

CULTIVATING LOCAL CHECKLIST

Direct to consumer marketing

5 / 9

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.

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 AI 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.

In response to consumer demand and growing interest in opportunities to sell local, OFA's Cultivating Local project has developed a series of nine checklists, nine recorded workshops, a resource hub, and a final report. To learn more, visit: ofa.on.ca/cultivating-local/



The Project was funded in part by the Ontario Ministry of Agriculture, Food and Agribusiness.