

Winter Produce for Profit

Our Story

If you are like many greenhouse and garden center owners, the problem of how to fill in the gaps during the cold winter months in order to keep your business profitable has always been a challenge. We know because we were there for many years. If you are a garden center with greenhouse-growing capabilities, the good news is that there is a way to keep your staff working so you don't have to re-hire and train each spring, keep customers coming into your facility each week, and be profitable.

Born out of a health concern Vic Vanik had ten years ago, we've developed a system of growing and marketing fresh produce throughout the winter months. Over the years this system has driven our food production to become a major sales category in the garden center. The benefits are multi-fold: not only will you get to enjoy delicious produce throughout the year, but you'll be able to retain many or all of your staff full time year round, make your facility profitable during the winter months along with the spring and summer seasons, and build your customer base by attracting a new demographic – the foodies.

The high margin dollars that can be generated by your garden center during months when your facility typically sits empty and your staff is laid off, will keep you growing and income flowing year-round. We've attained margins as high as 95% while becoming the local green grocer. Most people return weekly to shop and when they come in for produce, they often purchase other items increasing your sales in other categories too. People have to eat on a regular basis and locally produced food is not only a hot topic right now, but sustainable on a long-term basis.

We've helped people across the country get started. Jim Monroe of Greenbrier Nursery in West Virginia said it's saved his garden center. Other centers have also had success and we know there are many others that can benefit.

Danny Summers of The Garden Center Group said, *"I feel this program is a great way for garden centers to expand their winter sales and profit, keep paying their employees throughout the winter months, and keep customers coming to their center all year long. Of course, it's not realistic for every center, but if you have empty greenhouse space during the fall and winter months, why not put it to use and make it profitable for your center!"*



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The Game Changer

This is a game-changing comprehensive program that will take you through the planning stages from production, to harvest, and marketing gathered from over 50 years of experience as a grower and over ten in the produce market. This program is designed to shorten your learning curve and help you get growing successfully beginning your first year. Not only will it walk you through the selection and growing processes, but will also include things that many growers haven't dealt with in the past such as the maze that is barcoding, labeling, safety procedures for food handling, organic produce certification, and packaging produce for profitability. We know this works because we've seen



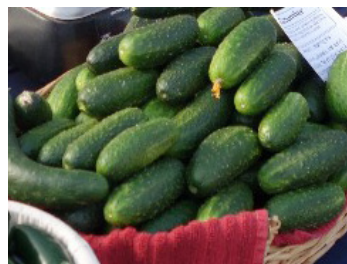
the transformation in our business and, if done correctly, it can and will change your business model. Stop doing the "same old thing" but expecting different results. Instead, think in a new direction and transform your traditional garden center into a year round profit center!

Our years of experience will save you time and money because we've already done the work for you. The Winter Produce Program includes:

1. An assessment of your facility and operation to determine how this program can best benefit you.
2. An on-site visit to get you started. Excludes travel expenses.
3. A crop and production schedule and recommendations specific to your area/operation.
4. Information and assistance with labeling correctly and registering barcodes.
5. Help in navigating the maze of fertilizers, OMRI and Organic Certification.
6. A written food safety manual template to use as a guide for your own.
7. Help with questions on lighting your crops. They don't all provide the same results!
8. Guidance with the most effective organic pesticides for insects and diseases.
9. Information gathered over many years of trial on how to package smartly and price wisely for profit to increase your bottom line.
10. Detailed information on how to successfully set up your own Winter Farmer's Market.
11. Marketing ideas on where to sell your produce and how to get started.
12. An extensive manual outlining the above, plus follow up via phone.
13. A private Facebook Group where you can share questions and ideas.

Interested in making your center a year-round profit center?

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Winter Produce for Profit Program Best Fits

Our Winter Produce for Profit Program is not suitable for every garden center. It's designed for those that have greenhouse-growing capabilities and space as spring crops move out. Following are some other considerations.

Centers that would be most successful include:

1. Located in areas where foodies thrive or healthy living is a major focus.
2. Retirement communities where healthy food is a focus, but people may no longer wish or be able to plant their own gardens.
3. Areas where there is abundant sunshine.
4. Affluent areas where customers can afford to pay the prices greenhouse grown produce in the winter months commands, factoring in the cost of heating, labor, etc. Labor and fuel costs do add up, especially with \$15/hr labor costs being the standard in many areas now.
5. Areas where supporting small, local, independent businesses is popular or encouraged by the local Chamber of Commerce, or other business-related organizations.
6. Areas where people are already used to having access to fresh food from their own gardens during the summer months but may be looking to fill that gap during the winter months.
7. Areas where local grocery stores, schools, hospitals, and restaurants may be willing to support and purchase from you.
8. Regions in which you can start a local winter farmer's market. The market may include vendors that sell more than just produce. Ours included meats of all kinds, local honey, baked goods, jams & jellies, etc.
9. Garden Centers that might want to offer a "pick your own" service for their produce to keep labor costs down.
10. Centers that may already offer fall activities including a pumpkin patch. It would be very easy to extend that shoulder season by adding cabbage, lettuce, herbs, carrots, and broccoli to test the waters before deciding to fully implement a winter program.
11. Areas where there may be an already established place to sell your produce during the winter months – e.g. restaurants that may have a refrigerated case in which they sell products from their vendors.

Centers that might be less successful include:

1. Areas where it's cloudy most of the winter, unless you would consider installing grow lights.
2. Highly agricultural areas where there is a high percentage of people with their own high tunnels, greenhouses, etc. in which they are already growing year-round.
3. Greenhouses in which the heating bills would be cost prohibitive – e.g. propane.
4. Temperate areas where there is already an abundance of fresh produce available during the winter months because that's their growing season in that area (areas like Florida & Arizona).
5. Folks that, understandably, just want to rest during the winter months after the busy spring/summer season.