

Starting a Lavender Farm

Over the past years I have had several people approach me with wanting to know how to start a lavender farm or what I have learned. This is a big subject because it combines understanding how to be a successful farmer with how to start/have a successful small business. So here is what I have learned over a number of years.

The first step you must get past to have a successful lavender farm is to determine if you can economically grow lavender. We spent 3-5 years in determining this and until you can answer it decisively you will not have stable business. Growing lavender is not quite like growing corn or soy beans because when you harvest them, the plant is done. You put the seed in, grow it and harvest it and that is it. Your only decision is how you might rotate crops from year to year. With lavender you harvest and still have the plant which needs to be tended to the rest of the year. It is also not like a nursery where the plant must be tended to because in a nursery you are not harvesting a crop from the plant. So growing lavender is a combination of being a crop farmer AND being a nursery. There are aspects of both that must be integrated successfully for the lavender to both thrive, produce a good crop and be economically feasible (so you make money or at least do not lose it)

So here is what we have learned to successfully grow lavender as a crop successfully.

- 1) you must have the right environment, sun, drainage, and air circulation (I have talked about this in more detail at previous postings)
- 2) you must have selected and found lavender plants which are hardy to your climate AND fit the business model that you wish to follow.
- 3) You must be prepared to control weeds, water plants when young, trim plants after harvest and if necessary, again at late winter/early spring.
- 4) You must be able to propagate through cuttings and divisions (you cannot afford to keep purchasing lavender plants particularly if you are dealt a very harsh winter)
- 5) You must be able to handle a short and heavy harvest season where in the space of a few weeks you will have to cut and process most of your crop.
- 6) You must get your lavender plants through the winter months.

If you can figure out how to do the above and can do it over a period of 3-5 years then you will know that you have the foundation for a successful lavender farming business. This does not ensure you will have a successful small business but without it lavender farming will be more of a hobby than a business.

Hand in hand with this first step is to figure out what business plan will work for you and your farm. This business plan is separate yet connected to figuring out how to grow lavender. Specifically, the business plan will help you know a) what types of lavender will work best for you b) where to locate your lavender farm or if you already have the land that will impact what your business plan may be and c) what is the layout and facilities you will need for your farm. So, the business plan is going to be impact what lavender and where your farm may be and where your farm and facilities are will impact your business plan. That is why I say be very careful to spend 3-5 years figuring and testing out these two things.