



Western SARE

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THE VALUE OF SUMMER SQUASH

Objectives

To determine how harvest frequency and harvest size affect the yield and marketability of fruits produced by summer squash plants, *Cucurbita pepo*.

I compared the yields from harvesting mini squash daily vs. every 2-3 days at a larger size. Is mini squash worth the extra effort, and can it be profitable for a small market

Farmer/Rancher Grant

Title: Harvest Frequency, Yield, and Economics of Summer Squash

Project Number: FW06-042

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Amount Funded: \$4,730



Project Coordinator Karen Strickler at the farmers market.

gardener? The study included a field experiment, a customer survey at two Farmers' Markets, a vendor survey, and development of an enterprise budget for squash production aimed at market gardeners and small farmers.

Materials and Methods

Two zucchini and two patty pan varieties were assessed:

Zucchini

- green: Cash Flow from Johnny's Selected Seeds
- yellow: Butterstick from Territorial Seed Company

Patty pan

- green: Starship from Territorial Seed Company
 - yellow: Sunburst from Territorial Seed Company
- Forty equally spaced hills were randomly assigned a variety and harvest frequency.



There were 5 hills of each variety and harvest frequency combination. Each hill was planted with 5 seeds of the same variety and thinned to 3 plants. Flags indicate harvest frequency.

Squash from each hill were counted and weighed individually.

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Western SARE, a USDA organization, funds grants for research and education that develop or promote some aspect of agricultural sustainability, which embraces

- *profitable farms and ranches*
- *a healthy environment*
- *strong families and communities.*

The Western Region, one of four SARE regions nationwide, is administered through Utah State University.

Western SARE:
<http://wsare.usu.edu>

National SARE
www.sare.org

THE VALUE OF SUMMER SQUASH

Results

Squash Yield

Weekly squash yield tracked fluctuations in temperature (DD = Weekly degree day accumulations) over the season.

Daily harvests yielded a greater number of fruits. Small yellow patty pan are especially prolific for mini squash production.

How does squash yield compare if I harvest small squash more frequently vs. larger squash less frequently? While a squash fruit is growing, it inhibits the growth of younger fruit and flowers. When harvested daily the plant compensates for the loss of fruit by producing new vegetative growth, flowers and fruits.

Squash Sales and Pricing

Large squash sold well at farmers markets at 2-4 for \$1.00. Small squash sold well at 5 - 8 for \$1.00. The number of small squash for \$1.00 increased as size of the squash decreased late in the season. Mini squash sold by numbers brought in the highest price per pound.

Percent that sold:

- small squash, 94% (green squash slightly more than yellow)
- large zucchini, 83%
- large patty pans, 72%. ("What do you do with these?")

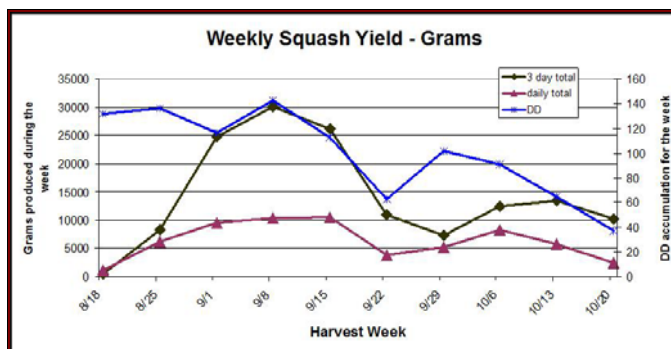
Squash Sales and Pricing. Customer Survey

Most preferred to buy squash by numbers (5-6 baby, 2-4 medium squash) (89% of respondents) than by the pound.

Most custom-



Squash harvested over a three-day period. At top right are large squash harvested 9/3. At left and bottom right left and bottom right are small squash harvested 9/3-5.



ers said they would pay no more than \$1.00 per pound for squash, and many said they would not pay as much per pound for baby squash as for medium squash (yet they paid much more).

Enterprise Budget

I modified an enterprise budget for summer squash from the University of Kentucky, using my 2007 costs. I used the enterprise budget to consider what combinations of yield, price of squash, and costs of growing squash will result in a profit.

600+ lbs per year, and sell it at \$2.75 per pound (within my price range for mini squash) to make a profit. To increase customers, consider grilling some squash at market as a value-added product.

