

## Exploring Specialty Crop Production

Ellie Andrews, UCCE Specialty Crops Advisor for Sonoma, Marin, and Napa Counties

### Question 1: Is this site suitable?

To assess a site for potential specialty crop production, start with California Farm Link's [Farmland Assessment Field Guide](#) which considerations such as:

→ Legality: permits, zoning, regulations, value-added processing, farm stands, tours, etc.

- Consult with Planning Department
- UCCE Agricultural Ombudsperson: Kerry McGrath for Sonoma County ([kamcgrath@ucanr.edu](mailto:kamcgrath@ucanr.edu)), Vince Trotter for Marin County ([vtrotter@ucanr.edu](mailto:vtrotter@ucanr.edu))

→ On-site infrastructure: current and required infrastructure including water access, fencing, cold storage, etc.

- Conduct infrastructure inventory
- Conduct well assessments

→ Soil and water quality

- Send samples to a lab to gain site-specific information, [UCCE List of Labs](#)
- Consult the [Web Soil Survey](#) for bigger-picture information

→ Microclimate

- Consult data from a [CIMIS Station](#)
- See historical weather data

→ Access to farm labor

- Consider how to find skilled farm labor
- Consider if you will hire or contract

→ Market opportunities

- Consider where you will sell crops, for instance: farm stands, farmers markets, Community Supported Agriculture (CSA) subscriptions, local aggregators, distributors, groceries, restaurants, etc.

- Talk with local growers, farmers market managers, and distributors in your area to better understand local demands and market dynamics.

If these factors are conducive to support economically and environmentally sustainable specialty crop production, then ask....

### Question 2: Which specialty crops are most appropriate?

The next step is to match site characteristics, constraints and opportunities with crop needs:

→ Match site factors with appropriate crop types, varieties, rootstocks, etc. Here are examples of specialty crops that are commonly grown in the North Bay Area:

- Annuals: lettuce, kale, spinach, other greens, tomatoes, peppers, squash, cucurbits, onions, garlic, cut flowers
- Perennials: apples, olives, pears, plums, lemons, mandarins, peaches, strawberries, blueberries, blackberries, raspberries
- Learn more: [UCCE North Bay Specialty Crops website](#)
- Learn more: [UC ANR Catalog](#)

→ Match your production scale with available labor, market constraints and opportunities, lease/mortgage rate, and cost of infrastructure investments within a sound business plan

- Learn more: [UC ANR Specialty and Minor Crops Handbook](#)
- Learn more: [UC Davis Cost & Return Studies](#)
- Learn more: [Kitchen Table Advisors Agriculturalist & Landholder Relationship Guide](#)