

# Getting started in farming

Third in a series of six articles on how to get started in farming.

**NEWARK, Del.** — Good farms rarely come on the open market. They're often bought up by other farmers who've made a purchase option arrangement with the previous owner in order to enlarge their own operations. So potential buyers or renters often have to look hard to find what they want. If you want to acquire some land to farm, be prepared for a search.

"Most people who become established in commercial farming want to own their own land," says University of Delaware extension farm management specialist Dr. Don Tilmon. "Ownership gives you more security and more control over the

operation. Renting leaves you with more capital to invest in production inputs. But there's the risk of having the farm sold out from under you, or of losing it for some other reason."

Today a lot of operators farm both owned and rented land.

County extension agents and farm supply dealers sometimes know of farms for sale or rent. Local banks or auctioneers are also worth checking.

Once you find an available farm, find out as much as you can about its current productivity and potential. Talk to neighbors in the area, including some good nearby farmers. Check with credit agencies, the Soil Conservation Service and the Agricultural

Stabilization and Conservation Service to find out what they think of the place and its prospects. Some bankers are also quite knowledgeable about farm worth.

Determine the size of the farm in actual acres. Buying on the basis of "more or less acreage" at the current price may result in you're paying for land that isn't there. Examine the distribution of land on the property — the percentage in cropland, pasture, woodlot, and wasteland. Usable cropland usually determines the value of a farm, so total cropland currently available, plus potential cropland, should be a major focus of your prepurchase inspection.

Before you commit yourself, determine the productivity of the

farm in terms of future income. Unless you have another source of income, it will have to pay for itself and provide your living expenses.

Ask yourself, "Why is this farm on the market?" If the seller or renter wants to retire or move to another farm, perhaps it's just another business transaction. But be sure there are no hidden problems.

Check buildings from roof to foundation, inside and out. Look for dry rot and termites. Check for running water, adequate electrical facilities and other factors that may affect use or cost of structures.

If you buy a farm that's a going business, and a good one, usually there won't be problems with

building conditions and field layout. But find out for yourself.

Try to get over the land several times during the year before you buy. Find out when crops are planted and harvested and note the condition of fields during the growing season. Are there problem spots — too wet, too dry, too rocky? Are there other conditions that can cut yields?

The physical features of the land will affect both the type of farming you do and the efficiency of your operation, points out Tilmon. It's more expensive, for example, to work hilly or rolling land than flat land. Small fields are harder to work because of the need for smaller equipment and more space is lost in turning rows, fences, or hedgerows. Erosion is more of a problem when the land is hilly. Stoniness affects land use and causes wear and tear on machinery.

"Implement life can be cut in half on very stony ground," he says.

Farm layout includes the arrangement, shape, and size of

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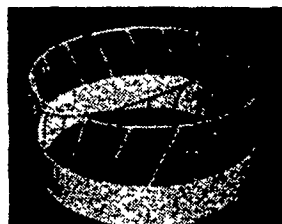
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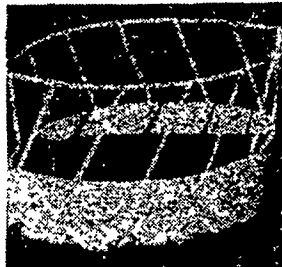


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