

ASCFG Virtual Growers School 2021
Scaling Up
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From Gardening to Farming: Scaling Up You and Your Farm

Building a successful career in the speciality cut flower industry takes time, resources, and believing in yourself and your product. In order to grow yourself and your business, a balanced and stable foundation is a top priority. Use the following information as a reference guide for tips on scaling up, efficiencies, and a few general practices to ensure that you'll be on the right track for success!

Scaling Up

Scaling up can be intimidating and overwhelming, but hear me out.

Investing in equipment and tools- It is so important to understand and remember that you have one body. Yes, bits and pieces can be repaired and swapped out, but don't wear your body out any faster than will happen independently. Investments like a tractor, better hand tools, etc. will pay for themselves by leaps and bounds.

Growing with your market- As the demand for your product grows, be willing and ready to meet that demand.

Living and growing in excess- You can't sell a product if you don't have it, and you can't have it if you don't grow it. Utilizing all of your space to its fullest potential is a key mindset to be in while you are scaling up your farm.

Efficiencies

Becoming efficient and implementing efficiencies into your daily life and growing plan will change the way your business grows...literally.

Using your resources wisely- Borrowing and renting tools and machinery are great ways to save money in the beginning. Reaching out to your local Extension office and building relationships with the horticulture department is a huge FREE resource.

Building a team- We can't talk about scaling up without talking about, and acknowledging, growing your farm family and hiring employees. Hiring for farm work is challenging. Because we are growing flowers and beautiful products, it can be misunderstood that this job is simply about picking flowers in a sun dress... Hiring competent individuals that understand what this industry entails will completely change the trajectory of your business. Great team members are worth their weight in gold.

Setting clear expectations- Be honest with yourself and your crew. Make sure that everyone is on the same page. When dealing with a large workload, make lists and prioritize. When showing employees a new skill, make sure they completely understand how the process is done AND WHY you are doing that process. Explaining the WHY will make the thought processes more cohesive as they are carrying out the work.

Communicating- Open lines of communication between employers and employees, florists and farmers, market customers and vendors, etc. are CRUCIAL. When a line of communication gets closed or hindered, misunderstandings happen. Check in with your communication recipient often, even when it has nothing to do with a sale or task. Showing you care, means more than you realize.

Utilizing friends responsibly- Building relationships with people who are doing the same work as you, and at the same stage in business growth, will provide you with a sounding board to utilize at a later time. It may seem easy to be constantly asking a more seasoned grower every question that comes to mind. However, many seasoned farmers offer consultation services where they are compensated for their time and knowledge that has taken them years and years to compile.

Streamlining with programs- Programs can be as simple as a spreadsheet or journal. Or, they can be more complex and specific (HoneyBook). For farming, I find that spreadsheets are lifesavers when it comes to referencing and sharing information with my team. Google Docs and Sheets can be easily shared with team members. Seeding schedules, harvest lists, and more are ways to streamline and easily share important information.

General Practices

Going from gardening to farming requires an immense mindset adjustment. Some rules still apply, but many small (and large) details change.

Sourcing- Being very aware of the costs of your inputs should play a factor into the decisions you make. Recurring purchases like seed, mulches, supplies, etc. should be made with scrutiny and with efficiency in mind. Ex: Paying \$4 for a small packet of sunflower seed probably isn't a smart decision when that same item can be purchased in bulk.

Securing and using hoophouse and covered space- Growing crops in a covered environment will allow you to have product earlier and later, as well as a superior product during all growing seasons. When scaling up, keeping sale avenues open for longer periods of time will provide you with more farm income.

Using mulches, ground covers, and drip irrigation- Any way to increase efficiencies will help you scale up by taking some tasks off of your to-do list.

Learn how to read plants- Taking the time to invest in yourself and your knowledge is always a good idea. Learning basic signs of specific nutrient deficiency, stress, and more will allow you to make corrections faster.