouse.com, and other known equipment clearinghouses on a regular basis.

We try to make sure that any equipment that we buy is multi-use. For example, several years ago we bought a hi-wheel JD tractor. It was great for the few things it did but way too specialized for the size of our farm. We ended up selling it at a loss. Another example is the vegetable washer we bought this year. Not only does it wash our tomatoes that it was purchased for, but peppers, eggplants, squash, cucumbers, melons, and new potatoes, making it well worth the money we spent on it.

As we are making decisions on the farm we are constantly asking these questions:

How does this fit with my long-term plan?

How many hours will this save us? Cost us?

How does this affect, me, the farmer?

How does this affect our crew? What do they think?

How does this affect the farm financially, or what are the long-term liabilities of this decision?

How does this fit with our systems already existing on the farm?

Do we have the money for it?

What additional expenses, resources, or time commitments will this purchase/lease incur?

What are the numbers on this? Payback, reduced cost per unit of crop, etc.?

What do councilors or mentors think?

What do other farmers using this piece of equipment, technique, or soil type think of it?