

Small Producers Initiative
Mesquite Field Farm
10/10/2022

Making the Most of Online Sales Platforms

Good evening everyone and thank you for taking the time out of your busy lives to spend it with us this evening. We hope that the information we provide this evening is valuable to you. As you know, more and more farms are distributing their products directly to the customer or consumer. The pandemic lock down and the failure of our fragile transportation and distribution chain has made the customer extremely aware of potential problems in our food systems. Additionally, the customer is now demanding locally produced food. The interest in CSA's, Farmers Markets, and Farm Stores has significantly increased causing exponential growth in revenue and demand. Many small farms are now utilizing social media and websites to advertise to their customers and potential customers. This has taught us that we actually have fewer barriers to entry in many farm to consumer enterprises. While there are state and federal laws that impact some markets and their ability to sell online, the web is certainly a tool we have available to us.

There are two specific benefits we, the farmer, need to understand.

1. Direct marketing can significantly improve farm business viability by allowing the farm to capture a greater percentage of food dollars without the middleman such as distributors, packers, or processors. Farms and farmers can set their pricing to reflect the rates required for sustainability and profitability.

2. Direct markets provide opportunities for personal connections with our customers. Most of us have learned to focus on the relationships to our customers. Our markets increase our visibility and sales. We have learned how to successfully set pricing, understand our profits and losses, and how to adapt to customer needs.

Considering most of you understand these 2 points, I will speak to the opportunity that brought you to this webinar. Your increased sales, and marketability has caused you to increase production. You are now jumping to that next level of production. Your inventory management is becoming more difficult, your thinking about starting deliveries or you are modifying how you do deliveries, you are expanding sales channels, and its becoming a little overwhelming. *Or unlike me*, you have managed your growth, increased sales, made all of the right decisions and you are calmly and strategically ready to move to the next level...an online store. The question is which one and why. *We tell anyone that will listen, every farm is different, every farm has a different environment, everyone of you has a different business model. Not a single one of you has a farm exactly like someone else.* Surprisingly, not a single online sales platform is exactly the same. Each one

Doug Havemann
Mesquite Field Farm
210-639-5855

www.mesquitefieldfarm.com
Facebook:mesquitefieldfarm
YouTube: Mesquite Field Farm



of them was developed based on a perspective of its owners, their experiences, their customers, and the culture surrounding their operations. Many of these platforms, just like your farms, will have similar features. The key is to understand what makes them different from each other and which of those differences aligns with your business. Are you looking for an online presence with a store that allows you to take credit card payments online? Are you wanting to manage your inventory better and accept online payments? Are you wanting to setup multiple drop points in a city based on dates or zipcodes (geo-fencing)? Do you want to have a single website presence that incorporates a store and online payment platform? Do you want a low priced entry point into a platform with the ability to grow your business before you upgrade to more features? The questions are endless. Now that I have asked some questions you may need to consider before partnering with one of the online platforms, I want to add one more very important point. Ensure that you are making enough in revenue to pay for these services for a year. Understand that if you utilize a platform as your only web presence, if you cancel the service you cancel your web presence. Also understand that there may be additional charges or items that you need in order to utilize some of these services such as a domain name (www.yourbusiness.com), email account, mailchimp account (for newsletters), linktree account (to link to your social media), photos of your operation, and finally, have a mission/vision statement prepared. Ask these providers to tell you what additional things you will need to be successful. Each of them will do everything they can to help you be successful. I have worked with two of these providers for several years evaluating their products for multiple businesses. They do truly want you to be successful. With that let us move to the demonstrations. If there is anything I can do for anyone afterwards, please let me know. Enjoy.

Here is a checklist of questions to assist you with your platform choices.

- Does the platform offer you the ability to have multiple price lists based on how you are selling (retail, wholesale, distributors)?
- Can people shop as a guest or do they have to create an account?
- Can you control access to a private store?
- Can you provide different forms of order fulfillment (pick up at farm, pick up points, shipping, delivery for wholesale)?
- Can I geofence or setup local delivery zones by zipcode and customer type?
- Will I receive a picking list and packing list when my order window closes?
- Do the customers receive automated receipts and reminders?
- Can I offer delivery for some items and pickup for others?

- What type of support is offered if my customers have a problems (phone, chat, both)?
- Can I offer subscriptions to a single product or a bundle of products?
- What are all of the transaction, product, and stripe fees?
- Is there a setup fee for my site above and beyond my monthly fee?
- Can I accept a deposit then auto-reconcile a final price (when weighed)?
- Are payment details stored securely, or must I chase down final payments?
- Can I take a card deposit online, then invoice customers for the final charge?
- Can my buyers purchase credits, then utilize credits as items are ordered?
- Does the platform integrate with mailchimp (newsletter), routific (delivery), quickbooks (accounting), avalara (taxes)?
- Can I sign-up for a monthly or annual eCommerce subscription?
- Can I cancel my eCommerce subscription anytime?
- Am I getting a “flat” processing rate, or are reward cards more expensive?
- Are the advertised card rates based on “card present” versus “not present” online?
- Can I offer customers the “option” to cover credit card processing fees?
- Can I enable tipping beyond just covering credit card processing fees?
- Am I indemnified and insured in the event of a privacy or security breach?
- Am I obligated to pay a percentage (%) of gross sales to the platform provider?
- Are my customers going to be charged a “service fee” at checkout?
- Will I have assistance to set-up my eCommerce solution?
- Do I receive assistance to configure my store on the web, social, email, and newsletters?
- Will I have access to an account manager for free?

- Do I have access to live phone and chat support for questions 24X7?
- Am I competing with other Farms in a pool of buyers (a “marketplace”)?
- Are emails sent from my farm domain?
- Are receipts and invoices branded for my farm?
- Do I “own” and can I access all of my customers’ information and order history anytime
- Flexible, customizable catch weight functionality
- Can I pre-authorize customers but not charge them until weights are finalized?
- Is the capability there to easily bulk adjust order items with correct weights?
- Does it require more than a single click to print all invoices on any given day?
- Can I control product availability by location?
- Can I customize delivery fees, minimum purchase levels and dates by location?