

Dried Flowers, Herbs, and Cover Crop Sold as Seasonal Decoration: Enterprise Analysis on A Small Diversified Farm



Cover crop, herbs, and flowers provide unique opportunities for small farm owners interested in diversification, increasing profit, and season extension. Each year small farms spend time cutting back flowers, herbs, or cover crop to improve health, stimulate production, or prepare ground for new crops. The freshly cut material is normally left in the field. This grant analyzed the profitability of enterprises that utilize the freshly cut material in decorative and edible value-added products.

Crop: Colored Uprights Sorghum (Sorghum Bicolor)

Sorghum, also commonly called Broomcorn, is commonly used as decoration during the summer and fall. It is quick growing, easy to harvest and retains its color for over a year. It is used widely in the wreath industry as an accent. Sorghum can also be used as a cover crop and adds organic matter when tilled into the soil.

Introduction:

Two enterprises were analyzed to assess the most profitable venture: Sorghum Stalks made into tall bunches for late summer and early fall (Halloween) and 8" Sorghum Wreaths for fall decoration or Thanksgiving Center pieces.

Marketing:

Retail:

- Sorghum Stalks were harvested at the beginning of October for sales throughout the entire month. Six stalks formed a bunch and it was tied together with jute twine. Sorghum stalks were sold at seven farmers market throughout New Jersey, of the fifteen bunches made, only two sold.

- Sorghum Wreaths were harvested and made during the month of November as a fall wreath or Thanksgiving centerpiece. Wreaths were sold at seven farmers markets throughout New Jersey, thirteen of twenty-two wreaths sold in three weeks.

Added Value:

- Jute twine was added to the sorghum stalks.
- Black tip wheat and Silver Tip Rye were added to the Sorghum wreath as a decorative accent.

Why do people purchase decorative sorghum?

Sorghum stalks and wreaths add festive decoration to a home.

Growing Practices:

- One bare ground bed with two lines of drip tape was prepared for two rows of sorghum. An Earthway 1001-B precision garden seeder was used with seed plate 18112 for popcorn. Each row received two passes with the seeder on July 5th.
- Cultivation: the sorghum was basket weeded and hand weeded once, it easily outcompetes the surrounding weeds.
- Irrigation: Little irrigation was required.

Harvest and Post-Harvest:

Tools: harvest crate, harvest clippers

- Sorghum is ready to harvest when the tassels are vibrant in color and have a glossy appearance.
- Stalks for bunching can be harvested near the base and brought to a prep area in bulk where they are bunched and wrapped with jute twine.
- Stalks for wreaths are bent to waist height and clipped one inch from the base of the tassels.



Data:

Colored Uprights Sorghum	Bed Feet Wreaths	Bed Feet Stalks	Total Row Feet	# of Plants	Unmarketable Stems
Sorghum bicolor	127	28	310	1100	4

	Labor (minutes)	Wreaths Sold	Price per Wreath	Wreath Profit	Cost of Production	Net Profit
Sorghum Wreaths	342.60	13	25	325	114.20	\$210.79
	Labor (minutes)	Stalks Sold	Price per Stalk	Stalk Profit	Cost of Production	Net Profit
Sorghum bunches	115.33	2	4	8	38.44	-\$30.44
	Labor (minutes)			Total Profit	Cost of Production	Net Profit
Two Enterprises	444.7			333	148.23	\$184.76

Wreath Making:

*Tools: clippers, crate, wreath rings, wreath production machine
We use a Mitchell Craftmaster II Wreath Maker for all our wreath products. 8" wreath rings were used for Sorghum Wreaths*

- An average of 35 stems were used per wreath with 3-5 stems used inside each clamp. The difference in number of stems per wreath results from tassel circumference.
- Silver Tip Rye or Black Tip Wheat were used as accents in 2 of the clamps.
- Average time to make one wreath: 7 minutes 45 seconds

Results:

Seed maturation was delayed due to the wet and cold month of September. This delay may have affected Sorghum Bunch sales due to the dull appearance of the tassels, but there is too little evidence to draw any conclusion. A prevention strategy is seeding the crop at an earlier date.

Overall, Sorghum Wreaths is the most profitable enterprise with a net profit of \$210 using 127 bed feet (254 row feet). Including bunched Sorghum as an enterprise only decreases the net profit for this crop. We used the sorghum bunches as decoration for our market stand at seven farmers markets throughout October, however it is unknown if their attractiveness drew people into our stand and increased revenue by an additional \$30.44.

Conclusion:

Sorghum wreaths is a profitable enterprise that can be easily worked into production on a small, diversified, vegetable or flower farm. It can assist with season extension, creating labor after the first frost and adds a new product for fall celebrations. Lastly, wreath making classes are becoming increasingly popular experience and can add an agritourism event on the farm.

Additional Resources:

University of Main Cooperative Extension Bulletin #7012, Making Balsam Fir Wreaths
<https://extension.umaine.edu/publications/7012e/>

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