

Asap

Local Food
Strong Farms
Healthy Communities

Appalachian Grown

Farmer Toolkit





ASAP Programs

Our mission is to help local farms thrive, link farmers to markets and supporters, and build healthy communities through connections to local food.

Our decade long **Local Food Campaign** serves as a national model and provides consumers with resources such as the *Local Food Guide*—a free print and online directory of the area's family farms, tailgate markets, and businesses that use local agricultural products.

ASAP identifies and defines "local" through our **Appalachian Grown™** certification program. We created the Appalachian Grown logo as a tool to help you easily identify authentically local food from the Southern Appalachian region. When you see the logo at stores, restaurants, tailgates, and other businesses, you know that you're buying fresh foods that support family farms, strengthen our local economy, and protect the region's natural beauty. More than 800 family farms and more than 100 farmers tailgate markets are Appalachian Grown certified. Currently, nearly 500 partner businesses source from Appalachian Grown certified farms.

Our **Growing Minds Farm to School Program** takes ASAP's work to area schools, preschools, and Head Start centers. The program provides resources and training to farmers, teachers, chefs, school nutrition staff, parents, and other community members to encourage schools to provide experiential education that will ensure children know where their food comes from and develop lifelong healthy eating habits.

ASAP's **Local Food Research Center** studies the role and importance of building strong local and regional food systems. Examples of our work include exploring the relationship between localizing our food system and creating healthier communities, examining the types of conversations that farmers are having with consumers, which deepens our understanding of the particular challenges that farmers face in growing for and selling to local markets, and identifying key strategies for overcoming these challenges and strengthening support for local food and farms.

We organize and run **Asheville City Market**, a destination farmers market located in downtown and South Asheville. Asheville City Market is pleased to accept SNAP/EBT food assistance and acts as a learning lab market for implementing best practices and gathering data to benefit markets across the region.

Annually, we host **ASAP's Farm Tour**, a weekend where WNC farms open their doors and barns to offer enriching on-farm experiences. To kick off the growing season, ASAP hosts and organizes the **Business of Farming Conference** to provide business planning and marketing workshops for farmers.

Our vision is one of strong farms, thriving local food economies, and healthy communities where farming is valued as central to our heritage and our future.

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For more information about ASAP's work and programs, visit us at asapconnections.org



ASAP Services

IN THIS SECTION:

- ASAP Programs
- What Is Appalachian Grown?
- Services for Appalachian Grown Farmers





What Is Appalachian Grown™?

In our mission to support Southern Appalachian farms and build a local food system, ASAP developed the Appalachian Grown program with the goals of expanding local markets for area farms and providing a way for the public to easily identify products from local farms.

Appalachian Grown means certified local. It is a trusted brand that helps buyers and shoppers know when they are spending their dollars to the benefit of local family farms and communities. Appalachian Grown is a branding program for farms, tailgate markets, retailers, and wholesalers that certifies food and agricultural products grown or raised on farms in Western North Carolina and the Southern Appalachian Mountains.

Your farm and business will benefit from the high demand for local food by participating in the Appalachian Grown program. ASAP's research shows that the demand for locally grown farm products in the region is at an all-time high. An ASAP consumer survey shows that 80% of Western North Carolina residents say they purchase local food at least once a month with over half saying they buy on a weekly basis. This is true throughout the region. Appalachian Grown is the key way to designate local food within the marketplace. In addition to the use of the Appalachian Grown logo and branded promotional materials, there are a variety of services and resources for farms, tailgate markets, and partner businesses.

The Appalachian Grown Region

The Appalachian Grown region is made up of Appalachian counties within 100 miles of Asheville. The region includes 60 Appalachian counties in North Carolina, Georgia, South Carolina, Tennessee, and Virginia.



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Participating in the Appalachian Grown Program

The Appalachian Grown program certifies farmers and tailgate markets who are located within the Appalachian Grown region. Retailers and wholesalers offering products from certified farms can participate as partner businesses.

Requirements

To be eligible for Appalachian Grown certification, farms must be located in the Appalachian Grown region and be a family farm—one in which the family holds the financial responsibility, takes the risk, and provides the majority of the management decisions for the farm. Tailgate markets can also be certified if they are located in an Appalachian Grown county and the majority of the vendors at the market are farmers selling products they have raised on their own farms. Businesses (groceries, restaurants, distributors, processors, etc.) that have made a commitment to source and identify local foods may become Appalachian Grown partner businesses..

How to Participate

There is no cost to participate in the Appalachian Grown program. Farms, tailgate markets, and businesses who wish to become Appalachian Grown certified or Appalachian Grown partners can register through creation of a free online listing in ASAP's *Local Food Guide* at appalachiangrown.org.

Annual Recertification

After initial certification, all farms and businesses must annually renew their certification by updating their online *Local Food Guide* listing with current business information. Certification renewals can be conducted online or by calling the ASAP office.

Appalachian Grown Promotional Materials for Farms

Using Appalachian Grown packaging and promotional materials is a great way to inform the customer that what they are buying is certified local. ASAP offers a wide range of materials for market farms as well as wholesale producers.

- Plastic produce bags in 2 sizes
- Rubber bands
- Twist ties
- A variety of stickers
- Waxed boxes in 5 sizes

For a product list and information how to order, go the resources section at asapconnections.org, email appgrown@asapconnections.org, call 828-236-1282, or stop by the office at 306 West Haywood Street in Asheville.





Services for Appalachian Grown™ Farmers

Support

One-on-One Consultations: ASAP offers one-on-one consulting to discuss market opportunities, marketing, and business planning. Contact ASAP to set up a time to discuss options and resources for your farm.

Market Connections: ASAP facilitates connections with area buyers through the online *Wholesale Local Food Guide*, as well as direct communication with ASAP staff. Visit appalachiangrown.org and click on the wholesale tab to view potential buyers or contact us to discuss buyers that may be the best fit for your farm.

Trainings: ASAP offers an annual business conference for farmers, and periodic training and networking sessions focused on business planning, risk management, and marketing strategies.

Marketing

Local Food Guide: Offered in print and online, the free guide is the go-to resource for local food supporters. The online guide at appalachiangrown.org offers a searchable database for customers looking for farms, products, and area businesses featuring local food. More than 50,000 copies of the print edition are distributed annually throughout the region, providing you the opportunity to highlight your business through a listing or display ad.

Appalachian Grown Branding: Use the Appalachian Grown logo to identify your products as certified local. Available electronically in a variety of formats, the logo offers a trusted brand to use in your marketing.

Packaging Materials: ASAP purchases Appalachian Grown branded packaging materials in bulk to bring down costs for certified farms. Offering quality materials and making your products identifiably local can help you meet market requirements and maintain the value of your products as certified local.

Events

Business of Farming Conference: Each February, ASAP hosts a conference focused on the business aspects of running a farm. Workshops, including marketing strategies, selling to restaurants, social media, agritourism, and bookkeeping, are combined with networking opportunities and grower-buyer meetings.

CSA Fair: In March, leading up to the traditional CSA season, ASAP facilitates an event where the public can meet CSA farmers who operate CSA programs with drop-offs in Buncombe County.

Farm Tour: ASAP coordinates and promotes a regional farm tour every year. Appalachian Grown farms in the central and southern mountains are eligible to apply to be on the tour.

Grower-Buyer Meetings: Grower-Buyer Meetings are like speed-dating for farms and purchasers. Sit down with grocers, restaurants, and distributors to start a conversation to see if you might be a good fit for one another. Stay connected with ASAP for upcoming opportunities to connect with buyers in your region.

Community

Events Calendar and Classifieds: [Fromhere.org](http://fromhere.org) is ASAP's community food and farming forum. Post and find regional classifieds and events listings.

Networking: Being an Appalachian Grown farmer offers you the opportunity to connect with other farmers, buyers, and community members in the local food movement through events, websites, social media, and more.

Updates from ASAP: Periodically, ASAP will send you an email with upcoming opportunities, so you get the first chance at event discounts, sales, grant announcements, and more.

Social Media: ASAP uses Facebook, Instagram, and Twitter to promote local food, news, and happenings in our region. Connect with ASAP's social media to align your farm business with the food movement at-large and to hear the latest from ASAP about resources, events, and more. Use #appalachiangrown and tag your posts @asapconnections.

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Business Plan Overview

A business plan is a written document that includes your mission/goals and details how your business is going to achieve its goals. This plan typically includes marketing, financial, and operational components. There are a lot of resources available to support small business entrepreneurs in developing business plans, but it is easy to get overwhelmed. Your plan does not have to be complex, but it is important to have one that can act as a functional tool for your farm. Every plan is unique, and you should expect it to change and grow with your operation. When creating or updating your plan, be sure to explore the wide range of resources available to you through government and nonprofit support systems for farms in our region. Here are some of the broad components to consider when forming your plan:

Product and Services: When determining your product mix and offerings you should take into account your skills and expertise as well as market demand.

Sales and Marketing: Where and how you are going to sell your product depends on market opportunities, requirements, and strategies for connecting with customers. Determining the best markets for your farm will include production considerations as well as your capacity and skill set.

Operations: Outlining the administrative pieces of your business is an important aspect of both starting and growing your farm business. This includes determining business structure and legal considerations, licensing, insurance, labor/staffing, and equipment.

Management Team: While you may be a team of one or two starting up your farm business, it is important to outline your skill set and identify what gaps you may need to fill, and who you may be able to involve to support your operation.

Development: This component of your business plan includes long term goal setting and allows you to dream a bit. While it is easy to get bogged down in the present state of things, this is an important piece of keeping your business vibrant and remaining competitive.

Financials: Good record-keeping is the foundation of farm finances. By accurately tracking your production cost and sales, you can determine what pieces of your business are most profitable and better plan for growth or scaling back.

For an online version of this publication, visit the resources section at asapconnections.org.

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Business and Market Planning

IN THIS SECTION:

- Business Plan Overview
- Regional Support Agencies for Farm Business Planning
- The Regulatory Environment for Farms in Western North Carolina
- Market Opportunities for Farmers
- Tips for Selling at Farmers Markets
- CSA Toolkit
- Agritourism and Farm Tour Guide
- Guide to Selling Wholesale
- Tips for Buyers and Producers





Regional Support Agencies for Farm Business Planning



Farmer Support

USDA has several types of offices focused on supporting farmers and natural resources. The first step in accessing these federal programs and resources is connecting with your local Farm Service Agency (FSA) office and getting a farm number. Farm support through these federal programs includes disaster assistance, low interest loans, cost share programs, crop insurance, and keeping you informed about new and developing resources for your farm. FSA can also connect you with other support agencies through their local referral database, Bridges to Opportunity. usda.gov



Market Planning

In addition to programs, resources, and materials designed to drive demand for local food, ASAP also helps Appalachian Grown farms connect with market opportunities and explore effective marketing strategies for their farm business. This can include discussion of new or existing enterprises, potential market opportunities and requirements, connections with area buyers, and direct or wholesale marketing resources. asapconnections.org



Financial and Business Consultation

Mountain BizWorks is a community development financial institution (CDFI) offering highly customized business coaching and lending support to people who are starting and expanding businesses within Western North Carolina. Subsidies are available for low to moderate income clients. Consultations often include identifying business and financial goals, setting up record-keeping systems, outlining enterprise budgets, QuickBooks training, and industry specific guidance. mountainbizworks.org



Production Planning & Assistance

County and regional Cooperative Extension professionals are an important community resource for farmers looking for training and technical assistance for production planning and problem solving. Extension assists people who want to improve their personal life or business, their farm, their community, and the environment. Extension's research, professionals, volunteers, and the support of county government make it possible. ces.ncsu.edu



Business Planning & Assistance

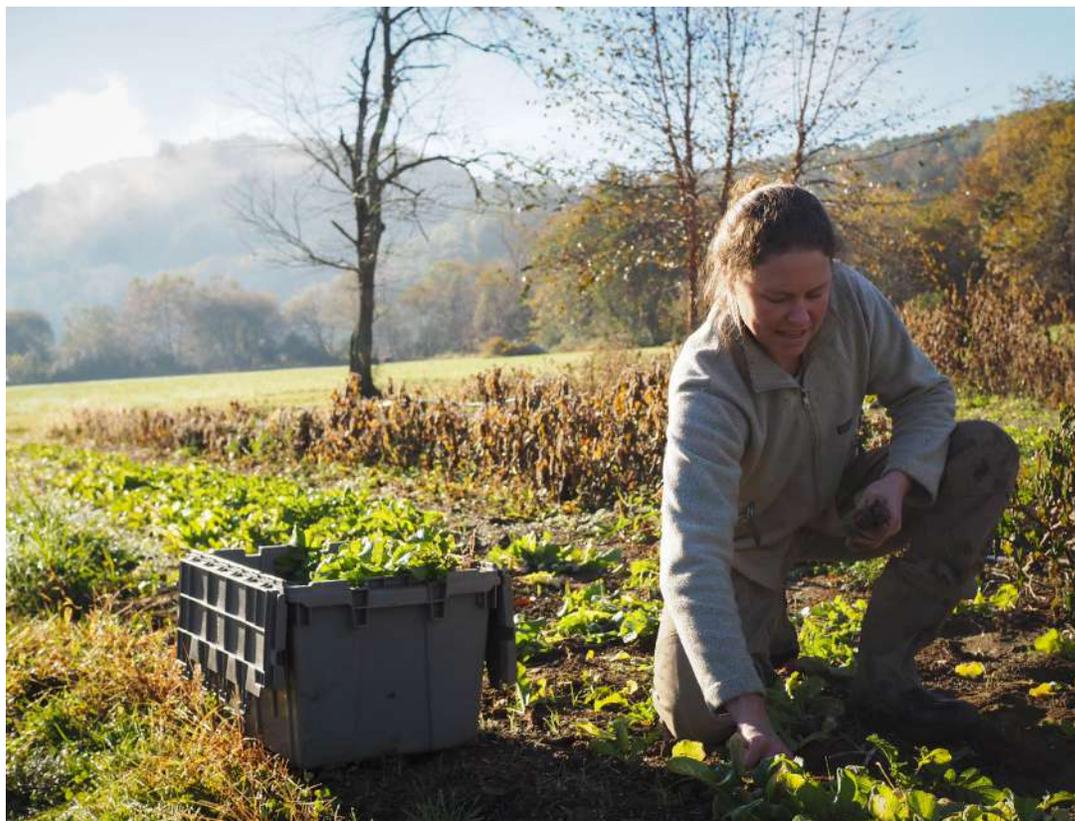
The Small Business Center Network, comprised of 58 Small Business Centers throughout North Carolina, supports the development of new businesses and the growth of existing businesses by being a community-based provider of training, counseling, and resource information. Confidential counseling services and access to resource libraries are free of charge. ncsbc.net

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The Regulatory Environment for Farms in Western North Carolina



For an online version of this publication, with live links, visit the resources section at asapconnections.org.

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Written and compiled by ASAP staff with expertise from NC Cooperative Extension Service, NCDA&CS, Organic Growers School, Jake's Farm, ISAMPA, NC Choices, and Mountain BizWorks. For more resources visit the resources section at asapconnections.org.

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In some ways, farming is a business like any other. Many new farmers justifiably worry that they may unknowingly fail to follow the rules, get the right licenses, or file the right forms.

Interestingly, there is no "license to farm" required. One can't be a barber in North Carolina without completing at least 1,528 hours of training, apprenticing for 12 months, and passing an exam, whereas anyone can choose to start farming tomorrow. However, this does not mean farms are exempt from law and regulation. Depending on what a farmer grows, where they grow it, and how they sell it, there are different laws to be aware of, and there may be some specific types of licenses, inspections, certifications, and tax procedures to follow.

The goal of this publication is to offer an overview of regulatory components of a farm business and provide resources as to where to find detailed information. This is not a comprehensive guide and all farmers are expected to conduct their own due diligence in determining the required actions for their operation.

Licenses

Privilege or Business License

[Business Link North Carolina](#) (BLNC) works in partnership with the North Carolina Department of Commerce to be a one-stop location for information on all the licenses and inspections your business may need. Reach BLNC at 800-228-8443.

Some locations—especially within town or city borders—require that anybody selling anything have a business license, sometimes called a privilege license. This is more likely to be enforced if a farm has a visible location to receive customers, such as a farm store or roadside stand. This is a yearly fee, typically in the \$25–\$100 range. For more information, or to pay this fee, ask at your town hall or county office. Getting a business license is not the same as incorporating or registering your business

name. If you are interested in incorporating your farm, get legal advice and then do so through the [NC Department of Secretary of State](#) (sosnc.gov). If your farm is not going to be incorporated, then it is wise to register your business name with your [County Register of Deeds](#) (ncard.us).

Meat Handlers License

You must become a registered meat handler if you wish to deal in commerce of meat or poultry. Contact the The North Carolina Department of Agriculture & Consumer Services (NCDA&CS) [Meat and Poultry Inspection Division](#) at 919-707-3180 to start the process. A member of their field staff will visit, and you will need to fill out some simple paperwork. Most farmers say this is not a difficult process.



Taxes

Income Tax

Farming is not a tax-exempt activity. Most farms, with the exception of those who choose one of the more elaborate and corporate structures, will pay taxes using the IRS Schedule F. This form itemizes all of your farm's income and expense items and states your profit or loss from farming. Any profit or loss then carries over to your personal income tax form, such as a 1040, and becomes part of the personal or household tax liability. As with any business, it is wise to educate yourself so that you can set up your business' legal structure and make ongoing choices that reduce your tax burden.

Property Tax

Farmers should be aware of the Present-Use Valuation (PUV) program administered by county tax departments. This program allows your property to be taxed based on its use for farming or forestry and the quality of its soils, instead of based on its development value. The minimum parcel size in farming to qualify ranges from 5 to 20 acres depending on use. To learn more, find the Present-Use Valuation Program Guide by searching [ncdor.gov](#).

Sales and Use Tax

Sales tax is a system by which retail merchants collect a tax from customers and pass it on to the state. The retailer does not gain or lose money and only serves as a pass-through from the customer to the government; the only cost is your time. There are two sales tax rates in North Carolina, and they can vary slightly between counties. Certain foods have a tax rate at 2%; most other items have a tax rate at or around 7%.

Farms that only sell wholesale do not have to collect sales tax. The retailer will collect on your products when they sell to the end user. Among farms that sell retail (direct to the final customer),

sales of raw, unaltered produce by the person who grew it are also exempt. Beyond that, the rules are complicated regarding specific farm products. For example, once you add seasoning of any kind to raw vegetables, they become taxable. Live animals are untaxed, but raw cuts of meat are taxed at 2%. To view a helpful paper from the North Carolina Department of Revenue, search ncdor.gov for [Qualifying Farmer or Conditional Farmer Exemption Certificate Number](#). Section 8 of the [Sales and Use Tax Technical Bulletin](#) covers farming.

Beginning January 1, 2014, a North Carolina general statute requires farmers that sell at farmers markets to register with the North Carolina Department of Revenue (NCDOR) and obtain a Certificate of Registration even if no tax will be due. For more details on how to register and comply with the law see ASAP's [Guide to Compliance with NC Statute for Farmers Market Managers and Vendors](#).

New retailers should go to ncdor.gov for more information about sales and use tax registration. Once signed up, make sure you file as required, usually monthly—there can be heavy late fees.

Sales and Use Tax: Sales and Purchase Exemptions

Farms may have a [sales tax exemption](#) from NCDOR when purchasing certain items, such as farm equipment, certain supplies, and even on-farm fuel. To apply for exemption, complete Form E-595QF online or mail it to the state to receive an Exemption Certificate Number.

Contact your local NCDOR office for more information or go to ncdor.gov and search for E-595QF.

Food Safety

The Food Safety Modernization Act (FSMA), signed into US law in 2011, is now in effect and farmers need to be aware of how it applies to them, including the Produce Safety (PS) Rule and applicable compliance dates. This is a mandatory regulation. For produce growers it is important to determine if 1) your farm or products are covered by this rule, and 2) if your farm may be eligible for a qualified exemption.

Farms not covered by the PS Rule include those whose average annual produce sales are \$25,000 or less for the previous three-year period. These farms may be required to have financial records to prove they are “not covered” by the rule.

Farms with an annual produce sales over \$25,000 are covered by this rule, but may be eligible for a qualified exemption if they 1) sell the majority of the food to qualified end users (consumers, restaurants, or retail establishments within NC or not more than 275 miles of the farm or via internet sales) AND 2) the average monetary value of food sales for the past three years was less than \$500,000 annually. Qualified exemptions require the farm to keep financial records to prove food sales beginning on 1/26/2016 and comply with labeling requirements (effective on 1/20/2020). Labeling requirements consist of including the name and complete business address of the farm where the produce was grown either on the label of the produce or on display at the point of purchase.

All other farms are considered “Covered Farms”. Covered farms need to have at least one representative attend a Produce Safety Alliance (PSA) Grower training by their respective compliance date. For specific definitions, a list of “covered produce” and “not covered produce,” compliance dates, and more detail see [FSMA's Produce Safety Rule: An Overview](#) by Elena Rogers, Area Specialized Agent, Food Safety-Fresh Produce Western NC or search ncfreshproducesafety.ces.ncsu.edu.

All farmers, but particularly produce growers, should make it part of their job description to keep updated on food safety changes. Your [Cooperative Extension County Center](#) (ces.ncsu.edu) is an excellent source of information and training. Farms with interest in wholesaling should begin to seek out this training and also work down the path toward GAP certification.



Certifications

Good Agricultural Practices (GAP) Certification

Good Agricultural Practices (GAP) and Good Handling Practices (GHP) are voluntary audits that verify that fruits and vegetables are produced, packed, handled, and stored as safely as possible to minimize risks of microbial food safety hazards. These certifications are not required by law for every grower, but may be needed for farms that are interested in selling to larger wholesale markets including grocery stores, distributors, school systems or other institutions. Carolina Farm Stewardship Association (CFSA) has a [Good Agricultural Practices \(GAPs\) Manual](#) specific to small farms available on their website and NCDA&CS has developed the [GAP Certification Assistance Program](#) that offers cost share assistance for certification when available. Additionally NCDA&CS offers a [Water Analysis Cost Share program](#) to encourage water testing as part of a pre- and post-harvest food safety program for fruit and vegetable crops.



Organic Certification

The “organic” label is a federally regulated program. Certification is provided by independent certifiers registered with the [National Organic Program](#) of the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA). There are no certifying agencies based in North Carolina. Two certifiers used by some area farms are [Clemson University Organic Certification Program](#) and Florida-based [Quality Certification Services \(QCS\)](#). The cost varies depending on the size and complexity of your operation. There are federal and state cost-share programs that can help pay. Monies come and go from these programs, so search Services at [USDA Agricultural Marketing Services](#) or go to Farmer Services—Organic Certification Reimbursement at [NCDA&CS](#) to find current information.

There is some controversy among farmers about the use of the word “organic” when not referring to a farm or product that has been certified under the federal program. The law is clear: It is illegal to use the word to describe your farm or product if not certified. A budget has recently been assigned to enforce this law, and stiff penalties are possible. There is an exemption for farms with \$5,000 or less in annual sales of organic products. However, such farms must still meet the production requirements of organic certification in order to use the word and keep some records to document those practices. They just don’t have to file as such.

Other Certifications

Other certifications of production methods used by some farms in WNC include: [Certified Naturally Grown](#) (naturallygrown.org), [Certified Biodynamic](#) (demeter-usa.org), [Animal Welfare Approved](#) (animalwelfareapproved.us), and [Certified Humane](#) (certifiedhumane.org).

Appalachian Grown: Certified Local

ASAP’s Appalachian Grown™ program certifies food and agricultural products grown or raised on farms in Western North Carolina and the Southern Appalachian Mountains. The Appalachian Grown label helps consumers, retailers, and wholesalers better distinguish and identify local agricultural products. To become certified, you sign that you are a family farm located in a certain geographic area, and you agree to only label products as Appalachian Grown if they were grown on your farm or another certified farm.

NC Branding

Farms interested in participating in the state branding program, [Goodness Grows in NC](#), can become a member at the NCDA&CS’s Marketing Program website: [Got To Be NC](#).



Land Use

Zoning, Limits on Land Use, and Right to Farm

Farms in city and town jurisdictions need to be aware of the zoning designation of their farm, especially regarding farm stores or stands. Cities, some towns, and a few counties do regulate land use so that stores with busy parking lots can't be built in quiet residential neighborhoods. However, North Carolina law says that local governments have limited authority to regulate the land use activities of "bona fide farms." For example, if your local government places a limit on small or large livestock, as a true working farmer you may find the law does not apply to you. The use and interpretation of these rules varies from place to place.

North Carolina has Right to Farm laws. They protect you (somewhat) from lawsuits by neighbors and developers who consider a farm a "nuisance" because of sounds, smells, dust, flies, etc. The law says that if a farm has been in existence for more than a year and was not a nuisance when founded, it cannot become a nuisance because the conditions around it changed. In other words, if somebody chose to build a housing development next to your manure pile, the law says that is their problem. But this does not override common sense. North Carolina law also requires that certain best management practices be used with livestock to minimize odor, maintain clean rivers, prevent chemical dumping, etc.

Signage

You can't just put a sign up anywhere. With the exception of some town and city residential zones, a sign on your own property is fine, but you may still need a permit. Contact your local planning department for more information. Signs on the right-of-way of state roads and highways are common in rural areas but are not legal, so do not be surprised if your sign is removed by North Carolina Department of Transportation (NCDOT) and you do not get it back. Right-of-way width varies; 50 feet from the centerline of the road is typical. If there is a key intersection where you want signage to direct people to your farm, your best bet is to talk with the property owner about posting a sign beyond the right-of-way, with the proper permits in place.



NCDA&CS has an official [Agricultural Tourism Highway Signs Program](#) for major highways, but it is slow-moving, expensive, and requires that your farm have regular hours most of the year.

Waste Management and Use of Agricultural Chemicals on Your Land

Application of restricted-use pesticides on the farm scale requires a Private Pesticide Applicator Certification from NCDA&CS. Training and exams are available at county Cooperative Extension offices. For larger animal waste systems and other activities that could cause pollutant discharge into waterways, there are state and federal laws that restrict your activity and may require permitting. A great source of information on these laws, as well as the various cost share programs that can help you pay for environmental improvements, is your local [Soil and Water Conservation District](#) (ncaswcd.org) office.



Labor

In many ways, laws governing labor on the farm are the same as for any other employer. In some ways, farms enjoy special legal considerations. For example, there are certain exemptions from overtime laws and youth employment regulations for farmers. There are also specific laws regarding the registration and use of farm labor contractors (typically employed to manage farm worker crews).

You may also be wondering whether you can get in trouble when you rely on minimally compensated farm interns and apprentices. Apprentice programs can be perfectly legal. There are laws governing reporting of this labor. In-kind compensation, such as housing or food, may not be overvalued. Exemptions for small farmers employing fewer than five full-time employees or employees who live off of the farm can allow for more flexible labor programs without minimum wage requirements. Federal and state departments of labor, the Occupational Safety and Health Administration

(OSHA), and the Internal Revenue Service (IRS) all govern worker laws, so be sure to research your particular intentions before you start the hiring process. For a more specific explanation of these issues, refer to the local publication [Structuring Labor on the Small Farm](#), available from the [Organic Growers School](#) (organicgrowersschool.org).

Product-Specific Rules and Regulators

Eggs

The [NCDA&CS Food & Drug Protection Division](#) (ncagr.gov/fooddrug/food/egglaw.htm) regulates eggs. Egg sellers of more than 30 dozen per week, unless sold on-farm, need to grade their eggs. Reusing cartons is legal if they are clean, but they must be labeled with the name and address of the producer (with previous name and address not visible). Selling eggs at a tailgate market without mechanical refrigeration is legal if they are kept at a safe temperature (under 45 degrees).

Meats and Poultry

The [NCDA&CS Meat & Poultry Inspection Division](#) (ncagr.gov/meatpoultry) regulates large animal and poultry production and processing. Meat animals being sold to the general public must be killed and butchered at an inspected meat processing plant. There is an exemption for the slaughtering of up to 20,000 (per calendar year) chickens, turkeys, and/or other poultry of your own, raised on your own farm, and sold within North Carolina. Operating under this exemption requires monitoring and scheduled reviews by NCDA&CS to verify that required criteria are being met. The regional small animal producers' group ISAMPA_WNC (Independent Small Animal Meat Processors Association of WNC) links to the most recent [NCDA&CS ruling](#) on this subject (isampa.org).

The [NCDA&CS Food & Drug Protection Division](#) (ncagr.gov/fooddrug) now regulates rabbit production and processing under its [Food Program](#). Regulations generally mirror those of poultry, but with the recent shift in who regulates, the regulatory landscape for rabbits may be in flux. Contact the division with your questions—Jim Melvin is the current contact.

Meats and poultry processed at an NCDA&CS-inspected facility can only be sold in state. Exempt poultry processed on the farm can only be sold in state. Out of state sales, or sales with interstate commerce implied (such as to a grocery chain), are only allowed under USDA inspection.

The labeling of meats is regulated. When your meats are processed at an NCDA&CS- or USDA-inspected plant, any labeling you intend to use will first need to be approved by regulators, via the plant. For example, your beef cannot legally be labeled “hormone free,” but it can legally be labeled “raised without added hormones.”



Cheese and Dairy

To sell milk for drinking, milk must be bottled in a “Grade A” facility. Grade A milk is regulated by the NCDA&CS Food & Drug Protection Division. Milk processing for cheese can be under “Grade B” conditions. This still requires a sterile environment and commercial-grade equipment. Making cheese on a home stovetop for commerce is not legal—multiple producers of this type were shut down by NCDA in recent history. A good one-stop information point about cheese and dairy is [NC Dairy Advantage](http://ncdairyadvantage.com) (ncdairyadvantage.com).

Processed Food Products

Value added or processed foods are those that are changed or altered from their raw form. This can include, but is not limited to drying, canning, chopping, cooking, grinding, or pickling. These products are also regulated by the NCDA&CS Food & Drug Protection Division. It is important to call the regulators before investing in making these products so that you can understand the requirements for processing and labeling. Our current local inspector of many years is Susan Parrish and she is available for questions or to schedule a visit by contacting the division’s main number at 919-733-7366.

Most baked goods, some canned goods, some dried foods and other low-risk, shelf-stable products can be produced in a home kitchen. But, the kitchen must have been inspected by the NCDA&CA Food & Drug Protection Division. Most farmers and food entrepreneurs report that this is a fairly simple process and field staff are helpful. However, certain factors can prevent approval. Indoor pets, are one commonly encountered barrier that the division will not abide. Some farm products are typically not processed in a home kitchen, but rather in a designated cooking or processing facility or area of the farm. Many traditional Appalachian practices, such as boiling down sorghum in the open air or grinding corn meal or in the barn, may not be deemed safe enough. “High-risk” foods, such as refrigerated or frozen products (including dairy products), low-acid canned foods, and seafood products, are required to be processed in a licensed commercial facility. Contact Susan Parrish at the number above with questions specific to your product or facilities.



People processing acidified foods for sale in rigid (glass or plastic) containers are required to complete a training offered by North Carolina State University (NCSU) called [Acidified Food Processing and Packaging—Better Process Control School](https://www.ncsu.edu/extension/food-safety/acidified-food-processing-and-packaging-better-process-control-school/) (commonly called “pickle school”) and pass tests offered at the end of each training day. This training schedule is usually posted at foodsafety.ncsu.edu/acidified-foods-manufacturing-school. The local nonprofit organization [Blue Ridge Food Ventures](https://www.blueridgefoodventures.com/) is often involved in these sessions. Pickle school is not cheap to attend.

Prepared Foods

Foods that are served ready to eat (typically with eating utensils or plates) and/or which are not shelf-stable are regulated by the NC Department of Health and Human Services and enforced at the county level. It is almost always impossible to meet the regulations to prepare such foods in a home kitchen, and it is difficult and expensive to do so in a mobile/temporary setting such as a community event. Contact your county Health Department for more information. Find your local [Health Department](https://www.ncalhd.org/) (ncalhd.org).





Risk Management

Insurance

For the most part, insurance is not a regulatory issue. While some buyers require that farms carry product liability insurance in order to supply them, it is generally a matter of choice if and how much insurance to carry. A farm rider on your home policy is not the same as a dedicated farm insurance policy. It is generally weaker and may not assume you are conducting a serious farm business.

Here's a basic overview of some of the types of insurance a farm may carry. A general liability policy helps protect you against most lawsuits, accidents, and damages to the property of others that occurs on your farm, but not damages due to your farm products. Product liability coverage helps protect against damage related to your products, such as food-borne illness. Property coverage protects against damage to or theft of your farm property

and items on that property. Crop insurance covers losses due to crops that are planted and don't reach marketable quality. Don't assume that your farm policy covers any or all of these items. Consult with your agent.

The one law in place in North Carolina regarding farms and insurance is an act passed in 2005 that limits liability for farms when inviting the public on to their property for agritourism purposes. A key point is that in order to qualify for the protections this law provides, farms must post on their property a sign with specific text given in the law. Search [agri-tourism](http://ncagr.gov) at ncagr.gov. for more details.

Disaster Relief

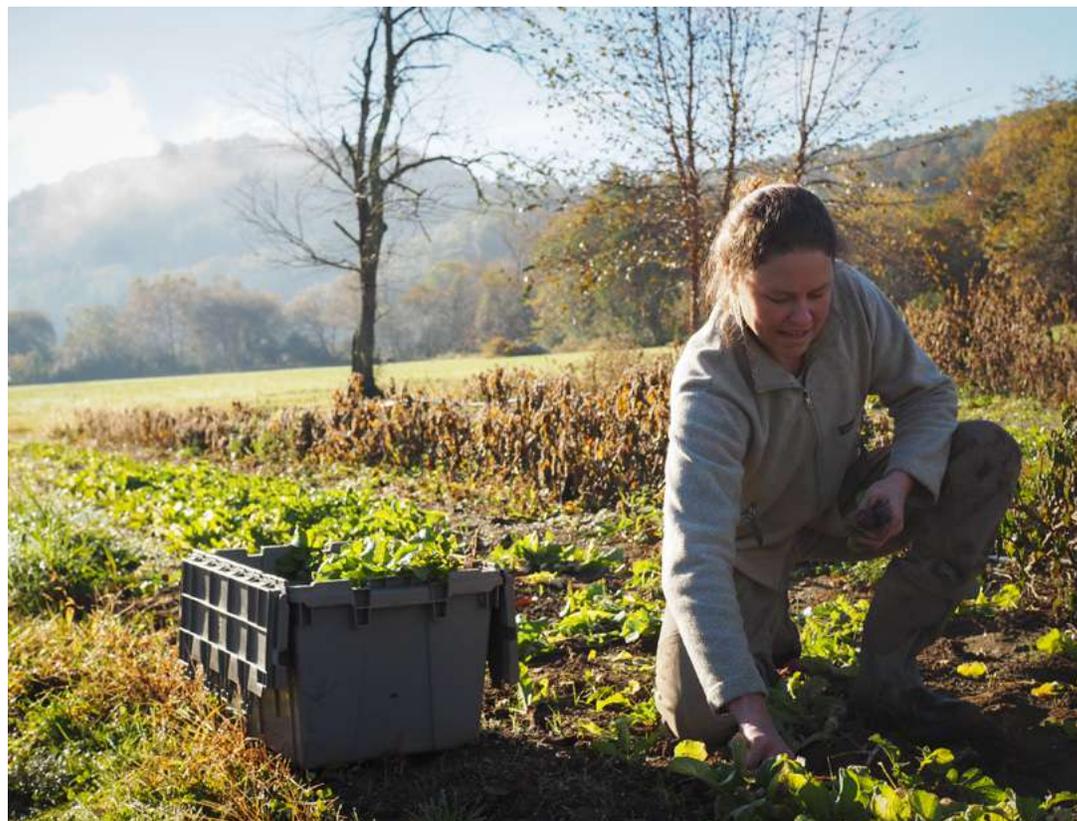
Widespread crop loss events such as flood or drought are sometimes followed by relief packages from state or federal agencies. To qualify, it is important to have already registered your farm with the [Farm Service Agency \(FSA\)](#) in [your county](#). Some relief packages require that recipients carried crop insurance. See the [Frequently Asked Questions](#) at USDA Risk Management Agency (RMA) (rma.usda.gov) on crop insurance to learn more about crop insurance and other RMA support packages.

The Last Word

Keeping good records supports meeting the concerns of regulators and helps your farm make good management decisions.



The Regulatory Environment for Farms in Western North Carolina



For an online version of this publication, with live links, visit the resources section at asapconnections.org.

Revised November 2019

Written and compiled by ASAP staff with expertise from NC Cooperative Extension Service, NCDA&CS, Organic Growers School, Jake's Farm, ISAMPA, NC Choices, and Mountain BizWorks. For more resources visit the resources section at asapconnections.org.

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In some ways, farming is a business like any other. Many new farmers justifiably worry that they may unknowingly fail to follow the rules, get the right licenses, or file the right forms.

Interestingly, there is no “license to farm” required. One can’t be a barber in North Carolina without completing at least 1,528 hours of training, apprenticing for 12 months, and passing an exam, whereas anyone can choose to start farming tomorrow. However, this does not mean farms are exempt from law and regulation. Depending on what a farmer grows, where they grow it, and how they sell it, there are different laws to be aware of, and there may be some specific types of licenses, inspections, certifications, and tax procedures to follow.

The goal of this publication is to offer an overview of regulatory components of a farm business and provide resources as to where to find detailed information. This is not a comprehensive guide and all farmers are expected to conduct their own due diligence in determining the required actions for their operation.

Licenses

Privilege or Business License

[Business Link North Carolina](#) (BLNC) works in partnership with the North Carolina Department of Commerce to be a one-stop location for information on all the licenses and inspections your business may need. Reach BLNC at 800-228-8443.

Some locations—especially within town or city borders—require that anybody selling anything have a business license, sometimes called a privilege license. This is more likely to be enforced if a farm has a visible location to receive customers, such as a farm store or roadside stand. This is a yearly fee, typically in the \$25–\$100 range. For more information, or to pay this fee, ask at your town hall or county office. Getting a business license is not the same as incorporating or registering your business

name. If you are interested in incorporating your farm, get legal advice and then do so through the [NC Department of Secretary of State](#) (sosnc.gov). If your farm is not going to be incorporated, then it is wise to register your business name with your [County Register of Deeds](#) (ncard.us).



Meat Handlers License

You must become a registered meat handler if you wish to deal in commerce of meat or poultry. Contact the The North Carolina Department of Agriculture & Consumer Services (NCDA&CS) [Meat and Poultry Inspection Division](#) at 919-707-3180 to start the process. A member of their field staff will visit, and you will need to fill out some simple paperwork. Most farmers say this is not a difficult process.

Taxes

Income Tax

Farming is not a tax-exempt activity. Most farms, with the exception of those who choose one of the more elaborate and corporate structures, will pay taxes using the IRS Schedule F. This form itemizes all of your farm's income and expense items and states your profit or loss from farming. Any profit or loss then carries over to your personal income tax form, such as a 1040, and becomes part of the personal or household tax liability. As with any business, it is wise to educate yourself so that you can set up your business' legal structure and make ongoing choices that reduce your tax burden.

Property Tax

Farmers should be aware of the Present-Use Valuation (PUV) program administered by county tax departments. This program allows your property to be taxed based on its use for farming or forestry and the quality of its soils, instead of based on its development value. The minimum parcel size in farming to qualify ranges from 5 to 20 acres depending on use. To learn more, find the Present-Use Valuation Program Guide by searching [ncdor.gov](#).

Sales and Use Tax

Sales tax is a system by which retail merchants collect a tax from customers and pass it on to the state. The retailer does not gain or lose money and only serves as a pass-through from the customer to the government; the only cost is your time. There are two sales tax rates in North Carolina, and they can vary slightly between counties. Certain foods have a tax rate at 2%; most other items have a tax rate at or around 7%.

Farms that only sell wholesale do not have to collect sales tax. The retailer will collect on your products when they sell to the end user. Among farms that sell retail (direct to the final customer),

sales of raw, unaltered produce by the person who grew it are also exempt. Beyond that, the rules are complicated regarding specific farm products. For example, once you add seasoning of any kind to raw vegetables, they become taxable. Live animals are untaxed, but raw cuts of meat are taxed at 2%. To view a helpful paper from the North Carolina Department of Revenue, search ncdor.gov for [Qualifying Farmer or Conditional Farmer Exemption Certificate Number](#). Section 8 of the [Sales and Use Tax Technical Bulletin](#) covers farming.

Beginning January 1, 2014, a North Carolina general statute requires farmers that sell at farmers markets to register with the North Carolina Department of Revenue (NCDOR) and obtain a Certificate of Registration even if no tax will be due. For more details on how to register and comply with the law see ASAP's [Guide to Compliance with NC Statute for Farmers Market Managers and Vendors](#).

New retailers should go to ncdor.gov for more information about sales and use tax registration. Once signed up, make sure you file as required, usually monthly—there can be heavy late fees.

Sales and Use Tax: Sales and Purchase Exemptions

Farms may have a [sales tax exemption](#) from NCDOR when purchasing certain items, such as farm equipment, certain supplies, and even on-farm fuel. To apply for exemption, complete Form E-595QF online or mail it to the state to receive an Exemption Certificate Number.

Contact your local NCDOR office for more information or go to ncdor.gov and search for E-595QF.

Food Safety

The Food Safety Modernization Act (FSMA), signed into US law in 2011, is now in effect and farmers need to be aware of how it applies to them, including the Produce Safety (PS) Rule and applicable compliance dates. This is a mandatory regulation. For produce growers it is important to determine if 1) your farm or products are covered by this rule, and 2) if your farm may be eligible for a qualified exemption.

Farms not covered by the PS Rule include those whose average annual produce sales are \$25,000 or less for the previous three-year period. These farms may be required to have financial records to prove they are “not covered” by the rule.

Farms with an annual produce sales over \$25,000 are covered by this rule, but may be eligible for a qualified exemption if they 1) sell the majority of the food to qualified end users (consumers, restaurants, or retail establishments within NC or not more than 275 miles of the farm or via internet sales) AND 2) the average monetary value of food sales for the past three years was less than \$500,000 annually. Qualified exemptions require the farm to keep financial records to prove food sales beginning on 1/26/2016 and comply with labeling requirements (effective on 1/20/2020). Labeling requirements consist of including the name and complete business address of the farm where the produce was grown either on the label of the produce or on display at the point of purchase.

All other farms are considered “Covered Farms”. Covered farms need to have at least one representative attend a Produce Safety Alliance (PSA) Grower training by their respective compliance date. For specific definitions, a list of “covered produce” and “not covered produce,” compliance dates, and more detail see [FSMA's Produce Safety Rule: An Overview](#) by Elena Rogers, Area Specialized Agent, Food Safety-Fresh Produce Western NC or search ncfreshproducesafety.ces.ncsu.edu.

All farmers, but particularly produce growers, should make it part of their job description to keep updated on food safety changes. Your [Cooperative Extension County Center](#) (ces.ncsu.edu) is an excellent source of information and training. Farms with interest in wholesaling should begin to seek out this training and also work down the path toward GAP certification.



Certifications

Good Agricultural Practices (GAP) Certification

Good Agricultural Practices (GAP) and Good Handling Practices (GHP) are voluntary audits that verify that fruits and vegetables are produced, packed, handled, and stored as safely as possible to minimize risks of microbial food safety hazards. These certifications are not required by law for every grower, but may be needed for farms that are interested in selling to larger wholesale markets including grocery stores, distributors, school systems or other institutions. Carolina Farm Stewardship Association (CFSA) has a [Good Agricultural Practices \(GAPs\) Manual](#) specific to small farms available on their website and NCDA&CS has developed the [GAP Certification Assistance Program](#) that offers cost share assistance for certification when available. Additionally NCDA&CS offers a [Water Analysis Cost Share program](#) to encourage water testing as part of a pre- and post-harvest food safety program for fruit and vegetable crops.



Organic Certification

The “organic” label is a federally regulated program. Certification is provided by independent certifiers registered with the [National Organic Program](#) of the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA). There are no certifying agencies based in North Carolina. Two certifiers used by some area farms are [Clemson University Organic Certification Program](#) and Florida-based [Quality Certification Services \(QCS\)](#). The cost varies depending on the size and complexity of your operation. There are federal and state cost-share programs that can help pay. Monies come and go from these programs, so search Services at [USDA Agricultural Marketing Services](#) or go to Farmer Services—Organic Certification Reimbursement at [NCDA&CS](#) to find current information.

There is some controversy among farmers about the use of the word “organic” when not referring to a farm or product that has been certified under the federal program. The law is clear: It is illegal to use the word to describe your farm or product if not certified. A budget has recently been assigned to enforce this law, and stiff penalties are possible. There is an exemption for farms with \$5,000 or less in annual sales of organic products. However, such farms must still meet the production requirements of organic certification in order to use the word and keep some records to document those practices. They just don’t have to file as such.

Other Certifications

Other certifications of production methods used by some farms in WNC include: [Certified Naturally Grown](#) ([naturallygrown.org](#)), [Certified Biodynamic](#) ([demeter-usa.org](#)), [Animal Welfare Approved](#) ([animalwelfareapproved.us](#)), and [Certified Humane](#) ([certifiedhumane.org](#)).

Appalachian Grown: Certified Local

ASAP’s Appalachian Grown™ program certifies food and agricultural products grown or raised on farms in Western North Carolina and the Southern Appalachian Mountains. The Appalachian Grown label helps consumers, retailers, and wholesalers better distinguish and identify local agricultural products. To become certified, you sign that you are a family farm located in a certain geographic area, and you agree to only label products as Appalachian Grown if they were grown on your farm or another certified farm.

NC Branding

Farms interested in participating in the state branding program, [Goodness Grows in NC](#), can become a member at the NCDA&CS’s Marketing Program website: [Got To Be NC](#).



Land Use

Zoning, Limits on Land Use, and Right to Farm

Farms in city and town jurisdictions need to be aware of the zoning designation of their farm, especially regarding farm stores or stands. Cities, some towns, and a few counties do regulate land use so that stores with busy parking lots can't be built in quiet residential neighborhoods. However, North Carolina law says that local governments have limited authority to regulate the land use activities of "bona fide farms." For example, if your local government places a limit on small or large livestock, as a true working farmer you may find the law does not apply to you. The use and interpretation of these rules varies from place to place.

North Carolina has Right to Farm laws. They protect you (somewhat) from lawsuits by neighbors and developers who consider a farm a "nuisance" because of sounds, smells, dust, flies, etc. The law says that if a farm has been in existence for more than a year and was not a nuisance when founded, it cannot become a nuisance because the conditions around it changed. In other words, if somebody chose to build a housing development next to your manure pile, the law says that is their problem. But this does not override common sense. North Carolina law also requires that certain best management practices be used with livestock to minimize odor, maintain clean rivers, prevent chemical dumping, etc.

Signage

You can't just put a sign up anywhere. With the exception of some town and city residential zones, a sign on your own property is fine, but you may still need a permit. Contact your local planning department for more information. Signs on the right-of-way of state roads and highways are common in rural areas but are not legal, so do not be surprised if your sign is removed by North Carolina Department of Transportation (NCDOT) and you do not get it back. Right-of-way width varies; 50 feet from the centerline of the road is typical. If there is a key intersection where you want signage to direct people to your farm, your best bet is to talk with the property owner about posting a sign beyond the right-of-way, with the proper permits in place.



NCDA&CS has an official [Agricultural Tourism Highway Signs Program](#) for major highways, but it is slow-moving, expensive, and requires that your farm have regular hours most of the year.

Waste Management and Use of Agricultural Chemicals on Your Land

Application of restricted-use pesticides on the farm scale requires a Private Pesticide Applicator Certification from NCDA&CS. Training and exams are available at county Cooperative Extension offices. For larger animal waste systems and other activities that could cause pollutant discharge into waterways, there are state and federal laws that restrict your activity and may require permitting. A great source of information on these laws, as well as the various cost share programs that can help you pay for environmental improvements, is your local [Soil and Water Conservation District](#) (ncaswcd.org) office.



Labor

In many ways, laws governing labor on the farm are the same as for any other employer. In some ways, farms enjoy special legal considerations. For example, there are certain exemptions from overtime laws and youth employment regulations for farmers. There are also specific laws regarding the registration and use of farm labor contractors (typically employed to manage farm worker crews).

You may also be wondering whether you can get in trouble when you rely on minimally compensated farm interns and apprentices. Apprentice programs can be perfectly legal. There are laws governing reporting of this labor. In-kind compensation, such as housing or food, may not be overvalued. Exemptions for small farmers employing fewer than five full-time employees or employees who live off of the farm can allow for more flexible labor programs without minimum wage requirements. Federal and state

departments of labor, the Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA), and the Internal Revenue Service (IRS) all govern worker laws, so be sure to research your particular intentions before you start the hiring process. For a more specific explanation of these issues, refer to the local publication [Structuring Labor on the Small Farm](#), available from the [Organic Growers School](#) (organicgrowersschool.org).

Product-Specific Rules and Regulators

Eggs

The [NCDA&CS Food & Drug Protection Division](#) (ncagr.gov/fooddrug/food/egglaw.htm) regulates eggs. Egg sellers of more than 30 dozen per week, unless sold on-farm, need to grade their eggs. Reusing cartons is legal if they are clean, but they must be labeled with the name and address of the producer (with previous name and address not visible). Selling eggs at a tailgate market without mechanical refrigeration is legal if they are kept at a safe temperature (under 45 degrees).

Meats and Poultry

The [NCDA&CS Meat & Poultry Inspection Division](#) (ncagr.gov/meatpoultry) regulates large animal and poultry production and processing. Meat animals being sold to the general public must be killed and butchered at an inspected meat processing plant. There is an exemption for the slaughtering of up to 20,000 (per calendar year) chickens, turkeys, and/or other poultry of your own, raised on your own farm, and sold within North Carolina. Operating under this exemption requires monitoring and scheduled reviews by NCDA&CS to verify that required criteria are being met. The [NCDA&CS Food & Drug Protection Division](#) (ncagr.gov/fooddrug) now regulates rabbit production and processing under its [Food Program](#). Regulations generally mirror those of poultry, but with the recent shift in who regulates, the regulatory landscape for rabbits may be in flux. Contact the division with your questions—Jim Melvin is the current contact.

Meats and poultry processed at an NCDA&CS-inspected facility can only be sold in state. Exempt poultry processed on the farm can only be sold in state. Out of state sales, or sales with interstate commerce implied (such as to a grocery chain), are only allowed under USDA inspection.

The labeling of meats is regulated. When your meats are processed at an NCDA&CS- or USDA-inspected plant, any labeling you intend to use will first need to be approved by regulators, via the plant. For example, your beef cannot legally be labeled “hormone free,” but it can legally be labeled “raised without added hormones.”



Cheese and Dairy

To sell milk for drinking, milk must be bottled in a “Grade A” facility. Grade A milk is regulated by the NCDA&CS Food & Drug Protection Division. Milk processing for cheese can be under “Grade B” conditions. This still requires a sterile environment and commercial-grade equipment. Making cheese on a home stovetop for commerce is not legal—multiple producers of this type were shut down by NCDA in recent history. A good one-stop information point about cheese and dairy is [NC Dairy Advantage](http://ncdairyadvantage.com) (ncdairyadvantage.com).

Specific labeling is required for sale of raw milk or raw milk product dispensed as animal feed or “pet milk”, including the statement “NOT FOR HUMAN CONSUMPTION” in letters at least one-half inch in height and “IT IS NOT LEGAL TO SELL RAW MILK FOR HUMAN CONSUMPTION IN NORTH CAROLINA.” It remains The Farm Act of 2018, Session Law 2018-113, states that that only milk that is Grade “A” pasteurized milk may be sold or dispensed directly to consumers for human consumption. However, SECTION 15.1.(c) specified that this does not prohibit the dispensing of raw milk or raw milk products for personal use or consumption or to independent or partial owner of a cow, goat, or other lactating animal. This allows dairy producers of any species to sell shares of their animals to consumers. In exchange the shareholder has access to that animal’s pasteurized or unpasteurized products (ex. milk, cheese, yogurt, etc.).



Foraged Mushrooms

To sell foraged mushrooms directly to restaurants, foragers must follow the guidelines set forth by the NC Dept. of Health and Human Services in their “Wild Foraged Mushrooms in North Carolina Food Establishments” statement. These guidelines do not apply to: sale of foraged mushrooms at farmers markets, cultivated mushrooms, or the sale of foraged mushrooms to a food processing plant that is regulated by a food regulatory agency. To sell to restaurants, foragers must be “approved mushroom identification experts”, and it is the responsibility of both the restaurant as well as the forager to provide and maintain documentation of this distinction. NCDHHS’s criteria to be qualified as an “approved mushroom identification expert”, and there within trainings to achieve this distinction, adhere to the suggestions set forth in Center for Food Protection’s “Guidance Document

for a Model Wild-harvested Mushroom Program.” While a certification course is not required, foragers must be able to provide documentation of their wild mushroom identification training in all wild foraged species being sold, and this training must meet the aforementioned CFP criteria. Individuals interested in meeting CFP criteria may consider the “Mushroom Identification & NC Foraging License Certification” class which has been identified as meeting NCDHHS’s guidelines.

Foragers selling to restaurants must also complete the “North Carolina Wild Mushroom Verification Form” and have the person in charge of the restaurant purchasing the foraged product sign this document as well. This document must be retained by the restaurant for at least 90 days following the sale of the foraged product. Additionally, each container of mushrooms must be affixed with a “North Carolina Wild Mushroom Verification/Sale Tag”, and this tag must stay affixed until the container is empty. This tag must be retained by the purchasing establishment for at least 30 total days following the sale of product.

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Market Opportunities for Farmers



Market opportunities for farms are typically divided into direct sales and wholesale markets. Direct sales are straight to the consumer, and wholesale sales are through an intermediate buyer who will resell your product, such as a distributor, restaurant, or grocery store. While there are pros and cons to every market, choosing the right market mix for your farm operation can depend on your production, location, distribution, and how you choose to spend your time. Just like many farms choose to grow a diverse mix of products, having several market outlets is also critical to reducing your risk and developing a sustainable business model.

Direct sales offer farmers the opportunity to connect directly with customers, including the ability for consumers to ask questions, maintaining the value of local, and allow you to market your true value. Farmers markets, farm stands, and community supported agriculture (CSA) programs all put you in control of where and how to sell your products. These outlets typically offer higher retail prices, but require more time commitment. Direct markets are often the easiest entry point for small producers, as they allow farms to build their customer base and brand awareness while increasing production or determining product mix.

Wholesale markets offer farms the opportunity to move larger volumes of product to fewer customers. While wholesale markets will have a lower price point they require less time for sales and offer cross-promotional opportunities. Wholesale volumes, requirements, and prices can vary widely depending on the market, so be strategic about which avenues are right for your operation.

To learn more about direct sales and wholesale market opportunities in the region contact ASAP or search for potential buyers in the *Wholesale Local Food Guide* found at appalachiangrown.org. ASAP's annual Business of Farming Conference also features workshops on direct marketing strategies and accessing wholesale markets. Visit asapconnections.org for more information.

September 2017

Written and compiled by ASAP staff.
For more resources visit the resources section at asapconnections.org.

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Understanding Markets

Don't Put All Your Eggs in One Basket

It is important to have a good market mix and to frequently evaluate what is working and what you can improve. This will help reduce risk and increase profits. Deciding which enterprises to undertake can often be difficult. From CSA to wholesale markets to direct retailing or a niche market, the possibilities can seem endless. Before starting any new enterprise it is always a good idea to review your current situation and goals. Ask yourself if there is an established market for your product or service or if you will need to create it? Do you have the necessary skills, equipment, and labor? Will it be profitable?

Recognizing the challenges and benefits of a certain market will help you determine if it is a good fit for you and your farm. Need help deciding what market mix will work? ASAP can help you answer these questions and evaluate the feasibility for your farm. If you're interested in free individual marketing support, connecting with local buyers, or fine-tuning your marketing ideas, ASAP can help. We work with area buyers to understand their requirements and product needs in an effort to make strong grower-buyer connections. Call us to get started, 828-236-1282.

Analysis of Market Requirements

The various market outlets have different needs and requirements. Find markets that will work within your production and marketing styles.

Pricing Guidelines

- Know your variable and fixed costs.
- Keep good production records.
- Don't forget to pay yourself.
- Minimum pricing should be set by production and marketing costs.



Direct Sales

Weekly tailgate markets, CSA shares, farm stands, u-pick, and online stores are included in this model. With all of these models you can enjoy a direct relationship with your customers which can be rewarding and motivating.

Customer Service: High level of customer service and salesmanship. All interactions are direct with the consumer and require a large time commitment from the farm, including travel.

Packaging: Minimal packaging/informal.

Insurance and Certifications: Insurance is not currently not required for direct sales, with the exception of u-pick and farm stands. Special insurance is needed to cover visitors to the farm. Certifications may be the factor that draws certain customers to your products.

Volume and Variety: Volume can be difficult to judge, with the exception of CSA shares, which are typically pre-sold. Variety is important along with planning and planting for a continuous crop and an extended growing season.

Payment: Payment is typically at the time of purchase, with the exception of CSA shares, where customers pre-pay for the season. Farms are setting prices and should expect the highest return of all of the markets.

Wholesale Markets

Restaurants

Selling to restaurants can be rewarding. But it requires cultivating a good relationship with the chef or owner, understanding their needs, and being willing to respond. Chefs expect top quality and a high level of customer service. Volume restaurant pricing is typically slightly less than retail but higher than wholesale.

Customer Service: The success of selling to a restaurant often depends on the relationship established with the chef. Persistence is key—don't give up after one call.

Packaging: Most restaurants accept informal packaging, but make sure produce is thoroughly washed. Your farm name and contents on the box is helpful for keeping your farm associated with your products and quality.

Delivery: A regular delivery schedule is expected along with weekly calls for availability and ordering.

Insurance and Certifications: Most restaurants do not require liability insurance or GAP certification, although corporate-owned restaurants often have different requirements from those that are locally owned.

Volume and Consistency: Chefs look for fresh, seasonal, and unique products. Volume is often lower than wholesale markets and size consistency is less critical.

Invoicing and Payment: Invoicing can be less formal but it should be itemized on a receipt with your farm name. Payment is typically received at delivery but larger restaurants may require terms.

Groceries and Distributors

You must be able to meet the demand of grocers and wholesale buyers with a consistent and reliable supply. Expect wholesale pricing—usually determined by the buyer.

Customer Service: A high level of customer service is expected.

Packaging: Wholesale and retail markets will expect standardized packaging. The retail environment will often require PLU or UPC code which can greatly add to your cost. Marking products as local is the most effective at this stage.

Delivery: A regular delivery schedule is likely required, and there can be multiple delivery points for one client. A refrigerated truck may also be a requirement.

Insurance and Certifications: Some amount of product liability insurance along with GAP certification and traceability measures may be required. You should be working on GAP compliance or open to doing so.

Volume and Consistency: High volume and consistency in product shape, size, and color (professional grading) are required. Farms are expected to offer credit on unsatisfactory product.

Invoicing and Payment: Farms must have the ability to create a professional invoice, itemized and priced. Most grocers require terms.





Schools and Institutions

This market is often the most difficult for a farm to access directly since many institutions operate under contracts with larger food service providers and their requirements are more strict.

Packaging: Standardized packaging required.

Delivery: A regular delivery schedule is likely required, and there can be multiple delivery points for one client. This is especially true of school systems. A refrigerated truck may also be a requirement.

Insurance and Certifications: Some type of product liability insurance along with GAP certification and traceability are likely required. Farms should be working on GAP compliance or open to doing so.

Volume and Consistency: Volume can vary greatly depending on the size of the school system or institution. Consistency is important when selling to schools, as they have strict nutrition guidelines. Professional washing and grading is required.

Invoicing and Payment: Most public schools operate under a bid system, and farms will be expected to submit a bid for a chance to sell product along with other distributors. Farms must have the ability to create a professional invoice, itemized and priced. Most schools require terms or farms may be expected to take credit cards.

Working with a New Buyer

Be persistent and patient. Connecting with a buyer is a process. It may be challenging to get the time and attention of the right person.

Establish a relationship with a primary buyer. Also get to know other staff—having a single contact may limit your options if your only contact leaves.

Personally invite the buyer or chef out to your farm. Let them see firsthand what makes your product special.

Be professional. Be reliable—call when you say you will and deliver on time.

Don't over promise. Be conservative in what you say you can do until regular patterns are established.

Communicate any problems immediately. For example, delay in delivery, weather, crop failure, etc.

Tips for Selling at Farmers Markets



Farmers markets present a unique opportunity for farms to sell smaller volumes of product at a higher price, direct to consumers. Additionally, they are often the easiest point of entry for new or beginning farmers, as they allow farms to build their customer base and brand awareness while honing in their production and getting direct feedback from consumers. While these outlets typically allow for higher retail prices, not all farms perform equally at farmers markets and it is important to maximize your sales potential in order to make markets worth your time. This document is designed to share a few key strategies for increasing sales and expanding your customer base at farmers markets.

For an online version of this publication, visit the resources section at asapconnections.org.

Revised September 2017

Written and compiled by ASAP staff. For more resources visit the resources section at asapconnections.org.

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Presentation

First impressions make a big difference. Putting a meaningful amount of time into your booth layout and product display will have a positive impact on your market sales.

Easy identification—Invest in a sign or banner to identify your farm. Make it easy for frequent market customers to find you and to attract new customers.

Design with color—Customers are attracted by colorful and beautiful arrangements. Be mindful of complementary colors of products or props when arranging your display.

Provide a sense of abundance—There’s an old sales adage “stack it high and watch it fly,” which holds true for the farmers market world. A large volume and variety of product catches the eye of customers and conveys a quality in production. Product displayed at eye level always seems to sell more.

Less can be more—Perhaps you’ve had a good day at market, or perhaps a bad week of production, either/or the selection on your table is now quite minimal. Rather than spread everything out in a thin layer, make a conscious effort to stack your product higher in smaller containers. This will keep the customer from thinking that all you have left are the proverbial dregs.



Stand-ins—Does your product need to be in a cooler at market? Use stand-ins such as photos, stuffed animals, or statues to attract attention and illustrate the products that you have available.

Body language—Whether we like it or not, customers look to the vendors when making their shopping decisions. Crossed arms, scowls, and sunglasses (especially when used in combination) do not invite customers in. Many shoppers come to market to connect with you and your farm, so try to engage folks with a smile or greeting. Try to listen and stay engaged with your customer base, welcoming their questions and using each interaction as a way to build your brand. You are an integral element of your booth’s overall appearance, so put on a clean shirt and bring your coffee.

Information and Invitation

For those market shoppers who aren’t swayed simply by appearance, additional information and invitation may be helpful.

Price and product—Customers may not instantly know the product they are looking at. More importantly perhaps, customers need to know the price of everything that is for sale. Don’t take these two simple needs for granted, as they are the foundation of a customer’s shopping experience. Many customers, especially new ones, can be intimidated or reserved about asking about items or their price. Clear signs and labels help customers decide what products they want or can afford. Consider having a price board inside and outside your booth to accommodate those customers window shopping and those inside ready to purchase.

Accessibility—For customers looking specifically for vendors who accept credit/debit, SNAP/EBT, or WIC/Senior vouchers, the display of these corresponding signs is a make or break element. If you accept any or all of these forms of payment, get your signs up early and have them prominently displayed. If you speak a second or third language, have signs that promote this as well.

Sampling—Perhaps the most powerful tool in a market vendor’s arsenal—sampling allows vendors to convey the quality of their product, and make a multi-sensory connection with a potential customer. Sampling is especially helpful in inviting “looky-loos” to your booth, or for moving product that may be less understood by a general customer base.

Sales speak—We’re not all salespeople, so having a few prepared lines may assist in selling a bit more, or getting a customer to return again next week (“Hope to see you next week, we’ll have tomatoes for the first time this season”). Have an elevator speech or talking points for quickly and effectively telling customers about your farm, or for questions you know will be asked (production practices, price questions, etc.). Remember that direct sales are driven by relationships, so making customers feel welcome and knowledgeable about your farm and products is a critical piece of both attracting new customers and retaining existing ones.



Know and Connect with Your Customer Base

In today's world, customers have a myriad of options for purchasing food and an increasing number of options for purchasing local food. So why do people come to your farmers market? Why do they buy from you? Who are they? Understanding these questions and their corresponding answers will help you sell more.

Find out more about your customers—Are they young families? Do they have children who play soccer? Do they enjoy outdoor activities? Are they retirees? Are they affiliated with religious or community organizations? Knowing these answers will not only deepen your customer relationships, but will allow you to shape your product and outlets to best serve niches within your customer base.

Farm name and brand—Taking the time needed to develop your unique farm name and brand is critical to being remembered and returned to by past customers. Customers will want to tell their friends and family about your product, so make sure they know your name. Have your farm name prominently displayed at market, additionally a memorable logo is a great aid for more visual customers. Print business cards for those customers who may be interested in larger volumes of products, or other farm services you may offer. A banner may be a pain to handle in high winds, but it a great way to help customers remember and recognize your farm.

Help customers connect—Perhaps the most cited reason for why customers choose to shop at farmers markets, and purchase local food in general, is a desire to connect with how their food is grown and those growing it. Make yourself open to this!

Tell your Story—What makes your farm unique? Perhaps it is your location, a production style, your family or farm history, how you got into farming, or all of the above. Your farm story, and how customers can connect with it, is critical for standing out in people's memory and reminding them why they take the extra time to shop at a farmers market. Make it personal and authentic, sharing the challenges of farming along with your successes.

Names are important—Do you recognize a return customer? Ask them their name. Tell them yours as well. While this tip may seem simple, knowing someone's name is critical to connecting with them. If you can't remember a name, try to connect with something else you may recall. "How is your sweet puppy doing?" or "Good to see you again, did you try the recipe in your CSA box?"

Social media and newsletters—Expand your customer connections beyond the market and invite your customers into your day to day through social media and newsletters. These digital forms of communication are an excellent medium for sharing your farm story and encouraging folks to look for you and your products at upcoming markets. This also opens up the conversation for customers to connect with you in market, asking "did you ever find your lost calf?" or "I loved that picture of your muddy boots, it reminded me of when..."



Start Somewhere

Whether you have been selling at markets for years or starting from scratch, there are ways you can incorporate these strategies to improve your sales. Sometimes it is hard to know where to start or what you could improve upon, so give these tips to a friend or neighbor that you have seen at the market and ask them for suggestions of where you can improve. If it is too intimidating to try to think of this whole list simultaneously, start small. But, start somewhere.



CSA Toolkit

Models, Strategies, and Resources



CSA farming is no longer a brand-new business model—it's a pathway to diversifying and sustaining your farm business. Farmers are trying new ideas and pushing the limits of what a CSA can be. Long-established CSA farms are facing competition, and this competition is pushing CSA farms to be more efficient, more effective, and more innovative.

For an online version of this publication, with live links, visit the resources section at asapconnections.org.

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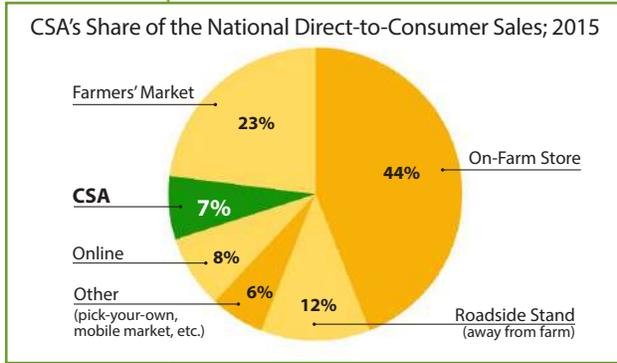


New to the concept?

CSA stands for Community Supported Agriculture. It's a direct relationship between one or more farms and a set of customers, usually involving a commitment to buy the farm's products through prepayment and/or subscription. Check out established resources like *NC State Extension's "CSA Resource Guide for Farmers,"* *Member Assembler's* generous set of articles, and the USDA's CSA page to learn more.

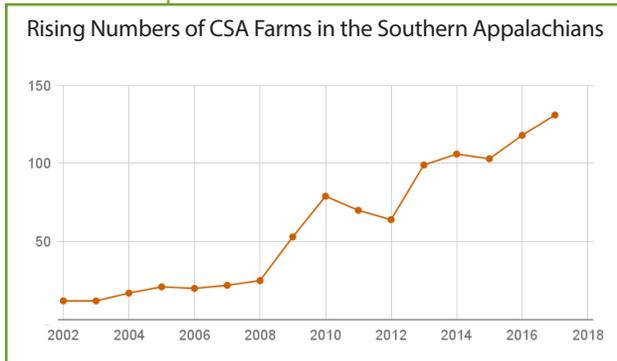
The State of CSAs

figure 1



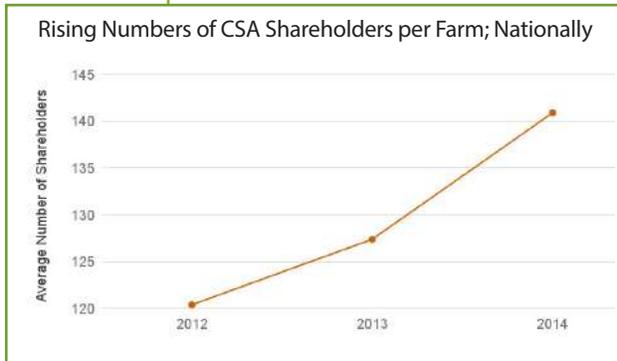
In 2015, the USDA reported that 7,398 farms sold products directly to consumers through a CSA accounting for 7% of the \$3 billion in direct-to-consumer sales by farms in the United States.¹ (Figure 1). The total sales for CSA operations (including those with value-added products) was nearly \$226 million for an average of \$30,585 per operation.

figure 2



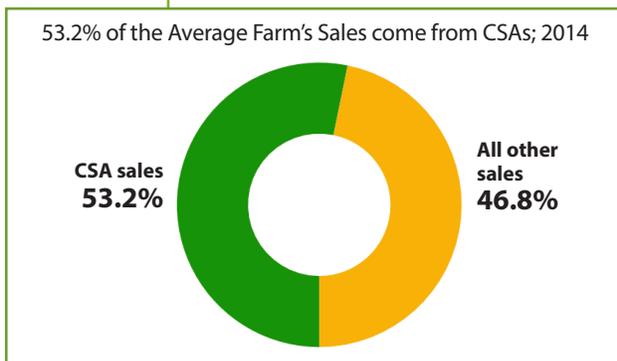
In Western North Carolina and the Southern Appalachians, the number of farms offering CSAs has expanded dramatically. In 2002, the first year ASAP began keeping records of farms within 100 miles of Asheville, NC, only 12 farms had CSA programs. In 2017, 131 farms offered CSAs in the region—more than a tenfold increase in 15 years (Figure 2).

figure 3



One clear trend is that CSA farms are consistently offering more shares. A USDA survey found that the average number of shareholders for a CSA increased by 6% in 2013 and 11% in 2014² (Figure 3). In 2014, the average shareholder size was 141 and the median size 60 shareholders (not shown).

figure 4



The majority of farms must still supplement their CSA programs with other sources of income. The same USDA survey found that the average percentage of a farm's sales coming from a CSA was 53 percent³ (Figure 4), and over 40 percent of all farms received less than half of their income from their CSA.

¹ U.S. Department of Agriculture NASS. Direct Farm Sales of Food. December 2016. <https://www.agcensus.usda.gov/Publications/2012/Online_Resources/Highlights/Local_Food/LocalFoodsMarketingPractices_Highlights.pdf>

^{2,3} Timothy Woods, Matthew Ernst, and Debra Tropp. Community Supported Agriculture—New Models for Changing Markets. U.S. Department of Agriculture, Agricultural Marketing Service, April 2017. <<https://www.ams.usda.gov/sites/default/files/media/CSANewModelsforChangingMarketsb.pdf>>



Five things to consider before starting a CSA

1. You are in charge of everything. A CSA includes marketing, outreach, getting members, signing them up, managing payments, communicating with customers, and farming—it's a complicated enterprise.
2. There is a high level of commitment. You have taken people's money in advance, and they expect the best throughout the entire season.
3. Intense planning is needed for production, marketing, and member communication.
4. Expect a high level of communication with members through newsletters, recipes, farm days, and other approaches.
5. CSA is not a great model for a beginner farmer. It is best to have at least one season under your belt to practice with no pressure.

Models and Strategies

As with any successful business, marketing and promoting your products or services are just as important as efficient distribution and appealing options. Here are some examples of ways farms have approached marketing and offering customized options.

Find Your Market

From a farmer's perspective, it's a great advantage to have a critical mass of CSA customers in one location sharing and talking about your food. This excitement has the potential to increase your customer retention from year to year because people aren't making decisions alone. Instead, they have banded together and share a common goal. A critical mass of customers also simplifies your CSA distribution and organization.

In the early years of CSA, these customer groups came from existing social circles and generally overlapped as a demographic with natural foods shoppers. Many customers came from the same part of the baby boomer generation that sought social change as youth in the 1960s–70s and had become grown-up consumers ready for the CSA trend to begin in the 1980s–90s. This group has now reached retirement age—although baby boomers remain a top set of CSA customers, their demand no longer matches the CSA share supply.

For your CSA farm to be successful, you must think like a marketer. Who are your customers? Do your customers attend church? Do they use social media? Are they young “foodies” who like to experiment with new recipes or people who are intimidated by the wide variety of greens? Do they have children who play sports? Do they work at a particular place or in a certain industry that has local roots? Are they urban or rural? Are they recent, or historically, immigrants from a particular part of the world?

For 15 years, most CSAs used similar language and similar communication systems, shifting together over time from paper to web. As a result, they found similar customers. To distinguish your CSA, you must find the specific communication streams, ways of talking, and distribution systems that work for your farm's market. The contents of your box may even have to shift depending on your customers.

As the popularity of CSAs has grown, other businesses have adopted similar models. These offerings range from subscription programs for artisan foodmakers to multifarm CSAs compiled by distributors. Therefore, in addition to differentiating yourself from other farm CSAs, you should also highlight the values customers are supporting in buying directly from a farm.

47 Tips and Tricks for CSA Farm Marketing

www.memberassembler.com/hub/marketing-tips-for-farmers

National database of CSA farms

localharvest.org has a national listing of CSA farms. Their tracking shows that CSAs have steadily spread beyond urban centers. Church- and workplace-based programs are part of this trend.

ASAP's 2017 *Local Food Guide* at appalachiangrown.org lists a much greater number with 131 CSA farms within 100 miles of Asheville, NC.

Workplace CSA links

www.grownorthwest.com/2010/05/in-the-workplace-how-csa-inspired-one-local-company/

Enlightening inside view of how workplaces can enhance CSA at a larger company with strong benefits and sustainability goals. Workplace subsidizes shares and pays up front, collecting from employees via payroll deduction.

asapconnections.org/downloads/workplace-csa-models.pdf

A summary of CSA workplace models with multiple real world examples.

Faith-Based CSA links

www.hazon.org/adamah/the-farm/csa/

Programs at 56 locations around the world linked to reform Jewish congregations.

www.interfaithfood.org/resources/csa-tool-kit/

Tips on building a faith-based CSA from a community group's perspective.

Seasonal CSA

This seasonal CSA is the model we are most familiar with in this region today. Members commit in the late winter or early spring for a summer CSA that runs for 20-30 weeks during the peak of the harvest season. Many farms may also offer a fall or winter share or only a winter share. With season extension becoming prevalent, a winter only CSA is a new approach with less competition.

Farms may offer one size share while others may also offer half shares. Add-ons or extras are a way to offer other farm products. There are any number of variations with this model for size of shares and payment structure. Within this seasonal model there are some good strategies for attracting subscribers or shareholders.

Work Share: Some farms will offer working shares in their CSA. Under this model, shareholders assist with your on-farm tasks in exchange for a reduced-price or free share. This model can benefit both farm and customer: the farm benefits from reduced labor costs and the customer has access to local food at a reduced or no cost. Work-trade CSA's can allow your customers to take their relationship with food and farming to a deeper level. CSA customers with past farming or gardening experience might be good fit for this model. This is should be a formal agreement. See the [work share agreement from Colchester Farm](#) to understand some of the commitment and expectations in this model.

Affinity Groups: A rising trend is to relieve yourself of finding customers individually by getting customers to do the outreach for you. Organized by neighborhood, town, congregation, or workplace, each group of your CSA program can have a coordinator or champion, equipped with marketing materials and good understanding of your business, whose job is to recruit others and organize share distribution. You may provide a discount or other incentive to the those who take on this coordinator role.

This strategy has great potential to lighten your sales and marketing burden. Its other advantage is in logistical support. For example, during the peak of summer with subscribers vacationing out of town and passing on their shares, the CSA coordinator can find families or food banks to take the extra shares.

These champion customers can often develop through workplace or faith-based communities, in which multiple CSA shares are purchased for individuals at their place of business or place of worship. The coordinator can pick up from the farm, meet at a pick-up location, or farms preferably deliver CSA boxes directly to the participating location if the group can reach a minimum number of shares.

Most workplaces interested in having a CSA will appoint an individual to lead the charge on bringing local food to their workplace, simplifying your marketing and distribution efforts. Hospitals have come to the forefront of workplace CSAs, but other large businesses and health-minded businesses (gyms, yoga studios, etc.) make strong candidates as well.

Around the country and across faiths, food is rising up as a focus of congregational discussion and action. It makes sense—the links between spiritual sustenance and nutritional sustenance are as old as our most hallowed sacred texts. Congregations and other faith-based communities are interested in connecting with local farms as forms of fellowship, social action, and adherence to scriptural guidance.

Affinity groups can extend beyond business and faith. Other community groups such as schools and neighborhoods, wherever groups congregate on a regular basis. CSA can coincide with scheduled routine like a regular gym schedule or school pickup. Reach out to groups that you feel might have interest in a CSA.

Different group names and applications may be necessary for different groups and the application may be returned to a program coordinator or to you at the farm. Tracking multiple application forms, while maintaining different parts of your CSA website and promotions, will take coordination and organization skills. An advantage to this model is that you have people on the ground in different communities talking about your CSA and helping to sell your shares, saving you time dealing with distribution and logistics.

Market Share CSAs

Market share or market-style CSAs are a newer model. Just as in a traditional CSA, customers pay an upfront fee at the beginning of the season. However, rather than picking up a standardized, pre-packed box at a predetermined location, customers meet their CSA farm at a specified farmers market. Customers select any produce they want from their farm's market setup. Customers are limited in their selection only by the size and weekly cost of their CSA share. This model mitigates some of the most cited issues with traditional CSAs, such as customers receiving produce they don't like or getting produce items in excessive or insufficient volumes.

While the market share model does not offer farmers the same structure for production planning, it does offer payment before the season starts and reduces the labor involved in packing boxes each week. Shareholders often receive a discount on their selection through a market style CSA, for example \$25 worth of produce for a share price of \$20. The savings to the customer reflects the benefits of this CSA model to the farmer.

Some farms offering market share CSAs use a card-based system, in which shareholders are given a card preloaded with funds for their share size. Shareholders swipe their card each week when they've made their selections. While this method may be appealing to some, simple paper-based systems are also sufficient.

Buy-Down CSA

Similar to the market-style with a lump sum paid in at the beginning of the season and regular purchases through the season reduce your balance aiming for \$0 at the end of the season. This model is not based on a weekly amount but a seasonal or for the term of the CSA. This can either be with a debit type card or tracked manually.

Add-on Products

Farms have sought help to supplement their shares since the origin of North American CSAs in the 1980s. Specialized items such as fruit, land-and water-intensive foods such as sweet corn, and entirely different product lines such as meats and eggs have been add-ons to basic CSA shares.

For diversified farms, these add-ons can come from their own production and include more expensive/intensive items that supplement their traditional CSA offerings. Though add-on items may not be desired by every CSA member, for some members they can be a deciding factor when choosing their CSA farm for the season. These add-ons could include eggs, meats, flowers, and more, and feature an added price for each desired item.

For farms that are not as diversified, add-ons may come from other farms. It's possible that some customers will be wary of additions from other farms. Some customers value variety and reliability and have no concerns about you providing items from other farms; other customer bases may be passionate adherents to the idea that "this is my farmer" and believe that add-on products dilute the value of their share. If you do collaborate with other farms to provide add-on items, use your brochure, website, or other promotional outlets to provide detailed information about collaborating farms and their products.

Working Together with Other Farms

By working with other farms to supply your shares, you can lower your production risk and better guarantee a positive food experience for your customer. However, an almost philosophical debate is underway about multifarm CSAs. Is the direct relationship between a single farm, its farmers, and its customers absolutely essential to the concept of a CSA? How much product can come from other local farms before some perceived value is lost?



Some CSA programs offer restaurant or foodservice shares. Mixed boxes are of less use to a chef. Providing a different single item each week may be preferred.



Fully Collaborative Multifarm CSAs

Multifarm CSAs typically involve the coordination of multiple growers to provide both overlapping and specialized supply. An example of overlapping supply is three farms planting crops of peas in weekly succession. This approach saves any one farm from the intense level of succession planting sometimes needed to reduce the risk of crop failure and disappointed customers. An example of specialized supply is one or two farms in the CSA growing tomatoes and investing in all of the latest disease-combating structures and protocols. This approach frees other farms to grow sweet corn, berries, green beans, or other resource-intensive crops. Multifarm CSAs typically aim to grow to a point where a skilled person at one of the farms (or a contracted outsider) is paid to provide supply coordination, customer service, and bookkeeping. For an example of a multifarm CSA that grew out of a single farm CSA, read *Local Harvest: A Multifarm CSA Handbook*.

From *Local Harvest: A Multifarm CSA Handbook*

“In the years since 2006, the CSA has fine-tuned its methods. Sticking with the same distribution site, and solidifying a group of five evenly balanced (in terms of percentage of the co-op) larger farms and three smaller ones, Local Harvest has been able to seamlessly expand to 300 members, while retaining between 60 and 70 percent of members year-to-year.” After the 2009 season, Trumble noted that, “Size does matter. When we were 200 members, we were just barely able to pay our bills. At 250 members, we ran smoothly and ended up with a small profit (patronage dividend). At 300 members, we are able to run the business and not have to worry about whether we can afford a site assistant, or to pay an employee who has worked a few hours over time.”

Retaining Customers

Retention rates of CSA customers are generally poor. According to a 2016 report published by the University of California, the average annual retention rate for CSAs is 63%; many farms do worse. This turnover means that you need to recruit the equivalent of your entire CSA customer base every two to three years. It takes less time and money to retain current customers than to find new ones, so be sure to put as much energy into retention strategies as you do to new customer marketing outreach. The approaches outlined in this document are all designed to increase retention.

In addition, a vital retention strategy is customer engagement. Use newsletters, social media, farm workdays, seasonal celebrations, and one-on-one interaction to develop relationships with your customers, give them an intimate sense of what’s happening on the farm day-to-day, and build customer loyalty. Most customers buy a CSA not only for what is in the box, but as a way to connect with the family farm growing their food.

Maintaining and building these relationships is key to retaining customers and creating community advocates for your farm.

Also important is training your interns in great customer service. Farm owners tend to be friendly and enthusiastic with their customers in part because they take pride in their product and because their customers are directly supporting the farm and their livelihood. Farm interns, because they don’t have a direct stake in the farm business, can be less engaged. Build customer service into your farm internship program so that interns are gaining skills in customer interaction and engagement. Educate interns about your farming philosophy and goals. Give them scripts and stories to share, practice customer interactions with them, and work alongside them to set the tone of your farm.

Pushing the Definition of a CSA

Distributors, grocers, and other non-farm businesses are pushing the boundaries of a CSA. Regardless of whether or not you consider these models true CSAs, it is good to know the options that are out there, either for you to adopt, or simply to understand your competition.

Strategies for Engaging your CSA Customer Base

Newsletters are perhaps the most widely used form of engagement for CSA farms. An emailed newsletter can share recipes, tell the story of the harvest, and increase customer excitement for the upcoming box. If nothing else, newsletters also help remind customers to pick up their share!

Member potluck dinners and gatherings, hosted once or more a year at your farm, are a great way to deepen your connection to your CSA customers, foster relationships between shareholders, and build an invested CSA community for your farm.

Other strategies for engaging your customer base include maintaining a social media presence for your farm, including recipes and occasional surprises in CSA boxes, and putting extra effort into the aesthetics of your box (e.g., tying a flower to the outside). Be creative, listen to your customers, and share your farm experiences with them.

Understanding Customers and Managing Expectations

A 2015 CSA customer survey from the University of California showed that the number one reason people leave CSAs is product mix—CSA customers felt there wasn't enough variety or they preferred to choose products themselves. The number two reason cited was product quantity—customers said they threw out a lot of product. Most people leave the CSA due to lack of choice, yet the idea of receiving what is available when it is available is an integral part of the CSA concept. Increase customer retention by managing customer expectations upfront and making customer engagement a priority.

Reasons for Discontinuing CSA Membership	Agree	Neutral	Disagree
The product mix did not meet my needs	47%	18%	35%
Lack of choice about products included	41%	18%	41%
Too little diversity in products in the share	33%	23%	44%
Lack of choice about quantity and/or frequency	23%	19%	58%
Lack of time for cooking or processing the food	27%	17%	56%
Price per box is too high	21%	25%	54%
Too low of a value	19%	26%	56%
Inconvenient to pick up or receive the share	25%	12%	63%
Too much food in the share	19%	16%	65%
Lack of knowledge for food preparation	17%	14%	69%
Too little food in the share	11%	18%	71%
Payment period is too long	3%	21%	77%

"Who supports Community Supported Agriculture (CSA) in California? Comparisons of current and former CSA members." Libby Christensen, Ryan E. Galt, Katharine Bradley, Natasha Simpson, & Kate Munden-Dixon University of California, Davis, Department of Human Ecology, Geography Graduate Group, Community Development Graduate Group UC Davis-CAFF CSA Workshop, Sebastopol Grange, Sebastopol 9/28/15

Are customers really that irrational? Do they sign up for a CSA with eager eyes, then leave the program six months later over the very point that first excited them? Maybe not. Part of the issue is that new farms overpromise on their product mix. At the same time that farms warn you get what you get, they showcase a spectacular product calendar that they may not yet have the growing expertise to fulfill. One way to manage customer expectations is to hold off on launching a CSA program until you have several years of experience on your land trying to grow a CSA-like bounty and variety.

Even with experienced farms, subscribers likely drop off from CSAs due to unrealistic expectations. They imagine they'll get something familiar and easy to cook every week, and maybe they won't. They imagine they'll get just the right amount of food for their family, and maybe they won't. They imagine produce will look like it does in the store, and maybe it won't. They imagine they'll now make time to cook a whole lot more than they ever did, and maybe they won't. They imagine that getting berries, cucumbers, corn, or another crop is guaranteed—nothing is ever guaranteed.

Member Assembler's annual 2015 CSA Farming Annual Report found a 46.1% average retention rate among the 305 farms they surveyed.

Search for these sample customer interactions:

[Sauvie Island Organics blog](#)

[Waltham Fields Community Farm newsletters](#)

As one small step toward preventing these expectations, consider reposting or handing out this wonderful information sheet from Local Harvest.



Tips for Potential CSA Members

Don't expect all your produce to come from the CSA

Most CSAs do not provide families with enough fruit to meet their usual intake. Many don't provide any fruit at all, so it is good to ask what to expect in that regard. Depending on the size of your family and how much you cook, you will probably find that you need to supplement the vegetables as well, especially staples like onions, garlic, and carrots.

If you are not used to eating seasonally, do some research.

If you are not accustomed to eating seasonally, you may find that it takes awhile to make a transition from eating whatever is at the grocery store (pretty much everything) to whatever is in your CSA basket (what's in season). It may surprise you to find that tomatoes do not ripen until August in your area. You should expect the season to start off lighter than it finishes. In most areas, the first crops will be salad greens, peas, green onions and the like. By the end of the season, the boxes should be much heavier, with things like winter squash, potatoes, tomatoes, and broccoli. Many farms provide a list of what produce to expect when. It's worth reading. If they don't offer you such a list, ask.

Quantity varies—good to ask up front.

When filling the weekly CSA baskets, farmers try and provide a variety of items, in a reasonable quantity. They don't want to be skimpy, and they don't want to overwhelm their members. Too much of even a good thing and it ends up going to waste, which makes everyone feel bad. Over time, farmers develop a feel for how much is the right amount for their particular community—what's fair, what's reasonable, what will get eaten. Of course, the weather and other mitigating circumstances can get in the way of their ability to provide the ideal amount, as discussed above. One of the most important questions to ask before you sign up is, "About how much produce do you expect to deliver each week, and how does that vary from the beginning of the season to the end?"

If you want to preserve food for winter, ask.

Some farms allow members to get extra quantities of certain vegetables for canning or freezing. If this is something that interests you, talk to the farmer early in the season.

Make sure you understand the policies.

Farms differ in their policies regarding what happens with your box if you don't pick it up (e.g., vacation, something-came-up, I forgot, etc.) Make sure you know how these situations are dealt with, before the season starts.

CSA Systems of Operation

CSAs are businesses. Farmers with CSAs are signing contracts with customers, hiring management employees, using sophisticated planning tools, and putting custom software to work.

Formal Agreements and Contracts

Every CSA farm should have customers sign a formal contract or agreement. The contract or agreement can serve several purposes. Required to sign a formal contract, customers will pause to read exactly what they are signing up for. With the right language, it can temper customer expectations, protect you from refund requests, and enable you to distribute unclaimed shares to other families or organizations. If you use a payment plan, it can also function as a payment agreement.

Here is a very simple but effective block of contract language from Devon Point Farm. Additional resources and example contracts are available from the Pennsylvania Association for Sustainable Agriculture.

Please initial each of the following:

____ I understand I am committing to become a member of Devon Point Farm's 2017 Farm Share Program, that my deposit is non-refundable, and I shall share in the risks and rewards of the Share program. I am comfortable with the fact that I will receive a variety of crops, but I may not get every crop that is on the farm's production list due to crop failures or low yields.

____ I agree that it is my responsibility to pick up my share each week at Devon Point Farm in Woodstock on Tuesdays between 4–6 pm, and that any share not picked up during that time will automatically become the property of Devon Point Farm, and that there are no refunds or repeats for missed shares.

Please sign this contract here:

Signature: _____ Date: _____

Planning and Management Tools

Many custom management software solutions are available for CSA farmers. These include Farmigo, CSA Toolbox, Member Assembler, CSAware, and others. Pricing for these programs is calculated either per share sold or as a percentage of sales. Features include online sign-up for your customers, ongoing customer communication, delivery and pick-up site tracking, financial tracking and billing, reporting, production planning, and more.

One downside of using a custom system for tasks such as billing and record-keeping is that more common systems have broader support and wider application. You can accomplish many tasks with homemade planning sheets on paper or widely available software you may be using anyway, such as Microsoft Excel or Intuit QuickBooks.

The Organic Farmer's Business Handbook (Richard Wiswall, 2009), includes many ideas and tools for farmers (organic or not) operating and planning CSAs. Wiswall describes a range of planning systems—from complex computer-based systems to paper-based crop journals.

Links to More Sample Contracts

www.evergreenfarm.typepad.com/files/2017-workshare-contract.pdf

EverGreen Farm's two-page contract specifically for those interested in reduced-cost work shares is a masterpiece of blunt and to the point language. Farmer readers will understand that a successful work share program with a real discount needs to be this strong.

www.intervalefoodhub.com

Intervale's CSA Policy also includes some tough rules, like a \$5 fee for subscribers who don't return their basket, and a requirement that subscribers read all emails from the program.

www.pasafarming.org/resources/resources/guide-to-legal-issues-in-csa-operations-1/view

Pennsylvania Association for Sustainable Agriculture has several sample agreements at the end of this document.

Agritourism and Farm Tour Guide



For an online version of this publication, visit the resources section at asapconnections.org.

Revised November 2017

Written and compiled by ASAP staff with expertise from Blue Ridge Women in Agriculture, NCDA&CS, and the Regional Farm Tour Learning Community. For more resources visit the resources section at asapconnections.org.

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Agritourism is an experiential way of sharing your farm story with the community. In addition to diversifying your income and farm marketing, opening your farm to visitors offers the public an opportunity to create personal connections with your farm and agriculture in the region. This guide is designed to help you determine if agritourism is a good fit for your operation, as well as offer resources and strategies to ensure it is a positive experience for you and your farm visitors.

Getting Started: Is Agritourism Right for My Farm?

Welcoming visitors to your farm is only a good opportunity, if it is a right fit for you and your operation. Here are a few questions to ask yourself:

- Do I enjoy interacting with the public?
- What are my goals and expectations for opening my farm to visitors?
- What is my timeline for achieving these goals?
- What resources, skills, and facilities does my farm have to get started?
- What resources do we need to develop?
- What costs are we willing to incur in getting started?

Determine if Your Effort is Worth the Gain

Create a timeline with specific tasks leading up to your events and activities to give yourself a realistic look at the time and resources involved. Here are questions to consider:

- What will you gain in exchange for your time (e.g., on-farm sales, new and repeat customers)?
- Are there specific people you would like to invite to your farm (e.g., customers, chefs, potential buyers, friends, neighbors, local club or congregation members)?
- Does your insurance cover visitors to your farm? There are risks in opening your farm to the public. Do you have the time and resources to evaluate and mitigate those risks?
- How will you balance responsibilities such as selling at a farmers market, farm chores, or off-farm work? Will you need to hire or recruit others to help?
- Are there other ways to generate revenue in addition to selling your farm products?
- How can you engage with visitors to build long-term relationships and expand your customer base?
- Do you have materials for visitors to take home (e.g., rack cards, brochures, a list of where to find your farm products, stickers, farm apparel, coupons, or promotions of farm offerings and events)?



Benefits of Agritourism

Reasons farms report success in welcoming visitors:

- Increase exposure for farm and business
- Educate people about farm processes and products
- Drive traffic to the farm to increase customer base
- Reach new customers and turn occasional customers into “farm fans”
- Sell and market farm products
- Market farm offerings (e.g., events, festivals, and lodging)
- Connect with people who will become repeat visitors, and who will let other people know about the farm.

Managing Risk and Reducing Hazards

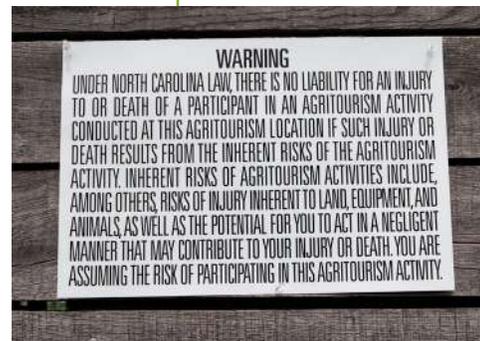
- Survey potential hazards on your farm. Invite a friend or neighbor to walk your property to help identify risks and hazards you may have overlooked.
- Minimize potential hazards by using signage and barriers to limit access to risky areas or structures on your farm.
- Move animals that may be dangerous or scared of visitors to safe areas of the farm.



- Create an emergency plan and ensure all staff and volunteers are trained on your emergency management procedures, including communications, emergency response, and incident reporting. Make sure cell phones or radios are on hand and working throughout your events. If you do not have cell service make certain all staff and volunteers know where phones are located. Have a first aid kit on site and check to see that it's fully stocked.
- Have a rain plan. Where will people go if it suddenly starts raining? Will you have rainy day activities? Will these activities require materials not normally on your farm?
- Make a list of rules specific to your farm and share them with staff and volunteers to cover with visitors. Rules can be framed in a positive way, but be certain to reiterate those important to safety (e.g., don't stand behind the donkey, pick up the rooster, climb on the tractor).

Do you have the insurance coverage needed to protect you and your visitors? Talk with your insurance agent about what your policy covers and what supplemental coverage you might need depending on your operation and planned activities. Figure the cost of insurance into your budget planning when determining which agritourism activities your farm plans to offer. If your agent has not been to your farm in a while, invite him/her out to see what you have been doing, and how your activities/tours will flow. Each year review your insurance policy and tell your agent what agritourism ventures you are planning and implementing. The more they know, the better they are able to protect you.

The North Carolina Limited Liability Law was designed to protect farms by making farm visitors aware of the inherent risks and hazards of agritourism activities on your farm through posted and visible warning signs. This statute has specific guidelines to follow and does not protect you from liability if you are negligent or fail to take steps to remove hazards on your property. This law is not a substitution for insurance, but hopefully a tool for reducing unwarranted litigation. Plan ahead and consider getting professional and legal expertise to assess your farm's individual risks and insurance needs. For a full explanation of the Limited Liability Law and how to use and obtain liability warning signs go to www.ncagr.gov and search agritourism laws.



Setting Up Your Farm for an Event

Signage—Make it easy for visitors to find your farm. Set out temporary directional signs at major intersections or critical turns, as well as locations where road signs or directions may be unclear.

Parking—Many farms depend on pasture or other grassy areas for parking, but it is good to have a backup plan in case of excessive rain. Plan for a volunteer to help direct parking. Use signs, rope, or flagging to indicate parking spaces and places to easily turn around.

Welcome table—Set up a welcome and information station to greet visitors when they first arrive. Make it visible and weather resistant. Orient your welcome station staff or volunteers in advance with what to communicate to visitors. Have literature or maps available along with cards or brochures.

Restrooms and hand washing—Clearly indicate location of restrooms and/or hand-washing facilities if they are available. Provide hand sanitizer.

Product sales—If you are selling or sampling your products, keep them stocked and the area well staffed. Arrange products in a visible and attractive display. Have plenty of information available about your growing practices, the story of your farm, and where customers can find your products.

Activities—Offer hands-on activities, either as part of a tour, something to do while visitors wait, or as another income stream for your farm. Activities can be as simple as product sampling, viewing baby animals, or more elaborate undertakings such as a make-your-own bouquet station or a photo booth.

Staffing and Volunteers

Farms and visitors will have a better experience and on-farm sales will be improved if the farm is well staffed with knowledgeable people. Consider using staff or volunteers to manage parking, a welcome table, product sampling, activities, sales table, music, tours and demonstrations. Make sure everyone is well-trained for their role and can answer questions (tour schedule, accessible areas, hand washing, product sales, etc.). It is best if farmers lead tours, but if experienced staff or volunteers will assist in leading tours, be sure they are equipped with information and stories to share with visitors. If possible, have a rehearsal or join in on other tours to pick up tips and frequently asked questions.

Thank your volunteers! These are folks who have given time to show their support of your farm, so be sure to show your appreciation for their time. Volunteers are not only supportive the day of an event, but can become regular farm supporters and customers.



Marketing Your Events and Tours

You are putting time, energy, and resources into welcoming visitors to your farm, make sure you get the word out. Marketing and promotions involve an investment of time and/or money, but here are a few low-cost ideas:



Tell your story—Local media is often looking for content and community interest stories. Send out a press release with event details and photos to your local newspaper. Be sure to communicate what the “story” is, e.g., “historic farm now open to the public,” “celebrate summer with u-pick berries,” or “come meet the next generation of farmers.” Invite local news, radio, or other media to attend and give them ample notice.

Create marketing materials—Create “save the date” cards or fliers to distribute to friends and customers. Include a picture and/or a coupon (free item or percentage off on farm sales) to encourage them to hold on to the card and follow through on the visit.

Cross-promote with your farmers markets and retail outlets—Add posters, tour guides, or other marketing materials to your farmers market or retail displays. Ask area businesses that carry your products to display materials and include event information in newsletters, website, or social media. This also offers the business a way to promote their support of local food and farms.

Strengthen connections with your customers—It is easier to increase sales to an existing customer than find new ones. Communicate with your customers about your upcoming events through newsletters, at farmers markets, through your CSA, or at any of your retail outlets. Don’t forget to invite your wholesale customers to join as well.

Post promotional signage—Post flyers at local businesses and on community bulletin boards. Put signs along your property. Include event date and time to catch interested folks driving by.

Market events on web and social media—Share event information on your website, social media sites (Facebook, Instagram, Twitter), and on your community event calendars. Post teaser photos and videos of what people can see and do on your farm.

Leading Tours and Activities

When planning a tour consider why people go on farm tours. Most visitors want to know the story of your farm, learn more about growing practices and products, and connect with local agriculture. In addition to planning what to show them on the farm, think about what makes your farm unique. What farm history, growing tips, or funny stories could you incorporate? Remember that folks are visiting to learn about your farm, but also about you. While some farmers don’t like to talk about themselves, the story of who you are and why you are farming is just as critical as what you grow.

Determine how you would like guests to tour your farm. Will you lead tours or will guests explore on their own? If self-guided, are you providing a map with points of interest? Where will the tour pause to allow people to catch up or catch their breath? Be mindful of group size. Everyone on the tour should be able to hear you and see what you are talking about. Stop to talk rather talking while walking. If groups tend to be more than 20 people consider breaking into smaller groups or offering stations to rotate through. Consider a long and short tour option. Tours should aim to be no longer than 30 minutes. There may be some visitors that are not physically able to participate in long or steep walks. What options could be created to engage these customers?

In addition to hearing your stories about you farm operation and products, visitors also want to engage with your farm and create their own stories. Offering taste tests, cooking demos, art activities, hiking, u-pick, or demonstrations (milking, harvesting, cheese production, wool processing, etc.) builds a personal connection to your farm.



Activities for Children

For activities, recipes, lesson plans, and ideas for engaging children in local food and agriculture visit growing-minds.org.



Staying Connected to Your Visitors

Send guests home with a way to engage with your farm again—Offer an invitation to your next farm event, a coupon for your product at market, information about your CSA, or a list of places where they can find your farm products. Give them a reason to come back and support you again.

Gather names and contact information—If one of your goals is to build your customer base, it is important to know how to connect with your visitors again. You don't have to commit to a monthly newsletter, but do have visitors sign up to hear about future events and happenings on the farm. It is easier to promote your products and events to folks that already have a solid connection to your farm.

Sample and sell products—Farm tours are a great time to share and sell products. Visitors are often disappointed if there aren't opportunities to support your farm with a purchase and a way to take home a piece of the experience. Dedicate a staff member or knowledgeable volunteer to manage and replenish your product table/sales area, and locate it in an area visitors walk through on their way in and out. Make sure prices are well marked and that there is information about where your products are available outside the tour.

Encourage visitors to share their stories—Ask visitors to post pictures from their farm visit on social media, offer a photo contest or give out "refer a friend" coupons. This type of engagement not only builds on the experience visitors had on your farm, but encourages them to share it with their family and friends.



Pre-Event Checklist

Use this checklist to assess your farm's preparedness for hosting visitors and to start planning your agritourism activities.

Marketing	Yes/No	Notes
Have you done promotions to invite people to your farm and events (social media, ads, flyers)?		
Do you have a sign-up sheet for visitors to give you their information for future events?		
Do you have handouts (rack cards, brochures, coupons, magnets) to give visitors information about your farm and how to stay connected?		
Do you have products to sell or samples to offer? Are they attractively displayed? Are prices visible?		
Do you have a sign promoting visitors to "like" or "follow" you on social media?		
Directions and Parking	Yes/No	Notes
Is there a well placed farm sign at the entrance to your farm?		
Is the parking area well marked?		
Will you need parking attendants?		
Is there good visibility for visitors to enter and exit safely?		
Is there adequate parking?		
Is parking area free of potholes and mud? If it rains, will people get stuck?		
Is there signage to direct visitors from parking area to welcome table?		
Facilities	Yes/No	Notes
Are walking paths and roads in good condition (relatively smooth, no tripping hazards)?		
Are there signs with instructions, rules, safety information?		
Do you have an agritourism liability sign posted?		
Is there a bathroom facility open to the public? Is there a handwashing station or hand sanitizer?		
Is your farm accessible to visitors with limited mobility?		
Are there places to sit?		
Staffing	Yes/No	Notes
Do you have a staffing plan? Consider the staffing you will need for the experiences you are offering (tours, demonstrations, product sales, activities).		
Will you need volunteers? How will you recruit volunteers (family, neighbors, local schools, universities, community groups)?		

Safety and Risk Management	Yes/No	Notes
Do you have a list of rules specific to your farm? What is your plan for communicating them to staff, volunteers, and visitors?		
Have all potential hazards been removed, flagged, or roped off (farm equipment, barns, steep slopes, poison ivy, ponds, etc.)?		
Are accessible buildings and spaces safe for the public?		
Are electric fences well marked or turned off during tours and activities?		
Is your farm family-friendly and kid safe? Do kids need to be tightly supervised or kept out of certain areas?		
Do you have an emergency plan? Do farm staff and volunteers have cell phones or radios?		
Do you have a first aid kit and do staff and volunteers know its location?		
Is all fire and safety equipment in operational condition?		
Does your farm have animals? Will visitors interact with them? If so, do you have hand or foot washing facilities available to minimize disease transmission?		
Visitor Experience	Yes/No	Notes
Do you have a designated welcome area to greet visitors near the entrance?		
Is it clear how visitors will tour your farm? Do you have a schedule of tours and activities?		
Do you have a self-guided tour option with a printed map or stations with signs or staff?		
Is there an activity to engage visitors if they need to wait for a tour (product samples, self-guided tours, activities)?		
Is there shelter for visitors in case of rain or a sudden thunderstorm?		
Conducting Tours	Yes/No	Notes
Have you prepared a short presentation that highlights the main aspects of your farm? Does it show off your farm's unique qualities?		
Can your presentation be tailored to your audience (children, non-farmers, large groups)?		
Does your tour allow for extra time for rest, travel, and questions?		
Are there interactive activities on your tour (tastings, demonstrations, hands-on activities)?		



Guide to Selling Wholesale



For an online version of this publication, with live links, visit the resources section at asapconnections.org.

Revised September 2017

Written and compiled by ASAP staff. For more resources visit the resources section at asapconnections.org.

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This guide is designed to offer an overview of wholesale market opportunities, from small restaurants to large grocery chains and institutions. The first steps to determining which of these markets are right for your farm involve understanding the needs and capacities of your farm business, as well as the range of market requirements across wholesale outlets.

In this overview you'll find the differences between various outlets, general requirements, and relevant resources to help you determine what markets may be a good match for your farm. This can also be a tool to determine what is a good fit for your business now, as well as what you may need to do to build your capacity for expanding in the future.

As always, building relationships is key to successfully entering into a new market. While this guide offers information, there is no substitute for direct communications with buyers in order to learn more about their individual needs and requirements. Clear and consistent communication will help ensure there are well-defined expectations, and set the stage for a successful, mutually beneficial partnership.

ASAP is available to help farms in the region make market connections and be better prepared to access opportunities in local markets. Please contact us to learn more.



Benefits of Selling Wholesale

Diversification—Whether you start with direct sales or wholesale markets, diversifying both your product and market mix are key to managing risk for your farm. While juggling too many markets may not be sustainable, having options for where to sell your products gives your farm more resiliency.

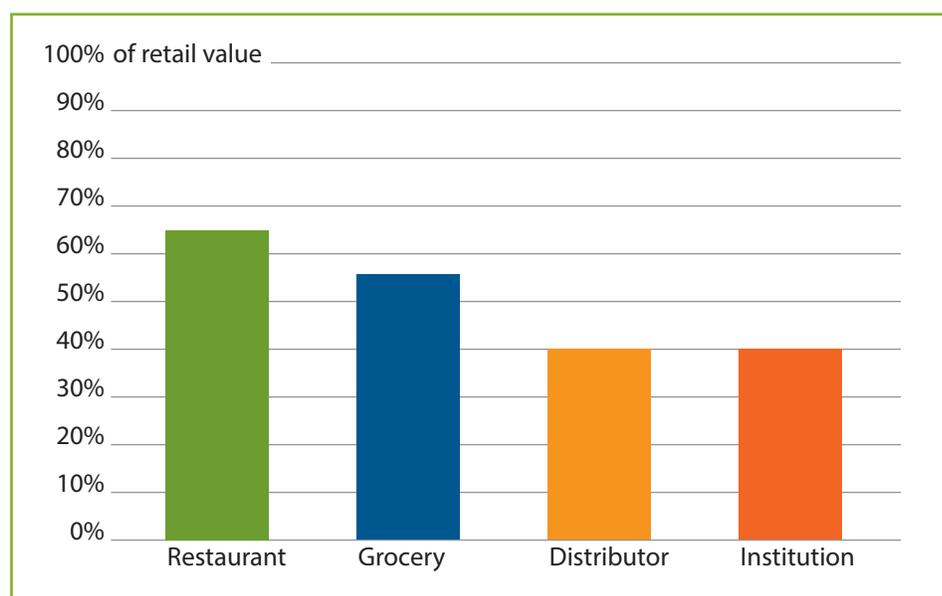
Somewhere to turn with surpluses—While wholesale markets have a lower price point than retail, they can reduce loss when you have surplus product you are not able to move through direct markets. Consistent record keeping and financial planning will help you better understand your break-even point for pricing, and is an important tool for understanding the right market mix for your farm.

Convenience/efficiency—Factoring in your time at tailgate markets or farm stands, wholesale markets can be more profitable than selling direct depending on the scale of your farm. Consider volumes and delivery requirements when looking at wholesale market opportunities. With good record keeping you may find it is more efficient to sell through a distributor than direct to multiple locations.

Cross promotional opportunities—Building your brand and telling the story behind your farm and products is often easier in direct markets where you can connect face-to-face with customers. Diversifying with wholesale markets can be a way to cross-promote your products, offering customers multiple options for buying your products and supporting your farm. Connections and presence throughout the community are great marketing tools, whether selling to local schools or area restaurants. For this strategy to be effective, it is critical to brand or identify your product through wholesale systems. This can be done through product labeling, point of purchase materials (farmer profiles, signage, rack cards, etc.), and providing your farm story to your buyers to use in advertising and promotions.

Understanding the Industry

Pricing is only one of multiple factors to consider when examining wholesale market opportunities. This section offers some generalizations that can be made about different markets and offers resource links for those wanting to learn more.



Restaurants

In general, restaurants are the easiest wholesale market for small farms to access. They are highly variable, depending on the size and customer base, but usually pay closer to retail prices. Building and maintaining relationships is key to all wholesale markets, but the following resources offer specific recommendations for working with chefs.



- General tips for selling to restaurants: [Tips for Selling to Restaurants](#) (ATTRA)
- Additional communication and relationship-building techniques: [Selling To Restaurants](#) (ATTRA)
- Further information on crop selection, harvesting, and pricing specifically for restaurant accounts: [Marketing To Restaurants](#) (NC Cooperative Extension) (ATTRA)

Groceries

Groceries are a larger volume market, but also variable depending on the size and number of stores. While smaller independently owned stores or co-ops often have fewer requirements, generally selling to groceries requires product liability insurance, a food safety plan or GAP certification, standard sizing and packing, and may require multiple delivery locations.

- General tips for selling to groceries: [Tips for Selling to Grocery Stores](#) (ATTRA)
- UPC and PLU codes: [Using PLU and UPC Codes](#) (CEFS)

Distributors

Distributors, wholesalers, brokers, packers—these categories often get lumped together or terms are used interchangeably, but each can offer a different range of services including washing, packing, grading, storage, insurance, sales, and distribution. Here is how these

distributor markets differ and general tips for selling to each sector:

- [Tips for Selling to Produce Distributors](#) (ATTRA)
- [Tips for Selling to Produce Brokers](#) (ATTRA)
- [Tips for Selling to Produce Packing Houses](#) (ATTRA)
- [Tips for Selling to Wholesale Buyers at Terminal Markets](#) (ATTRA)

Schools and Institutions

While this is usually a higher volume market, it is often a low price point (depending on the scale, the high volume can offset the low price point) and typically has the highest level of purchasing requirements. While many institutions prefer purchasing through a distributor or may require a bid process, they are often also interested in supplemental direct purchases and featuring local products on their menus. Find out if the food service is independently operated or run by a management company when considering these markets, as there may be more red tape working with larger companies. Selling to institutions is typically a market for larger growers and can be useful in market diversification.

- [How School Food Works](#) (ASAP—Growing Minds)
- A diagram illustrating the process for determining local procurement options (which are not mutually exclusive) for school system and how ASAP can help: [Local Food Purchasing Flow Chart](#) (ASAP—Growing Minds)



Market Requirements

Product liability insurance—While product liability insurance is important for direct and wholesale markets, the level of coverage you purchase may be determined by the requirements of your buyers. One to five million dollar coverage is not unusual for larger grocery stores or institutional markets to require of producers. Some packers or distributors may offer some coverage, but it is important to fully understand your risk by discussing this with buyers and your insurance agent.

Certifications—(GAP, Organic, Appalachian Grown, etc.) When selling into wholesale markets you lose the opportunity to communicate directly with the end consumer about your growing practices or the story behind your farm. Certifications provide consumers with information they need to know if they are supporting the types of growing practices or farms that are important to them. Certifications might open up new market opportunities as well. Assess market opportunities and requirements and weigh the costs and paperwork involved to determine if it is a critical piece of your business plan. These resources offer a good starting point for if considering GAP, Organic, or Appalachian Grown certification for your farm.

- [GAP Certification: Is It Worth It?](#) (NC Cooperative Extension)
- [Good Agricultural Practices for Small Diversified Farms](#) (CFSA)
- [Organic Certification FAQs](#) (CFSA)
- [The Road to Organic Certification](#) (USDA)
- [Certified Local: What is Appalachian Grown?](#) (ASAP)

Vendor application process—Often you will have to be set up as a vendor within your buyer's system, and the process for this is highly variable. Ask your buyers about this process early on, as it may be simple and can happen with your first sale or it may have to be set up weeks in advance with involved paperwork, proof of certifications, or multiple levels of approval.

Invoicing—This can be as simple as a receipt book, but buyers will take you more seriously and can justify their purchases if you have a professional invoice.

Communication style—You will hear repeatedly that communication is key to successful relationships with your buyers. The first step in this is finding out their preferred contact method: call, email, text. Create a system to establish consistent communication, such as a weekly availability list and price sheet. Mimic the industry and find out what will fit best within each procurement system.

Delivery schedules—It is important to consider delivery in determining your capacity to serve a market. Is it worth your time if a buyer expects you to deliver weekly? What about daily? Is there

flexibility in the time of day you deliver? Does it conflict with or complement other deliveries? Is refrigeration necessary?

Post-harvest handling—This is one of the biggest factors that will affect the quality of your product and your reputation with your buyers, as well as one of the most common mistakes for farmers scaling up from direct markets. Do your homework as to the proper cooling, storage, washing, and packing required for each of your products as this can save you significant loss on returned or degraded product in addition to your reputation for a quality product with good shelf life. NC Growing Together offers a variety of helpful resources, including a guide to [Post-handling resources](#) (CEFS)



Packaging

Packaging will factor into your costs for any market, but the types of packaging that are standard and required will vary depending on the types of wholesale markets. In general:

- Check with your customers—ask to see examples
- Check with your local distributor
- Mimic the industry (e.g., ice broccoli)—understand the industry standards
- Look at standard products from box companies
- See [Produce Packaging Standards](#)
- See [Appalachian Grown branded materials](#)



Pricing

Your cost of production should be central to pricing your products. Record-keeping is key in determining this, and it will be different for every farm. The following are some of the costs that factor into your cost of production:

- Variable and fixed costs
- Soil amendments
- Pest management
- Labor
- Irrigation
- Machinery and equipment (repairs, fuel)
- Marketing
- Packaging
- Land



When determining which products are going to be profitable for your farm you may want to consider those that might be loss leaders (loses money, but stimulates sales of other products) and breaking even. Other market factors that influence the pricing of products include seasonal trends (weather in other areas), specialty versus commodity crops, and the promotional value for customers (will they pay more than the national market price for local or other values that may be important to them). Here are several resources you can reference to give you a baseline for general market pricing:

- NCDA&CS Marketing Division publishes [weekly product pricing reports](#) at Market Summaries
- Distributor price sheets (Mountain Food Products, Leading Green)
- Organic sources such as Agricultural Marketing Service, Maine Organic Farmers and Gardeners Association, Northeast Organic Farming Association of New Hampshire, Organic Farmers' Agency for Relationship Marketing (OFARM), and the Rodale Institute.



Wholesale Marketing

The demand for local is high and continues to grow. Labeling your product local and connecting it to your farm and story will appeal to consumers and increase demand for your product. This can also be a selling point for wholesale buyers who want to reach a broader customer base and meet consumer demand for authentically local products.



Point of purchase materials

Work with your wholesale accounts to label your products local and highlight your farm. This should accomplish their goal of meeting customer demand for local, while also differentiating your product and promoting your farm in the marketplace.

To get more detailed information about ASAP's Appalachian Grown Program, including a map of the region, how to use Appalachian Grown in your marketing, and the value of Appalachian Grown—read our [Appalachian Grown Marketing Guide](#).

Tips for finding buyers:

- Look at messaging and menus
- Follow food trends
- Use the *Wholesale Local Food Guide* at appalachiangrown.org
- Connect with ASAP
- Attend Grower-Buyer meetings at ASAP's Business of Farming Conference

Relationships are everything!

This applies to retail and wholesale.

- Know yourself, strengths and weaknesses
- Samples, samples, samples
- Communication is key:
 - be persistent
 - ask for feedback
 - be responsible with follow through
 - provide relevant updates about your products (e.g., let your buyer know if you don't have what they're expecting)

Summary Recommendations

Do your homework about what buyers are looking for (e.g., products, volume, delivery, certifications, packaging)

- Keep good documentation
- Ask questions
- Sell your story
- Be accessible



Tips for Buyers and Producers



Restaurant and Grocers Buying Local

1. Expect quality

Locally grown farm goods should meet or exceed your quality standards. But the word quality doesn't always mean the same thing to everyone. Freshness? Flavor? Uniformity? Visual perfection? Know what is important to you, and make your standards clear.

2. Make a commitment

It helps the farmer if you buy consistently while a product is in season. In fact, if you establish steady buying patterns, they may even adapt their growing practices to meet your needs.

3. Cultivate trust

Remember that it's all about the relationship. Remain flexible and patient.

4. Maintain communication

Establish a predictable routine for phone calls, orders, and questions, and give as much advance notice of your needs as you can. Do you prefer to call or be called?

5. Understand pricing

Local farms aren't a source for bargain-hunting; assume you'll pay a full, fair price for farm goods. Discuss pricing with farms to make sure

they are getting what they need for their product while also fitting your budget. Can you pay more for some products if a farm can come down on others?

6. Think seasonally

Sourcing what's fresh and in season will put more local foods on your menus and in your stores; your customers and area farmers will appreciate it. A seasonal produce availability chart is available from ASAP.

7. Pay promptly

Most farmers like to be paid either COD or in seven days. If terms are required, discuss them up front.

8. Clarify your requirements

If you have certain requirements for farmers, like GAP certification or liability insurance, be sure to let them know.

9. Learn more

Continue to seek out information about products that are available, and inspire your co-workers/staff to do the same. Visit the farms if you can, or visit area tailgate markets where many farmers sell.

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Farms Selling Wholesale

1. Be persistent

It may take several calls before you talk to the right person at the right time, while having the right product in hand. Don't be afraid to keep trying.

2. Sell your product

Arrange to visit buyers personally and take free samples. If you offer something special or unusual and know its uses, don't be afraid to offer advice.

3. Make a commitment

Businesses need a consistent product, so always work to meet buyer expectations when it comes to quantity and quality. If your product changes, call the buyer well in advance and give them the option to accept it or find another source.

4. Maintain communication

Share what's going on at the farm with your customers often, follow up on deliveries, find out buyers' needs, and ask them what is appreciated and what can be improved. It's all about the relationship.

5. Set a schedule

Most restaurants and other buyers have established delivery times, so you'll need to work within them. Know their busy times and plan your visits and calls accordingly.

6. Know your customers

Eat at restaurants and read their menus to see how products are used (many menus are also online). Shop at grocers to see how products are displayed and marketed.

7. Standardize billing

Prepare itemized invoices ahead; make sure your billing materials include your farm name and contact info. Some buyers are not set up for COD—flexibility with terms can offer more opportunities. Don't hesitate to notify buyers if they are past due.

8. Specialize and diversify

Make yourself unique. Offer something they can't get elsewhere, and you'll have your foot in the door for a long time.

9. Prep your produce

Buyers expect produce that is clean and ready to use. Doing the prep work could make the difference in gaining a repeat customer. Don't know how your customer wants produce prepped and packed? Ask them to see samples of what they like.



Branding and Marketing

IN THIS SECTION:

- Marketing Your Farm
- Storytelling Toolkit
- Press Releases: Guidelines and Template
- Photography Tips for the Farm
- A Social Media Guide for Farmers
- Developing Your Farm Brand
- Working with a Graphic Designer
- Making the Most of Your *Local Food Guide* Listing



Marketing Your Farm



For an online version of this publication, visit the resources section at asapconnections.org.

A good marketing plan is an essential element of a farming enterprise and should not be overlooked. Some would venture it ranks above production in importance, because a farm's profitability is greatly influenced by their ability to consistently sell product throughout the season for a good price. It can be tempting to start production without giving much thought to marketing or where product will be sold. However, planning for this in advance of harvest will help determine production levels and estimate income. Keep in mind that marketing is not simply about selling, but having a clear idea of who your customers are, what they want, and being able to deliver it to them for a profit.

A marketing plan for a farm should include promotion of your products as well as pricing, packaging, and distribution. It should also broadly define your customer or buyer, the values that drive their purchasing, and the most effective means of connecting with them.

If marketing is not your expertise try to identify others in your network to help. Many graphic designers are able to work with you on developing and implementing a marketing plan. ASAP's [Working with a Graphic Designer](#) resource can help you be prepared to make the best use of paid professional time.

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Market It Local

The demand for locally grown farm products continues to grow on both the national and local level and there is evidence that consumers will show preference for, and pay more for, local products if you communicate its value. Surveys of consumers in WNC indicate the top reasons people give for wanting to buy locally grown farm products:

- To support local economy/community
- To have a meaningful connection with the people growing their food
- To have knowledge and trustworthy information about how their food is being grown
- For the qualities they believe local food has, e.g., freshness, better flavor, more nutrition, better for the environment.

Understanding the motivations and values behind local purchases offer you insight into the most effective tools for marketing your farm and its products.

Tell your story—Customer want to get to know you and your far, as well as, how their food is grown. Make it personal, customers want to know the story behind their food. Not only will this build your customer base, but it will add value to your product. [ASAP's Storytelling Toolkit](#) is a great resource for helping you craft and communicate your farm story.

Develop a farm identity and logo—Think about branding as a necessity and an asset—customers need to be able to easily identify your farm. Consistent imagery and messaging is critical to helping people remember your business and associate it with the values that drive their purchasing. ASAP's [Developing Your Farm Brand](#) offers tools and resources to help you through this process.

Label it local—Local labeling is essential when selling wholesale or to a third party, but also important to attracting new customers and reminding existing supporters that they are helping sustain local farms. In some cases local labeling may be the only way a customer knows your products were grown or raised here in the region. ASAP's Appalachian Grown program and branded materials can help you highlight your farm as authentically local.

Once you have jumped into crafting your farm story and developing a farm brand, there are a number of ways to use these tools to market your farm. As with any marketing effort it will take some combination of time and money, so it's important to be strategic about how and where you focus your resources. The following section discusses how to target your efforts and best practices for promoting your farm.



Focus your Efforts

The biggest marketing mistake many businesses make is trying to reach everyone with their message. Consumers are swamped with promotional messages in daily life and the default reaction to most advertising is to ignore it. Customers need to see or hear your message repeatedly to start to take notice, so unless you have a huge marketing budget and a full time person working on marketing, it is important to be strategic about where you focus your resources.

Building connections and relationships with your customers is the best way to optimize the potential of local markets. To begin this customer engagement process try to learn more about the values and characteristics of your customers and target your efforts on people that share those values and may have similar interests. Who will your farm story resonate with? Which audiences share your values and will be willing to invest in your story? Are there customers that have commonalities in daily routines or buying habits? This narrow focus is called a market share. To add to your market share it can be helpful to create a “persona,” or an imaginary person, who reflects characteristics and values of your customers. Focusing your marketing efforts on this persona, and ways to reach them throughout their daily life, will also reach other people like them—therein targeting your marketing.

Sample Persona

Let’s consider a hypothetical customer named Amanda. Amanda lives in Yancey County and works at the local hospital. She is married with two children in elementary school and her interests include cooking, outdoor recreation, and healthy living. Based on this broad information alone, you can identify a number of potential ways to reach Amanda and other customers like her. You could sponsor youth sports events, so she sees your logo while her children play. You could buy radio ads during the time she drives her kids to school, so she hears your message while in the car. You could advertise in *Blue Ridge Outdoors*, a free magazine for people interested in getting back to nature. You could leave rack cards about your farm offerings in the break room at the hospital or the community center that offers exercise classes. Your goal is to reach your audience in the places they’re already looking. Create your own sample persona of a target customer and brainstorm a list of places or media that may already be part of their daily life.



Partnerships

While you are targeting the customers you want to connect with, also think about beneficial partners that may also be trying to reach the same audience. Is there another business that serves the same customer in a complementary way? For example, maybe there is a local baker offering cooking classes and you could promote the class to your CSA members. The baker could feature ingredients from your farm in the class and/or offer a coupon for participants to visit you at the market. Look for partners that may have complementary skill sets, and may be genuinely excited about working together. You may be social media savvy and a potential partner may have a broad newsletter list. Partnerships need to be equitable and mutually beneficial, but developing trusted partnerships can be an effective way to spend your marketing time and money.

Master Your Message

A clear description of your target audience and a compelling picture of how you want them to view your farm products will help you develop a good marketing message. Frame your message to illustrate the benefits of your products or services, focusing on what your business means to them, not what it means to you— then, keep your messaging clear and concise.

Stay Consistent

Elements such as logos and taglines will help you stay consistent and help your target audience learn to recognize your brand while developing loyalty for your products. While customers may say that they heard about your business “from a friend,” that reference is often the last step of a chain reinforced by consistent messaging on signs, products, and media.

Say It Again

Repetition is key to getting your message across. A marketing rule of thumb states that people need to hear or see the same message three to five times before they consider taking action. If you choose to purchase print advertising, for example, it’s usually better to buy four quarter-page ads than a single one-page ad. Your efforts may not bring immediate results, so be persistent with whatever approach you choose.



Images Matter

Words can be the least important part of a marketing effort. Striking images and logos are what first attract the eyes of customers and reinforce your message visually. Be prepared to invest ongoing time in your business’s visuals. ASAP’s [Photography Tips for the Farm](#) provides basic advice on getting good images from your farm, but consider investing in professional help if you lack the time or vision to do so yourself.

Build a List

It is significantly easier to sell more to an existing customer, or get a referral from them, than it is to find a new one. Once you connect with a customer, don’t take them for granted. Creating and building your customer list gives you the opportunity to continue to connect with the customers you already have. Keep mailing list signup sheets readily available wherever you sell your products and prominently display links to online signup forms on your website and social media. Use email and mailing addresses to strategically stay in touch with your customer base and keep your farm at the front of their minds. Services for online newsletters include MailChimp, MyNewsletterBuilder, and Constant Contact.

Customers need compelling reasons to sign up for newsletters or follow you on social media. Offer special sales or advanced invites. Customers are looking for ways to feel connected with area farms— give them the opportunity.

Be selective with your direct mailings—once per month is a good newsletter frequency. Each mailing should offer some real value to subscribers, such as a special coupon, an exclusive opportunity to visit the farm, or a great recipe featuring your products. Make sure that your subscribers have opted into receiving your communications and that you provide an easy way to unsubscribe.

Where to Share

No matter where you share your story, it is important to focus on the quality of your presentation. While the authenticity of your voice is an asset, make sure it has a professional look. Investing in quality materials and implementing a few of these best practices will make sure it gets heard in the competitive media environment.

Print Materials

A few professionally produced print materials are often the best place for farms to start with marketing. Rack cards, flyers or business cards can be given to customers or strategically placed in locations your customers are likely to frequent. For example, health-conscious customers might spend time at area gyms or yoga studios, many of which have community bulletin boards. Those interested in organic growing practices might visit local co-ops or natural food stores, while people interested in local crafts might visit galleries and museums.

Unlike many other forms of communication, print advertisements are persistent—a reader will see an ad in a magazine or newspaper every time he or she flips through the pages. Because print ads can also be more expensive than other media, it's important to research publications thoroughly before committing to a purchase. Regional magazines and local newspapers exist for very specific interests, and their advertising rates are often less than mass market publications.

Earned Media

Earned media refers to press you don't have to pay for—the stories, articles, and interviews about your business that appear as content in news sources. These mentions are extremely valuable—they carry the authority of a trusted media source and give you the chance to tell your story in more detail. While earned media can be difficult to obtain, read more about steps to boost your chances in ASAP's [Storytelling Toolkit](#).

Press releases are the primary way to tell contacts in the media about news from your business. These short documents share the key facts of your news and should entice journalists and reporters to learn more. ASAP has created a simple resource, [Press Releases](#), that including guidelines and a template. You can also take more direct routes to earned media by writing your own letters to the editor and op-ed pieces about topics relevant to farming in the area.

Social Media

Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, Pinterest, Snapchat—"social media" is the collective term for these websites and applications. Unlike traditional media, where a single author or organization talks to a passive audience, social media serves as a place for public conversations between many users. ASAP's [Social Media Guide](#) provides a comprehensive overview of how farm businesses can best take advantage of these platforms.

The most important thing to remember about social media is that your business shares the same space as your customers' friends. Whatever you do must compete with the daily activities and interests of those personal networks. Instead of simply promoting your business, your goal on social media should be to build relationships and community, participating in conversations and sharing your status.

Many social media professionals recommend the 80-20 rule when posting: roughly 80% of your content should entertain or educate your customers, while only 20% or so should directly market your business. Applied to a farm, that 80% could include recipes for seasonal produce, attractive pictures, and short "day in the life" stories. The 20% of marketing content could include your presence at local farmers markets, CSA share availability, and new partnerships with restaurants or groceries.

Remember why people want to connect with your farm. This is a chance to help customers share in the story of your farm and the cycles of the seasons. Customers seeking out local food and farms are looking for authenticity, transparency, and the stories behind where their food comes from. Posts that offer insight into your growing practices, the amount of work that goes into farming, or a peek into your farm story are going to be engaging.

Conclusion

While marketing is often seen as just one more thing demanding your time and money, it is a critical piece of building and maintaining your farm business. Being strategic about your efforts and making a marketing plan will help you be as efficient as possible. Here are a few pieces to remember to include in your plan:

Spend some money—Invest in having a nice looking and consistent web presence and print materials, and/or regular ad placements.

Spend some time—Explore earned and social media, build a list, build on existing relationships.

Repetition—Try to reach the same person 3-5 times with a consistent message.

Be patient—This type of marketing is relationship-based and will take time to grow. Don't just try something once.

Remember your current customers—It is easier to increase sales to current customers than find new ones, so think about ways to build on existing relationships as well as create new ones.

ASAP offers one-on-one marketing support for farms in the Appalachian Grown region. For feedback or suggestions on your marketing plan contact ASAP by calling (828) 236-1282.

Asap

Local Food
Strong Farms
Healthy Communities

Storytelling Toolkit



Why Storytelling Matters

Good stories evoke an emotional response, create imagery, and build connections with their audiences. A couple of sentences can create a sense of place, capture a region's heritage, and draw the listener in to hear more. Authentic stories and opportunities to engage with them are what differentiate local food and farms.

Pam Zimmerman and her family operate a u-pick berry farm in Madison County, but their farm story goes much deeper than offering raspberry picking with beautiful mountain views. Like many farms in Madison County their story starts with tobacco, a crop that offered stability for family farms and brought community together until the late '90s. It was a combination of factors that led to the loss of tobacco as a profitable crop—the ending of government price subsidies, increased need for chemicals to combat disease, and the lack of field labor available. Looking for new options for their farm the Zimmermans took a risk in shifting their farm to u-pick. Would customers drive the long winding roads to find their farm?

It is their leap of faith into a new farm enterprise, seeking to sustain a new generation on the farm, that captures the risks and challenges farmers face. It is their commitment to sustaining their family farm that offers new ways to build community.



"My parents tell a story about me being two months old, lying in a crib in the corner, while they were handling tobacco. So I guess you could say I've been a tobacco farmer most of my life."

—Pam Zimmerman

For an online version of this publication, with live links, visit the resources section at asapconnections.org.

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Written and compiled by Daniel Walton, ASAP Fellow and ASAP staff with expertise from Hickory Nut Gap Farm, 12Twelve Marketing, CAKE Websites and More, and the farmers who shared their stories. For more resources visit the resources section at asapconnections.org.

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Connect with Customers

Stories influence how we decide. Our decisions and actions are often based more on emotional reactions than rational thought. Stories are an opportunity to connect with consumers through emotion and/or humor, establishing your farm in their memories while building a sense of connection and inspiring ongoing commitment. When customers connect with you through stories, they become invested in your success.

Sharing the stories of your farm is a way to engage new or potential customers, but it's also a way to build and maintain connections with your existing ones. Businesses generally make 80 percent of their sales to 20 percent of their customers. That 20 percent are the people you have successfully engaged in your story.

Share Your Value

Storytelling also gives you the chance to distinguish your farm business from the food choices typically available to customers and make connections with their core values. Whether you highlight your choice of growing practices, family legacy on the farm, or reasons for farming in the first place, sharing your story is a way to communicate the values your customers support. These values differentiate your products and build customer commitment.

Research shows that many customers care deeply about supporting local and sustainable agriculture. For example, 56 percent of respondents to a 2016 survey by *The Packer*, a produce trade magazine, said they felt strongly about keeping their food dollars within their own communities. ASAP's own research finds that three-quarters of buyers are willing to pay more for local food. According to the Hartman Group, a marketing think tank, food has become a cultural product, and local food is a way for consumers to connect with their regional culture.

Progressive Grocer, an industry trade publication, found that modern customers look for product attributes important to their lifestyles and beliefs—elements such as produce origins, freshness, and health qualities. Understanding the values that drive customers to seek out your products is critical to both finding new customers and building loyal ones. But to capture this value, you have to sell your story alongside your products.

Change the Food System

By sharing the story of your farm business, you contribute to changing the larger narrative about what the food system should look like. The values you care about, such as land stewardship, food safety and nutrition, and opportunities for future generations, come through when you talk about your work. When consumers connect with these stories, they start caring about those values as well, increasing demand for local, sustainable food as the “new normal”—and that rising tide benefits everyone.



Aimee Ellingsen, co-owner of *CAKE Websites and More*, didn't remember the name of the farm from which she'd just bought a basket of fresh vegetables. She wasn't quite sure if she even correctly recalled the names of the friendly farmers behind the market stand. But she knew she wanted to be a **repeat customer** and learn more about their farm, all because of a short conversation.

“The first time I bought veggies from Julie and Carl Mansfield of Mountain Harvest Organics, they told me they supported their ‘farming habit’ by doing computer programming in the offseason,” says Aimee. “I thought, ‘Wow, these people really love farming if they choose to sacrifice all the money they could make programming to grow beautiful veggies.’ Ten years later, I am still a regular customer of theirs.”

Many customers don't know that farmers often work off-farm jobs to make their financial numbers work. While the romantic ideal of leaving an office job to operate a farm is enticing, there's often a lot more to a farmer's life. Being part of the tech world herself, Aimee formed an immediate connection with Julie and Carl's **story**. Their narrative made *Mountain Harvest Organics* stand out from other businesses in Aimee's mind, and it gave her an emotional reason to learn more about their farm and continue supporting the farmers at market.

As Aimee's experience shows, **customers are drawn to compelling, relatable stories** that spark their interest.



"The reason that we grow the way we do is so I can open my front door and my kids can go out and eat anything they want. Small farmers live where they're growing, and we're going to be here. We want to pass this land onto our kids."

—Anna Littman, Ivy Creek Family Farm



"I can get up on these hills and sit down and wonder what my grandfathers and mothers and great-grandfathers and mothers and great-greats on back were seeing when they were working on this farm. You can't beat the lifestyle, and you can't beat the heritage, and you can't beat the training."

—Doug Harrell, Harrell Hill Farm



"We've been able to pass down education and wisdom generation to generation. It instills a great work ethic in the kids. Children get to see what their parents do. Young farmers will struggle financially, and the kids get see that. It helps them value the importance of money right now."

—Tony Nesbitt, Cane Creek Valley Farm

Crafting Your Farm Story

What makes a good story? How can you tell your story in an authentic and engaging way? The following section walks you through the process of developing a strong narrative. You'll identify the basic elements of your story, see examples of how to put those elements together, and learn some best practices for sharing your results.

The Building Blocks of Stories

Your farm story is made from the same elements as the stories you see every day in magazine articles, books, and movies. Like those narratives, yours has characters, a setting in space and time, and a plot arc from beginning to end. ASAP's storytelling template can help you recognize these foundational elements in the history of your business. Consider following along with that document as you read through the next section. The story of Hickory Nut Gap Farm will be used as an example to illustrate each of the parts on the template.

The Hero

Every story has a protagonist—the explorer who crosses oceans, the dog who finds the way home, the doctor who finds the cure. This central character is the focus of the story's action and moves the plot along. In a farm story, this hero is often you as the farmer, but you can also take a wider focus. If you run a tight-knit family operation, you might want to present your entire family as heroes, or you may personify your farm itself if the land has a particularly interesting history. In any case, the reader wants to know who you are and what your connection is with your farm.

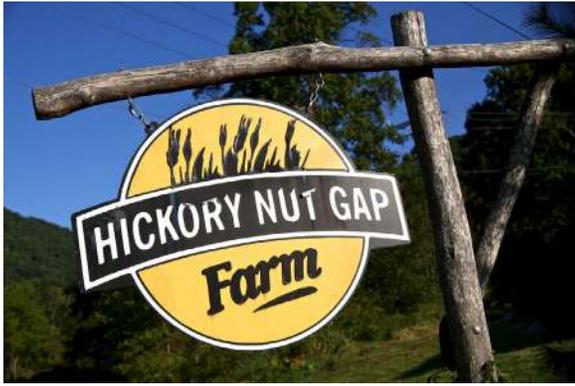
In the case of Hickory Nut Gap Farm, the heroes are Jamie and Amy Ager. Jamie is a fourth-generation farmer at Hickory Nut Gap, while Amy comes from a farming background in Kentucky. The two met during their studies at Warren Wilson College, got married, and decided to work together to revitalize Jamie's family farm.



JAMIE + AMY AGER

It all began in chemistry class with Jamie who claimed needing help with his homework, ahem, and Amy, the detail oriented student who understood the expectations of the professor. A study group thus formed and so did the relationship between the two owners of Hickory Nut Gap Farm and Hickory Nut Gap Meats, 15 years ago at Warren Wilson College in Swannanoa, NC.

Read more at
hickorynutgapfarm.com/our-story/jamie-amy-ager/



The Vision

The hero of a story is driven by his or her goal, whether that be discovering a new continent, finding the way home, or curing a disease. **In a farm story, this goal often involves your personal values.** For example, you may be farming to preserve your family farm, build a

sustainable business, do something more personally meaningful than your first career, or create a lifestyle for your children.

Hickory Nut Gap's vision stemmed from the grassfed beef production system Jamie and Amy Ager learned as students at Warren Wilson College. Jamie was particularly inspired by Joel Salatin and his innovative approach to raising ecologically sustainable, high-quality meat products. The two wanted to produce better beef in a way that was better for the environment.



The Barrier

Opposing the main character in every story is a barrier, something that stands between the hero and his or her goal. In fiction, that barrier is often a villain—think Darth Vader in *Star Wars* or Maleficent in *Sleeping Beauty*. But in a farm story, the barrier is more often a situation than a person. Any farming challenge can be a barrier, including land access, lack of markets, severe weather events, or loss of crops or animals. Obstacles can also be personal, such as illness or injury, the loss of a family member, the need to balance farming with parenthood, or the challenge of learning a new skill.

With Jamie and Amy Ager, one of the biggest barriers was the lack of a market for Hickory Nut Gap's premium grassfed beef. They knew that they wanted to sell a quality, responsible product, but when they began running the farm in 2000, large-scale demand for their products didn't exist in Western North Carolina.



HISTORY OF HICKORY NUT GAP FARM

Hickory Nut Gap—where the highway crosses the Buncombe and Henderson County line, and the rain settles on the Continental Divide, tracking east towards the Atlantic or west to the Gulf—has always been an important gateway across the Blue Ridge.

The modern history of Hickory Nut Gap Farm began in 1916, with the arrival of Jim and Elizabeth McClure. Newly married and still on their honeymoon, they fell in love with the old Sherrill's Inn and the surrounding farm. Elizabeth devoted herself to restoring the old inn and its landscaping. On April 30th, 1918 Jim held the first official meeting of the Hickory Nut Gap Farm Company. Wading into farm work, Jim learned firsthand about the many difficulties of mountain agriculture. We are now five generations of McClure descendants on this land.

Read more at www.hickorynutgapfarm.com/our_story/history/



“What’s incredible about being able to save even a few varieties a year is that you’re really tapping into this global pulse among farmers of heritage, of seed preservation. Genetic preservation happens all over the world and is woven into the fabric of rural farming communities.”

–Holly Whitesides, *Against the Grain Farm*



At Flourish Flower Farm in Candler, Niki Irving bends down to harvest more flowers. As she fills her bucket, she talks about what she wants the bouquets mean to the people who receive them. “I think it feeds people in a different way,” Niki says. “Obviously, everyone has to eat, but flowers just kind of feed your soul.”



Stephanie Boxberger of Stoney Hollow Farm in Graham County, North Carolina, welcomes the public to her farm six days a week. It’s a u-pick farm where visitors can pick their own berries, peaches, plums, and vegetables like snow peas. “We just enjoy showing people how and where things are growing,” Stephanie says. “We love to see families come out and spend time together doing an activity that everyone can enjoy.”

The Resolution

Over the course of the story, the hero acts to remove or overcome the barrier that blocks his or her vision. An aspiring chef, for example, might train for years at top restaurants; a scientist could conduct research on a disease; and an explorer could climb a mountain. As a farmer, your resolution could include banding together with family, raising funds for land, waking up before the dawn to care for livestock, or partnering with chefs to create consistent demand for your products.

Jamie and Amy Ager spent their early years at Hickory Nut Gap putting in long hours at farmers markets, educating customers and chefs to raise awareness about their production methods. They also engaged Jamie’s family in the discussion about placing the farm under a conservation easement, which supported their vision for the land while also allowing them to plan their business for the long term.



The Moral

Why does this story matter? Good narratives give the audience something to take away into everyday life; think “slow and steady wins the race” from the fable of the tortoise and the hare. The moral of a farm story might be the value of community support, preserving agricultural heritage and farmland, or supporting sustainable growing practices. This conclusion tells the audience again that your values are important and worthwhile.

For Hickory Nut Gap, the moral is that hard work and persistence do pay off. By building relationships with customers and other buyers, Jamie and Amy Ager created a market for their products. They were able to greatly expand their operation and become one of the region’s leading suppliers of grassfed beef, all while staying true to their ideals of environmental and animal welfare.

Putting It All Together

There are often many smaller stories that make up your overarching farm story. Take some time to experiment with different angles or perspectives, knowing that your story is ever-changing and doesn't have to be the same for every audience. Once you've established the basics of your farm story, you need to combine those elements into a cohesive whole. Each story is unique, and writing your narrative requires a personal touch. However, a few common guidelines can make your writing more powerful and engaging for your audience.

Keep people at the focus

Even if you choose to make your farm the hero of your story, make sure you tell the tale through the people who have lived and worked on the land. Humans are inherently social, and it's easier to empathize and connect with another person than with animals or objects. Provide physical description where appropriate so your audience can better imagine the action, and include names for as many characters as you can.

Make the goals clear

Characters don't take on life until they've expressed their desires—their reasons for being in the story. Introduce those goals, such as owning your own land or getting your product on market shelves, as soon as you can so your audience can begin connecting with the plot.

Establish the setting

Offer your audience connection and context by giving details about when and where your story takes place. This is especially important for local farm stories: the setting is literally your audience's backyard, so they are more likely to understand and relate with the narrative. The setting can also include a point in time, perhaps beginning with your great-grandparents or the widespread sell-off of family farms in the 1980s.

Use your own voice

This is your farm story—own it! Write in the type of language you normally speak in, and consider including direct quotes from key characters (including yourself). Your audience will appreciate authenticity more than flowery language.

Offer a visual

Give concrete examples wherever possible to illustrate your story. To relate how excited your customers were for your return to a farmers market, for example, don't just say they were excited—tell your audience about the wide smiles, the lengthy line, and the "Sold Out" sign you had to put up before the end of the day.

Prepare different versions

You may not always have time or space to tell your full farm story. Be mindful of those limitations and have shorter versions of your narrative at the ready. By focusing on the key points, you can make the most out of a thirty-second discussion at the farmers market, a social media post, or a character-limited profile in the *Local Food Guide*. You can also offer short stories that illustrate particular values. Describing how you warmed a weak baby calf by your wood stove, for example, would show your commitment to healthy, humanely raised animals.



After hearing about the long reentry intervals (how long until it is safe to reenter an orchard after spraying) for some agricultural chemicals, Gary McCurry of Fox Gap Farm decided to explore certified organic practices for his apples. "I want my grandchildren to be able to play in these orchards," Gary says.



About 15 years ago, Dawn and Bobby Creasman stopped selling apples to processors and started selling directly to consumers. They planted about a dozen new apple varieties, not knowing which ones would be popular with the public. It can take three to five years for apple trees to mature before their first harvest, so choosing the wrong variety one spring can mean years of headaches.



Sara Jane and Jamie Davis of A Way of Life Farm lost their tomato crop after they applied compost that had been contaminated with herbicides. "With a small farm like ours, there's not just another empty field to till up somewhere and plant," says Sara Jane. "Fortunately, Jamie and I are both known to be stubborn. We're certainly not going anywhere, and our farm will make it through this."

Sharing Your Farm Story

Once you have crafted and developed your farm story, there are a number of ways to tell it. From short blurbs on social media to lengthy articles in the press, each medium requires a different approach. The section below discusses a few common avenues for communication and ways to think about incorporating your story into them.

Print Materials

Printing your own materials, such as flyers, brochures, and rack cards, can be a good way to spread your farm's story in places where you wouldn't otherwise have a presence. These pieces can go on community bulletin boards or brochure displays to be a persistent reminder of you and your farm.

Due to the limited space of these materials, you need to compress your story to its key elements for your readers. Focus on your vision, the values that distinguish your farm from others, and give a bit of detail about your history to establish your credibility. Bullet points are often useful for quickly getting that information across to busy readers. Your goal is not to share your entire story, but instead to spark interest that will lead people to seek out more details.

Earned Media

"Earned media" refers to the stories, articles, and interviews about your business that appear as content in news sources. These mentions are extremely valuable—they carry the authority of a trusted media source and give you the chance to tell your story in more detail. News organizations are always looking for compelling stories, so a strong narrative is a great first step for gaining media coverage.

Press Kit

The media is a deadline-driven industry, so once a reporter contacts you, you should respond as quickly as possible. A press kit is a prepared collection of resources about your farm that you can send reporters to give them useful background information. The easier you can make their job, the more likely they will include you in their piece and call on you in the future as a source.

Press kits often include a fact sheet about your business, a short biography of the lead farmer, a collection of previous media mentions, and low-resolution images. A fact sheet is usually a simple list of key information such as contact details, farm size, and products offered. The biography, however, is a great place to describe the central character of your story. In roughly one page, provide background on who you are, why you farm, and what obstacles you've overcome. You'll generate the human interest on which many journalists thrive.

The National Sustainable Agriculture Coalition provides excellent [templates](#) and advice for assembling a press kit. Check out their website for guidance on fact sheets, biographies, and much more.

Social Media

Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, Pinterest, Snapchat—“social media” is the collective term for these websites and applications. Unlike traditional media, where a single author or organization talks to a passive audience, social media serves as a place for public conversations between many users. ASAP’s [Social Media Guide](#) provides a comprehensive overview of how farm businesses can best take advantage of these platforms.

The most important thing to remember about social media is that your farm shares the same space as your customers’ friends. Whatever you do must compete with the daily activities and interests of those personal networks. Instead of simply promoting your business, your goal on social media should be to build a community and participate in conversations.

What to Post

Remember why people want to connect with your farm. Your customers are looking for authenticity, transparency, and the stories behind where their food comes from. Because social media should be updated frequently, it’s an excellent place to share unfolding stories, such as your season-long efforts to grow a new crop or raise new buildings. You don’t need to give all of the information at once—spread it out over time to keep your audience engaged and give them a chance to comment on the news.

Keep It Visual

Social media posts with pictures generally create far more interest than those without. That makes social media a particularly good avenue for stories grounded in concrete details—think raising baby livestock, harvesting baskets of new produce, or putting up hoop houses for seasonal extension. ASAP’s [Photography Tips](#) provides basic advice on getting good images from your farm, but consider investing in professional help if you lack the time or vision to do so yourself.

Practice Sharing Your Story

Know that practice makes perfect when it comes to sharing your farm story. Over time, you’ll develop a version that’s true to you and your farm. Try sharing your story with customers at your tailgate market booth or on a farm tour, tell it to your friends, or run it by ASAP. The more you share your story, the more it will evolve into something that feels right for you and resonates with your community.

A good story draws people into your world. It’s your chance to spread the passion that brought you to farming, recognize the obstacles you’ve faced, and celebrate the successes you’ve made along the way. When customers truly connect with your story, they’ll want to hear it continue into the future. You can create strong emotional commitments to the success of your farm business and the entire local food movement.



Flying Cloud Farm

May 24 at 4:47pm

Honeybees have been a big time in the poppies in between the showers today. We save seeds every year for the poppies that my great-grandmother grew in her garden in Fairview 100 years ago. I think she brought them from Brittany in France before World War I. They self-seed well, but we always plant them in the fall to make sure we have them. Although the flowers don’t last in bouquets, the green pods are awesome in arrangements and wreaths. And they make the bees and folks driving down the road very happy.



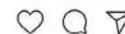
Like

Comment

Share

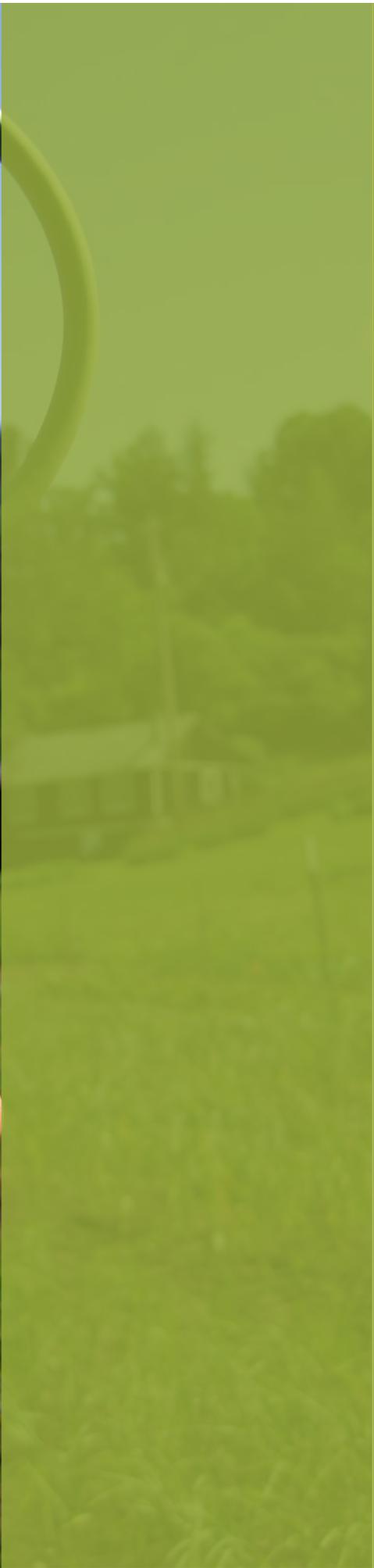


Photo



Liked by [gainesground](#), [wildwoodfox](#) and 511 others
[papercrane](#) My crew. These awesome ladies keep things moving along on the farm and motivate me each day. One loves horses, one loves butterflies, I love them. #tbt to when we put the brassicas in the ground. Can't thank y'all enough [@oldlikedirt](#) & [@ericakrizen!](#) 📷 by [@west_ashe](#)





Press Releases: Guidelines and Template

What is a press release?

A press release is a short written piece that communicates information about a specific event, circumstance, or happening related to your organization.

Why should I write a press release?

A press release can entice the media to repeat or expand on your organization's news. Journalists may use the press release as-is to write a short article, or they may follow up with you to get more details and write a longer piece. This can greatly expand the reach of your news and expose your organization to many more customers.

How do you write a press release?

ASAP's Press Release Template on the next page offers specific guidance on writing a press release. Generally speaking, you want to give the most relevant details about your news as concisely as possible, include quotes that could appear in a journalist's story, and provide contact details so readers can learn more.

When should I write a press release?

A press release should announce a major event or change in your organization. Examples include a new business partnership, change to product offerings, upcoming public tour, or community project.

Where should I send my press release?

You can send your press release directly to local newspapers, magazines or directly to journalists, and bloggers. The websites of most news organizations will have contact information for their editors or reporters. Because these people often receive dozens of press releases on a daily basis, it's important to write a concise, eye-catching headline for your press release. If your release is not time-sensitive, consider sending it by regular mail instead of email to stand out from the crowd.

Many websites offer free or paid listings of press releases. Free sites may limit the length of your release or prevent you from attaching pictures, while paid sites often send your release to media outlets for you. The best free sites include PRLog.com, PR.com, and PR-Inside.com. The best paid sites include PR Newswire, PR Web, and BusinessWire.com. Expect to pay roughly \$150-\$250 for good distribution at a paid site.

September 2017

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Press Release Template

Farm Business name
Farm Business address
Farm Business phone number
Farm Business website (hyperlink)

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE: Date

MEDIA CONTACT: Your name, phone number, [email \(hyperlink\)](#)

[Headline featuring Farm Business name and news]

Your city, state — [Lede paragraph] The first paragraph of a press release, known as the lede, should quickly answer the big questions about your news. By the end of the lede, your reader should know the WHO, WHAT, WHEN, WHERE, WHY, and HOW of the story. Keep this paragraph short, roughly 30–40 words.

[Second paragraph] The second paragraph should provide more specific details about your news. Give context about why the news should be important to your audience or how the news will impact your organization. Again, keep your phrasing as concise as possible.

[Third paragraph/quote] The third paragraph often includes a quote from someone impacted by the news. Consider quoting a leader in your organization or a customer who is excited by your news. Journalists need quotes to turn a press release into a story, so include one or several throughout the press release.

[Fourth and following paragraphs] The rest of the press release can provide background on the news or your farm business. You should include all necessary information as soon as possible in the release, but these later paragraphs can give the reader more context or talk about future plans. Keep your press release to one page and the total word count to roughly 250–300 words.

[Information about photo availability] Tell the reader if you have photographs available to illustrate your news. If you do, provide the contact information for obtaining those photos.

ABOUT [your farm business]

[Section text] This section should be a short (35–50 words) description of your organization and its mission. Include your website and phone number again.

###

End all press releases with three hash marks (###) to follow journalistic convention.

Feel free to copy, modify, and otherwise use this template to send out press releases.

Photography Tips for the Farm



Pictures of farm life, products, new beginnings, and the change of seasons are useful images to promote your farm business. From the documentation of a crop to a beautiful sunset, your camera is an indispensable tool. Taking pictures should be considered part of your farm work.

Equipment: Keep it simple and easy—utilize the equipment you already have. You can get great pictures with a smartphone or digital camera. Keep your camera setting at a high quality so images will be large enough to print as well as post on social media.

Keep your camera handy: Photo opportunities often come when you least expect them. If you carry your smartphone or camera, you are always ready for the shot.

Take lots of photos: The more photographs you take, the better the chance you'll get a great one. Change your position, angle, and orientation for variation.

Make a shot list: Make a point to photograph all of the varieties you produce at their peak. Set up shots to show off your bounty. Take pictures of the landscape, animals, people working, and events at your farm.

Communicate with photography: Photographs tell stories and are a great way to connect with customers on social media and to keep your website fresh.

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Composition

Chance doesn't always hand you the best shot. Arranging your subjects, changing your perspective, or placing the subject at the side of the frame creates a more dynamic composition. Off-center subjects can be balanced on the opposite side of the frame with leading lines, shadows, and objects in the foreground or background.

Leading Lines

Natural lines can strengthen composition by leading the viewer's eyes toward your subject. Diagonal lines can add energy. Curved lines can add soft elegance. Using a road or path can add depth.

Framing

Framing your subject with elements in the foreground can add scale and depth to pictures. Overhanging tree branches, doorways, or anything that covers at least two sides of the photo can give a three-dimensional effect that invites viewers into the image.

Perspective

Eye level is great for a lot of shots, but experiment with different angles. Get above or below your subject's eye level. This will help give the photo a more personal and inviting feeling.



Exposure

Always give consideration to how your subject is lit. Without light, you'll lose detail and clarity in your image. Watch the light and use it to enhance your composition. The soft, even lighting of cloudy days is great for people pictures. Morning or evening light is superior and cast nice hues on your subjects. Generally keep the sun at your back but be aware of shadows especially on faces.

Black & White

Removing color can add impact by eliminating competing colors. Backlighting and using silhouettes in your photo can add contrast, and make it more interesting. Converting a photo to black and white can also save a poorly-exposed or grainy image.



Background

Be aware of your background. Change your position to eliminate unimportant elements and background clutter that can be distracting.

Zoom in or Crop Later

Zooming in on the subject or cropping and image later can improve the composition, focus the viewers attention, and show nice details in your photo.



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A Social Media Guide for Farmers



What is social media?

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How does social media benefit my business?

Of all adults in the US, 68 percent use Facebook, and 66 percent of those users visit the site every day. A third of all US adults use sites such as Instagram and Pinterest. Among millennials, over 90 percent regularly use social media. Simply put, the people who will buy from you spend a lot of time looking at social media. You should make sure your business is in front of their eyes.

How do I use it?

The most important thing to remember about social media is that your business shares the same space as your customers’ friends. Whatever you do must compete with the daily activities and interests of those personal networks. Instead of simply promoting your business, your goal on social media should be to build a community and participate in conversations. People enjoy learning about the day-to-day stories and interests of your business much more than they enjoy advertising. This neighborly approach will make your business more familiar to potential customers, create good feelings about your brand, and ultimately lead to greater sales.

Asap
Local Food
Strong Farms
Healthy Communities

November 2017

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Choosing Social Media

What platforms are right for my business?

When choosing the platforms for your business's social media marketing, you should have two main concerns in mind. First, who are your customers? Different sites tend to attract different demographics of users in terms of age, gender, and location. Second, how much effort will you be able to spend on social media? If you lack the time or resources to regularly update multiple sites with high-quality photos and videos, consider sticking to a single, simpler platform. The following sections describe the most popular social media sites and what roles they can play in your marketing.

Facebook

If you only have time for one social media platform, make it Facebook. As the world's most popular social media site, Facebook attracts the widest range of users; you're sure to connect with a large proportion of your customer base. Facebook allows you to maintain a detailed business profile, post a wide variety of content types, and create highly specific advertising to reach new buyers.

Instagram

Instagram is the premier social media site for sharing photos and other visual content. If your business has a lot of visually appealing products such as livestock, diverse produce, or fresh flowers, or if you have time to take pictures of your work in action, Instagram can be a great way to build excitement. Instagram users tend to be younger and more urban than those of other social media sites.

YouTube

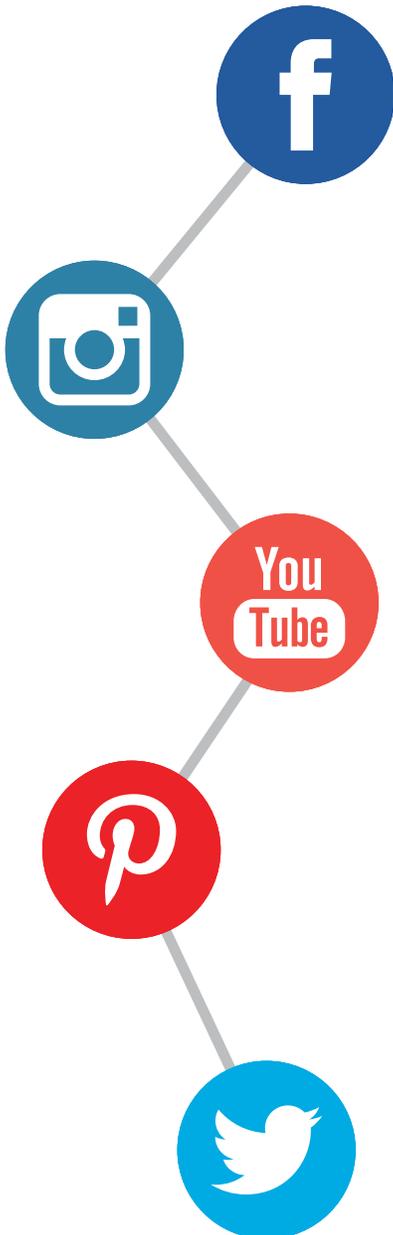
YouTube is the best place to share quality videos of your business. The emphasis here is on quality; if you don't have the time or resources to craft professional-looking content, you may want to avoid posting on YouTube. However, an investment in good video can yield big rewards, as amusing or interesting YouTube content is often shared widely over other social media platforms.

Pinterest

Pinterest focuses on collections of labeled photographs, known individually as pins. As with Instagram, businesses with lots of visually appealing products can attract lots of interest on this platform. Advice in visual form, such as cooking or baking recipes and infographics on farming practices, can also do well. Pinterest users tend to skew more female than those of other social media sites.

Twitter

Twitter allows users to quickly post short updates, known as tweets, that are often marked with hashtags to join with broader conversations. Because the average lifespan (time seen after posting) of a tweet is only 14 minutes, Twitter is most suited to businesses that can post multiple times throughout the day. Twitter's users skew more male and educated than those of other social media sites. Twitter is also particularly popular among media workers and journalists, which makes it useful for businesses that regularly generate interesting news.



Starting a Social Media Profile

What do I need to get started?

Regardless of which social media platforms you choose to use, you'll want to do some preparation before establishing your profile. First, write out a description of your target audience—who are they, where do they live, what do they like, how do they interact with you? This audience analysis will help you think about how best to fit in with your customers' online lives. Second, create a schedule for when to publish content. Consistency is crucial for making your customers feel like you're a part of their community. Third, determine who in your business will be responsible for running your social media. Make sure that person understands your audience, the social media platforms you choose to use, and the regular schedule for posting content on your pages.

Profile creation checklist

The following checklist outlines the must-have content you'll need to establish a Facebook profile. You can use the same content for many other social media sites, so consider following this checklist even if you decide not to use Facebook. Note that if you establish multiple social media profiles, you should use the same branding (images and description) across all of them.

□ Cover image

This is the featured at the top of your profile and is your audience's first impression upon arriving at your page. Choose an image that represents your brand, such as a landscape of your farm or a shot of people enjoying your products. Consider overlaying your business's slogan or tagline on top of the photo for extra placement of your main message. After you upload this image, make sure you click on it to add a description with a link to your website.

□ Profile photo

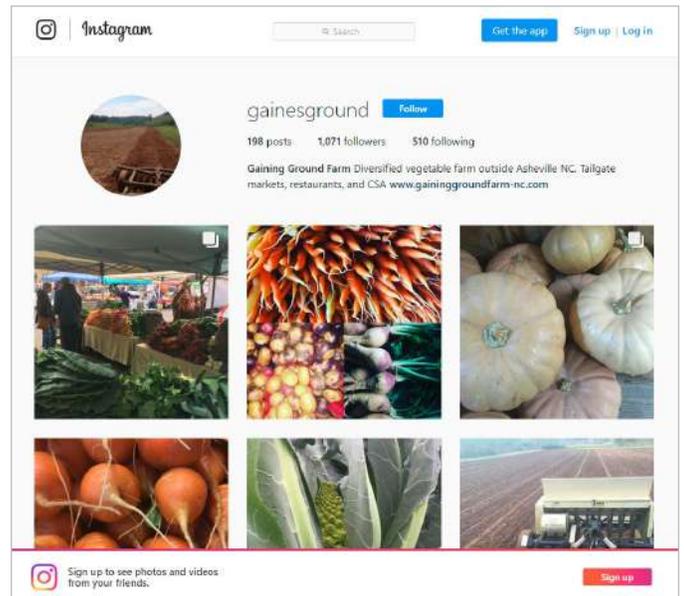
Your profile image appears in the upper left corner of your page and is included next to every post or comment you make. Because your profile photo is used at different sizes throughout Facebook, make sure you upload an easily recognizable image, such as your logo, in this slot.

□ About section

The About section includes your page's category, description, address, hours, products, and contact information. Fill out every available field so interested customers can learn as much as possible about your business.

□ Page roles

Page roles, located under Settings on the upper right of your Facebook page, allows you to assign people to perform specific tasks on your page. By default, you will be the admin of the page once you create it and have full access to all of its functions. If other employees at your business will be handling social media, it's best to add them as editors.



profile photo

cover image



Creating a business page

Business accounts are preferable because you have access to insights, which provide analytics and reports about the visitors to your social media sites. To make a Facebook page for your farm business you must first have a personal account. Create a page for your farm or business, and select the business type. In Instagram you can convert your current profile into a business account in settings.

Running a Social Media Profile



Social media calendar

Social media is a marathon, not a sprint: its benefits accumulate over time as you build a base of followers for your business. Therefore, you should plan for the long term using a social media calendar. By keeping tabs on what and when you plan to post, you'll ensure the right balance of promotional and informational content. You'll also ensure you have room in your schedule to promote crucial events such as new product launches or market openings.

Simple calendar tools such as Google Calendar can make months of social content visible at a glance. If you also use a digital calendar for your business's events, you can easily match social postings to that activity. Scheduling content around holidays often helps boost engagement, and lists of lesser-known holidays can give you more ideas. For example, National Siblings Day, National Farmers Markets Day, and National Puppy Day all have their own place on the calendar.

Scheduling posts

Social media tools are available to schedule your posts in advance, making it more convenient to deliver content at the right time. Facebook's Publishing Tools offers a Scheduled Posts tab that allows you to create posts weeks or months in advance of publication. Twitter's TweetDeck also allows you to generate content on your own time. If you plan to use multiple social media platforms, consider using Hootsuite, which lets you see and manage all of your social profiles in a single location.

What should I post?

Remember that your social media presence exists in the same place as your customers' friends and family. Your content is competing for attention with baby pictures, breaking news, and travel stories—if you spend all your time advertising your products and services, your customers will tune you out or stop following your page. Because social media sites show users more content from people and pages with which they are actively involved, you want your posts to attract as many likes, shares, and comments as possible.

To that end, many social media professionals recommend the 80-20 rule: roughly 80% of your content should entertain or educate your customers, while only 20% or so should directly market your business. Applied to a farm, that 80% could include recipes for seasonal produce, attractive pictures of your fields and livestock, short "day in the life" stories or images, announcements of local food events, videos discussing your farming process, and planting advice for home gardeners. The 20% of marketing content could include your presence at local farmers markets, CSA share availability, new partnerships with restaurants or groceries, and farm tour or event announcements.

Remember why people want to connect with your farm. This is a chance to help customers connect with the joys and challenges of farming, offering them a chance to share in the story of your farm and the cycles of the seasons. Customers seeking out local food and farms are looking for authenticity, transparency and the stories behind where their food comes from. Posts that offer insight into your growing practices, the amount of work and risk that goes into farming, or a peek into your farm story are going to be engaging.

When should I post?



More important than the timing of your posts is consistency. Your followers should learn to expect something new from your page on a regular basis. That schedule could be several times per day on Twitter, once a day on Facebook, or once per week on Pinterest, but it should stay as constant as possible. This approach makes your business look more professional and shows new followers that they can expect regular activity from you.

The actual timing of posts depends on your audience. As a general rule, the best times to post social content are roughly 12 noon and 3 pm—during lunchtime and the afternoon slump, when people are likely to be checking their computers and smartphones. However, your audience may be most involved with social media at different times. On Facebook, check the Posts tab of your page's Insights to see a graph of when your fans are online, then plan to post for those peak hours.

How should I post?

Social media posts should generally be short and simple. On average, the Facebook posts that receive the most engagement have 80 characters or fewer, and the optimal range for Twitter tweets is roughly 71–100 characters. Pinterest descriptions and Instagram captions can be longer: the best Pinterest captions have approximately 200 characters, while Instagram captions can contain up to 2,200 characters (although only the first 110 or so are displayed in picture previews).

With that little text, how can you engage your audience? As the old adage goes, a picture is worth a thousand words. Use the written part of your post to explain an interesting image or give context to an infographic. You can also use hyperlinks to pages with longer content. Facebook automatically pulls pictures, titles, and descriptions from linked pages, all of which you can edit. Importantly, you can delete the web address from hyperlink posts on Facebook to save characters while keeping the link itself.

Interacting with followers

If you've successfully identified the interests of your followers, they should begin liking and commenting on the content you post. That's your invitation to continue the conversation. Like as many comments and shares of your content as possible; every time you do so, your follower sees your business's name and understands that you value their attention. If you have a way to add more insight to someone's comment, add a comment of your own. Remember that your goal is to make your business become another trusted voice in your followers' social communities.

On occasion, visitors to your page may leave negative feedback about your services or products. Don't shy away from responding to these comments. By promptly addressing complaints with respect and compassion, you make your business appear more professional and demonstrate concern for your customers. Hiding or ignoring negative posts often just makes your critics more critical.

Advertising





Words to Know

Like any activity, social media has its own vocabulary. Here are some of the key words marketers use when talking about social media.

Analytics—technology that records what happens on social media, including who visits your business, what interests they have, and how they interact with your content.

Boost—advertising on Facebook to show your posts to people who wouldn't otherwise see them.

Content—anything you post on social media, including text, pictures, videos, audio, and links.

Comment—a user's response to content, usually displayed below the original post.

Engagement—any action someone takes on your content, including likes, shares, and comments.

Hashtag—a word or phrase preceded by the # sign that links users to all other posts with the same hashtag, allowing them to discover new content on their topics of interest.

Insights—Facebook's built-in analytics about visitors to your social media account.

Like—the main way users show support or interest in content on Facebook.

Mention—the act of tagging another user's social media account in a post, usually by using the @ symbol followed by that user's name.

Platform—a social media site or application, such as Facebook or Instagram.

Post—a single piece of content on social media.

Reach—the number of unique people who have seen content from your business.

Share—the act of reposting someone else's content to your own social media page.

Trending—a word, phrase, or topic that is popular on social media at a given moment.

Viral—any content that is shared widely through social media networks.

Why advertise on social media?

No matter how engaging your content is, your business can normally only reach your followers and their social connections. To grow, you need to reach people who haven't heard of you, and advertising can be a quick, cost-effective way to do so. By spending as little as a few dollars, you can get your business's name and products in front of hundreds of potential new customers.

What do I advertise?

Advertising on social media generally focuses on two main objectives: building brand awareness and driving interest in sales. For the first objective, you might use a colorful image of your farm's products linked to your webpage or Facebook profile. For the second, direct links to event Facebook pages with short, engaging copy work well. Once customers express interest in an event, you can continue to reach them by posting on the event page.

Targeting your ads

The success of social media advertising is tied to how tightly ads can be targeted to specific groups of people. For example, a Facebook ad can be shown only to people ages 45–55 who live within 10 miles of Asheville, have a college education, and show an interest in local food. If you know the demographics and interests of the people who currently buy from you, you can easily direct ads to find similar customers on social media.

How to advertise

The options for advertising can be overwhelming, so the best place to start is with Facebook's on-site tutorials. These resources will guide you through how to set an ad objective, target your audience, and create copy for your ad. Searching Google for "social media advertising guide" will also yield a huge number of resources to inspire your advertising strategy. In general, remember that short is sweet when it comes to ad copy and that attractive, high-quality images grab the most attention from potential customers.

Analytics and Insights

Social media analytics let you see who your followers are and their interests. Facebook, Instagram, and Twitter provide a free analytic dashboard with key statistics about your account, including demographics about your followers (i.e. age, gender, location), which of your posts have been most popular, and when your users are most active. Use these insights to plan what and when to post to strategically appeal to your audience.



Asap

Local Food
Strong Farms
Healthy Communities



Developing Your Farm Brand

Developing a Brand

Every farm story needs a storyteller to share their message with their audience. That voice is your farm's brand—the public personality that communicates what you believe and what you hope to accomplish.

Good branding instantly gives your customers an idea of what they can expect from your farm and helps your products stand out in a crowded market.

Branding encompasses your farm's name, mission, tagline, and logo. ASAP's Storytelling Toolkit can help you determine what you want to communicate with these elements. The following resource gets into the finer details of branding—the immediate visual and verbal impressions that greet your customers and help you stay in the front of their memory.



For an online version of this publication, with live links to the resources, visit the resources section at asapconnections.org.

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Written and compiled by ASAP staff. For more resources visit the resources section at asapconnections.org.

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Name Your Farm

Your farm's name is the foundation of your brand. Everything associated with your business, from packaging to market signage to social media, will carry this label. Good naming can take time, but the rewards of a memorable, appropriate name will last for as long as your farm does.

Key Considerations

All names, no matter their inspiration, should keep a few practical principles in mind. These four considerations give guidelines for your creativity.

Meaningful—Above all else, your name should communicate to someone completely unfamiliar with your business that you are an agricultural producer. Many farms accomplish this by adding “farm,” “ranch,” “acres,” or “gardens” to the end of their name, but you can also mention specific products if your operation is more focused. Consider that your products might change over time, so choose something with longevity in mind.

Pronounceable—If you want good word-of-mouth, people need to be able to say your name. Names with odd spellings or unusual pronunciations are harder to remember, search for, and share with others, so keep it simple.

Memorable—Short names are easier to remember than long names, so consider keeping your farm's name at three words or fewer. Humorous or emotion-evoking names can also help your farm stick in memory.

Marketable—Search Google with your proposed name in quotation marks to make sure it hasn't been taken by another business, or isn't copyright protected. Preferably, you want a name you can use as a website address and social media profile on multiple platforms.

Types of Names

Farm names tend to fall into similar categories. The following list gives some of the most common naming sources and provides local examples for each.

Landmarks—Distinctive geographical features can root a farm's name in its place.

- Bridle Creek Farms
- Hickory Nut Gap Farm
- Dry Ridge Farm

People—Family and farmer names give a simple and personal source for farm names.

- Becki's Bounty
- Bone Family Farm
- Franny's Farm

Poetry—Some farm names aim to evoke pleasant associations with natural imagery.

- Cloud 9 Farm
- Sunswept Farm
- Laughing Water Farm

Humor—Joking or punning farm names can make a memorable impression.

- Good Fibrations
- Sh-Nanny-Gans
- ZomBee Farm

Products—These names make it clear to customers what a farm has to offer.

- Zimmerman's Berry Farm
- Blue Ridge Christmas Trees
- Pisgah Flowers

Story—Some names are tied into the origin stories of their associated farms.

- Black Thumb Farms
- Jah Works Farm
- Spinning Spider Creamery

Values—Farms with these names emphasize their reasons for being.

- Way of Life Farm
- Care of the Earth Community Farm
- New Beginnings Historic Farm

Naming Inspiration

If you haven't already done so, consider completing ASAP's [Storytelling Toolkit](#). Going through this process can help you focus on keywords and farm values to inspire your naming. Random farm name generators on the Internet can also spark your creativity.

Try asking other farmers how they came up with their farm names. Georgia Organics has a short blog series called [How'd You Name That Farm](#), which goes into the inspiration behind names like Mud Fairy Farm and Rag & Frass Farm. Many farming and homesteading forums are also happy to provide feedback on potential names.

Resources for Mission Statements

Both Rutgers Cooperative Extension and Purdue Extension offer good worksheets for thinking through a mission statement, as well as completed examples from other farms. Sources beyond the farming world, such as *Entrepreneur* magazine, can provide additional insight into the process. Good local examples for mission statements include Farm House Beef, Patchwork Urban Farms, and Veterans Healing Farm.

Write a Mission Statement

A mission statement is where your farm's ideals and values meet up with the day-to-day realities of running a business. It's a short piece of writing—usually no more than a paragraph—that communicates the essence of your farm to your customers and the general public.

A solid mission statement can also help you personally focus on the reasons for your farm. When you clearly describe your goals, you can set concrete benchmarks for your progress and determine whether your efforts are succeeding. If you have employees beyond yourself, your mission statement can also help them become more invested in their work.

Exercise: Answer the Essentials

Your mission statement should give someone with no previous knowledge of your farm the essential facts about your operation. A reader should walk away able to answer the following four questions in as specific terms as possible.

Answer the following questions to formulate your mission statement.

What does your farm do?—Describe what products your farm makes or raises. List any services you offer, such as farm tours, u-pick, or lodging.

How do you do it?—Mention the values and practices that inform your work. Examples include Organic certification, excellent customer service, and hand-crafting products.

Whom do you do it for?—Briefly outline your desired market. Think about where your customers are located and whether they buy at the retail or wholesale level.

What sets you apart?—List any unique qualities that differentiate your farm from similar businesses. Aspects such as family history or community partnerships can help your farm stick out in a crowded marketplace.

Now take a little time and pull it together into a concise statement that captures the essence of your farm.

Create a Tagline

A tagline is the shortest version of your farm's story. In many cases, your tagline can be even more important than your full story, because more people will come across this phrase in your marketing and packaging materials. Therefore, this short statement should be the definition of your service or brand.

Keeping it simple is key. A tagline is not a mission statement—at the longest, it should be a short sentence. The most effective taglines reflect one simple thing you want people to know or think about you. Working through the following exercise can help you narrow down the possibilities for your own farm business.



Design a Logo

The best logos are visually striking, instantly recognizable, and representative of your farm's values. A good logo also sets the foundation for the rest of your farm's visual design, from colors to fonts to graphic style. Note that a logo is meant as a mark of recognition, not an advertisement of your services or products—it can be abstract or metaphorical if that's the most effective approach.

When creating a logo, you should consider the cost and flexibility of reproduction. Logo designs can vary from simple one-color marks to complex illustrations. How will the logo be used to promote your brand? Will it be used on a sign, reduced small on a label, printed on cards and brochures, made into a rubber stamp—or it may need to work for all of these uses? Simpler logos generally remain more recognizable than complex logos at smaller sizes.

Logo development can be very subjective, and asking trusted contacts for feedback can help you make the right choices. It's often worth hiring a graphic designer to assist with the process. The cost for logo development can range from roughly \$300 for a wordmark to \$3,000 for an illustrated logo, but this initial investment will pay off over many years as your brand grows in recognition. Look at a wide variety of logos, from within the industry and beyond, and think about why certain designs resonate with you the most. ASAP's resource, [Working with a Graphic Designer](#), can introduce you to the design process.

Summary

Your farm's brand is the voice you use to talk about your work with the wider world. Through your name, mission, tagline, and logo, you can provide customers with a first impression that encourages them to learn more. Every aspect of your branding can convey the meaning behind your products and hint at your larger farm story.

Be sure to give branding the time it deserves at the start of your farm business. Once chosen, names and logos can last for many years, building recognition and positive associations among your customers. ASAP is happy to consult on your farm's branding or direct you to professionals that can make your business stand out.



Working with a Graphic Designer



When Should You Hire a Graphic Designer?

A graphic designer can create a professional look for your brand and develop marketing materials to promote your business. Time and money are limiting factors for most small businesses, so knowing when to connect with a professional and how to best use their time is important. While the financial investment of creating a logo can be daunting, it is a long-term investment that should give you good returns. Unless you or someone on your farm has the skill set, hiring a graphic designer is the best approach to developing your farm identity and marketing materials.

What are my options?

A **freelance designer** is self-employed and usually works from home or a studio space. Often their rates are lower, because their overhead is lower, but this is their business and they still need equipment and expensive software to get the job done. A freelancer may be the best fit for a smaller farm.

Crowdsourced design can be an economical option. It offers any online designer an opportunity to create a logo for a set price. While the low price may be attractive, this system often relies on recycled and canned solutions and may not address your needs and goals in the way that the personal connection with a designer can.

A **full-service design firm** may be just what you need if you are growing and need greater capabilities. They may approach the initial concept development with a team and have copywriting, illustration, and photography resources in-house. This may be the best fit for a larger established farm with several marketing outlets.

Many graphic designers also offer **web design** but often web developers are also needed if there is any complexity to the site. It is usually best to have logo and identity work done before developing a website.

For an online version of this publication, visit the resources section at asapconnections.org.

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Choosing the right designer

When you decide it's time to professionalize your logo or brand, the first step is finding a designer you can connect with. A good strategy is to identify logos or materials that you like and find out who did the design. You may get a referral from a friend or consider a designer that has worked with other farms. You can always search online for designers in your region.

When considering a designer:

- Look at samples—most serious designers will have a website to showcase their work.
- Make sure you like their style—don't expect an illustrated logo from a designer that does not show illustration in their portfolio.
- Ask for a quote or price range—some designers will quote a flat rate and others will charge an hourly rate depending on the type of project. You will need to provide adequate information about your project to get a fair price.
- Interview a designer or two—this gives you the opportunity to judge if you have a good fit.
- What is the range of materials you need—do you need one designer to meet all of your needs. Many designers specialize but work closely with other designers in allied fields.

Before you hire a graphic designer

To make the best use of your time and the money you will be paying a designer, spend some time beforehand thinking through your needs and what you want your design to communicate. The most efficient approach to a design project begins with a design brief. A design brief is a document that provides the designer with the information needed to begin the creative process, and allows you to focus on exactly what you want to achieve before any work begins on the project. A design brief should primarily focus on your desired results and outcomes of the project. It should not attempt to deal with the aesthetics of design—that is the responsibility of the designer. A good design brief will ensure that you get a high quality design that meets your needs.

The Design Brief

About your business

An overview of your business history and a statement of your goals is the best starting point for a design brief. This information will let your designer know more about your business and better able to develop designs to meet your needs. Provide your designer with a design brief in advance of meeting if possible and they will review and ask more questions to get a good feel for the project. That conversation is critical, but this documentation will be an important reference. A design brief should begin with the basics—who, what, when where, why of your farm.

Who: Who are you? What is your story? The [Storytelling Toolkit](#) can help you formulate this information into a story and may be useful in developing content for marketing pieces.

What: What does your farm business do and how do you do it? What are your products? What is your business' personality? What makes you different from your competitors? What do you value the most?

When: When was your farm established? What is your farm's history?

Where: What is your business' local connection or sense of place?

Why: Why are you farming? Why should people support you? What are the goals and vision of your business?

About your project

The second portion of a design brief delves into project-specific information. Information for a logo development will be a bit different from a brochure or retail product label. This information will help a designer understand your project goals and desired outcomes. This process will also help you crystallize your thoughts on what you need and will aim your designer in the right direction. If you have current or past materials, provide those materials to your designer and discuss your likes and dislikes of those designs. Consider the following questions and provide as much detail as possible.

- What is the overall goal of the design project?
- What are you trying to communicate and why?
- Is this a stand alone piece or part of a larger marketing plan?
- Who is the target market and what are their demographics and psychographics? (i.e. age, gender, income, tastes, views, attitudes, employment, geography, lifestyle)
- Who is your competition? Provide examples.
- How will you measure success?

Logo design

Logo development can be an exciting step for a business. It will be the centerpiece of your branding and should serve you for a long while. A good logo is distinctive, yet simple and it effectively conveys your intended message.

- What is the tone or feeling you would like to convey?
- Is there specific imagery you want to include?
- Are there colors and styles that you like or dislike? Provide the designer with things not to do, and styles that you do not like or wish to see in your design.
- Do you have a tagline or copy that must be integrated into the logo design?

Print and website design

Marketing and promotional materials, or website design will need additional information and resources. The copy and images used in a design are as crucial as the design. Rely on your designer for suggestions of resources like a copywriter or photographer. Many print designers also do simple websites and offer site maintenance. More complex sites may require the services of a programmer.

Designers consider themselves to be problem solvers. It is best to not have rigid ideas about the format of a piece—your designer can help you identify options and flush out an effective strategy.

- What problem is the piece solving? Are you trying to reach new consumers, sell more products, or build awareness of your products or services?
- If you already have a logo, is it effective and meeting your goals?
- What copy (text) needs to be included in the design? Who is providing the copy or does a copywriter need to be involved?
- Do you have images or do you need a photographer? If you have photography, is the quality appropriate for the intended use?
- Will you need illustrations or diagrams? Who is providing these or do they need to be created?
- Will materials be printed? Designers usually have relationships with multiple printers and should be able to suggest the best way to reproduce your design.
- Will you need a domain name and web hosting?
- What other information should the designer know?

The Design Process

Logo design

Your first project with a designer may be a logo design. After a discovery session aided by your design brief and research by your designer, you can expect an initial presentation with a few design concepts. Ideally, there will be the a concept that appeals to you. If not more concepts will be generated—be upfront about what you like or don't like about the initial concepts presented. There will typically be a round of revisions with the chosen concept based on your input followed by a second presentation. Finally, the logo will be refined to a finished stage and you will be provided the logo in several formats. You may not be able to open them all but, they may be critical for some design applications in the future.

Print and website design projects

Print materials follow a similar path except each piece needs a strategy for developing copy, images, and eventual reproduction. You will be asked for approvals, or to sign off, at various stages. Take that seriously and read your copy, check phone numbers, and addresses. The later down the road it gets, the more expensive it becomes to correct errors. It is costly to reprint.

Budget

A budget is always an important subject—you need to know what you can or are willing to afford before getting started. Different types of logos require different time commitment and therefore different costs. A simple wordmark can be inexpensive, but an illustrated logo or hand lettering will cost more. The cost of marketing materials can be a little more predictable. Discussing a budget prevents designers from wasting valuable time and resources while trying to offer you the best design solution for the your budget. Most designers will be frank if you are not in the same price ballpark and may be able to advise you on a lower cost design route to still get excellent results. Resources from other creatives, such as copywriters and photographers, plus the cost of reproduction should be considered in your budget.

Deadlines

Set a realistic deadline with your designer and formulate a timeline for the completion of the work. You should take into account the various stages of the design process such as consultation, concept development, production and printing. You will be asked to periodically review artwork and eventually sign off on a project. Make sure you understand your responsibilities for these stages. Errors and changes at later stages can be costly.

Conclusion

Developing your brand should be an enjoyable process and the results should reflect your values. It is best if you can cultivate a long term relationship with your designer—you have both made a time investment. A good partnership can provide a cohesive strategy for the future and fulfill your marketing goals.

Logo file formats

eps can be used to save high quality vector art. It is preferred by designers and printers for reliable quality but it may not be viewable on your computer if you do not have design software.

pdf is a great all purpose format for print.

jpg is best format for photographic images or for placement on the web and in many business software programs.

png is great option for the web as the background can be transparent.

Making the Most of Your *Local Food Guide* listing



ASAP's *Local Food Guide* is a powerful tool for connecting with current and potential customers. This document offers tips for using the Guide to help better market and promote your farm.

Online Local Food Guide

ASAP's online [Local Food Guide](http://appalachiangrown.org) listing (appalachiangrown.org) is completely free and can dramatically increase your farm's online presence. Current and potential customers will see it, so make sure that the information provided is as accurate as possible. If you do not have a website for your business, this listing can serve a similar purpose, providing nearly all of the information customers need to know about your farm. If you do have a website, linking it with your listing will improve the likelihood you will come up in online searches. While some of these tips seem basic, they are common missed steps.

Tips for online listing:

- Make sure your phone number and/or email is accurate! These are first points of contact for wholesale and retail customers that find your listing.
- Include a photo or logo to help your listing stand out. For best viewing, your image should be 240x180 px. ASAP can assist in resizing or fitting your image at your request.
- Take advantage of your description. Have a unique history? Include it. Proud of your production practices? Talk about them. Grow a truly unique variety? Share its name. Your description is your chance to really separate yourself from the crowd. This section will be included in keyword searches, so share your story and product details.
- Help customers find you at market. If used correctly, the "Supplied Tailgate Markets" section will link to the listings of the farmers markets where you vend, and your farm name will appear on their corresponding market listings. This linking function will only work if the included farmers market name is spelled exactly as it appears in the market's online *Local Food Guide* listing.
- Include a link to your Facebook and/or Twitter. A social media page, when paired with an online *Local Food Guide* listing, is a nice one-two punch of information and engagement.
- Highlight all of your farm's offerings. The *Local Food Guide* includes sections specifically for CSAs, u-pick, and agritourism offerings. Customers looking specifically for these offerings will be able to quickly search and find your farm.

For an online version of this publication, visit the resources section at asapconnections.org.

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Candy Mountain Farm

Murphy, NC—Cherokee Co.
828-494-2083
juhlin@peoplepc.com

We are a 12-month mixed vegetable production farm. Direct sales and farmers market. No chemical pesticides or fertilizer used. Call or email for appointment prior to visit. Summer and Fall CSA shares available on a limited basis.

Printed *Local Food Guide*

ASAP prints at least 50,000 copies of the *Local Food Guide* each year and distributes them across the Appalachian Grown region. A print listing costs \$30 for farms and is a great way to promote your farm to thousands of potential customers. This print listing is updated and paid for through your online *Local Food Guide* listing. However, not all of the information in your online listing will be included in your print listing. For farms, a print listing includes a farm name, city, county, phone, email, and print description. See the sample listing to the left for the print guide format. For farms that want to promote themselves with a full color display ad, these are included in the publication at a discounted rate for farms.

Tips for print listing:

- If your farm offers a CSA, u-pick, lodging, and/or other agritourism offerings, make sure to completely fill out the corresponding sections in the online guide. These farm offerings are given standalone sections or tables in the printed guide, giving you the opportunity have your farm listed in multiple sections included in the \$30 listing payment.
- Although the word count is limited to 250 characters, take advantage of your description. This is the information that will differentiate your farm from others in the *Guide*, so be creative and highlight the details that make your farm unique.
- You may want to write your online description first, as there is no word limit. Then edit it down for your print listing.



Wholesale *Local Food Guide*

Looking to connect with restaurants, caterers, bakers, value-added processors, grocers, and wholesalers/distributors? The Wholesale *Local Food Guide* is for you. Located under the “Wholesale” option on the top menu, this subsection of the online *Local Food Guide* is updated through the same process as the rest of your online listing.

The *Wholesale Local Food Guide* is used by buyers looking for farms able to supply wholesale accounts (larger volumes of product at a lower cost). When ASAP receives sourcing requests from restaurants and other wholesale buyers, the wholesale guide helps us identify potential sourcing matches. If you don't have a wholesale listing, you may be missing out on potential partnerships.

Tips for wholesale listing:

- Your *Wholesale Local Food Guide* description appears as “Why We're the Farm for You.” This description should be catered toward a wholesale clientele and is limited to 150 characters.
- Check the boxes for only those items you can supply at wholesale volumes.
- Willing to deliver for larger orders? Include a distribution area (either mileage or city/county range) and minimum order for delivery.

Notice

We work hard to keep information up to date and accurate making ASAP's *Local Food Guide* a trusted source of information for customers and wholesale buyers. You need to update your online *Local Food Guide* listing annually. This contains the data for the print and wholesale guides. Updating your listing will also renew your Appalachian Grown certification. ASAP will call and send email reminders, but take care of it early! If you do not update your listing annually, it will be deleted. For questions or to update via phone, call the ASAP office at (828) 236-1282.