statement I often get is, “I recently purchased a small acreage, and I’d appreciate some guidance as to what I can do with it.” Unfortunately, the spectrum of specialty crop options is limited because the property is often limited in terms of what it can support. All too often, people purchase property without first having developed goals and a plan of action for the property. Purchasing a place prior to planning is a risky proposition.

Before purchasing a place you will need to set goals; take inventory of existing farm resources, family resources and skills; and decide on an enterprise(s). Keep in mind these factors are not independent but frequently interact and influence each
due to rationing. If you plan on irrigating only be counted on for emergency use as it is equivalent to 27,000 gallons. This volume of irrigation water is a huge determin-

Careful consideration of financial, pro-
duction and quality of life goals is required for success. When formulating goals, con-
sider these questions: Do you view the farm as a way to achieve quality of life for the family? Do you want the farm to produce a supplemental or a full income for your family? Do you need the farm to provide food and/or energy independence? Your response to these questions will determine the size, location, soil type, type of topog-

Excessively sloped property is susceptible to erosion when cultivated and is best suited for perennial crops such as fruit. Early flow-
ing crops, such as the stone fruit, require an elevated site not prone to forming frost pock-

from a stream, you will first need to obtain a water-use permit from the state agency charged with water-use oversight. In Okla-

Water is another critical resource that deter-
munes crop options for your farm. In the year. This condition is unacceptable if your

Soil
Not all properties are created equal. Well-
drained, loamy soils can support a wide range of specialty crops. Poorly drained, finer-text-
tured clay soils will not support stone fruit and root crops without extensive modific-
tions.

Excessively sheltered sites that block air-
flow are not good candidates for hoop house production because breezes are required for ventilation. Wind-pollinated crops (like tomatoes) and crops susceptible to powdery mildew (like cucurbits) grown in hoop houses will perform poorly without sufficient airflow to facilitate pollination and exhaust humid air.

Farms located far from populated areas are at a disadvantage from a marketing stand-
point. Consumers are less likely to travel long distances to pick or purchase produce and will choose closer options, all things being equal. The farther your farm is located from markets, the more expenses you will incur for fuel and labor. Property located on poorly maintained dirt roads will, in all probability, not be accessible during certain times of the year. This condition is unacceptable if your goal is to establish an agritourism enterprise.

Climate
Climate is important to farming. Rainfall is a supplemental or a full income for your

Water
Water is another critical resource that deter-
mines crop options for your farm. In the South-
ern Great Plains, it is considered too risky to grow specialty crops without irriga-
tion. Prior to establishing cropping goals, you will want to determine the quantity and qual-
ity of water available for irrigation. Your water source needs to have the capacity to supply a minimum of 1 acre-inch per week, which is equivalent to 27,000 gallons. This volume must be available throughout the summer months. Sources of irrigation water include ponds, streams, wells and municipal. If your irrigation water source is a pond, keep in mind you will need to compensate for the water lost from the pond due to evaporation. Surf-

CLIMATE
Climate is important to farming. Rainfall, growing season (frost-free days), temperature, wind speed and probability of hail storms vary throughout states and regions. In Oklahoma, if you are searching for a piece of property with the primary goal of producing for early, local markets, you would confine your search to the south and southeast portions of the state.

LOCATION
Urban agriculture, also known as city farming, is becoming a viable option for growers looking to take advantage of proximity to consumers. Many of the properties used by urban growers include abandoned lots, public spaces, and church and school grounds. Growers planning on using these properties whether purchased, leased or donated, have a few extra things to consider. Neighborhoods often have covenants that restrict activity types. Some cities restrict food gardening activities to the backyard. Growers should be aware of these restrictions before purchasing or leasing a property. Abandoned lots can be contaminated with glass shards, scrap metal, lead paint and other toxic substances, all products of past demolition activities. Instead of growing in contaminated soils, many growers are opting to use container, bag and hydroponic growing systems. Intensive, raised bed growing systems that use off-site sources of soil or custom-made soil mixes are also compatible with properties with thin, poorly drained, compacted and contaminated soils.

Small acreages located in periurban “town and country” areas outside of the city limits have their own set of potential roadblocks when it comes to producing and marketing specialty crops. I am aware of several growers who deal with complaints by neighbors on a consistent basis regarding their farming prac-
tices. One neighbor may complain about the noise of the tillage equipment, while others express concerns about spray drift. Some com-
plain about the traffic generated by customers frequenting the roadside market or who chose to pick their own. While these activities may not be illegal, they don’t tend to promote good relationships among neighbors. Sometimes choosing a more remote property is worth the sacrifice when it comes to dealing with grumpy neighbors.

Prior to purchasing a property, consider the types of crops being grown in the immediate vicinity and the farming techniques utilized. In Oklahoma, much of the rural acreage is grazed or hayed. A standard practice is to spray these pastures with herbicides to control weeds and brush. Herbicide damage to specialty crops as a result of spray drift is an all-too-common prob-
lem encountered by fruit and vegetable growers located in regions dominated by pasture land.

Locating a property for organic production presents its own set of challenges. The majority of introduced pasture in the Southern Great Plains is comprised of bermudagrass. Bermudagrass eradic-
ation without the use of herbicide is a difficult and time-consuming process. Choosing a prop-
erty free of bermudagrass solves this problem; however, this is easier said than done considering the prevalence of bermudagrass forage.