

INCORPORATING ONLINE SALES INTO YOUR AGRITOURISM BUSINESS

Author: Audrey Comerford, Agritourism Coordinator, OSU Extension Service

Online sales are a good way to diversify your farm product sales. Big picture—online sales continue to increase each year, and the COVID-19 pandemic has pushed that trend even further. In terms of local food, we have also seen an increase in the number of customers who want to shop and purchase products online. There are some costs involved in setting up your online store and figuring out an efficient system for fulfilling online orders. But many farmers have found it is worth the investment.

Setting Up Your E-commerce Site

The website [Nerdwallet.com](https://nerdwallet.com) outlines [five basic steps for setting up an online store](#):

Step 1: Choose a name and get your domain. If you already have a business website, you can use your current domain.

Step 2: Pick your ecommerce platform. All e-commerce platforms have various fees so shop around for the system that you think will work best for you. See a comparison breakdown of what each platform offers [here](#).

Step 3: Plan and build your ecommerce website. The online store does not have to be anything fancy or professionally designed—just a place where customers can easily browse and purchase your products.

Step 4: Set up payment, tax, shipping, and marketing tools

Step 5: Test and launch your ecommerce website

This is an involved process that requires some technical expertise so you may need to hire someone to help you with this. Alternatively, website builders such as Squarespace and Wix have ways to easily integrate an online store into an existing website. And e-commerce platforms such as Square now offer an easy webpage to host online product sales. Setting up an Etsy shop may be another good option. Etsy is heavily searched and is great for local and handmade products. See a comparison breakdown of what each platform offers [here](#).

Here are some tips if you are thinking about setting up an online shop:

- Start with a few products at first. It can be overwhelming to think of adding everything you may offer, especially if a lot of the products are seasonal. By starting with a few items you know you have quantities of, it can eliminate the need to change item listings on the website and make launching an online store at first easier.
- Consider selling bundles or boxes rather than all individual products. This can be a way to reduce the number of items listed on the website and make it easier to gather orders together if the boxes are all the same. An example of this might be a weekly produce box a customer can purchase online and pickup on farm.



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On-farm pickup vs. shipping

One of the major decisions you will have to make in setting up your online store is whether or not you will ship your products. This decision will depend on a number of factors:

- The type of products you offer: Are they perishable or nonperishable?
- Staff time: Do you have the capacity to pack and ship online orders?
- Cost: How will you cover costs for boxes, packaging, shipping, dealing with returns, customer expectations.

One way to have online sales while avoiding shipping can be offering an on-farm pickup option. Customers order and pay online and then come to the farm to pick up their ready order. Most e-commerce platforms allow a “pickup” selection for the customer. This cuts down on time and money for the farm due to shipping and is a good option for local customers. Having a pickup location on-farm with signage and a system for pulling and labeling online orders is also recommended. It is also a great opportunity to market agricultural tourism activities and offerings you might also have. If you have tours or a seasonal festival, farm pickups are a great way to let customers know you also offer those things. Delivery is another option along with this; however, staff and other logistics must be taken into consideration.

Ticketed timeslots

An online store can also be used to sell event entry tickets or ticketed timeslots for your agritourism business. Ticketed timeslots can be integrated into an online store platform via third party platforms such as Eventbrite or TicketSpice. Customers can go onto your website, book the timeslot they want to come visit in and pay directly from there. Some benefits of having prebooked ticketed timeslots is knowing how many people are coming at particular times so you can staff accordingly. This kind of system gives you some assurance regarding how many customers to expect, and the ability manage how many people are at your location at one time. Other more conventional reservation systems (email, phone) can also accomplish these same goals, but having the online program handle it for you it may simplify the process and reduce the amount of staff time involved in keeping track of reservations.

If you do decide prebooked ticketed timeslots are something you would like to try, make sure your refund policy is clear before the customer books. Whatever your rules around that are, you want to make sure it is communicated clearly so it can be referred to if there is an issue.

Sources

[CSA Innovation Network, Farmer to Farm Exchange: Ecommerce Platforms](#)
[Community Alliance with Family Farms \(CAFF\), Instagram Shopping: The How's and Why](#)
[Nerdwallet.com](#)

Additional Resources

[Oregon Tilth](#)

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This material is based upon work supported by USDA/NIFA under Award Number 2018-70027-28587.



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