

## **Dear Aggie, What should I plan to do for my produce farm during the off-season?**

With the arrival of fall, most of the annual produce has started to dieback before winter. As production starts to slow down, you might wonder what tasks can be completed during the off-season. Some of the main activities to consider are performing routine maintenance, connecting with the community, and preparing for the next growing season.

Routine maintenance can play a huge role in the start of the next growing season. Once Spring arrives, the equipment and tools will be ready for early planting. You can check your vehicles, heavy machinery, and tools to make sure that they're in working condition. With early checks, any repairs needed will have plenty of time to fix, either hiring someone or working on it yourself.

Throughout the growing season, it can be busy and community connections may be difficult to keep. Fall and winter allows time for classes and workshops that are offered by Cornell Cooperative Extension and other organizations. Meeting new producers and reconnecting with others allows you socialize, network, and learn. Visiting another farm may also be beneficial. Another way to connect with the community is to renew bonds with friends and family.

Besides connecting with others, a lot of planning can be completed before spring begins. You can prepare for the next growing season during your downtime and take some time to work on paperwork. By purchasing seeds or transplants ahead of time, you can avoid desired varieties going out of stock. You can review or start crop rotation methods when designing your layout for the next growing season. When you're working on your layout, you can review the previous designs (if any) to determine where to plant each crop or create fallow rows.

Bookkeeping is also important for a successful farm business. Financial records can be reviewed and help you discover what crops were the most and least profitable during this growing season. These results can help you determine how much you'd like to invest in each crop for the next growing season. You'll also find out how you invested in marketing, equipment, tools and supplies, vendor fees, etc. The pesticide and fertilizer documents should also be up to date. Planting records can be utilized to keep track of events that happened on the farm. Management records can also track employee information, amount of labor, inventory, etc. Bookkeeping has been an important component of understanding the current farm's business practices and how to improve for the next growing season.

Understanding the operation of your farm during the off-season can be a little overwhelming with observing paperwork and finding out what you need for the farm. However, preparation allows more time for you to complete tasks before you get too busy in the Spring.

If you need assistance on how to start preparing your farm for next year, contact the agricultural team at your local Cornell Cooperative Extension! We can provide education and research-based

resources to help your farm succeed. If you're located in Jefferson County, feel free to contact our local CCE Office at 315-788-8450 or Cierra Williams at [clw247@cornell.edu](mailto:clw247@cornell.edu).