

Small_Acreage_Fruit_Production

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SPEAKERS

Suzanne Slack, Christa Hartsook, Olivia Hanlon

- C** Christa Hartsook 00:15

Hello, and welcome to the small farms podcast, a production of the small farms program at Iowa State University Extension and Outreach. Our podcast covers the opportunities and challenges associated with rural life.
- O** Olivia Hanlon 00:28

In this episode, I visit with Suzanne slack fruit crop specialists with Iowa State University Extension and Outreach. Today we are talking about fruit production on small acreages. I'm Olivia Hanlon small farms education extension specialist, and we hope you enjoy the show. Suzanne, welcome. We're glad to have you joining us today.
- S** Suzanne Slack 00:48

Thank you, Olivia. Thanks for inviting me. I'm excited to talk about small fruit.
- O** Olivia Hanlon 00:52

Absolutely. So Suzanne, you're fairly new to your role as in like within the past year, and this is your first time on our podcast here. So why don't we start with you telling us a little bit about yourself and what your role for Iowa State is?
- S** Suzanne Slack 01:06

Yeah, so so I've been here about eight months at the time of this taping. And my role is to work on fruits for Iowa. So what that means is anything that's a perennial fruit crop, so cherries, apples, berries, anything that overwinters are crops that I work on, and my program at Iowa

State is to develop new strategies for mitigating stress, and figuring out exactly what's going on with our vines and trees and bushes in Iowa that make fruit.

O Olivia Hanlon 01:41

Awesome. So Suzanne, like I said, we're talking possibilities of fruits on small acreage just today. But before we get started on that, let's start by talking a little bit about what's going on around the state right now. It's pretty wet in most places, especially here in central Iowa. So can you tell us a little bit about what kinds of problems the wetness could cause that would affect already established fruits on our acreages?

S Suzanne Slack 02:06

Yeah, so we'll start with the the most problematic one right now, which is strawberries. So strawberries are typically come in around this time of year, mid to late June. And we're seeing a lot of flooding in strawberry patches. And this is particularly bad because once those berries get emerged in water, there's really no coming back from it. So we'll probably lose a little bit of strawberry harvest, which is unfortunate, it won't hurt the plants Overall, though, there might be a little bit of death and decay, but hopefully they'll they're resilient and dry out in time that they'll survive and be more productive next year. As far as everything else go. It really depends on the crop some crops. Some plants can handle having some pretty wet feet, as we like to say in horticulture. So the roots are soaked, but depends on how long they're so so hopefully, our especially our apple trees and pear trees are planted in areas with some better drainage than others. It depends on the rootstock. Some are more accepting of having wet roots soaked roots for a while others are not.

O Olivia Hanlon 03:10

Okay, so is there anything that we should be doing anything extra to help out our fruit plants while it is super wet out there.

S Suzanne Slack 03:19

So the best thing we can do is if we haven't been thinking about fungicides, now's the time to think about fungicides. So we just talked about the soil being really wet. But if the fruit is really wet, too, and the leaves are really wet, that prolonged leaf wetness will allow for fungi to really take hold and potentially have some infection risk.

O Olivia Hanlon 03:42

Okay, so now we will dive into our possibilities of fruits on our small acreage is. So what are some of the best fruit crops that we can grow here in Iowa.

S Suzanne Slack 03:54

Suzanne Slack 03:34

So the best fruit crops we can grow in Iowa, we can grow with no protective covering apples, pears, some types of tart cherries, or sour cherries. We can also grow blueberries if we do a lot of soil amendments, lots of different types of berry crops no problem. Strawberries also for the most part, no problem. And those are the major ones. Now for smaller acres or a smaller farm you have a lot more options because then we can get into using some high tunnels or some other practices like that. And then you can grow a little bit more.

Olivia Hanlon 04:29

Okay, so which of those crops would be good options for those who may have extra limited space on their acreage, Suzanne,

Suzanne Slack 04:35

so some options for limited space are high density dwarf apples. So you can fit quite a few Apple plants into a small space if you get torqued rootstocks, we could have up to 2000 trees per acre for instance, and get quite a bit of harvest off of those other options are raspberries can grow and blackberries can grow in limited space too. You can There's different trellising systems that you can actually move them up and down. So they can be almost like a vertical farm situation. Those are two of the better ones for a limited space, but it depends on your market and what you think you can also sell.

Olivia Hanlon 05:14

Absolutely. So of those options that you listed earlier that we have here in the state, which crops are going to give us the highest returns on our acreages.

Suzanne Slack 05:24

that is a really good question. It depends on depends on a lot. So for instance, if you are near a high population area, doing a pick your own strawberry operation can yield some fantastic results. Pick your own apples can also, might give you the most bang for your buck. Because you know, all the labor of pickings gone. Same thing with strawberries. If you feel super into it, and you want to do like a whole nine yards, a cidery or a winery is another option. So a lot of times, especially small acreage, you don't need to have that much because you can always buy more from someone else. And you could have just a display or a smaller amount that you make into your wines or ciders.

Olivia Hanlon 06:06

So when we are looking at our acreages Suzanne, and we're trying to figure out what we want to grow, how do we figure out what the best crop for our acreage is?

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Suzanne Slack 06:17

So the first thing that I like to do is look at a soil test. So the first step, the first step, so what is your soil profile look like? What kind of pH soil pH Do you have? What's the layout of the land really relevant right now? What's your drainage look like? Figuring out that also looking at your low temperatures throughout the season. So if you're in a microclimate that has extremely low temperatures, even trying to do peaches in a high tunnel, for instance, is just probably not going to work out.

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Olivia Hanlon 06:49

Okay, so if there are multiple that we think would be a good fit for our acreage, Suzanne, should we pick just one or is it best to diversify?

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Suzanne Slack 06:58

That's a really good question. A lot of times we hear diversify, diversify, diversify. But if you're in an area where you know, you can move strawberries, for instance, maybe it would be better just to focus on that. And then maybe get something a little later, like a couple of apples if you can. But it really depends on what you're going for. Sometimes people end up with too few of too many things. And I can cause marketing problems because someone might not want to only buy a little bit of one thing from you. So, market's really important for figuring that out.

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Olivia Hanlon 07:33

Okay, so Suzanne, if people are wanting more information on anything that we chatted briefly about today, or if they have any questions, where should they look? Or who should they reach out to?

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Suzanne Slack 07:45

That's a good question. So So currently, I said, I'm really new. We're currently working on a website. Hopefully that'll launch soon. So if you are listening to this, after the month of July, you'll be able to just type in Iowa fruit and hopefully it pops up with some information and some contact info. Until then we have me. So I'm Dr. Suzanne slack. And if you're a commercial, I'd be more than happy to talk to you. We also have a couple of other specialists throughout the state. Dr. Patrick O'Malley is on the east side of the state. And then we just recently hired Dr. Randall Voss and he is I think, statewide, so well, they're good contacts for any free related questions too.

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Olivia Hanlon 08:23

Awesome. Is there anything that we didn't cover today that you'd like to talk about? Suzanne?



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Suzanne Slack 08:28

I don't think so. This was a really good start on some of this fruit on small acreages.

O

Olivia Hanlon 08:35

Awesome. Well, thank you very much for joining us today. Susanne. It was great to have you and we can't wait to hopefully have you back in the future.

S

Suzanne Slack 08:42

Thank you so much, Olivia.

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08:44

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