

# SUSTAINABLE CONNECTIONS FOOD & FARMING



## FARMER'S MARKETING GUIDE



## INTRODUCTION

If you are farming or thinking about farming – you know there are a number of ways you can sell your products, and outlets to do so. But where to start? What’s the best mix? Your unique marketing mix will likely depend on both your preferred lifestyle and your business model.

Are you a people person who would enjoy selling at farmers markets? Are you passionate about education and welcoming customers onto your farm? Would you rather focus on farming and staying on the farm? Are you interested in engaging with a number of customers to sell a CSA share, or would you rather have a few larger wholesale accounts to move your products?

Your marketing mix will likely depend on the market around you, your product mix and your personal preferences, and how you choose to spend your time. There are some farmers who make all of their living on solely selling directly (CSA, farmers markets, farm stand), and there are others who primarily utilize wholesale sales outlets (restaurants, grocers, institutions, distribution companies), but most farmers tend to sell to a variety of outlets to form a mix of marketing outlets for their operations.

Dig into the marketing avenues below to explore best practices, local resources, and more information about the various ways to sell your products.

## AN OVERVIEW OF MARKET OUTLETS AND MARKETING TECHNIQUES

- [1\) Marketing Tips & Best Practices](#)
- [2\) Farmers Markets](#)
- [3\) Community Supported Agriculture \(CSA\)](#)
- [4\) Restaurants](#)
- [5\) Grocers](#)
- [6\) Schools & Institutions](#)
- [7\) Farm Stand, U-Pick & Agritourism](#)
- [8\) Distributor/Wholesale](#)

## MARKETING TIPS & BEST PRACTICES

### WHO: Knowing Your Customer

Do you know who your target customer is? Some marketers split potential customers into three categories:

- 1) **Core Shoppers:** These customers know why local is important, are enthusiastic natural food/co-op/farmers market shoppers – these are the core customers. For wholesale buyers, it might be Farm-to-Table restaurants, or local Co-op grocery stores
- 2) **Swing Shoppers:** These customers like the idea of shopping at farmers markets or eating more local food, but only do it part of the time. They need a reminder and lots of education to get inspired to make those choices. For wholesale buyers, it might be a locally owned restaurant who occasionally places an order, or a grocery store who wants to get more involved.
- 3) **Non-Local Shoppers:** These folks will likely not be your customers. They may not shop at local stores/markets and not fully understand about the value of fresh, local food.

*Depending on where you are in your business, it's valuable to spend your marketing efforts building more sales opportunities with your Core Shoppers, while talking to your customers like they are all the Swing Shoppers, keeping your messaging really educational and informative so it adds value and loops in the folks who are looking for more of that. [Read this great, and short, article](#) to learn more!*

### WHAT: Creating Content

Ask yourself this question: what kinds of things do you want to make sure your customers know about your business or about local food? Write a list of all those things. Once you know the *kinds* of content you want to relay, it makes telling your story that much easier.

*Example: why we care, about the owners/staff, that we're a local business, that we're organic, how to use the produce/products we grow/raise (recipes), where to find our products in town (restaurants & stores), the nutritional benefit of eating local veggies, the economic impacts of supporting local businesses, etc.*

Another valuable exercise is to create boilerplate language for your business: the tagline, the elevator speech, and the paragraph/one pager. Creating consistent content helps you to root into what's most important about your business AND gives you language you can use online, for listings, the press, for talking with your direct and wholesale customers, for putting on your materials/products, and more. Once you get these boilerplate messages dialed in, you will use them time and time again!

**The Tagline:** Your business in one short sentence or less

*ex. Helsing Junction Farm is a Community Supported Agriculture farm in Rochester, WA with home delivery in Seattle, **Olympia** or Portland.*

*ex. Joes Gardens is Bellingham's urban farm & market*

**The Elevator Speech:** You have 30 seconds to describe your business (usually 1-2 sentences...expanding on the tagline language)

**The One-Pager/Paragraph:** You've been asked to write two paragraphs about your business for your local newspaper (expand on your elevator speech language)

## **WHERE & HOW: Marketing Tools & Resources**

Now that you've identified your customer and crafted some awesome content about your business, it's time to utilize the tools available to get the word out about your farm and your products. We know it can be challenging to find the time to market your business, so we've outlined some of the most effective and free tools that get the most bang-for-your-buck and time spent. Once you get your systems set up, regular marketing doesn't have to take a ton of time/energy and will grow your businesses' sales, closing the loop of all of your hard work.

**Social media:** An important way to connect with your audience and share your story.

- Instagram: It is the king of social media right now! Best practice for time saving: have an Instagram account that's linked to your business Facebook page.
- Facebook: Have a business Facebook page that you update at least a few times a week. To save time, link your Instagram posts to your page.

**Newsletter:** A free and easy way to keep your customers engaged throughout the year – have a sign up at the farmers market, and on your website and Facebook page.

- MailChimp: We love this free online newsletter software, it has easy to use templates that you can replicate with fresh content each week/month.

**Local & Regional Directories:** Add your farm to local farm listings and farm maps so customers can find you. These are affordable and valuable resources.

- [Whatcom Food & Farm Finder](#): Produced by Sustainable Connections each winter, these guides have a wide distribution (30,000 copies to 350+ locations) and valuable shelf time – 1 year
- [Puget Sound Fresh Guide](#): A region-wide farm guide produced by Seattle Tilth (formerly Cascade Harvest Coalition)
- [Food-Hub.org](#): An online listing for buyer and sellers of food across the NW region

**Business to Business Co-Promotions:** A good practice in building community and introducing your business to new customers. Example: you sell your products to Aslan Brewing Co. You work with them to do some co-promotions through social media/newsletters/fliers/maybe a coupon you can each give out, etc.

**Create attractive signs & displays:** It's worth the time and effort if you are selling at the farmers market or have a farm stand. One great resource is Canva.com, where you can easily make beautiful designs, text over photos, newsletter/Facebook headers and more for free or cheap.

**Press Relations:** Be sure to notify local media about events or happenings – it's a great way to get the word out, and potentially have an article about you in a local publication. See the appendix for an example.

### **BEST PRACTICES:**

- Create a **monthly marketing/messaging calendar**, where you schedule out your social media posts and content, newsletters, fresh sheets and more. What will take you a couple hours to set up, will save you lots of time throughout the month.
- **Connect and sync up all of the places/platforms** you use for marketing. Send folks you're your farm stand to sign up for your newsletter or liking your Instagram. Send people from your Facebook page to your website, etc.



## FARMERS MARKETS

Farmers markets can be a great way for a new or growing farm business to get the word out and gain more exposure. Often farmers markets can be slow at first while customers get to know you and your product, but it is a good way to build traction and support for a strong customer base, CSA, and even restaurant sales.

### Best Practices:

- Focus on product presentation, booth design & signage are important!
- Offer a diversity of products compared to what other vendors are selling, and consider grouping items together, i.e. “salsa kits” or “pickling mix”, “mixed roasted veggies” with recipes
- Offer customers recipe cards, nutritional info and tips on how to use your product
- Be friendly, engaging, and informative when selling
- Use the farmers market to promote other channels of marketing – have a newsletter sign-up, feature names of restaurants you sell to, etc.
- Come up with a 10-second pitch on many of your products: “I love xx because it’s tasty and it’s easy to cook. Here’s what I do with it...” Your customers value your ideas and input, and will come back to you.

### Local/Regional Farmers Markets:

- [Bellingham Farmers Market](#)
- [Lynden Farmers Market](#)
- [Ferndale Farmers Market](#)
- [Twin Sisters Farmers Market](#)
- [Mount Vernon Farmers Market](#)
- [Anacortes Farmers Market](#)
- [Everett Farmers Market](#)
- [Seattle Farmers Markets](#)

### Additional Awesome Resources:

- [WA State Farmers Market Manual](#)
- Learn more about direct marketing [in this video](#)



## CSA (COMMUNITY SUPPORTED AGRICULTURE)

Selling your product through CSA can be a rewarding way to do business if you like interacting directly with your customers. Benefits of running a CSA include having cash flow near the early part of the season and having committed customers signed on. Challenges include coming up with organized tracking systems and being able to deliver on producing a variety of products throughout the season. It is important to have some experience farming under your belt before diving into offering a CSA to ensure you can produce a diversity of products, coordinate details and delivery, provide recipes, and more!

### Best Practices:

- Include a newsletter/farm update with recipes with each box. *We know through Workplace CSA surveys that including farm info, newsletters and recipes are a large factor in CSA retention.*
- Advertise through Sustainable Connections CSA Farm List (free list and compiled each winter), brochures, farm directories, social media and your website – online sign-ups are the most common.
- Consider marketing to groups like businesses and neighborhood associations where you can make a single drop for multiple shares.
- Treat your CSA customers well – they are your most valuable customers. If there is a shortage one week, be sure to make up for it the next.

### Local Resources:

- [Sustainable Connections CSA Farm List & CSA Fair](#)
- [Workplace CSA Toolkit for Farmers](#) – learn more about marketing your CSA to a large group/workplace
- [Puget Sound Fresh Directory](#)

### Additional Awesome Resources:

- [“47 Marketing Tips for CSA Farms”](#)
- [CSA Models & Strategies from Appalachian Sustainable Agriculture Project](#)



## RESTAURANTS

Selling to restaurants can be a great outlet, and is fun and rewarding to see your products used creatively. It is a good way to get the word out about your products and develop relationships within the community. One possible downside to selling to restaurants is delivery efficiencies and smaller orders.

### Best Practices:

- Seek out restaurants that offer daily or weekly specials or seasonal menus
- Focus on chefs that value you and want to build a relationship
- Utilize Forward Contracts when working with wholesale buyers to plan together for the season
- “Under-promise and over-deliver” - quality and consistency are key
- Be assertive in seeking out chefs or restaurants, but do it at the right times
  - Best times are generally weekdays between 9-11 or 2-4.
  - Call ahead to schedule a time to come by: bring samples, a spreadsheet of products and when they are available for the year
- Develop a fresh sheet to send out weekly to restaurant and wholesale buyer contacts – have an order deadline and delivery day established
- Provide restaurants with photos/your logo/your story, so they can promote you on their menu, in their establishment, and on their website and social media
- Invoice professionally, keep a copy and file it

### Local Resources:

- Sustainable Connections Events: The [Farm-to-Table Trade Meeting](#) and Farmer Chef Mixers
- [Forward Contract templates](#): created by local farmers and chefs, utilize this template to plan for the season’s production and increase sales with wholesale buyers
- [Puget Sound Food Hub](#): sell your products through this farmer’s marketing co-op to connect with restaurants and retailers up and down I-5.
- As a member of Sustainable Connections, we can help connect you with local wholesale buyers. We will also send out one featured post for you on the NW Chefs Listserv each year. Contact [sara@sustainableconnections.org](mailto:sara@sustainableconnections.org)
- [See a list of awesome local restaurants that source locally here!](#)

### Additional Awesome Resources:

- [“Marketing to Restaurants” from North Carolina Cooperative Extension](#)
- [“The ABCs of marketing to restaurants” from Rodale Institute](#)



## GROCCERS

Grocery stores can be a good market for farmers looking to move larger volumes of product with one customer. Before jumping into this market, you should have some experience first selling directly to the public and/or restaurants. This will help you fine-tune your production schedule, growing and marketing skills.

### Best Practices:

- When first approaching a store, find buyers in the department you want to sell to and set up an appointment. Bring samples, a product list for the full season, pricing, your business license, and any applicable certifications.
- Find out if they require Good Agricultural Practices (GAP) certification or the dollar amount of product liability insurance you must carry
- Learn more about product specs [here](#) (how many heads in a case, how many carrots in a bunch, etc)
- Bring high-quality products *when you say you will*
- Deliver your product in boxes labeled with farm name and product description (weights, etc.) and ask the buyer what packing and labeling they prefer
- Price setting: 35-45% lower than retail/market pricing recommended
- Use a good, clear, professional invoicing system – track deliveries, get signed invoice duplicate and file your copy
- Be aware of the potential need for UPC coding
- Provide point of sale signage with photos and info on your farm, and ask stores to use them (this will help to move your products faster)

### Local Resources

- SEE RESTAURANT page for Sustainable Connections resources
- Local Grocers that Buy Local:
  - [Community Food Co-op](#)
  - [Terra Organic & Natural Foods](#)
  - [The Green Barn \(Lynden\)](#)
  - [Haggen](#)
  - [Skagit Valley Co-op](#)
  - [The Markets, LLC \(Birch Bay & Anacortes\)](#)
  - [PCC Natural Markets \(Seattle\)](#)

### Additional Awesome Resources:

- [WSDA Good Agricultural Practices Info](#)



## SCHOOLS AND INSTITUTIONS

There is much interest from schools in connecting with and purchasing from local farms. These may be good market opportunities if you can meet the scale – schools can offer a steady market, medium and large volume sales, and agreements for planning and production. Both institutions and schools are a great way to get more connected to your community. With many state and private hospitals and institutions shifting their procurement standards to incorporate more fresh, healthy foods, this is a good time to connect with these markets, for farmers that can produce at a larger scale.

### Best Practices:

- For schools, contact the school’s food buyer, district child nutrition services director, or the Farm-to-School Coordinating Team
- For institutions like hospitals, senior centers, or retirement communities, contact the head chef or food services director
- Dedicate time to building relationships and regular communication
- Depending on the school or institution, your farm may be required to carry additional liability insurance or third party food safety certifications like Good Agricultural Practices (GAP)
- Utilize Forward Contracts to plan ahead for the season with buyers
- Learn more about product specs [here](#) (how many heads in a case, how many carrots in a bunch, etc)

### Local Resources

- SEE RESTAURANT page for Sustainable Connections resources
- **Local/Regional Schools/Institution contacts:**

Whatcom Farm-to-School Coordinating Team  
Mardi Solomon  
[coordinator@whatcomfarmtoschool.org](mailto:coordinator@whatcomfarmtoschool.org)

Western Washington University  
Patrick Durgan, Executive Chef  
[durgan-patrick@aramark.com](mailto:durgan-patrick@aramark.com)

Mt. Baker Care Center  
Jozef Bosman, Food Buyer  
[dietary@mtbakercarecenter.com](mailto:dietary@mtbakercarecenter.com)

St. Joseph’s Medical Center  
Patrick Warner, Head Chef  
[pwarner@peacehealth.org](mailto:pwarner@peacehealth.org)

United General Hospital, Skagit  
Chad Swanson, Food Services Director  
[cswanson@peacehealth.org](mailto:cswanson@peacehealth.org)



## FARM STAND, U-PICK, & AGRITOURISM

Having your customers out to your farm can be an important educational and memorable experience for them, and be a viable business option for you. With options ranging from a full service to self-service farm stand, U-pick options or creating an agritourism destination with tours, a farm store, ready-to-eat foods and even a farm-stay, there is plenty to consider.

### Best Practices:

- Advertise well, with large roadside signs, including obvious “open” signs, or signs with hours
- List in local and regional farming guides and directories
- Create an attractive atmosphere
- For U-pick or agritourism offerings, provide a clean site with parking, restrooms, rules, U-pick container options and prices clearly outlined

### Local/Regional Resources:

- [Whatcom Food & Farm Finder](#)
- [Puget Sound Fresh Guide](#)

### Additional Awesome Resources:

- [“Developing a Roadside Farm Market”](#) PennState Extension
- [“Roadside Stands”](#) Cooperative Extension Service, University of Kentucky



## DISTRIBUTORS & WHOLESALERS

Food wholesalers, or distributors, act as a middleman in moving product from your farm to other businesses and institutions. Working with a food wholesaler or distributor can be a good choice if you want to move larger volumes of product. This is a great option for farmers who would rather spend more time on the farm than making deliveries and selling to individual businesses on their own. The services do come with an associated cost that many farms see as worthwhile through time saved on delivery.

### Best Practices:

- Proper documentation/food safety plan: Most larger distributors require some form of Food Safety plan like GAPs
- Packing standards & labeling: Talk to distributors about their packing standards and how they need your products labeled
- Form a strong relationship: As with any business relationship, find out how to work best together. Plan on meeting each off-season to evaluate the season and plan for the upcoming year.
- Utilize Forward Contracts when working with wholesale buyers to plan together for the season
- Learn more about product specs [here](#) (how many heads in a case, how many carrots in a bunch, etc)

### Local/Regional Wholesalers & Distributors:

- [Organically Grown Co.](#)
- [Charlie's Produce](#)
- [Seattle Wholesale Grower's Market \(flowers\)](#)
- [Full list of produce wholesalers in Washington](#)

### Business to Consumer Wholesale Buyers:

- [Sound Harvest Delivery](#)
- [Acme Farms + Kitchen](#)
- [Dandelion Organic Delivery](#)