



Starting a Cut Flower Business

How to decide whether to grow cut flowers commercially

Ask yourself these questions to determine if you are fully prepared. The following information may help you decide whether you wish to work in this industry. If your answers to these questions are positive then we wish you the best of luck in starting in this exciting industry.

Why are you choosing to grow cut flowers?

Your answer may include a number of reasons such as:

- To make profit,
- A lifestyle choice,
- To take the opportunity to use existing land for production purposes, or
- For tax benefits.

Many people initially have good intentions for becoming a successful producer but unless they become fully aware of the large and, frequently difficult commitment required, they are eventually overwhelmed. Successful growing of cut flowers requires dedication, time input, farming skills, perseverance and sometimes luck. For this reason, do not commence operations unless you are able to invest substantial time, money and effort into the exercise.

Have you the resources available to undertake cut flower Production?

Time - Do you enjoy to work outside? Are you able to dedicate enough time to grow, maintain, harvest and market the crop? Are you willing to work hard and, during peak periods, long hours 7 days per week?

Producing good quality marketable products requires year-round regular (frequently daily) crop inspection to keep pests, diseases and disorders to a minimum. Growing any cut flowers does not lend itself well to the "weekend farmer" situation. However, in some cases, it is beneficial to have some external income to sustain you during the establishment period.

Money - As a guide, between \$80,000 and \$170,000 (excluding land) is needed to buy the infrastructure and equipment to undertake commercial cut flower production (eg tractors, irrigation, shade houses, sheds etc). The amount needed will vary depending on your situation, which crop you grow, whether you grow under shelter or in the field and to what extent your property is already developed.

Have you the experience in, or can you learn how to produce cut flowers?

Producing cut flowers of excellent quality may be one of the hardest primary production activities in horticulture. This is because the quality of your final product has a direct bearing on profit levels – even more so than other horticultural varieties such as fruit and vegetables. Although markets can be found for a range of product types (e.g. stems with more or less leaf, a different configuration/shape or flowers with variable colour), only excellent quality blooms can be sold without reducing customer satisfaction substantially.

Learning to grow cut flowers successfully includes a steep learning curve. In all cases, but especially if you do not have any experience in horticulture or agriculture production, we recommend that you undertake adequate research to better prepare yourself to meet the challenges ahead. Learn the best methods to use to produce a crop, speak to existing people in the industry to gain advice and undertake appropriate education and training activities. This will increase your chances of long-term business survival - many new industry entrants' businesses do not survive the first two years of production. This can result from crop failures (due to such occurrences as unexpected climatic conditions, pests, increased disease and disorder pressure, inappropriate crop selections for local conditions etc), downturns in markets and demand, increasing costs, reduction in prices obtained and other avoidable or unavoidable occurrences.

Some ways to researching the industry:

- Read widely on general horticulture; follow up by accessing specialist information.
- Observe what others are doing, when they do what, and why. Observe your plants and get to know them well.
- Conduct your own small trials to determine what grows well on your land.
- Practice basic activities and then proceed to more complex skills. Cover matters such as plant, pest or disease identification, and competency in sowing seed, mastery of propagation techniques, harvesting expertise, grading and packing.
- Visit flower auctions/wholesalers/florists, go to seminars, field trips and workshops.
- Be prepared to pay for good information. It will probably save you a lot of heartache and money.
- Study for a qualification.
- Join FAQI and receive all of our regular information services.

Have you skills in the activities conducted on a farm? If not, you will need to, among other things

- Learn to drive a tractor and obtain a license,
- Put an irrigation system in place or seek alternative help,
- Learn how to apply chemicals safely and obtain the relevant certification,
- Become aware of other licensing requirements (e.g. if cultivating Australian Natives flowers or Exporting, relevant licenses are required).

Are you doing adequate research to ensure that you make an informed decision?

All potential new growers are under an obligation to make their own decisions on what products to grow and how to grow them. This is best done through researching the options available to you, analysing your particular situation and growing cut flowers suited to your growing environment. Useful information resources are listed on the FAQI Fact Sheets and at the FAQI website at www.flowersqueensland.asn.au

Profits - how much can you expect to make and when?

There is potential to make good profits in this industry, but only by those growers who are able to combine experience, knowledge, and good luck together to become increasingly efficient (and thus reduce costs) and produce good quality products that enjoy high demand. Therefore

- Before planting any crop, assess its marketing potential thoroughly,
- Grow crops that either (1) have local and/or export markets and fetches a reasonable price or (2) Have new market potential that can be established by you or your agent(s);
- Produce flowers that are likely to find a niche market,
- Ensure that your flowers are produced in time to catch the greatest demand periods. (e.g. Mothers' Day, Valentine's Day, local demand periods and festivals applicable to your markets,
- Never market sub-standard products – customer dissatisfaction damages your business and others in the industry,
- Look for, and investigate, alternative and new marketing opportunities.

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