



Considerations for Getting your Farm Business Online

A rapid response quick reference guide to identifying, developing, and deploying web-based strategies to sell your farm products during the COVID-19 crisis and beyond

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As market demand shifts due to the spread of COVID-19, some farmers are having to change the way they have traditionally sold and marketed their products to sustain their farm businesses. Selling products through an online platform is one strategy farmers can use to help reach existing and new customers during this uncertain time. This guide serves as a quick reference to help producers begin to think through the process of selling their products online.

1. Assess your Local E-commerce/Delivery Environment

There may be infrastructure already in place to help facilitate getting your products to market through various online and delivery platforms near your farm. Visit <https://agriculture.sc.gov/coronavirus/local/> to find opportunities in your area. You can also consider developing a farm profile on the SC MarketMaker website (<https://sc.foodmarketmaker.com/>) and posting on the Buyer/Seller Forum on that site. If your farm is near a neighboring farm or food delivery organization that is already online and/or making deliveries you can reach out to them to explore potential partnership opportunities.

2. Connect (or Reconnect) with Your Customers

Social media provides free access to potential customers. If you do not already have one, set up a free business Facebook and/or Instagram page. You can seek to broaden your social media reach by publicizing your farm on other sites, especially those sites where your products were previously offered. For example, your local farmers' market Facebook page or a local restaurant that you previously delivered to. Also, be sure to add your farm to the South Carolina Department of Agriculture Where to Find Local Food During COVID-19 Website: <https://agriculture.sc.gov/coronavirus/local/>.

3. Start Taking Orders

Post your product offerings on social media and your website with information on how you can be reached. Communication can be as simple as a telephone call or an e-mail. The more you can automate this process, the better: Google Forms, online shopping carts, and more complex methods may make your life a lot easier after you learn how to use them. Be sure you have ordering windows and deadlines that will provide you with enough time to harvest, pack, and prepare for delivery.

4. Collect Payment

It is best to have customers pay before receiving their produce. While you may have to issue a refund or two by collecting money upfront, you won't have to spend a lot of time playing "bill collector." There are several examples of payment transaction portals that are available today including Square, Venmo, PayPal, etc. Research these options to find an online payment portal that will fit your needs.

Points to Consider:

- You may want to negotiate a better deal through your payment processor to reduce your credit card transaction fees.
- You might want to add a delivery fee to cover your transportation costs (fuel and vehicle maintenance).

5. Deliver the Orders

There are a few options for delivering orders: individual home deliveries, neighborhood "captains" or drop points, on-farm pick-up, curbside drops, etc.

If you will be making deliveries be sure to plan out your delivery route ahead of time to avoid back-tracking. You can use Google Maps for up to 9 stops or find an app for your phone to handle more stops, such as Multi-Stop Route Planner (available on Google Play). It is a good idea to divide your customers into more compact delivery zones. This strategy might include different delivery days for certain locations.

Prepare for your delivery trip: label orders with customers' names, alert customers of your delivery time window, have customers leave a cooler at their door if they will not be home during the delivery window if applicable.

Points to Consider

- Look professional: If possible, wear something with your farm name and/or logo.
- Have a sign on your delivery vehicle with your farm name and phone number/website.
- Provide samples of other products with your current orders to encourage future purchases.
- Be sure to follow health and safety protocols (outlined in item 6 below).

6. How will you make sure you keep you and your customers safe?

According to the [Clemson Extension Food Systems and Safety Team](#), The United States Department of Agriculture, Food and Drug Administration, and Centers for Disease Control and Prevention report no evidence of food or food packaging being associated with the transmission of COVID-19; however, it is always important to follow good hygiene practices when harvesting, packing, and delivering food products.¹

Points to Consider

- Always wash your hands before and after packing and delivering orders.
- Wear gloves and a mask when packing and delivering orders.
- Sanitize all surfaces that will come in contact with your products (vehicle, coolers, totes, boxes, etc.)
- Be careful with the use of reusable packaging and totes.
- Respect [CDC social distancing guidelines](#)². If allowed, leave orders at the door.

Authors

Ben Boyles, Matthew Fischer, R. David Lamie, Charlotte Maxwell, Steve Richards
Clemson University Cooperative Extension Agribusiness Program Team

Visit our [Clemson University Cooperative Extension Agribusiness Program Team COVID-19 Resource Page](#) for more information:
<https://www.clemson.edu/extension/covid19/agribusiness-covid.html>

¹ <https://www.clemson.edu/extension/covid19/food-systems-safety-covid.html>

² <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/prevent-getting-sick/social-distancing.html>

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