

Resources for Farmers Interested in Setting Up an Online Store

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Foreword

A webinar focusing on *E-Commerce Options for Direct Farm Marketers: Operating During the COVID-19 Pandemic* was held on May 7, 2020. Topics discussed included e-commerce platform options, considerations for choosing an e-commerce platform, payment processing options, an introduction to Square's online store, and considerations for shipping and curbside pick-up. A total of 59 people registered for the session with 27 joining the live webinar. The recording of the webinar is available at <https://youtu.be/isZh3VwpANs>. This fact sheet supplements information discussed during the session and provides links to additional resources.

Webinar speakers included Amy Ladd, Lucky Ladd Farms; Adam Acampora, Tennessee Farm Winegrowers Alliance; Kacey Troup, Tennessee Department of Agriculture; and Megan Bruch Leffew, Center for Profitable Agriculture. In addition, resources for the presentation and this fact sheet were contributed by Margarita Velandia, Department of Agricultural and Resource Economics; Annette Wszelaki and Amy Fulcher, Department of Plant Sciences; and Rob Holland, Center for Profitable Agriculture.

Disclaimers

Information presented is for educational purposes only and does not constitute legal or medical advice. Any specific products or services referenced are for informational purposes only and do not indicate an endorsement.

Choosing an E-Commerce Platform

There are many options to creating methods for customers to purchase products online. For producers who are already using Square to facilitate credit card purchases, Square's online store option may offer an effective solution. (See additional resources for setting up an online store in Square in the next section.) Some website platforms such as WordPress and Wix enable users to create online stores within those platforms. Other mainstream e-commerce platforms such as Squarespace and Shopify may also be used. Facebook also offers an option to add a "Shop" function to business pages. Finally, there are a multitude of platforms developed specifically for direct sales from farms.

The following resources may be helpful in identifying and evaluating e-commerce options for your farm:

- *Questions for Considering Online Sales Platforms for Farms Direct Marketing* by Oregon Tilth <https://tilth.org/education/resources/questions-for-considering-online-sales-platforms-for-farms-direct-marketing/>
- *Touchless Transactions: E-Commerce Guidance for Rural Business Managers Considering Online Sales* – This article from the Center for Rural Engagement discusses many considerations and provides tips and examples for producers considering online sales. <https://ruralengagement.org/2020/04/22/touchless-transactions-e-commerce-guidance-for-rural-business-managers-considering-online-sales/>
- *Farmer’s Guide to Direct Sales Software Platforms* from the National Young Farmers Coalition summarizes features and costs of platforms developed specifically for direct Farm marketers. <https://www.youngfarmers.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/04/Farmers-Guide-to-Direct-Sales-Software-Platforms.pdf>
- *Online Ordering Platforms for Farmers* – This fact sheet prepared by Matt Tucker and made available from the Intervale Center, Vermont Housing and Conservation Board and Vermont Farm and Forest Viability Program discusses options for online sales including the use of Google Forms, Square and PayPal. It discusses adding e-commerce options to existing websites such as Squarespace, Wix, Weebly, Ecwid, WordPress and WooCommerce. Standalone e-commerce options such as Shopify and other more farm-specific options are also explored. https://agriculture.vermont.gov/sites/agriculture/files/doc_library/Online%20Ordering%20Options%20for%20Farms.pdf.
- *Add a Shop to a Facebook Page* – View instructions on creating a shop on your Facebook page from Facebook’s Business Help Center at <https://www.facebook.com/business/help/912190892201033?id=206236483305742>.

Setting Up an Online Store with Square

Due to the increased demand for information about setting up online stores by farmers in the midst of the COVID-19 pandemic, several universities and organizations have offered webinars providing some instruction on setting up a free online store with Square. Links to two of those sessions are provided below:

- *Setting Up a Very Simple Online Store* – Brett Wolff with the Kentucky Center for Crop Diversification provides an overview of setting up a simple online store using Square at https://www.uky.edu/ccd/onlinestore_webinarlinks.
- *How to Create a Free Online Store for Your Farm* – Debbie Roos from NC State Extension demonstrates how to set up a simple online store using Square. The webinar recording and presentation slides are available at <https://growing-small-farms.ces.ncsu.edu/2020/04/recording-of-online-farm-store-webinar-now-available-for-viewing/>.

Promoting Your New Online Store

It will be important to inform customers of new online store through all available communication channels including:

- Website
- Social Media
- E-mail Lists
- Pick TN Products Listings – Update listing by emailing pick.tn@tn.gov.
- Other Online Listings
- Voicemail Greetings
- Printed Promotional Pieces
- Personal Correspondence (Phone calls, e-mails, etc.)

Considerations for Shipping Products

Shipping products from the farm requires careful analysis and planning. Producers should be sure to investigate shipping company policies and requirements for various product types. Producers should evaluate the costs of shipping including labor, packaging materials and actual shipping costs and decide how to recoup those costs through product prices and/or shipping fees. Some producers require a minimum purchase per transaction in order to ship to customers.

Shipping products such as meat that need to be maintained at a certain temperature requires special consideration and care. A new fact sheet from the Center for Profitable Agriculture discusses issues important to the shipping of meat:

- *Considerations for Shipping Meat Products Sold Directly from the Farm* – <https://tiny.utk.edu/CPA375>.

Considerations for Curbside Pick-up in the Midst of the COVID-19 Pandemic

If producers are offering curbside or drive-through pick-up, it will be important to implement procedures to maintain the health of customers and employees. Examples of such procedures include having one employee handle the product and another person handle the payment transaction, if applicable, to avoid cross contamination. Ideally, pre-payment will be made using the online store. Customers should be asked to stay in their vehicles and pop their trunks or open the back doors, if possible. The employee handling the products should not touch the vehicles. Either have another employee available to open and close the trunks or car doors or have the person handling payment do so. Employees should wear gloves and masks to protect customers and themselves. Early pick-up times could be reserved for people who are especially vulnerable to COVID-19 to reduce the risk for this population even further. Employees should be trained in recognizing the symptoms of COVID-19, proper handwashing and the proper use of gloves and masks. Employees should not come to work if they are sick or have been in contact with anyone who has been sick.



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