

## Gaston Grower Spotlight- May 2022



### The Start of U-Pick Season

May is the peak of strawberry season in North Carolina. This means local U-pick operations are starting to welcome folks back to the farm. Gaston County hosts various crops available for pick your own opportunities throughout the year. These crops include strawberries, blueberries, lavender, blackberries, muscadines, greens, pumpkins, and many different types of flowers. The strawberry above was picked from [Lineberger's Farm](#). There are many upsides to inviting people onto the farm to harvest their own produce, including profitability and customer education.



## So You Want to Start a U-Pick Farm

Every year we get calls from residents considering beginning their own U-Pick operations. While these types of operations are rewarding and potentially profitable, they are not for every landowner. The first consideration before beginning any farm venture is understanding the market for the crop of interest. Most visitors to U-pick farms do not travel much further than 30 miles to visit a farm. The traveling market for U-pick operations is stronger if there are more tourism activities for families near the farm. Consideration of competition is important as well. The landowner must understand if the market is large enough to support multiple U-pick farms with the same crops. Location is a key component as well and being on or near a major road helps.

Many times folks call us interested in starting an operation with little to no experience with the crop they desire to grow. It takes time to establish many U-pick crops and the first three to five years most likely will not be profitable. The first few years may not generate any revenue at all. Although customers will do a chunk of the picking, they will never pick everything, so labor for cleaning up behind customers and labor for customer education/point of sale must be accounted for. When bringing people onto a property increased liability is always a concern as well.

There are many more things to consider before venturing into the world of U-pick. If we haven't scared you away I think [this guide](#) from the University of Tennessee is a great starting point for appreciating all that goes into a successful U-pick farm. Remember, Gaston County Cooperative Extension is a resource for those considering inviting people onto the farm and for those looking for a local farm to visit.



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