

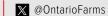
Cultivating Local:

Seizing Opportunities to Grow
Ontario's Local Agri-Products Sector

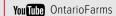
Through the Cultivating Local project, the Ontario Federation of Agriculture (OFA) has developed a series of nine checklists to support you in your direct-to-consumer sales journey.

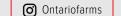
Nine checklists

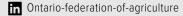
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- 8. Selling at farmers' markets
- 9. Selling to restaurants and retailers













Getting started in direct-to-consumer sales

Starting or diversifying a farm business requires careful planning, especially when exploring direct sales channels. Through the Cultivating Local project, the Ontario Federation of Agriculture (OFA) has developed a series of nine checklists to support you in your direct-to-consumer sales journey.

Plan and scope your vision Do your research. Determine the products or experience you would like to sell. You will have to consider the logistics of production as well as the demand and potential markets for your product. Consider value-added products. Showcase your farm product in value-added items like canned or dried goods, beauty products, textiles, beverages, etc. Identify your sales channels. You may decide to sell direct from your farm through custom order pickups, a farm stand, a retail store, a restaurant, etc. Alternatively, you could sell direct-to-consumer at farmers' markets or through wholesale markets and retailers. Develop a business plan. Once you have identified the product(s) and customer experience, plan accordingly. Learn about your customer demographic, define your sales channels and develop a business plan. Check out the business plan templates at fcc-fac.ca on the "Business Plan Tools" page to help get started. Research applicable regulations. Identify regulations and local land use planning policies that may apply to your business. Contact your local authorities early in the planning process, including: your municipal planning and economic development staff, local public health unit, Ontario Ministry of Agriculture, Food and Agribusiness (OMAFA), the Alcohol and Gaming Commission of Ontario, and/or the Canadian Food Inspection Agency. Learn more at Ontario.ca through the 'Ontario's agriculture and food laws' page.











Consider your staffing needs **Determine if you need more employees** and explore grants/programs available. Legal obligations. Learn more at Ontario.ca through the "Employment Standards Act" page about what is expected of you as an employer in Ontario. Promote that you are hiring. Leverage AgCareers.com or your local workforce planning board to post your job opportunities. Explore funding and financing options Reach out to your local Community Futures Development office to assist with funding, counselling, and strategic planning. Visit AgPal.ca and Farm Credit Canada at fcc-fac.ca to learn about funding programs for the agricultural sector. Learn about financing opportunities by contacting the Business Development Bank of Canada (BDC), the Agricultural Credit Corporation (ACC), or your local bank Leverage networks and expertise Look up the commodity or agricultural organization most relevant to your operation for resources and support. OMAFA keeps a directory of local boards, marketing boards, and representative associations. Find business development support by finding your Community Futures Development Corporations at the "Find Your Local CFDC" page or your local "Small Business Enterprise Centre" through the Business and Economy page at Ontario.ca. Contact your economic development or tourism office for learning and networking opportunities. Consider joining your local chamber of commerce. Attend industry conferences and events to meet experts, farmers and future farmers and to exchange ideas and best practices.

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On-farm stands and stores

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Research applicable regulations	
	Find local planning requirements through your local municipal website and contact your planning department.
	Food safety. Reach out to local authorities, including your local public health unit, Canadian Food Inspection Agency, Alcohol and Gaming Commission of Ontario and the Ministry of Agriculture, Food, and Agribusiness to ensure that you are compliant. Your Local Public Health Unit may inspect your food premise. Check out "O. Reg 493/17: Food Premises" for more information.
	Building safety. Ensure that your stand or store is compliant with local fire code regulations, and all other building-related compliance measures like accessibility.
Decide	on a point-of-sale system
	Staffing. Determine if your on-farm stand or store will be staffed or if payment will be received via an honour system.
	Consider a range of payment options, including cash or e-transfer, or an automated electronic system like Shopify or Square, depending on your business needs.
	Ensure that your inventory and sales can be accurately tracked for accounting and bookkeeping purposes.

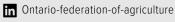














Operating your on-farm stand or store Marketing and promoting your products. Understand your target audience and tailor your advertising accordingly. See Cultivating Local checklists five and six, for marketing and social media tips. Evaluate accessibility. Ensure that your business is accessible and signage is visible so that customers can safely park and access your on-farm stand or store. Determine staffing needs. Consider applying for grants and programs to offset labour costs. Consider partnering with neighbouring producers. Diversify the products you are offering by sourcing from other local farms or businesses. Reputable branding. Consider joining the Foodland Ontario program to access free retail display signs and use the trusted logo. Apply at Ontario.ca/foodland or email foodland@ontario.ca for more details. Evaluate your progress Track your performance. Track sales, customer feedback, and foot traffic to evaluate the success of your farm store or stand. Be flexible and make adjustments. Adjust your products offered and inventory based on customer preferences, market trends, and seasonal fluctuations. Use budgeting tools. For help using market and pricing information to make decisions for your business, download the "farm business decision calculators" available at Ontario.ca.

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Agritourism

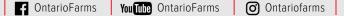
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Plan your agritourism experience Identify your unique assets. What features of your farm can you leverage to enhance the experience? Think of your location's unique assets and find ways to incorporate the buildings, farm animals, wildlife, and trails you have access to. Develop your agritourism activity. Agritourism offerings can include pick-yourown produce, farm-to-table dinners, corn mazes, wine or cider tastings, cooking classes, petting zoos, horseback rides, farm stays, seasonal festivals, and educational workshops (e.g., guided farm tours, working farm experiences). Research applicable agritourism laws and regulations Reach out to your local municipality to ensure compliance with local land use planning policies and zoning by-laws. Building and fire codes. Ensure any of the structures you may be building comply with the applicable legislation, including the Ontario Fire Code. Manage the risks. Understand the protections provided to you by reviewing the Growing Agritourism Act and choosing the appropriate liability insurance for your operation. Check out the "public event displays & live animal exhibits" resources on the Farm and Food Care Ontario website for more helpful tips. **Ensure visitors are safe.** Install relevant signage and safety instructions. Ensure animal safety. Maintain clear guidelines on visitor conduct, especially around animals. Signage, safety instructions, handwashing stations, and relevant biosecurity measures should be paired with all animal interactions.











Develop your business plan **Determine your pricing strategy.** Benchmark where similar experiences are and assess the value of the unique experience you are offering. Visit the "Pricing your product" page on Ontario.ca to learn about common pricing practices. As part of your business plan, consider investments in infrastructure, facilities, and staffing needs. For more information on developing a business plan, see checklist one, Getting Started. Start small, plan for seasonality, and assess the financial viability of your agritourism activities. Leverage partnerships & industry resources Networking. Consider a membership with Agritourism Ontario to benefit from networking, advocacy, and access to resources. Tourism initiatives. Explore initiatives like taste trails, culinary guides, or farm maps in your area. Find your local Regional Tourism Organization and consult Simcoe County's "Agritourism Toolkit" on the agricultural resources page at edo.simcoe.ca for useful tips. Partnerships. Consider partnerships with other local artisans, tourism businesses and farms to offer combined experiences or events. Access free webinars through the Global Agritourism Network to learn more about the different agritourism strategies you could consider.

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Value-added food and beverage

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Processing your product	
	Zoning. Contact your local municipal planning department to determine if your on-farm value-added processing activity is a permitted use.
	Property assessments and tax classifications. Contact your local municipal planning department to understand how value-added activities can affect your property assessments and tax classifications.
	Contact your local fire department to ensure your facility meets the Ontario Fire Code.
	Processing off-farm. Contact your local economic development office to get help finding facilities that can process or provide space for you to process your product.
Relevant regulations	
	You are required to notify your local Public Health Unit prior to opening your business. Consult you local Public Health Unit to see if you are also subject to inspections from the Ministry of Agriculture, Food, and Agribusiness or the Canadian Food Inspection Agency.
	Food safety regulations. Review applicable legislation to ensure your business is in compliance. Legislation may include the Ontario Food Premises Regulation, Food Safety Act, Cannabis Act, or Health Canada's Natural Health Product Regulation.
	Labelling. Use the CFIA Food Labelling for Industry toolkit for everything you need to know about labelling your product.

















Requirements for producing or selling alcohol **Zoning.** Check with your local municipality to ensure your property is zoned for beverage alcohol manufacturing and/or retail. Licensing. To sell alcohol you will need to obtain a Manufacturer's License from the Alcohol and Gaming Commission of Ontario (AGCO). If the product is made on-site you will need a Retail Store Endorsement and complete a Municipal Information Form through AGCO. Breweries, wineries or distilleries must obtain By the Glass Endorsement through the Alcohol and Gaming Commission of Ontario. For more information, see the AGCO's Beer, Spirits, and Wine Manufacturers guides. Events or farmers' markets. To sell here you will need to submit a Regulatory Submission Notification at least 10 days prior to the planned sale. More information on requirements can be found on the AGCO's website. Cost and pricing Cost of production. Know your fixed and variable costs to determine your pricing. Use the "cost of production for crops and livestock" on the Ontario.ca page for more information. Budgeting tools. Use calculations like a breakeven analysis which looks at the minimum production required to cover costs and then the minimum price needed to cover costs. Download the On-farm processing recipe-based costing tool on the "farm business decision calculators" page available at ontario.ca.

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Direct-to-consumer marketing

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Create a distinct brand Identify what makes your farm and product special. Is it the taste of your products? Your farm's story or a special feature on your farm? Your farming practices? Or something else? Create a simple logo and name that you can consistently use across your website, product labels, and social media. Consider having a face for the brand. For more tips on branding visit Farm Credit Canada's "Building your brand" playbook. Ensure that your business name isn't already taken by searching the Ontario Business Registry.

Consider your audience's values, for example:

- Families: Time/activities together and easy meal options.
- Busy professionals: Quick pick up or delivery options.
- Health conscious shoppers: Organic and nutrient dense products.
- New Canadians: Traditional ingredients, recipes, and holiday considerations.
- Chefs and restaurants: Consistent supply and unique ingredients.
- Tourists: Agritourism experiences like farm tours or u-pick days.





Creating your marketing strategy **Identify a few marketing activities** and build from there. For example, you could apply to use Foodland Ontario's logo and leverage their marketing resources, get listed in local food guides, create social media ads, and partner with other farms/businesses to promote each other. Create a schedule for marketing and social media activities. Keep in mind that consistency is more important than quantity - don't be afraid to recycle content! Engage your audience. Try running contests, polls, themed days or other activities. Refer to checklist six, Social Media for content ideas. Customer touch points. Ask happy customers to spread the word or leave a review. Keep customers engaged through loyalty or referral programs, engaging newsletters and by sharing educational content about your farm practices. Marketing tools Try Al tools for marketing strategies/schedules and help with generating ideas for content. Try low-cost paid ads. For example, use Meta Ads Manager for small ad campaigns on Facebook/Instagram. You can set a limit of \$10-\$15/day. Build and improve your SEO (search engine optimization). This means making small changes to your website or social media so it is easier to find in search engines. This may include using keywords, having reviews and using your Google Business Profile. Track your progress Set clear sale targets and track engagement metrics. Meta Ads Manager helps track reach and frequency to see how many times your ad was viewed. It is also important to see if people are following your ad links to your website to buy your products. Free marketing resources are available from groups like FedDev Ontario – Small Business Services, the Canadian Agri-food Marketers Alliance, and Nourish Food Marketing.

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CULTIVATING LOCAL CHECKLIST Social media



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Choosing your social media platform(s) Tailor your choice to your audience. For example, Facebook is most popular for adults over 35, Instagram and TikTok are more popular with younger audiences, and YouTube is a primary source of educational food information across all age demographics. Time management. Ensure that you can realistically manage the profiles attached to your business. Determine what kind of content you want to create. Different platforms suit different styles of content creation: Instagram - visual content; Facebook community posts, updates, event creation; TikTok - short videos; YouTube educational videos and vlogs; X - short text updates. Social media best practices Contact information. Always include links to your website and information or how to place orders/purchase your products on your social media. Quality visuals and accommodating content. Use consistent branding and real photos of your farm, products and customer stories to build trust. Also use simple language that is accessible for all audiences. Try tools like Canva to create appealing content easily. Be intentional and consistent with your posts. Posting consistently, tailoring themes to seasonal needs, and reusing content across platforms will make your message stronger. Try tools like Buffer and Hootsuite for scheduling your posts.







Building engagement **Encourage engagement** by setting aside time to respond to comments, direct messages, and to ask for questions/comments from viewers. Boost visibility by encouraging shares, tags, referrals, and contests, or by partnering with other farms, related businesses or influencers. **Networking and skill building.** Follow other farms, food businesses, or local pages for ideas. Check out resources including marketing influencers or businesses in your area and LinkedIn training courses. Set goals and track progress Determine why you are creating content and track progress by using tools like Google Analytics to monitor key performance indicators. This will allow you to see which social media platforms are driving things like traffic and purchasing. As your business grows, consider marketing new goods and services on a separate account to tailor your content to the appropriate audience. For example, if your pick-your-own flower shop starts offering wedding flowers, consider a separate account to reach engaged couples (and link it to your main business accounts).

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Selling your products online

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Your online presence Start by creating an online presence with a website and/or social media platform. Choose between building an online storefront with a website builder that has an E-commerce feature (e.g., WordPress, WooCommerce, or Shopify) or hiring a web developer. If you are looking for a farmer specific online selling platform, check out Local Line. To create a website, you will need to purchase a domain name. This is done by choosing a registrar (e.g. CIRA, GoDaddy), creating your domain name, selecting a domain extension (e.g. .org, .ca, .com), and providing contact and payment information to register it. Your preferred domain may not be available, so think of more than one option that fits your farm. Important features of an online storefront include: a shopping cart, secure server (a Secure Socket Layer (SSL) which most website builders have), payment process, being user-friendly, and syncing with your inventory. Check out the key regulations for selling online in Ontario by visiting the "ebusiness security. privacy, and legal requirements" page feddevontario.canada.ca.















The ordering process Make it easy to order. You are required to list your products, prices, and payment instructions clearly under Ontario's Consumer Protection Act. Use photos and descriptions that help people understand your product. Ensure the payment process is straightforward and be clear about any additional fees. Consider using upfront payment methods and use a secure, trusted checkout system like Square or Shopify. Be transparent about your return, refund, and cancellation policies as required under the Ontario Consumer Protection Act. Product delivery. Choose if you will offer pick-ups, meet-up locations, or delivery, and communicate these options clearly. Tools like Optimal Route can help with planning delivery routes and keep customers informed on delivery progress. Communications strategy Communicate regularly. Let customers know what is in season, about your new product launches, what's available and the options for payment. Consider creating key website pages to allow the customer to learn about your business. Direct your social media engagement to your storefront or website. Some social media platforms, like Instagram, also allow you to incorporate a storefront directly on the social media app. Review what works and adjust as you go. Ensure customers have a way to communicate with you and don't be afraid to ask for feedback.

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CULTIVATING LOCAL CHECKLIST Selling at farmers' markets

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Necessary background research Select your farmers' market. When searching for a farmers' market consider the location, customer base, market fees, and the market's values. Browse potential markets on the Farmers' Markets Ontario (FMO) website. and visit the markets before deciding where you want to sell. Ensure compliance with food safety requirements. Local Public Health Inspectors regularly inspect farmers' markets and can help you navigate food safety requirements. Insurance. You will need specific insurance to sell at a farmers' market, even if the market is insured. You can find a group insurance program through FMO.



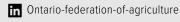














Getting farmers' market ready For tips on marketing, merchandising, displays, and best practices for sales, visit the FMO's website to complete the Market Vendor Certification Program. It is free for members and \$40 for non-members. Consider applying for the free Foodland Ontario program to access recognizable branding materials. Develop communication materials for your staff at the farmers' market. Think of the story behind your product, how it is grown, and the story of your farm. Refer to checklist five for marketing tips. Ensure to use your branding to boost vour reach. Pricing strategy. Consider the additional overhead costs associated with selling at a farmers' market and incorporate them into your pricing strategy. Avoid overextending yourself by attending too many markets. You can use the Ministry of Agriculture, Food, and Agribusiness' "Performance analysis by marketing channel" calculator to help determine pricing. Finding success at the market Use social media to let customers know which markets you will be attending. Refer to checklist six for social media tips. Use tools to track sales and manage the inventory sent to each market effectively. Farmers' Markets Ontario has resources for members including a market supplies checklist, tips on how to shine at a market, and how to create great market displays.

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Selling to restaurants and retailers

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Understand the market and client needs Research target restaurants and retailers. Consider building and maintaining relationships with key decision makers in the industry (procurement managers, chefs, or store managers). Don't be afraid to call potential buyers or visit local restaurants to discuss opportunities. Consider working with distributors that specialize in connecting restaurants and retailers with local products. For help explore "placing your product (distribution)" on Ontario.ca. Understand the supply chain and plan your logistics. Ensure that you can provide consistent product availability - keeping in mind seasonality and demand fluctuations. Create a schedule for the production, packaging, and delivery of your products. Diversify your buyers to prevent over-reliance on a single client. Follow up with buyers regularly to ensure satisfaction with your products and adjust your products based on demand trends.

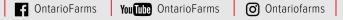














Preparing to sell Comply with food safety requirements, labelling regulations, and relevant certifications. Ensure proper labelling, handling, and transportation procedures are in place. Be aware of any other regulatory needs your clients may need you to meet. Use the Canadian Food Inspection Agency's "Industry Labelling Tool" at inspection.canada.ca for help complying with labelling standards. Refer to checklists four in the Cultivating Local project for value-added food tips and check out "O. Reg 493/17: Food Premises" for more information on food safety. Marketing. Develop a compelling story about your farm and create corresponding market materials including brochures, social media, and product photos. Plan for demand and seasonality. Ensure flexibility by understanding your product's peak demand times and work with clients to plan orders in advance. Pricing Offer clear pricing and be open to negotiation. Be clear on your pricing structure, keeping competitive rates for bulk orders. Be prepared to negotiate terms, including pricing flexibility for large or long-term orders placed in advance of busy seasons. Visit the "daily wholesale price reports" page on agriculture.canada.ca to find daily market commodity prices for different produce and inform your pricing strategy. Network and collaborate with industry groups Explore local food festivals to increase exposure and meet possible buyers who might be looking to source more local products. Explore resources like the Culinary Tourism Alliance, FeastON, and the Ontario "Eat Local" Groups page at sustainontario.ca.

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Cultivating Local:

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