# Produce Growers and Market Development: A Four-State Comparison

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States have pursued various types of produce-market development and have achieved different degrees of success. Georgia, Kentucky, North Carolina, and Tennessee provide an excellent opportunity to conduct a comparative study of produce-market development has been present in because of the prevalence of small farms, comparable growing seasons, and reliance on tobacco as a cash crop. Georgia and North Carolina have experienced expansion of their produce industries and the creation of marketing channels. The Kentucky and Tennessee produce industries and marketing channels have experienced much slower growth. One component of a project funded by the USDA/AMS/IFAFS to examine the interstate differences entailed a survey of produce growers in each state. The objective was to learn about their current situations and perceptions of market opportunities. A 34-question survey focusing on decisions about what to plant, post-harvest handling, current marketing activity, and anticipated changes in the produce industry was administered to samples of growers in each state. This Update will focus on an overview of the responses for Kentucky and Tennessee versus Georgia and North Carolina.

Several farm characteristics have been found that are common to Kentucky and Tennessee versus Georgia and North Carolina. Kentucky and Tennessee produce farms have smaller average size and, consequently, typically lower produce sales and farm income than those in Georgia and North Carolina. The former pair also has a higher concentration of older operators, but there is a tendency for growers in Kentucky and Tennessee to have relatively more operators with less than three years of experience. This may be a reflection of growers seeking alternatives to tobacco production.

When deciding what produce crops to grow, Georgia's and North Carolina's samples were more likely to have considered experience, production equipment, labor timing/availability, and profit potential. These could also reflect less experience in the Kentucky and Tennessee samples. Post-harvest factors associated with considering a new crop that were more likely to be part of Georgia's and North Carolina's decision making were contracting, broker/packer fees, grading, cooling, and volume requirements. This is consistent with these states tending to have larger farms, more revenue, and, as a result, greater awareness of the importance of these factors in the commercial distribution system.

Further evidence of a greater marketing focus in Georgia and North Carolina is the greater tendency to use post-harvest equipment. Sorting tables, sizers, precoolers, quick cooling, and branding involve higher costs, which are more likely to be spread over larger volumes in these two states versus Kentucky and Tennessee. Georgia and North Carolina growers also are more likely to be engaged in wholesale/broker marketing and value-added activities.

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