DIVERSIFICATION

Fact Sheet
CCD-FS-30
December 2023

## Three-Year Average Prices \& Quantities at Kentucky Produce Auctions: 2020-2022



## Overview

The produce auction is a marketing channel for growers producing fruit and vegetable crops, nursery crops, and ornamentals. There are several produce auctions located throughout Kentucky, Ohio, Illinois, Pennsylvania, and other bordering states (see Regional Produce Auctions map to the right). Produce auctions can vary in size and ownership structure, crop variety, and quality standards throughout the region; however, a similarity is that members of Amish and Mennonite communities manage many of these auctions.

The produce auction serves growers as a market to sell large quantities of crops while it serves buyers or consumers as a place to


Figure 1: Regional Produce Auctions. Credit: Joshua Knight. purchase fresh, local products in bulk. Some of these auctions gross millions of dollars in sales each year and play an important role in the region's specialty crop market.

## Crops and Auctions

This report compares average volumes and prices for 16 crops (listed under Crops and Units) from two major Kentucky produce auctions for the 2020, 2021, and 2022 seasons. While there are six produce auctions in Kentucky, the two largest auctions were selected for analysis. These auctions sell larger volumes, report more frequently, and offer relatively standardized products which makes them easy to compare. The previous edition of this report compared average volumes and prices for the 2017, 2018, and 2019 seasons - it can be found here.

This report provides a three-year average quantity and price graph of each crop selected for analysis. There is a graph for the Fairview Auction, the Lincoln County Auction, and a graph of the two auctions combined. Some crops (listed under Fairview-Specific Analysis) are only analyzed through the Fairview Auction because there is not enough data available for comparison. The volume unit for each crop is listed in the Crops and Units chart and on each page. The units are chosen based on the most common unit listed in price reports and converted (if needed) for comparison. Crops may be sold in smaller or different sizes that are not reflected here. A Unit Conversion Chart at the end of this publication gives our unit measurements or "retail volume" a net weight value.


Figure 2: Fairview \& Lincoln County Produce Auctions on Kentucky Map. Credit: Joshua Knight.

Fairview Produce Auction (FPA): This auction is in Christian County, Kentucky. The nearest cities are Hopkinsville and Russellville. FPA is 160 miles from Louisville, 70 miles from Nashville, and 50 miles from Bowling Green.

Lincoln County Produce Auction (LCPA): This auction is in Lincoln County, Kentucky. Danville and Berea are the nearest cities. LCPA is located 50 miles from Lexington, 105 miles from Louisville, and 130 miles from Cincinnati.

There are four additional produce auctions in Kentucky which are in Bath, Casey, Hart, and Trigg County. Together, Kentucky's produce auctions (excluding the newer auction established in 2023) recorded over 10 million dollars in sales in 2022.

## How To Read This Report

As stated earlier, each crop's page includes a three-year average quantity and price graph of each crop selected for analysis. There is a graph for the Fairview Auction, the Lincoln County Auction, and a graph of the two auctions combined.

Each page includes information on season length, packaging standards, and written commentary on the 2020-2022 season. Each page has a Total QTY \& Avg. \$ comparison for 2020, 2021, and 2022. Please note that 2022 and 2021 reflect the total quantity and weighted average price for the Fairview and Lincoln County auctions together. 2020 is only a reflection of Fairview's total quantity and weighted average price. The yearly quantities and price values we based our weighted averages on were reported to the Center for Crop Diversification via the auction's annual market summary report. This sidebar piece is a new addition to the 3 -Year Summary report and should be used for a general comparison between the years. This information is solely based on data that was available to the Center for Crop Diversification and is only a representation of two of the produce auctions in Kentucky.

Examining the Total QTY \& Avg. \$ tool on each page provides the reader with an idea of how the quantities and prices for produce items sold via the auction have changed over the 2020, 2021, and 2022 seasons. This highlights the amount of produce coming through the auctions and the increase in the amount of product sold through the auction post-Covid. In 2020, the auction saw an increase in products sold through auctions. We see that trend continuing in these post-Covid years.

Please note that the quantity under Total QTY is a summation of the crop sold over the entire year, while the price under Avg. \$ is a weighted average price across the entire year. This price does not represent the highest or lowest price point (for buyers or growers) for a specific crop. This report is to be used as a general trend analysis, but it is not the end-all-be-all of the produce auction.

If you have questions or comments about how to read, use, or understand this report please email Savannah Columbia.

## Crops and Units:

| Apples (1/2 bushel) | Asparagus (1/2 lbs.) | Beans (1/2 bushel) |
| :--- | :--- | :--- |
| Beets (bunch) | Blueberries (pint) | Broccoli (lbs.) |
| Cabbage (head) | Canary Melon (each) | Cantaloupe (each) |
| Cucumbers (1/2 bushel) | Peppers (bushel) | Pumpkins (each) |
| Strawberries (quart) | Sweet Corn (dozen) | Tomatoes (lbs.) |
| Watermelon (each) |  |  |

The crops analyzed in this report include apples, asparagus, (green) beans, (red) beets, blueberries, broccoli, cabbage, canary melons, cantaloupe, (slicing and pickling) cucumbers, (green bell) peppers, (small and medium/large) pumpkins, strawberries, sweet corn, (\#1 and \#2 grade, small and canner, and heirloom) tomatoes, and (seedless and seeded) watermelon.

## How Is This Report Useful To Me?

Producers may find this information useful when considering:

- What crops to grow and when to grow them. The graphs show when early or late season extension can bring a higher price for specific crops or when a high volume is going through the market, resulting in lower prices.
- How to price products for wholesale or bulk sales, as well as price minimums.
- Whether selling at an auction will fit their operation and market interests.
- How to package their product for sale at the auction. Each crop has a grading \& packing section identifying how the auction prefers receiving the product. This information is based on the Fairview Produce Auction's 2021 Grower Guidelines.

Auction Managers might use this information for:

- Communicating with prospective growers or buyers about the seasonal activity of various crops in Kentucky.
- Degrees and benefits of various quality premiums (ex. \#1 and \#2 Grade tomatoes vs. small and canner tomatoes) for different crops.
- Long-term planning for their market.

Buyers can use this information for:

- Observing the beginning, peak, and end of the season for specific crops coming through Kentucky's produce auctions.
- Understanding how the auction's prices compare to prices available from other market outlets.
- Planning purchasing outlets for crops throughout the year.


## For those interested in selling through the produce auctions:

- Product must be clean and in good condition upon arrival.
- The packaging must also be clean and in good condition.
- It is ideal to keep similar items, varieties, and sizes together for ease of selling at the auction. Out-ofstate produce must be labeled as such.
- Growers must comply with the Food Safety Modernization Act (FSMA) Produce Safety Rule. More information about FSMA and its exemptions can be found here. Your local Extension Office can also provide information about FSMA and grower training opportunities.
- A sale date calendar and individual auction price reports can be found at the top of each page for Bath County, Casey County, Fairview (Christian County), Hart County, Lincoln County, and Western Kentucky (Trigg County). Both 2023 and historical price reports can be found on the linked web pages. Please note that we selected 16 crops for analysis - many additional crops are coming through the auctions and being reported in the individual auction price reports so take time to explore them here.

Fairview


Combined


## Beans

Notes \& Observations

2020-2022 Weekly Average Prices \& Quantities

Season Length: Mid/Late May - November.

In this 3-year period, Fairview and Lincoln County follow a similar pattern as our last 3year report - high quantities in June and July with a small dip as August approaches. High price points can be observed at the beginning of the season and where the supply dips in August.
"Beans" refers to green beans, specifically.

Pack Size: Beans should be packed in waxed $1 / 2$ bushel boxes. Target net weight is 11-12 lbs.

Total QTY (1/2 bu.) \& Avg. \$s
2022: 12,259 | \$18.88
2021: 14,934 | \$14.76
2020: 10,062 | \$15.26

Fairview


## Lincoln County



Combined




Combined


## Blueberries

Notes \& Observations

2020-2022 Weekly Average Prices \& Quantities

Season Length: May - August.
Fairview's season seems to trend more for June - August, while Lincoln County's season is May - July.

In this 3-year period, Fairview and Lincoln County differ as to when their high-volume weeks occur. Fairview's season is a few weeks longer but comes with a decrease in price. High prices can be observed at the beginning of the season and when quantity in the market is low.

Pack Size: Blueberries should be packed in 12-pint berry flats. They are most often sold in pints but can come through the auction in gallon sizes.

Total QTY (pints) \& Avg. \$
2022: 2,706 | $\$ 3.99$
2021: 10,088 | \$2.38
2020: 3,170 | \$3.09

Fairview


Lincoln County


Combined


## Cabbage

Notes \&
Observations

2020-2022 Weekly Average Prices \& Quantities

Season Length: May -
December.
Lincoln County's season is slightly shorter and trends from June - mid December.

Cabbage has a distinct spring and fall season at the auction which can be seen clearly in the Fairview graph; however, it is accessible May -
December. There are a few spikes in price as supply falls or is limited - this could pose an opportunity for growers to capture higher prices if they can fill this gap.

Pack Size: Cabbage can be packed in cabbage boxes, bins, or mesh sacks. Cabbage is sold in even counts by the head.

Total QTY (head) \& Avg. \$
2022: 75,365 | \$0.87
2021: 98,428 | \$0.60
2020: 58,332 | \$0.86



Combined


## Cantaloupe

Notes \&
Observations
2020-2022 Weekly Average Prices \& Quantities

Season Length: June October.

In this 3-year period, Fairview and Lincoln County follow a similar pattern as our last 3year report - large volume coming through the market in weeks 28-31 with a gentle downward slope as we move into fall. Prices remain strong for melons as Kentucky becomes a larger melongrowing region.

Pack Size: Cantaloupe are packed in groups of 10 into 24 " bins and sold by the bin; however, their sales are reported by "each" melon sold. Growers should fill the bin to a stackable level and specify variety on the bin label.

Total QTY (each) \& Avg. \$
2022: 271,576 | \$1.32
2021: 271,059 | $\$ 0.88$
2020: 229,617 | \$1.04

Fairview


## Lincoln County

## 

## Combined



## Cucumbers

Notes \&
Observations
2020-2022 Weekly Average Prices \& Quantities

## Season Length: April/May December.

The quantity of cucumbers coming through the auction is bell-shaped, with peak supply in weeks 25-27 and 29-31 for Fairview and Lincoln County respectively. These high supply points are accompanied by lower prices; however, high prices can be observed at the beginning and end of the season for both auctions. Both pickling and slicing cucumbers are included here.

Pack Size: Pickling and slicing cucumbers are packed in $1 / 2$ bushel boxes. Slicers should be $7-8^{\prime \prime}$ in length, while $3^{\prime \prime}$ is the ideal size for pickling cucumbers.

Total QTY (1/2 bu.) \& Avg. \$
2022: 25,256 | \$9.01
2021: 78,182 | \$7.80
2020: 10,517 | \$10.90

Fairview


## Lincoln County



## Combined



## Peppers

Notes \& Observations

2020-2022 Weekly Average Prices \& Quantities

Season Length: June November.

Peak pepper season is late July; however, peppers are sold through the auction from the summer through the fall. Early season peppers come with a high price point, but prices remain steady throughout the season. There is no price premium for fall peppers, even though the supply is decreasing.

Pack Size: Green bell peppers are packed in 1-bushel boxes. Colored or mixed bell peppers may be packed in 1 or $1 / 2$ bushel boxes.

Total QTY (bushel) \& Avg. \$
2022: 10,575 | \$11.17
2021: 13,437 | \$7.21
2020: 13,067 | \$8.34




## Pumpkins: Large

## \& Medium

## Notes \& Observations

2020 - 2022 Weekly Average Prices \& Quantities

Season Length: August October.

Pumpkin season is relatively short. We have a bell-shaped supply which is typical for this crop. High prices are only captured in the first 1-2 weeks of the season. Lincoln County's prices decline over the season, while Fairview's remain steady from September through November. Orange and white pumpkins of large and medium size, along with jumbo pumpkins are represented here.

The graphs represent 20202022; however, only 2022 and 2021 QTYs are reported below.

Pack Size: Pumpkins are packed in 36 " bins. Growers should fill the bin to a stackable level in increments of 5. Group pumpkins based on size.


## Lincoln County



## Combined



## Pumpkins: Small

Notes \&
Observations
2020-2022 Weekly Average
Prices \& Quantities

Season Length: August October.

Again, pumpkin season is relatively short, and we have a mostly bell-shaped supply which is typical for this crop. High prices are captured in the first 1-2 weeks of Fairview's season, while Lincoln County has a price peak in week 37. Lincoln County's prices decline over the season, while Fairview's remain steady from September through November.

Pack Size: Pumpkins are packed in 36 " bins. Growers should fill the bin to a stackable level in increments of 5 . Group pumpkins based on size.

Total QTY (each) \& Avg. \$ is not available for small pumpkins because of a difficulty in reporting values.



Combined


## Strawberries

Notes \& Observations

2020-2022 Weekly Average Prices \& Quantities

Season Length: April June/July.

Strawberries also have a very short season. Peak volume comes through the auction in late May. Prices remain strong in the peak volume weeks and as supply decreases. Price per quart is similar to grocery store pricing which may reflect an acknowledgment of the shorter growing season or value in local strawberries.

Pack Size: Strawberries should be packed in 8-quart berry flats. Variety should be specified on the tag.

Total QTY (quarts) \& Avg. \$
2022: 42,536 | \$3.59
2021: 103,743 | \$2.33
2020: 13,850 | \$5.15


## Lincoln County



Combined


## Sweet Corn

Notes \& Observations

2020-2022 Weekly Average Prices \& Quantities

Season Length: June/July October.

Sweet corn also follows a bell-shaped quantity curve. High prices can be observed in the first few weeks at the auction but drop as supply increases. Prices do remain stable as the season passes even as the quantity drops in September and October.

Pack Size: Sweet corn should be packed in mesh bags with 5 dozen in each bag. These mesh bags should be packed in $24^{\prime \prime}$ or $26^{\prime \prime}$ bins with 50 dozen per bin. Variety should be specified on the tag.

Total QTY (dozen) \& Avg.
2022: 81,855 | \$3.75
2021: 137,030 | \$1.77
2020: 58,839 | \$3.72

## Fairview

##  <br> Avg. QTY of lbs. $\quad$ Avg. \$ per lbs.



## Combined



Tomatoes: \#1 \& \#2 Grade

Notes \& Observations

2020 - 2022 Weekly Average Prices \& Quantities

Season Length: May November/December. Fairview's season is almost all year round.

The peak season is late July August, with over \$1/lb. prices. High prices are seen for early-season tomatoes, with some rise in price as supply drops. \#1 and \#2 grade tomatoes bring higher \$/lb. compared to small and "canner" tomatoes, even in the saturated points of the season.

Pack Size: Tomatoes are packed in 20 lb . tomato boxes. The box must contain 20 lb . of net weight. Grade according to \#1: nearly flawless \& \#2: slightly flawed but no open cracks.

Sizing: Small: 2" - 2 3/4"; Medium: $23 / 4$ " - $31 / 4^{\prime \prime}$; Large: $31 / 4^{\prime \prime}-33 / 4^{\prime \prime}$; Extra Large: $33 / 4^{\prime \prime}$ and larger.

Total QTY (lbs.) \& Avg. \$
2022: 2,409,638 | \$0.96
2021: 2,834,333 | \$0.76
2020: 1,886,265 | $\$ 0.89$

Fairview


## Lincoln County



## Combined



## Tomatoes: Small

## \& Canner

Notes \& Observations

2020-2022 Weekly Average Prices \& Quantities

Season Length: May November/December. Fairview's season is almost all year round.

The peak season is late July August, accompanied by < $\$ 0.75 / \mathrm{lb}$. prices. High prices are seen for early-season product without much uptick as supply drops. Small and canner tomatoes do not bring as much \$/lb. as \#1 and \#2 grade tomatoes. But the auction serves as a great place to sell "seconds" to.

Pack Size: Tomatoes are packed in 20 lb . tomato boxes. The box must contain 20 lbs . of net weight. Grade according to:

Canner: cosmetic blemishes but no spoilage or leaks.

Sizing: Small: 2" $-23 / 4$ ";
Medium: $23 / 4 \prime \prime-31 / 4^{\prime \prime}$; Large: $31 / 4$ " $-33 / 4^{\prime \prime}$; Extra Large: $33 / 4^{\prime \prime}$ and larger.

Total QTY (lbs.) \& Avg. \$
2022: 819,808 | $\$ 0.46$
2021: 758,978 | \$0.32
2020: 805,545 | $\$ 0.39$

Fairview


## Lincoln County



Combined



## Lincoln County



Combined


## Watermelon:

## Seeded

Notes \& Observations

2020-2022 Weekly Average Prices \& Quantities

Season Length: May/July October.

High price points can be observed at the beginning of the season but drops as supply comes through the auction.

Pack Size: Watermelons should be packed in $24^{\prime \prime}$ bins. Properly packed bins will be full or nearly full. Seeded varieties are sized in 28, 35, and 45 counts. Variety and type (seeded or seedless) should be specified on the tag, as they are reported separately.

Total QTY (each) \& Avg. \$
2022: 67,044| \$2.94
2021: 63,016 |\$1.63
2020: 56,001 | \$2.13

## Fairview-Specific Analysis




## Notes \&

Observations
2020-2022 Weekly Average
Prices \& Quantities
Apples come through the auction from June December with peak supply in October and November. Price premiums can be observed for early-season apples. They should be packed in 20 lbs . fruit boxes and are sold in $1 / 2$ bushel quantities.

QTY (1/2 bushel) \& Avg. $\$$ is not available for apples because of a difficulty in reporting values.

Asparagus comes through the auction from April - June. Price stays steady across the season, then drops at the tailend. Asparagus is packed and sold in $1 / 2$ bushel boxes with the white ends cut off. This crop is reported by the auction in $1 / 2 \mathrm{lbs}$. bunch quantities.

Total QTY (1⁄2 lbs.) \& Avg. \$
2022: 5,711 | \$2.94
2021: 6,072 | \$2.43
2020: 5,600 | \$2.78

## Fairview-Specific Analysis




## Notes \&

Observations
2020-2022 Weekly Average
Prices \& Quantities
Broccoli comes through the auction in a spring and fall season like cabbage. It is packed in $1 / 2$ bushel boxes. We can observe the price spiking as quantity drops, and viceversa.

Total QTY (lbs.) \& Avg. \$s is not available for broccoli because of a difficulty in reporting values.

Canary Melons come through the auction from July October. As expected, price is high when supply is low. These melons are packed and sold in bins but are reported by the individual unit (each). We can observe a drop in average \$ for canary melons, but a large increase in quantity sold through the auction over the observation seasons.

Total QTY (each) \& Avg. \$
2022: 11,154 | \$1.55
2021: 9,126 | \$1.63
2020: 4,017 | \$2.06

## Fairview-Specific Analysis



Please remember the Fairview-Specific Analysis graphs only analyze data from the Fairview (Christian County) Produce Auction for the 20202022 seasons. Therefore, the total quantity sold and the average price are only a reflection of one of the auctions in the state and might not be representative of every auction in Kentucky.
However, the crops reported in this section are important for the produce auction markets and are worth including in this publication.

If you would like more quantity or price information about a specific crop sold through any of the produce auctions, please email Savannah Columbia.

## Notes \&

Observations
2020-2022 Weekly Average

## Prices \& Quantities

Watermelons come through the auction from July October. Prices are high when supply is low and viceversa, as expected. We can observe a high price point at the beginning and tail-end of the season. Watermelons should be packed in $24^{\prime \prime}$ bins. Properly packed bins will be full or nearly full. Seedless varieties are sized in 36,45 , and 60 counts. Variety and type (seeded or seedless) should be specified on the tag, as they are reported separately.

For seedless watermelon, both small and large melons are combined to provide Total QTY and weighted to provide Avg. \$.

Total QTY (each) \& Avg. \$
2022: 464,127 | \$3.02
2021: 420,572 | \$1.85
2020: 383,951 | \$2.29

## Unit Conversion Chart

| Product | Retail Volum | Net Weight (lbs.) |
| :---: | :---: | :---: |
| Apples | Bushel ½ Bushel | 42 to 48 lbs . 21 to 24 lbs . |
| Asparagus | Bushel $1 / 2$ Bushel ½ Bushel | $\begin{aligned} & 24 \mathrm{lbs} . \\ & 12 \mathrm{lbs} . \end{aligned}$ |
| Beans | Bushel $1 / 2$ Bushel $1 / 2$ Bushel | 28 to 30 lbs . 14 to 15 lbs . |
| Beets | Bunch | 2 lbs . |
| Blueberries | Pint | 0.75 to 1 lb . |
| Broccoli | Head | 1 to $11 / 2 \mathrm{lbs}$. |
| Cabbage | Head | 2 to 6 lbs . |
| Canary Melon | Each | 2 to 7 lbs . |
| Cantaloupe | Each | 1 to 4 lbs . |
| Cucumbers | Bushel $1 ⁄ 2$ Bushel | 48 to 50 lbs . 24 to 25 lbs . |
| Peppers | Bushel $1 ⁄ 2$ Bushel | 25 to 30 lbs . <br> 12.5 to 15 lbs . |
| Pumpkins | Each | 15 to 40 lbs . |
| Strawberries | Quart | 1.25 to 1.5 lbs . |
| Sweet Corn | Dozen | 6 to 8 lbs . |
| Tomatoes | Bushel | 53 lbs. |
| Watermelon | Each | 22 to 26 lbs . |

## Thanks for Reading!

These averages are summaries of the auction price data collected by the Center for Crop
Diversification. Additional crops, specific market prices, and alternative unit prices can be viewed in the weekly price reports on the site. Since its start in 2004, the Center for Crop Diversification's price reporting system has changed and expanded to include Center partners working in Illinois, Tennessee, and West Virginia.

## Check out all the other specialty crop resources from the CCD including:

- Three-Year Average Prices \& Quantities at Kentucky Produce Auctions: 2017-2019
- Three-Year Average Weekly Prices at Kentucky Farmers Markets: 2016-2018
- Produce Auction Price Reports
- Farmers Market Price Reports (Kentucky)
- Specialty Crop Budgets
- CCD's YouTube page
- Crop \& Market Profiles
- Video \& Recorded webinars
- Tons of FREE publications, tools, and other resources

We are always looking for feedback, so give us a shout on Facebook or by emailing Savannah Columbia.

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## Image \& Graphics:

Cover Photo: Savannah Columbia. Strawberries. Photo taken at the Fairview Produce Auction, 2023.
Regional Produce Auction Map and Fairview \& Lincoln County Produce Auctions on Kentucky Map: Joshua Knight, Senior Extension Associate, UK Horticulture \& UK CCD.

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