

Tennessee Grower Profile:

Karen Hightower, K&K Farms
Grower of Cut Flowers

Near Baileyton in Greene County,
Tennessee

Date of on-site visit: May 3, 2022

County Agent Host: Melody Rose

Chronicling Specialty Crop Marketing in Tennessee

FOCUS ON CUT FLOWERS

Rob Holland | Center for Profitable Agriculture



County Extension Agent, Melody Rose (right), visits with Greene County cut flower grower, Karen Hightower, to discuss her production and marketing strategies.

Series of grower profiles of selected specialty crops in Tennessee.

- Cut Flowers
- Persimmons
- Blueberries
- Elderberries
- Garlic
- Microgreens

TENNESSEE CUT FLOWER STATISTICS:

According to data from the USDA National Agriculture Statistics Service, the number of cut flower farms in Tennessee has increased by 70 percent from 2012 to 2017 increasing from 46 to 78 growers over the 5-year period with the value of annual cut flower sales now exceeding \$400,000 per year at \$427,664. Many cut flower growers' market direct to end users at farmers markets, direct from on-farm stands and other direct methods.

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COMMENTS & OBSERVATIONS FROM THE FARM

I grow a lot of sunflowers... sunflowers of all colors.

Again, I love flowers... love to grow and garden. If I didn't sell any, I would still grow them. So, selling gives me a little money and more opportunities to talk!

I just love plants and flowers. I started selling vegetables and then added the flowers to my mix. The flowers were a hit with customers and I began to focus more attention on them.

I also supply flowers for weddings.

People like my flowers and they sell easily, but there is a limit to the number of folks in this community that will buy flowers.

I really do what is easy for me to grow. I'm busy with kids and grandkids and big garden. I homeschool and sell vegetables, too.



I know what needs to be done and I do it until I'm done. I know when to stop, sort of.

I plant seeds every three weeks for just over 2 months in the spring. We harvest on a similar schedule until the first freeze in the fall.

I like to talk, and I like to work with customers.

I am so busy with so many things...I only do flowers that are easy for me to grow and that don't need a lot of labor.



I sell flowers from April to October... and I don't do a lot of bookkeeping. I probably sell \$150 per week.

I call what I do gardening... others call it chaos gardening.

We focus on growing 'non-formal' flowers. I do not do roses or any fancy flowers. I do zinnias, wildflowers, peonies, asters, marigolds, sweet William and hydrangeas. I don't live in LA and my customers don't either. I serve local customers... they are from rural Tennessee. 100% of my sales are local. I probably have 18 to 22 different flowers.





We sell direct from the farm, at a farmers market booth on Saturdays (in season) and I do food boxes. Our food boxes are a spin-off from our former CSA.

Most all (probably 98%) of my flower sales are arranged in a 1-quart jar -- \$15 per jar. I do not sell by the stem/piece.

We probably have 5000 contacts on Facebook.

People want to know where their food comes from...and they want to make a connection with the grower. This helps sell flowers, too.

We don't really do any marketing. We rely on word of mouth and social media. We have a big network through our home school connections.

My primary customer is a middle-aged woman. I sell to all ages and men buy some, but the middle-aged woman probably accounts for 90% of my sales.

At our farmers market booth, we feature vegetables (tomatoes, chard, lettuce, kale, spinach, cabbage) and we add flowers to the booth. *"I don't think I would sell all of my flowers if I did not have vegetables."*



I make the most money selling flowers/arrangements for weddings. But I sell and deliver at my farmers market booth.

I don't make a lot of money on my flowers, but I cover the costs and it is a lot of fun.





Additional Resources:

Cut Flower Production in Tennessee. Matt Ernst. University of Kentucky, Center for Crop Diversification, Crop Profile, CCD-CPA-CP-3. 2021.

Stock Cut Flower Production in Utah. Maegen Lewis, Melanie Stock, Brent Black and Dan Drost. Utah State University Extension. March 2022.

Low Tunnels for Field Cut Flower Production. Shannon Rauter, Melanie Stock Brent Black and Dan Drost. Utah State University. November 2021.



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