

# University of Kentucky Extension Enhances Small-Scale Specialty Crop Production

Kentucky ranks 5th in number of farms but 38th in farm size. More than 20% of the farms are less than 9 acres, many of which grow specialty crops like fruits and vegetables. Kentucky also has the largest number of high tunnels - which extend the growing season and provide protection for crops - in the Southeast.

## Extension supports the small-scale specialty crop industry with research-based programming and outreach efforts.



**Education and training** translates research into actionable knowledge and promotes best practices for specialty crop production. Extension Specialists and Associates provide workshops, trainings, seminars, field days, demonstrations and educational resources on various topics to enhance the production, management and marketing of specialty crops. The [UK Extension Integrated Pest Management \(IPM\) program](#) provides technical guidance and research-based education and outreach to help farmers address disease, insect and weed management. The [UK Pesticide Safety Education Program](#) provides training and certification of private pesticide applicators to support safe and responsible use.



**Virtual and hybrid programming** make research-based education and resources available and accessible to specialty crop farmers. Extension offers on-demand videos and live-streamed virtual field days and demonstrations to connect specialty crop farmers with resources.



**Strategic partnerships** enhance rapid response to emerging needs and trends, creating new market opportunities for specialty crop growers. For example, the annual [Kentucky Fruit and Vegetable Conference](#), which is devoted to fruit and vegetable production, handling, harvesting, marketing, storage and related topics, is presented in cooperation with the Kentucky Horticulture Council, UK Martin-Gatton College of Agriculture, Food, and Environment, Kentucky State University College of Food Science and Sustainable Systems and the Kentucky Department of Agriculture.



**Beginning and experienced specialty crop farmers** have access to needed resources. The [UK Division of Regulatory Services](#) provides affordable diagnostic services for soil testing, while the [UK Plant Disease Diagnostic Lab](#) provides free plant health, entomology and pathology services. Likewise, the [UK Center for Crop Diversification](#) provides various online resources and publications including decision tools, crop profiles, market channels, market development opportunities, enterprise budget planning tools, market price reports and price indices. The center also supports produce auctions and farmers markets.

**Capacity building** for emerging needs is critical. For many small-scale specialty crop farmers, county Extension agents are the first point of contact for technical guidance on production and management issues. Extension uses a train-the-trainer model, where specialists teach county agents who then provide technical assistance to growers, to build and sustain the capacity of agents to help farmers.

# Results

## Center for Crop Diversification (CCD) Outcomes

**167** CCD supported farmers markets across the state

**405** KY producers used CCD's Horticulture Business Quiz to explore new crop and market options

**65K** users visited the CCD website in 2023

**200,000+** publications and other resources downloaded from the CCD website in 2023

**600+**

new pesticide applicators

**10K+**

clients/farmers trained and certified on pesticide safety and pest management strategies

**1,600+**

farmers and farmers market vendors gained knowledge of crop diversification

**580+**

growers diversified their crops

**500**

growers, researchers, and technical service providers attend the two-day Kentucky Fruit and Vegetable conference and pre-conference events each year

**170**

educational videos focused on specialty crops have attracted 1,644 subscribers and nearly 190,000 views

## Links



Vegetable Scouting Guides



Vegetable Crops Extension & Research

## Commercial Horticulture Outcomes

**694** growers adopted techniques that extend the growing season

**131** growers conducted foliar tissue testing

**460** growers implemented irrigation systems

**852** growers planned and practiced crop rotation

