



## 2003 Kentucky Produce Planting Intentions & Outlook

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### Summary

The 2003 Kentucky Produce Planting & Marketing Intentions Survey was returned by 322 produce growers. These producers represent approximately 2,600 acres of commercial vegetable production and 500 acres of commercial fruit production. Based on these responses and vegetable co-op planting intentions, Kentucky's produce acreage should continue a 5 to 10 percent increase in 2003.

Commercial vegetable acreage will continue the 6-8 percent increase seen over the past five years to reach a decade high of 5,900 acres. Commercial vegetable acreage in 2003 could possibly eclipse 6,000 acres, depending on the amount of production from two emerging production areas (Trigg and Jackson Counties).

The state's four vegetable cooperatives account for the bulk of wholesale vegetable marketing. Co-op sales totaled nearly \$5 million in 2002. The Fairview Produce Auction also wholesaled nearly \$1 million of fresh produce crops, including about 100 acres of melons in 2002.

Kentucky farmers' markets and roadside stands also reported increased sales volume in 2002. This increase will likely continue in 2003.

Bearing and planted berry acreage, led by blueberries and strawberries, will increase about 10 percent to 400 acres. Slightly over 200 acres of grapes, mostly recent winegrape plantings, will bear some fruit in 2002. Tree fruit acreage, which has decreased consistently over the past 5 years, will hold steady in 2003.

The value of 2003 Kentucky fruit and vegetable production should increase by more than 10 percent over 2002 levels. The value increase in the vegetable sector will occur due to increased acreage of higher value vegetable crops, most notably melons and specialty peppers. The increase in value in the fruit sector is driven by a significant increase in mature berry acreage in 2003. The value of tree fruit production will remain steady due to value-added efforts (cider production) and continued emphasis of on-farm retail marketing of tree fruits and orchard products.

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## Summer Vegetables

### *Co-Op Sweet Corn, Cucumber Acreage Up*

Kentucky's four vegetable co-ops will lead expansion in summer vegetable production in 2003. The co-ops indicate they will increase acreage by 12 percent, from 1,848 acres in 2002 to 2,075 acres this year. This increase is led by a rebound in the West Kentucky Growers (Owensboro) sweet corn deal, from 712 to 845 acres. Co-op cucumber acreage, led by a 35 acre increase from the Central KY Growers Association (Georgetown), also contributes significantly to the increase in summer vegetable production.

### *Cantaloupe, Watermelons A Sweet Deal*

Melons are increasing in popularity both among co-op and non co-op producers. The Green River Produce Marketing Association (Horse Cave) will expand cantaloupe and watermelon area from 103 to 155 acres in 2003. The projected 100 percent increase in watermelon production at the co-op is fueled by seedless watermelon sales through the Farm-to-School program.

Outside of co-op production, producers marketing through the Fairview Produce Auction and the state's farmers' markets also report steady demand for melons. Surveyed producers who used the auction to market some or all of their produce indicated producing 50 acres of cantaloupes and 30 acres of watermelons in 2002.

### *Bell Peppers Make Way for Specialties*

Kentucky's profitable bell pepper acreage will decrease slightly in 2003, but this loss will be offset by an expansion in even more profitable specialty pepper production. Producers responding to the planting intentions survey indicated relatively large changes (almost 20 acres or 60 percent of 2002 acreage) in specialty and jalepeno pepper production.

Most of these specialty pepper producers are marketing through the co-ops. This indicates a shift in co-op pepper acreage is shifting toward production of higher value, specialty varieties. A new co-op affiliated with Cumberland Farm Products has formed for this season to specifically explore specialty pepper production.

### *Not Easy Being Greens, Beans*

Fresh commercial green bean production increased significantly to about 165 acres in 2002. Although beans remain a popular and profitable staple of the roadside and farmers' market trade, the exit of some larger producers will cause bean acreage to decrease to 150 acres in 2003. A similar situation will occur in 2003 for fresh greens (collards, chard, kale, lettuce, etc.). Both these crop groups, however, still have long-term market potential for increased direct and wholesale production by Kentucky producers.

**Table 1. Vegetable Co-Op Acreage Changes**

	2003	2002	2003 Acreage Change	Percent Change
Broccoli	75	35	40	114%
Cabbage	175	166	9	5%
Cantaloupe	125	83	42	51%
Sweet Corn	845	712	133	19%
Cucumbers	77	49	28	57%
Peppers	290	295	-5	-2%
Potatoes	150	120	30	25%
Pumpkins	220	264	-44	-17%
Squash (Summer)	41	46	-5	-11%
Tomatoes	57	68	-11	-16%
Watermelon	20	10	10	100%
<b>Total Acreage</b>	<b>2,075</b>	<b>1,848</b>	<b>227</b>	<b>+12%</b>

## **Fall Vegetables**

### **All Markets Continue Expansion**

#### ***Pumpkins Steady Despite Producer Exits***

Total pumpkin acreage marketed by co-ops will decrease by over 40 acres in 2003. This comes despite a 25-acre increase by the West KY co-op. Pumpkin producers not marketing through co-ops in 2002 will decrease acreage by about 100 acres. However, a new pumpkin deal (75-100 acres) fueled by County Ag Diversification efforts in Eastern Kentucky will offset this decrease to keep Kentucky pumpkin acreage just under 1,000 acres.

Though pumpkins are far from being as profitable as bell peppers, the decrease in pumpkin production mirrors the trend in Kentucky's wholesale pepper production. Wholesale vegetable growers naturally transition from lower value crops, like pumpkins, as higher value commodities are discovered. This trend has also occurred among the state's cucumber producers, some of whom have utilized trellis production to capture higher value fall markets.

#### ***Ornamental Vegetables Attract Growers***

Closely related to pumpkin production are ornamental corn and gourd crops. These crops, which can be more conducive to direct marketing due to being less perishable than food vegetables, are gaining popularity among Kentucky producers. Fall ornamental vegetable acreage for commercial sale will increase by 7-15 percent to about 65 acres in 2003.

#### ***Fall Cole Crops & Squash Show Promise***

Cole crops (broccoli, cauliflower, and cabbage) have potential for both summer and fall markets in Kentucky. Producers in western Kentucky will increase broccoli production substantially (from 40 to 75 acres) and explore the fall broccoli market this year. Cabbage, a longtime commercial vegetable standby in KY, will also increase slightly in acreage.

Produce growers also continue to explore the market for winter squash varieties. Although totaling less than 30 acres in commercial production, winter squash has consistently increased in the commercial acreage reported since 2001. Much of this growth is coming through direct marketers discovering demand for winter squash varieties.

## **Small Fruit**

### **Berry Production Up, Direct Markets Strong**

Kentucky's fresh small fruit and winegrape industries will grow significantly in 2003. This increase is primarily due to the maturing of 2001 and 2002 plantings. Tree fruits, which have decreased in area since the last US Ag Census estimates of 1997, will hold steady in 2003. Some smaller orchards and farmers' market tree fruit producers even indicate small acreage increases for tree fruit in 2003.

#### ***Blueberries***

Blueberries lead the way in small fruit expansion in both acreage and value of production. There were slightly over 50 acres of blueberries planted statewide in 2002. Only about 30% (15) of these acres were at full bearing maturity. An additional 20 acres will reach full bearing age in 2003, adding significant volumes of fresh blueberries into auction, PYO/U-Pick, and farmers' market channels. Wholesale market expansion will be critical for continued profitability all small fruit industries in Kentucky.

#### ***Brambles***

Commercial blackberry acreage should hold steady at about 100 acres in 2003. One Kentucky producer who is processing blackberries has plans for acreage expansion in future years. Wholesale blackberry sales to supermarkets are also expanding substantially. More interest is also being generated in red and black raspberry production, both popular with consumers.

**Table 2. Markets Used By Produce Growers In 2002**  
Percent of 310 Growers Responding

On-Farm Direct Markets (U-Pick, Farm Stand)	55%
Farmers' Markets	47%
Direct to Grocery	28%
Wholesale, Non Co-op	20%
Wholesale, Cooperatives	18%
Direct to Restaurants	14%
Auctions	10%
Other (Internet, Subscription/CSA, etc.)	8%

***Strawberries***

Western Kentucky (especially Paducah) has historically been noted for its commercial strawberry production. Fresh strawberry acreage is still concentrated in the state's western region, but has remained steady at about 200 acres for the past 10 years. Producers indicate increasing strawberry production in 2003, shifting strawberry acreage up slightly to 210 acres. Most strawberry production is marketed through PYO/U-Pick and direct markets.

***Grapes***

The late 1990s saw an explosion of interest in commercial winegrape production in KY. Grape acreage has increased from about 80 acres in 1997 to over 300 acres in 2003. About 220 of these acres will bear grapes in 2003 with most of this production marketed for local wine production.

Only a small amount of fresh market table grapes are produced in Kentucky. These are exclusively marketed through farmers' markets, grocery, and restaurant channels.

***Tree Fruit Acreage Steady***

Wholesale tree fruit production in Kentucky has become virtually economically unfeasible, leading to a steady decline in Kentucky orchard acreage over the past five years. Orchards now depend more than ever on

direct retail markets to turn profits. Value-added products, especially cider, are also renewing popularity. Tree fruit acreage will hold steady in 2003 for the first time since 1997.

***Other Fruits***

Kentucky State University is the country's center of paw paw production research. Paw paws, currants, and gooseberries all hold promise for specialty production in Kentucky. About 25 acres of other fresh fruits are produced around the state, mostly for farmers' market and related direct retail sales.

**Conclusion**

Kentucky's produce acreage will continue to increase in 2003. Producers surveyed indicate this production is marketed using a variety of direct and wholesale market channels (Table 2). This diversity of markets will continue in 2003, with growth in both direct and wholesale market volume.

Kentucky's fresh vegetable acreage will increase by 6-8 percent over 2002 levels to just under 6,000 acres in 2003. Total fruit acreage, led by small fruit expansion, will increase by 5 percent to about 3,000 acres. Total value of production also will increase slightly in 2003 as producers switch production to higher value produce crops.

**Table 3. Surveyed KY Acreage and Commercial Planting Intention Projections, 2003**

	1997 USDA Estimated Acreage	Intended Acreage Change From 2002 <sup>1</sup>	2003 Acreage Estimate
Asparagus	33	-1%	35
Beans, Snap	168	-29%	150
Beets	7	-2%	10
Broccoli	40	<1%	95
Cabbage	202	3%	260
Chinese Cabbage	N/A	0%	<10
Cantaloupes	184	-3%	225
Carrots	N/A	0%	<10
Cauliflower	N/A	0%	<10
Chicory, Endive	N/A	0%	<10
Corn, Sweet	1382	6%	2250
Corn, Ornamental	N/A	8%	25
Cucumbers, Fresh	102	-18%	100
Eggplant	12	0%	15
Greens	N/A	-10%	40
Leaf Lettuce & Romaine	17	11%	20
Lettuce (Greenhouse)	N/A	0%	<10
Okra	5	<1%	<10
Onions	31	4%	25
Ornamental Veggies.	N/A	12%	40
Parsley	N/A	0%	<10
Peppers, Bell	316	<1%	350
Peppers, Jalepeno	38	103%	40
Peppers, Other	N/A	40%	30
Potatoes, Red	N/A	<1%	125
Potatoes, White	N/A	1%	250
Pumpkins	820	-14%	950
Squash, Summer	100	-7%	100
Squash, Winter	N/A	42%	20
Sweet Potatoes	N/A	10%	20
Tomatoes, Field	562	6%	350
Tomatoes, Greenhouse	N/A	11%	<10
Watermelons	167	8%	150
Herbs	N/A	<1%	100
Cut Flowers	N/A	5%	20
Other Vegetables	35	21%	50
Apples	2169	0%	1800
Blackberries	72	-1%	100
Blueberries	24	59%	50
Grapes <sup>2</sup>	81	4%	220
Peaches	590	4%	500
Pears	43	0%	45
Raspberries	27	4%	40
Strawberries	193	20%	210
Other Fruits	N/A	N/A	25

<sup>1</sup>322 Produce Operations

<sup>2</sup>Grape acreage includes acres coming into partial production

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