

Online Sales Platforms for Direct to Consumer Sales

Event cancellations, restaurant closures, and safety practices at local markets have forced farmers across the state and country to redirect their marketing plans. There are multiple online sales platforms that can help ease the administrative burden of direct to consumer sales and help with online marketing to reach consumers. Here is a list of resources that farmers can utilize and a list of questions to consider when thinking about adopting an online platform. With the growing popularity of online shopping, producers should consider becoming involved in online sales to consumers as a strategy to make their agribusiness more resilient.

Before Getting Started

A first step is to look at the point of sales systems and website providers that an agribusiness is currently using. Some of these systems offer features that can be used as an online sales platform. The online sales platforms listed in this document may provide additional services to help manage this market channel for agribusinesses. What is best for each agribusiness will vary.

Questions to Consider When Getting Started With Online Sales

Here is a list of questions to consider while planning to get started with online sales. These questions are helpful to consider as part of a business plan and questions to consider asking customer service representatives of the online platforms.

1. Does the company already work with farmers in North Carolina?
2. What kind of IT or customer service support is provided?
3. Is farmer sales data collected and stored? What level of privacy is there?
4. What happens if the farmer decides not to use the platform anymore? Will the data be stored?
5. What is the total cost to use the platform? What are the monthly fees and credit card transactions fees? Who pays for the transactions fees?
6. What does it take to get set up? Can farmers get set up on the platform on their own, or do they need to work with a company representative?
7. Can a farmer integrate the platform into their farm's website, or does this involve building a new website?
8. What does a farmer need to do from getting their product posted to getting the payments entered?
9. Can the farmer alter the prices? Can they sell to different customer groups, such as restaurants and individuals? Can they offer promotional prices?
10. What do customers see? Can the farmer set limits so customers know when they sell out?

11. What are the customer payment options? Can the farmer accept EBT?
12. How do payments deposited into the farm account? How often does that happen? How are taxes handled?
13. Will this platform integrate with farm accounting software?
14. If custom boxes are offered, will the platform create labels or lists to help with packing?
15. How does the platform provide delivery support?
16. Is there anything else farmers should know about?

List of Online Sales Platforms

This is a list of online sales platforms to consider. There are many online sales platforms, so this list is not be complete. Many of these companies have specific customer service resources in response to COVID19. Most platforms offer multiple payment options for consumers, allowing for online or in-person payments. Most platforms allow the sales of products besides food and drinks.

Note: NC State does not endorse any of these platforms. This list is for informational purposes only.

Platform	Features	Pricing
<u>People-First Provisions</u>	In select Southeastern regions, sale of food bundles like bags or boxes, targeting primarily vacationers, requires vetting by local Extension office.	No startup or monthly fees; 18% transaction fee
<u>Barn2Door</u>	Storefront with different price point for different markets, easy sharing capabilities (social, newsletters, web, and mobile), marketing assistance.	Webstore + website has a startup cost of \$399 and is \$79/month
<u>Harvie</u>	CSA management, marketing assistance.	\$500 set up fee; \$0 monthly fee, 7% transaction fee + 2.9% +\$0.30/credit card sale
<u>Food4All</u>	Online shopping carts.	Free to producers (buyers cover cost of software)
<u>Local Food Marketplace</u>	CSA management, storefront with availability lists, multi-farm sales- including food hubs, delivery planning support	See <u>pricing website</u> ; pricing starts at \$499 start up and \$79/month
<u>Square Online Stores</u>	Multiple payment options; capital, payroll, and other services are available. Targeted for multiple types of businesses, not just food and farms.	Payment app is free, 2.6%+ \$0.10/credit card charge *NC State Extension <u>webinar</u> on starting a square store
<u>Open Food Network</u>	Online storefront, multi-farm/food hub sales.	Open source; free for less than \$500 in sales per month, over \$500/month is a 1% turnover fee
<u>Farmigo</u>	CSA management, online storefront, multi-farm and food hubs sales	2% of deliveries (minimum of \$150/month, only charge months where delivery happens)

<u>Farm Fresh Web</u>	Farmers and Shoppers App, communicate inventory with consumers who have the app.	90% of their services are free- no payment is required
<u>Cropolis</u>	Online sales, availability lists.	Packages range from \$29-99/month + credit card transactions fee of 2.9% +\$0.30/transaction
<u>CSAware</u>	CSA management	2% of sales (minimum of \$100/month), credit card transaction fees
<u>Farmers Web</u>	Availability lists, online store	Basic plan is free, Unlimited plan is \$75/month
<u>HarvestHand</u>	CSA management	First 10 members are free, then \$10/member/year
<u>Local Line</u>	Storefront for farms and food hubs	Packages from \$0-79.99/month See their <u>pricing webpage</u> for more information
<u>Local Orbit</u>	Food hub and multi-farm sales, delivery management, marketing assistance.	Depends on size of business. Plans range from \$70-450/month. See their <u>pricing webpage</u> for more information.
<u>Shopify</u>	Storefront. Not just for food and farm businesses.	Plans range from \$29-299/month. See their <u>pricing webpage</u> for more information.
<u>MeatSuite</u>	Bulk meat storefront serving NY and NC.	No cost.

Hesitant About Online Sales?

If online sales are not something you are interested in adopting, consider reaching out to your local food hub or farmers market to see if they have new (or not so new) options. Multi-farm CSAs organized by farmer co-ops, existing farmers markets, and food hubs can be viable options during this time that are convenient for consumers. Your [local Extension office](#) may be able to direct you to local resources.