

tomatoes
beets beans
corn potatoes
carrots cabbage
peppers

Social Media from Farm to Fork

How to connect with customers
and **grow** your market



Social media can help farmers build relationships with customers, stay current on food trends, let customers provide feedback, and make requests. Having a two-way communication can help you identify trends, invite customers, and make plans for future years.

10 ways to use social media to promote your farm products or farmers market

1. Have a web presence. Social media can give you a web presence—and it's free! All you have to do is sign up and start sharing pictures and information about your product. You will be advertising and marketing your product at minimal cost.

Did you know that Facebook pages are now publicly searchable on Google and other search engines? Many farms have a fully functional Facebook page that is free and easy to maintain.

2. Tell your story. Many consumers are looking for a greater connection with the farmers who grow the food they eat. They want to know how you got started and about your family, products, production practices, and educational offerings. Those who don't live and work on a farm may find the everyday details of your life fascinating.

3. Post photos. Photos provide a real connection with the farm. Notice which pictures are liked and shared, so you can give your customers more of what they enjoy.

For example, Bob's Farm posts photos of produce as well as scenes from around the farm. Over time, Bob realized that photos from around the farm generated the most discussion and engagement with potential customers. However, photos of in-season produce resulted in sales inquiries.

4. Share recipes. Pinterest, All Recipes, Facebook, and YouTube are just a few of the social networking sites that share recipes. Readers can post comments about a recipe and easily share it with others along with information about where to purchase locally grown fresh produce.

When corn is in season, Bob's Farm posts instructions on the proper way to store and freeze corn. If customers handle produce in the best way to preserve quality, they will be more likely to return for more next year as happy customers.

5. Get to know your customers. Use social networking to poll your customers about what they would like to buy. Keep contact information, and let them know when their favorite produce is available the following year.

Did you know that Facebook and other social media allow sorting and filtering of client data? Using filters is a great way to create categories of specific clientele.

6. Expand your customer base by networking with other businesses. Promote your product while also featuring other businesses you sell to and work with. If a local restaurant uses your seasonal produce, tell your followers about it and include pictures of your produce at the restaurant. If you help promote other businesses to your customers, chances are these businesses will repay the favor and spread the word about your product and services to their customers. Ultimately, their loyal customers can become your customers too.

When Bob's heirloom tomatoes were served at a local restaurant, he took a picture of the beautiful dish and posted it on his Facebook page. He mentioned the restaurant, a description of the dish, and that the tomatoes came from his farm. The restaurant shared his picture with its followers and told them about the great produce they get from Bob's Farm. This introduced Bob's Farm to an entirely new group of customers.

Bob's Farm posted on a tomato forum, "At Bob's Farm, we use well-composted manure to ensure that pathogens have been killed before application to our tomatoes." From the post, readers know that Bob's Farm is knowledgeable and conscientious about food safety. The next time they look for tomatoes, they will think of Bob's Farm. By building this reputation over time, Bob's Farm can become well-known and respected in the online tomato community.

7. Advertise sales promotions. Let your customers know what is in season, fresh, and a great deal this week. More and more people recognize that local foods are, by definition, fresher and higher quality than produce from thousands of miles away, but they don't always know when and where to get the local foods. Make sure your followers know the best time to buy blueberries, corn, watermelons, apples, etc., and where they can find the produce.

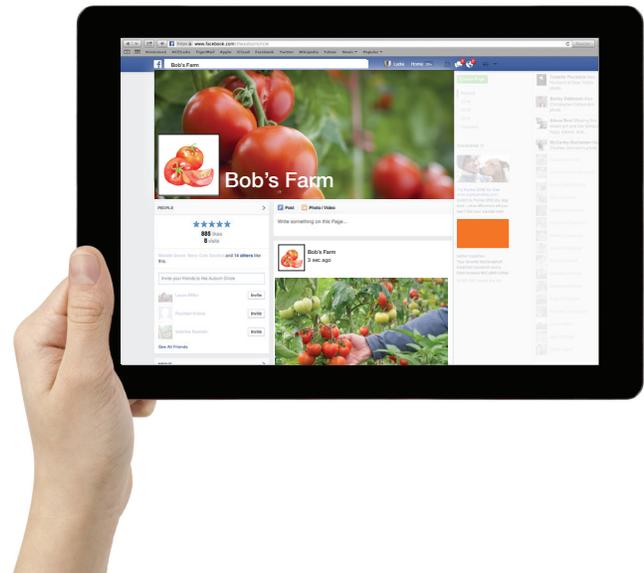
8. Solicit feedback. Ask your customers what time of day they would like the farm stand to be open or what products they would like to see. Ask them where they would like to buy your products and what they think about new varieties. You may get great new product or marketing ideas. Don't be afraid to solicit feedback. You will be in absolute control of what other people see and read on your page or channel.

9. Participate in niche communities. When you contribute to niche forums, you build your credibility within the community and promote your farm. Check out the hundreds of horticulture-related groups on myfolia.com.

10. Communicate with your customers about how the weather can affect your harvest or change your plans.

Customers who understand your challenges will be more tolerant of the unpredictable nature of seasonal availability of locally grown produce. Most social media sites, such as Facebook and Instagram, have great phone apps that let you interact with customers in real time.

A word of caution: The online community is extremely diverse. Make sure that you are listening to feedback from customers who are likely to buy your products. Remember that having your post go viral is not necessarily the goal. Slow and steady relationship building with local folks is better for a small business than having millions of people all over the world watch your video.



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