

HARVEST RECORDS

by Dave Colson, Ag Services Director

To evaluate a farm's financial and production goals, growers need to have a handle on farm sales. But just recording sales doesn't show the whole economic picture, as it does not count available, unsold product or product culled due to quality or size. Harvest records can quantify these losses and can also provide valuable information for food safety traceability, organic certification and farm planning.

How much information is necessary and helpful depends on farm size, the specific crops grown and how crops are marketed. Most diversified vegetable operations have two major categories of crops. **The first category includes crops that, once established, can be harvested multiple times during the season, such as chard, kale, winter squash and many herbs.** For these, the amount harvested corresponds to the estimated amount needed for farm sales. Crop location is the same for each harvest and the quantity harvested directly relates to the quantity sold. So for these crops a simple sales record, such as farmers' market crop total, a CSA share list or a wholesale invoice, will suffice as a harvest record.

The second crop category includes crops planted in succession or in multiple locations and harvested multiple times, such as green beans, broccoli, head lettuce and carrots. For these, a computer spreadsheet or notebook may be best for recording the date, location and amount of each crop harvested, along with when the

crop was packed for sale, if sales occur on a separate date. This information will help answer questions regarding a food safety issue and will provide traceability. In these records, date and quantity are relatively straightforward, but how much detail is necessary for recording the location? For some farms a simple field number or name would suffice. For farms with a broad range of crops in one or more fields, a bed numbering system or a way to identify specific growing areas is best.

Multi-ingredient products, such as a salad mix, are value-added products since they contain multiple ingredients and have been cut and prepared for the customer. Harvest records for these crops may require a spreadsheet or harvest notebook in which the date, variety, location

and amount can be recorded. It can also be beneficial to record weights after the wash step, as weights can vary depending on field and weather conditions. Under dry conditions a harvest record of 50 pounds of mixed greens with sales invoices totaling 60 pounds is not uncommon due to water retention during the washing step. Likewise, spinning off weight after a rainy day harvest can throw off numbers.

The final step to wrap these pieces together, especially for restaurant or wholesale accounts, would be to add an audit trail. Again, depending on the size of an operation, a lot numbering system that incorporates date, location, crop and other pertinent information may be necessary. For farms that market to local restaurants and retail outlets and that maintain harvest logs, a date marked on the farm label and on the invoice would satisfy the audit trail requirements for certification and would help in case of a food safety recall.

Farm records should first serve as a tool to improve your farm operation. If those records can also satisfy requirements for organic certification or food safety, then you've accomplished two tasks at once, always a good thing on a busy farm.

For additional information, harvest templates and other record-keeping forms, search ATTRA (www.attra.org) for Organic System Plan Template for Crop and/or Livestock Production.



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