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NEW · JERSEY

Site Evaluation Guide

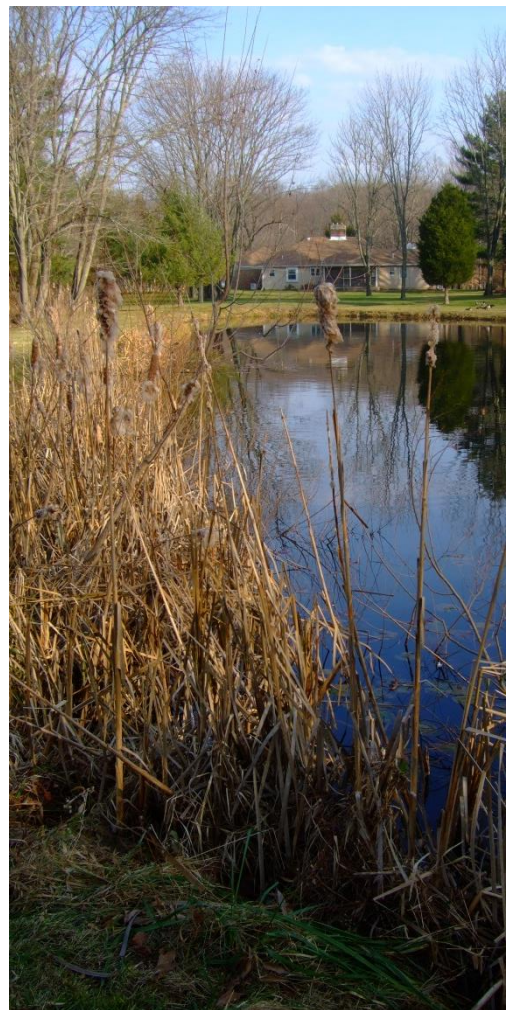
Evaluate the Production Potential of Your Farm

The Northeast Organic Farming Association of New Jersey (NOFA-NJ) is dedicated to supporting sustainable food and agriculture in New Jersey through education, technical assistance, and policy action.

Our members and governing board include farmers, gardeners, consumers, retailers, processors, educators, policy-makers, and researchers.

Consider joining us today!

908-371-1111
www.nofanj.org



The purpose of this guide is to help landowners and farmers make informed decisions on the suitability of their land for certain production models. It should encourage landowners to think critically about the capability and suitability of their land for certain farming operations. Please refer to the Resources section for additional information. Contact the NOFA-NJ office with any questions, comments or suggestions for improvement.

Overview

Use this guide to stay on track as you create your business plan or search for the perfect property! Each section of this guide corresponds to a different group of considerations for farms. This publication is in no way comprehensive, and producers should always do their due diligence to make sure their operation does not violate any local, state or federal laws.

Consult with your local Extension or Natural Resources Conservation Service office to learn more about local conditions and natural resources.

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Can I do this?

In addition to the technical skills and business savvy that are necessary to run a successful farm business, you need natural resources to grow your product. Natural resources (including soil, water, wildlife, energy) can be unique to a region, a farm or a field. And your farm's unique conditions may not support every type of farming operation.

Land suitability – in this case, the ability of the land to support specific farming activities – is a concept with which successful farmers are familiar. You can make informed decisions, using free or low cost tools, on soil and plant management in order to determine what your farm land is suitable for producing.

So while you're wondering whether your financing or personal skills can cut muster, don't forget the natural resources element. And reap the financial benefits of working with the land – not against it.

General Property Information

Compare the property information to the needs of your business idea.

	This Property				Estimated Need/Preference			
Total Acreage								
	Estimated need should depend on your income requirements, marketing channel, equipment, labor available, and product needs (i.e. spacing, rotations, forage, etc.).							
Current land use (approx. acreage)	<i>acreage</i>							
	<i>e.g. Pasture</i>	<i>e.g. Wooded</i>						
Zoning								
	Township zoning can greatly affect allowed use and placement of structures.							
Marketing Needs								
	Does the property afford ample parking? Is there space for a farm stand or CSA pick-up? Is the property visible from the road or is there opportunity for signage?							
Surrounding properties/land uses								
	Compatible land uses depend on the nature of your business – some may offer a customer base or may be a source of complaints, while others may be a source of contamination or offer equipment-sharing opportunities.							
Borders/buffers								
	Importance depends on organic certification goals, and information from above.							

Farm/Field Features

Depending on the diversity of your land, the field conditions may be uniform or inconsistent. Use your judgment on whether to repeat this evaluation section by field or complete it for the whole farm unit.

Water Features

Water bodies can signal shallow depth-to-groundwater (and, in turn, slower drainage), can create microclimates and may require special care to maintain. They may also serve as important habitat for beneficial creatures, create recreation opportunities, manage surface water flow or provide an irrigation source.

	Check if present	Planned use (e.g. irrigation, livestock water source, recreation, etc.)	Required equipment or maintenance (e.g. mowing, grading, filter, pump, livestock exclusion fencing, etc.)
Creek			
Drainage Ditch			
Pond			
Spring			
Stream			
<i>Other</i>			
<i>Other</i>			

Field/Farm Topography

The shape of the field's surface can affect water and air movement, which, in turn, affects potential soil movement (differences in soil depth) and can create microclimates (cold air settling). Slope can be used to your advantage, such as positively regulating air flow in an orchard, but may require specific management techniques to reduce the potential for negative impacts on production.

	Slope percent	Planned use (e.g. vegetables, orchard, pasture, pollinator habitat, etc.)	Required equipment or maintenance (e.g. tillage, mowing, mulching, etc.)	Impact mitigation plans (e.g. row layout, permanent cover, etc.)
Field: steepest				
Field : most level				
Field: most common				
Hills/Other features				
<i>Other</i>				

Farm/Field Features (continued)

Vegetation Features

Land bordering the production area can be a source of pollen for pollinators, weed seeds and shelter for livestock or wildlife. How you should manage or plan for these features will depend on their effect on production and your time/equipment.

	Check if present	Type of vegetation and density	Growth rate/habit (spreading, clumping, climbing, etc.)	Planned use (pollinator habitat, shelter, etc.)	Required equipment or maintenance (e.g. mowing, pruning, etc.)
Hedgerow					
Woodlot/Forest					
Uncultivated areas					
Landscaping					
<i>Other</i>					

Wildlife

Wildlife will affect your farming operation in different ways, depending on internal (your goals, equipment) and external (weather events, neighboring land) factors.

Habitat/Land use	On-farm or Neighbor	Associated animals (potential beneficial or pest source)	Exclusion strategy or buffers	Recommended management
Wetland				
Grassland				
Forest				
Brush				
<i>Other</i>				

Soil Characteristics

Use web-based and in-field tools to describe important characteristics of your soil. Land management can greatly affect some soil characteristics, so up-to-date soil tests and field observations are an invaluable addition to soil series descriptions.

Descriptors

The physical, biological and chemical characteristics of your soil impact your productivity potential. Whether your land is suitable for a certain enterprise, or the preparation needed to create a suitable environment, cannot be determined fully without a soils investigation.

	Type 1	Type 2	Type3	Type 4
Soil Series Name				
Texture				
Dominate Slope				
O.M. range				
pH				
Drainage Class				
Depth to Water Table				
Depth to Impervious Layer				

Management considerations

Different soil types behave differently under farm management. Use slope, drainage, texture and other information to create a soil management plan for each soil type under each planned use.

	Acreage	Planned use (e.g. vegetables, orchard, pasture, pollinator habitat, etc.)	Required equipment or maintenance (e.g. tillage, mowing, mulching, etc.)	Impact mitigation plans (e.g. mulching, conservation tillage, cover cropping, etc.)
Type 1				
Type 2				
Type 3				
Type 4				

Infrastructure

NOP Requirement (§205.200): Organic

	This Property	Estimated Need/Preference
Fencing		
	Fencing, both for livestock inclusion and pest exclusion, can be an expensive investment. There are ranges of products available, but consider repairs and upgrades into your budget if you start with the least expensive option.	
Water		
	In addition to a water source, there are pumps, filters, lines and other necessary items to deliver the water from the source to the destination.	
Buildings		
	These could include livestock shelter, equipment storage, greenhouse, meeting areas and many other functions. The dimensions, condition, accessibility and location should be considered.	
Food quality/food safety		
	Whether you're interested in processing birds onsite or producing vegetables, you'll need to create a food safety plan and may require specific buildings or features (wastewater collection, vegetable wash stand, fridges/freezers/coolers).	
Other		
	Your business may have other specific, specialized infrastructure needs.	

Equipment

Use information gathered from previous sections to determine the equipment you will need for both production and land management.

Name	Year Required	Cost	Use	Can you contract?

Resources

Resources below will help you fill out the sections in this worksheet. If you are seeking certification, always check with your certifier on organic certification issues. Consult with local agricultural experts for more information and guidance (including the farmer community).

Experts

USDA-NRCS
220 Davidson Ave, 4th Floor
Somerset, NJ 08873
732-537-6040

Cooperative Extension, Rutgers
88 Lipman Dr
New Brunswick, NJ 08901
njaes.rutgers.edu/county/

NJDA
PO Box 330
Trenton, NJ 08625
609-292-8896

General Property Information

Land Use: <http://www.nj.gov/dep/gis/geoweb splash.htm>

Marketing: http://www.smallfarm.org/main/for_new_farmers/resources_by_topic/market_research/

Right-to-Farm: <http://www.nj.gov/agriculture/sadc/rtfprogram/resources/localordinances.html>

Buffer Zone Guidance: <http://www.nj.gov/agriculture/divisions/md/pdf/bufferzoneguidance.pdf>

Farm/Field Features

Water Quality: <http://www.awqa.org/>

Water Sources: <http://nebeginningfarmers.org/farmers/land/water-sources/>

Topography/Tillage: <https://attra.ncat.org/attra-pub/viewhtml.php?id=106>

Habitat:

http://www.dnr.state.mi.us/publications/pdfs/huntingwildlifehabitat/landowners_guide/habitat_mgmt/Planning/Evaluating_Land.htm

Wildlife: <http://pubs.cas.psu.edu/FreePubs/pdfs/agrs104.pdf>

Soil Characteristics

Soil Health: <http://www.nrcs.usda.gov/wps/portal/nrcs/site/soils/home/>

Soil Preparation: <http://www.epa.gov/oecaagct/ag101/cropsoil.html>

Infrastructure/Equipment

Irrigation: http://www.caes.uga.edu/publications/pubDetail.cfm?pk_id=6979

Farm Machinery: <http://www.extension.iastate.edu/agdm/crops/pdf/a3-28.pdf>

Greenhouses: <https://attra.ncat.org/horticultural.html#Greenhouse>

Buildings: http://extension.psu.edu/animals/dairy/courses/technology-tuesday-series/webinars/dairy-systems-planning-and-building-series-the-use-of-existing-buildings/evaluating-existing-buildings/at_download/file



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