



DIGITAL MARKETING FOR SMALL FARMS

OPEN FOOD NETWORK



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GROWING YOUR ONLINE PRESENCE:

DIGITAL MARKETING FOR SMALL FARMS

In today's world, the truth is that almost every business needs an online presence. However, for many farmers (and small business owners in general), digital marketing does not come naturally. It may be confusing, feel pushy, or just be hard to make it a priority. With all the trends and buzzwords, it can be a challenge to filter out the noise and focus on the ways that digital marketing can work for you. In fact, the good news for small farms, local food producers and market vendors is that some of the most common digital marketing tools, like email newsletters and social media, are ideally suited to your business in many ways.



Creating digital content for your farm doesn't have to be daunting. In this short guide, we will help you draft a simple marketing strategy in under an hour, then walk you through first steps and best practices for email and social media marketing. We've even provided templates and content ideas to get you started! With a bit of planning and strategic focus, you can grow your online presence and begin to see real benefits as a result.



5 REASONS DIGITAL MARKETING WORKS FOR FARMS

1. IT LETS YOU TELL YOUR STORY

More and more people are looking for a connection to the earth, the food they eat, and the real people behind their food. This makes digital marketing perfect for small farms, whose setting and daily work offer authentic stories that draw readers in. Unlike many other types of business, farming also presents natural opportunities for compelling visuals: the food, flowers, animals and rural scenes that people love!

2. IT CONNECTS YOU DIRECTLY WITH CUSTOMERS

Marketing small farms is all about building the real relationships that make loyal customers. Digital marketing, especially email newsletters and social media, can extend the important connections that farmers and market vendors make in person.

3. IT IS IMMEDIATE

Emails and social media are quick ways to update customers about new products, features, events and moments at the farm.



4. IT IS FREE OR INEXPENSIVE TO GET STARTED

There is no cost to set up social media accounts or email newsletter lists, or to use many other tools such as the user-friendly graphic design platform, Canva. Website development and hosting can range in price, but is a worthwhile cost for almost all businesses.

5. IT IS FLEXIBLE

Farmers are tremendously busy; taking time for marketing can be a hard sell. One of the benefits of digital marketing is that you can often work it into your regular workday, taking a moment here or there to snap a picture or record a quick video with your phone. On the flip side, if you'd rather check a bunch off your list at once, calendars, templates and scheduling tools can help you set up the bulk of marketing efforts ahead of time.



THE BIG PICTURE: DEVELOPING A DIGITAL MARKETING STRATEGY

Without an overarching strategy, the time you spend marketing is likely to be inefficient, ineffective and frustrating. A marketing strategy is simply a long-term game plan that guides your marketing. It lays out your goals, ideal customers, competition, and how you will present your business as a brand. A digital marketing strategy (which may be part of this overall plan or a separate document) covers the same big picture information in relation to online channels specifically.



Getting started with this planning isn't as complicated as it might sound. You can find a template [here](#) and use the strategies below to help you develop a digital marketing strategy that is manageable, genuine and effective.



KNOW YOUR CUSTOMERS

Understanding who your customers are and what they want is essential to effective marketing. How old are they? Where do they live? What are their needs? Good marketing recognizes that customers are not just looking for a product but for a solution to their problems or a way to reach their goals. Is their driving need to put a healthy dinner on the table? To teach their kids where food comes from? To support more sustainable ways of living? Your marketing strategy can cover multiple consumers with multiple needs, but each marketing activity you plan should speak to a specific consumer at a particular stage in their journey towards becoming a buyer.

ALIGN YOUR MARKETING EFFORTS

When you are planning out your digital marketing, consider how it fits in with and complements your other marketing efforts. Ensure you are conveying the same message online and offline, and look for ways to cross-promote different activities. For example, you can use a monthly newsletter to promote farmers' markets you will attend, and use a QR code at your farmers' market stall to encourage shoppers to subscribe to your newsletter.

BUILD A LOCAL NETWORK

Connecting and collaborating with other local businesses can be a great way to reach more customers, create a sense of community, and save time and money. Look for ways to collaborate on marketing, both online and in-person. This could be as simple as sharing posts about a local event on social media or more formal, such as agreeing to sell complementary products from a neighbouring farm. Some online platforms such as Open Food Network make it possible to easily conduct co-selling and organize mini-marketplaces, expanding your online storefront to an integrated local network.

TELL YOUR STORY

Storytelling draws customers into a narrative so they become invested in the people and values behind a brand. With local food suppliers, this is all the more important: consumers who choose to buy their food directly from a farmer want to know who they are buying from. Think about how your marketing can incorporate your 'why,' the unique history and motivations behind your farm. Be open and authentic: your marketing should reflect who you are and what you have to offer.



Want to learn more about co-selling and how to set up mini-marketplaces? Contact support@openfoodnetwork.ca



PRIORITIZE DIGITAL CHANNELS THAT WORK FOR YOU

The basic digital marketing elements below are important starting points for small farms. Your digital marketing plan should summarize which of these platforms and tactics you will use, plus how much time and money you will invest in these activities.

WEBSITE + ONLINE SHOP

Having a professional presence, including e-commerce capabilities if relevant, is essential.



EMAIL NEWSLETTER

Sending out regular, high quality emails is one of the least expensive and most effective steps for small businesses.

SOCIAL MEDIA

Having a social media presence is a great way to build relationships and quickly share content; social media marketing works best when you stick to 1 or 2 platforms you can do well, such as Instagram and Facebook.



GOOGLE BUSINESS PROFILE + LOCAL DIRECTORIES

For businesses like small farms that market to local customers, appearing on maps and in other location-based listings will directly help customers find you.

CONTENT MARKETING

Adding fresh, valuable content to your blog as well as through other channels is the best way to increase your search ranking and establish trust with customers.



MARKET YEAR ROUND

Even if your farm is seasonal, thinking about marketing as a year-round effort will help you spread out some of the work to your slower time and keep your farm on people's radars even in the off-season. Consider these tips for year round marketing.

- Conduct a marketing audit to look for gaps and opportunities in your current marketing.
- Take advantage of downtime to focus on larger tasks such as creating your yearly marketing plan or updating your website.



- Continue creating content, sending out newsletters and posting on social media. There are lots of off-season topics that can keep your farm on people's minds, for example, recipes for using frozen produce in the Winter.
- Expand your mailing list by hosting a holiday giveaway or creating a downloadable gift to entice new subscribers through your website.
- Share testimonials and reviews that you gathered during the growing season to remind customers what they can look forward to.
- Generate hype for the next season with early bird discounts, testimonials and pictures of first plantings.



- Co-sell with another farm or business. If you have a small stock of products available in the Winter, joining forces with another local producer or retailer can help you extend your selling season.
- Host an appreciation event for your customers or an event for the larger public, if your space allows. Possibilities could include a holiday market, cooking class, or workshop on growing micro-greens indoors.
- Conduct a survey to find out what other products or services your customers are interested in.



SEARCH ENGINE OPTIMIZATION

Search Engine Optimization is the process of improving your website in specific ways to increase its ranking when people search for products or services related to your business. SEO is a large and complicated topic, but gaining even a basic understanding can make a big difference to your search ranking.

[Click here for a good beginner resource on SEO.](#)



EMAIL MARKETING

After a website, email marketing may be the most effective and important digital marketing you do, with one of the best returns on investment. Email marketing is an easy way to engage your customers and potential customers, free to get started (usually up to a certain subscriber limit), and unlike social media, email lists are owned by you.

Across all industries, the average email open rate is close to 20%, which is far higher than the estimated 6% reach of Facebook posts (Constant Contact, 2021, Hootsuite, 2022).



Email Open Rate



Facebook Post Open Rate

TYPES OF EMAIL MARKETING

Email newsletters:

Newsletters contain updates about your business and products, as well as content to educate, entertain or otherwise engage subscribers. The core of your email marketing plan will be sending newsletters to subscribers on a regular basis (e.g., weekly, monthly or seasonally).

Behavioural emails:

This type of email marketing refers to sending automated emails to subscribers based on specific actions and behaviours they take. A simple example is a welcome message that goes out automatically to new CSA members when they sign up.

Transactional emails:

Invoices, receipts and order confirmations are examples of transactional emails. We tend not to think of these emails as marketing, but they do provide an opportunity to convey your brand, promote your newsletter or social media with links in the footer, or provide a referral discount code.

Dedicated emails:

Dedicated emails contain information about only one offer, such as an upcoming event or a big sale. These emails can be effective at spurring a specific action but should be used sparingly as too many may become an annoyance.



GETTING STARTED WITH EMAIL MARKETING

1. CHOOSE AN EMAIL MARKETING TOOL

There are a number of tools that offer free service, usually giving access to certain features or up to a certain subscriber limit. Some of the most common ones are Mailchimp, Mailerlite and Sender. Some e-commerce platforms such as Shopify also include built-in newsletter functions, while others offer integration with Mailchimp. Check the details of each plan to choose one that's best for you.

2. BUILD YOUR LIST

It will take time to build up your email list, but there are a number of strategies you can use to gain subscribers.

- Promote your newsletter through your other communication channels, including on your social platforms and in your email signature. Include clear newsletter opt-in boxes and maybe even a pop-up on your website.
- Display a QR code at your farmers' market stall linking to a newsletter sign up page.

A QR code is a type of scannable barcode. When read by a smartphone, a QR code can redirect users to a particular URL or other information. In addition to newsletter sign ups, QR codes could be used to link to a landing page, social media profile, or store coupons. You can make your own for free using an online QR code generator such as [QR CODE GENERATOR](#). Try scanning this image with the camera on your smartphone to see how it works:



- Wherever you are promoting your newsletter, highlight the benefits of signing up. Make it clear what frequency and type of content subscribers can expect to receive (e.g., "Sign up for our free monthly newsletter to receive recipes, tips and special offers").



- Offer a special incentive such as a one-time discount or downloadable content to encourage customers to sign up. For example, at the start of the summer, offer a PDF of barbecue recipes and grilling tips, delivered to new subscribers when they sign up for your e-newsletter online.
- Consider having a few sample newsletters available online so potential subscribers can see exactly what you're offering.
- Remember that legally you always need to get permission from your audience before you add them to a marketing list.
- Ready for the next step? Segmenting your list allows you to tailor the content to match what your subscribers need, making it more valuable to them and reducing unsubscribes. Some simple ways to segment your list would be Customers vs. Prospects or Regular Customers vs. CSA Members.



3. START EMAILING!

The most important part of email marketing is sending out regular communications.

- Set a realistic goal for how frequently you send out emails. Sending too many emails can cause recipients to unsubscribe; however, many small businesses actually send out too few. If possible, aim for once a month, on a regular schedule (or typically once a week for CSA members).
- Set up an automated welcome email that sends out to new subscribers as soon as they join your list.
- Create additional automated emails and sequences as you refine your marketing strategy.

Keep it manageable. If monthly newsletters are not possible right now, start with seasonal and work to increase that next year.



MAKING THE MOST OF EMAIL MARKETING

MAKE YOUR CONTENT VALUABLE + RELATABLE

Many business owners are surprised to learn that most email content should NOT be promotional. In fact, 80-90% of your newsletters should focus on educating or entertaining with relevant, timely information and stories; use the remaining 10-20% to promote new products, big sales or other exciting offers.

“ 80-90% OF YOUR NEWSLETTERS SHOULD FOCUS ON EDUCATING OR ENTERTAINING. ”

WRITE IN A CONVERSATIONAL MANNER

Write in a casual but professional manner that reflects the brand voice you determined in your marketing strategy. This may be the way you talk in person or slightly different, but should sound authentic and engaging for your customers. Be descriptive, with lots of adjectives that help readers experience the sights, smells, sounds and tastes of the farm (e.g., “Nothing goes better with these sun-drenched days than the first juicy bite of watermelon from our fields”).

KEEP IT SHORT

If you don't consider yourself much of a writer, the good news is that email newsletters should be short and sweet—about 200-500 words. Instead of trying to squeeze everything in, focus on a common theme that holds content together, and use concise and compelling copy. For extended articles or stories, give your readers a taste of the content, then send them to your website or blog to find the complete pieces.



MAKE IT VISUALLY APPEALING

Newsletters don't have to be fancy, but they should be professional looking and attractive. Keep in mind these basic tips; as you advance in your marketing, you can consider more creative designs.

- Use a template to save time and build a consistent look. There are lots of free templates available within most email marketing platforms, as well as in Canva, which you can modify to match your brand colours and fonts.
- Follow best practices for legibility:
 - 600px width
 - Clear, web-safe fonts
 - Minimum 16 px body text, and 22-24 px header text.
- Keep your text to manageable chunks, with lots of white space around them. Use headings, subheadings and bulleted lists to make text easy to scan.
- Include high quality images, whether stock photos or your own. Use images purposefully to add to the message of the newsletters.

We've created some farm-specific templates and a completed newsletter. Check the [resources](#) page for links.



Some of the goodness coming to market soon:

SEPTEMBER: item 1, item 2, item 3
OCTOBER: item 1, item 2, item 3
NOVEMBER: item 1, item 2, item 3

LOGO HERE

Merry everything.
Happy always.

'Tis the season when we shift focus on the farm from growing to gifting. Here's a quick look at what you'll find in our shop throughout November and December.

GIFTS: item 1, item 2, item 3
TREATS: item 1, item 2, item 3
FRESH FOOD: item 1, item 2, item 3



MASTER SUBJECT LINES

With the volume of email that most people receive, creating a compelling subject line can be the difference between your newsletter being immediately opened or lost in the shuffle.

- Keep it brief. Generally that means around 9 words and 60 characters.
- Be specific and descriptive so subscribers know why the email is relevant to them.
- Create a sense of urgency and 'fear of missing out' when appropriate. Phrases like "Limited time" and "Last chance" are effective for this reason. Action verbs can also create a sense of urgency.
- Avoid "spammy" words like 'Cheap,' 'Free' and 'Apply now,' as well as the word 'Newsletter,' which readers are more likely to ignore.
- Choose tactics that match your brand, whether that is personal, clever, keyword-based or another approach.
- Use emojis strategically. A single-well chosen emoji can amplify your message, whereas using too many or in the wrong context can seem spammy or inappropriate.
- Add preview text that hints at the content and draws readers in.



According to OptinMonster, 47% of email recipients decide to open an email based on the subject line alone, while 69% report email as spam based only on the subject line.

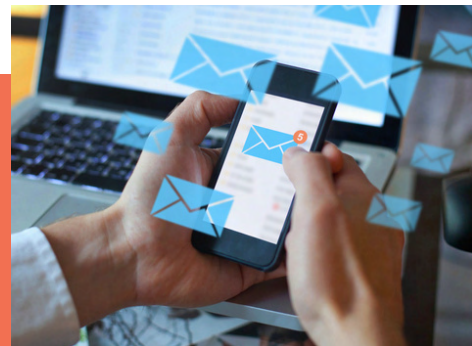
INCLUDE A CLEAR CALL-TO-ACTION

Provide a single, obvious action for readers to take. Often this will be a 'Shop Now' button, but could also be 'Sign Up Now' for a CSA registration or 'Get Tickets' for an event. Include the button near the top and bottom of your newsletter.



LOOK FOR QUICK FIXES

- Make sure your newsletter is mobile-friendly.
- Add alt text for all images, so that the newsletter still makes sense if images are blocked by the receiver's email.
- Customize the To and From fields. Use a familiar sender name and individual email address that shows you are a real person (e.g., rebecca@openfoodnetwork.ca). People are more likely to open emails that are personalized.
- Make it easy for people to unsubscribe. Including a simple "Unsubscribe Now" button helps to ensure your list is kept to active, interested people, and also helps keep your newsletter out of Junk folders.
- Always test your emails before sending out to your entire mailing list to make sure the links and formatting work the way you expect.



The majority of email views come from mobile devices (41%), followed by desktop (39%), and then tablets (19%).

-HubSpot Blog Research, 2021

MAKE USE OF INSIGHTS + ANALYTICS

Depending on your platform and account level, you may have access to basic, intermediate, or sophisticated analytics tools. Some of the measurements that can be useful for understanding your email performance include open rates, click rates and unsubscribe rates.

- **Open rate:** the percentage of subscribers who opened the email. This generally indicates how well your subject lines are performing, as well as the overall strength of your subscriber list.
- **Click rate:** the percentage of subscribers who clicked links in the email. This may help you assess how valuable the content of your email is to your audience, as well as the effectiveness of the call to action you've used.
- **Unsubscribe rate:** how many people unsubscribed from your list after receiving the email. This can tell you how effective the overall frequency and content of your campaigns are. If you see a significant number of unsubscribes (more than 2%), you may be sending emails too frequently or with content subscribers do not find valuable.

More advanced tools can track how subscribers are viewing your emails, how they are engaging with your emails, and how your list and performance have changed over time.



CONTENT IDEAS

Newsletters can be set up with the same basic categories of content in each one. For most farms, this will include stories from the farm; education, recipes and tips; community building content; and timely announcements such as the start of the farmers' market schedule. If you're struggling to come up with content, consider these ideas.

STORIES FROM THE FARM

Share behind the scenes stories that reflect yourself and your business. These can be more or less revealing depending on your comfort level, but should help customers feel like they know you and have a personal connection to the farm.

- Monthly or seasonal check-ins
- Stories of challenges and successes this season
- Day-in-the-life accounts

INFORMATION + EDUCATION

Most farmers and growers are passionate about their industry and their products. Sharing relevant information can build trust with customers by showing your expertise and enthusiasm.

- Usage tips and recipes
- How-to guides
- Links to blog posts
- Video content
- Industry news

ANNOUNCEMENTS + PROMOTION

When appropriate, newsletters can also include important announcements and carefully selected promotional pieces.

- New/special products
- Process reminders (e.g., delivery/pickups)
- Discounts and promotions
- Holiday messages
- Event invitations
- Schedule updates



COMMUNITY BUILDING

Newsletters are an opportunity to connect with other local businesses and with your customers.

- Vendor or partner spotlight
- Customer-generated content such as photos or recipes
- Customer testimonials
- Contests and giveaways
- Polls



SOCIAL MEDIA MARKETING

Social media is designed to build relationships and is most successful when it's used for that purpose, rather than for direct sales. Think of social media as a way to connect directly with customers, share day-to-day life on the farm, and help potential customers get to know you and your product before directing them to your website or physical location. It takes time to build a social media presence, and the algorithms used by different platforms can make it difficult to get your posts seen, so consistent posting is important.

GETTING STARTED WITH SOCIAL MEDIA

1. CHOOSE PLATFORMS

- Learn which platforms your customers and potential customers spend time on. You can find some helpful statistics [here](#).
- Consider what your goals are for using social media and which platform best suits your needs.

- Instagram strongly favours visual content, making it a great choice for farmers and food producers who can share attractive products and scenes. Instagram is easier to use on a mobile device and has a slightly younger demographic.
- Facebook can be particularly useful for targeting local customers, promoting events and sharing links.
- Other social media platforms such as Youtube, Twitter and Pinterest may be valuable for particular markets.

Focus on one or two platforms that you can do well. It's better to start small and consistent, rather than overwhelm yourself. For most farms, Facebook and/or Instagram are good places to start. These platforms have large numbers of users and it is easy to use both platforms simultaneously if you would like.



2. SET UP YOUR PROFILES

- Set up profiles as business accounts. This will create a professional space and allow access to useful features such as analytics, scheduling tools, and the ability to assign additional administrators. For Instagram profiles, a professional account will allow you to show a physical address and an industry, as well a contact button within your profile.
 - On Facebook, you must first have a personal account to serve as administrator for a separate business account.
 - On Instagram, you can have a separate business account or convert a personal account.
- Choose a consistent URL (@name) if you're signing up across multiple platforms.
- Fully complete your profile, including your business name, address and other essential information. Take the time to write compelling and accurate bio/about information. Add a professional profile picture and cover photo that reflect your brand.
- Include your location and what you sell in your bio.

3. FIND FOLLOWERS

- Spread the word about your accounts to personal contacts on platforms you are already active on.
- Encourage customers at the farm, Farmers' Market or from your CSA to find you on social media, and tell them how they'll benefit from doing so.
- Include your social profiles or a QR code on in-person signage and business cards.
- Include links to your social media accounts on your website and at the bottom of email newsletters.

- Follow business connections, organizations and other relevant pages or individuals. You can even do your own searches using keywords related to your page, or look through followers of similar accounts to make new connections.

4. START POSTING

- Set a realistic goal for how often you will post on each platform. For example, you could aim to post 2-3 times per week on Instagram as your primary platform, and once per week on Facebook to keep the account active.
- Try to post on consistent days/times. (See the next page for some tips on scheduling!)



MAKING THE MOST OF SOCIAL MEDIA MARKETING

FOCUS ON BUILDING RELATIONSHIPS

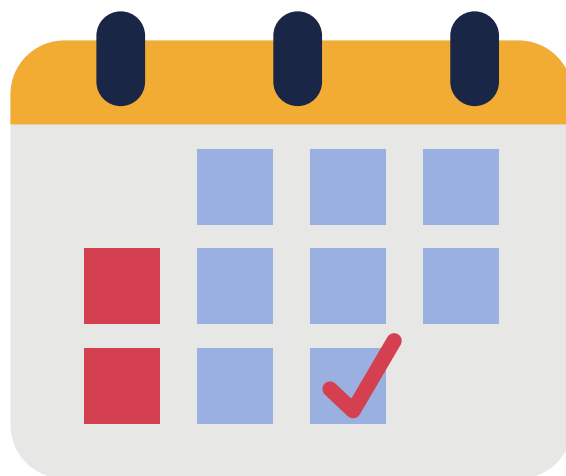
Relationship building is the core of social media and should be front and centre to how you use it.

- Be authentic in your tone and content. Even with a professional account, your profile should reflect who you are and what you have to offer. People are generally drawn to positivity, but being honest about challenges (especially with a sense of humour) can help others relate and build community.
- Focus on being helpful over creating sales, especially when engaging with customers. This could mean offering free content like recipes, answering questions without directly promoting your products, or referring someone to another business to find a product you don't carry. This helpfulness builds a relationship with customers and can lead to loyalty.
- Have a policy for how to handle interactions on social media, including negative feedback (for example, thanking the individual for their feedback and asking them to message you to try to resolve the issue). This is especially important if more than one person is managing the account.
- Check in regularly to reply to comments and private messages, answer and ask questions, and comment on posts you are tagged in.

PLAN + SCHEDULE POSTS

Planning most of your social media posts in advance, a month or more at a time, saves time, makes it easier to post consistently, and eliminates some of the stress you may feel trying to come up with content ideas. A social media calendar is an overview of your upcoming social media posts, usually in the form of a spreadsheet, Google calendar or within a management tool such as Hootsuite. For each post, the calendar lists the following information:

- the date and time to be posted
- the social platform
- copy and images/videos to include
- links and/or hashtags.



YOU CAN ACCESS A FREE CONTENT CALENDAR [HERE](#)



Once you have a calendar set up, use automated scheduling tools to organize posts ahead of time and ensure they go live at times they are most likely to be seen. Scheduling tools for Instagram and Facebook are available within Meta Business Suite or through a management platform such as Hootsuite. Overall, the best times to post on social media are 9:00 AM - 10:00 AM on Tuesdays, Wednesdays and Thursdays although this may vary by industry and business. You can explore more detailed statistics at [Sprout Social](#) or use Meta Business Suite to find data on optimal posting times specific to your account.



UNDERSTAND ALGORITHMS + ANALYTICS

Each social media platform has its own algorithm for displaying posts to users, but generally they prioritize content by personal contacts and groups as opposed to content from businesses and media (paid advertising is the exception to this). As you continue to develop your digital marketing strategy, you can use various analytic and reporting tools to see what generates the most interest and modify your approach as you go on.



YOU CAN REACH MORE OF YOUR AUDIENCE AND NEW CUSTOMERS BY POSTING REGULARLY, ENGAGING IN MEANINGFUL INTERACTION ON YOUR PAGE (E.G., REPLYING TO COMMENTS), AND POSTING PHOTOS AND ESPECIALLY VIDEOS.



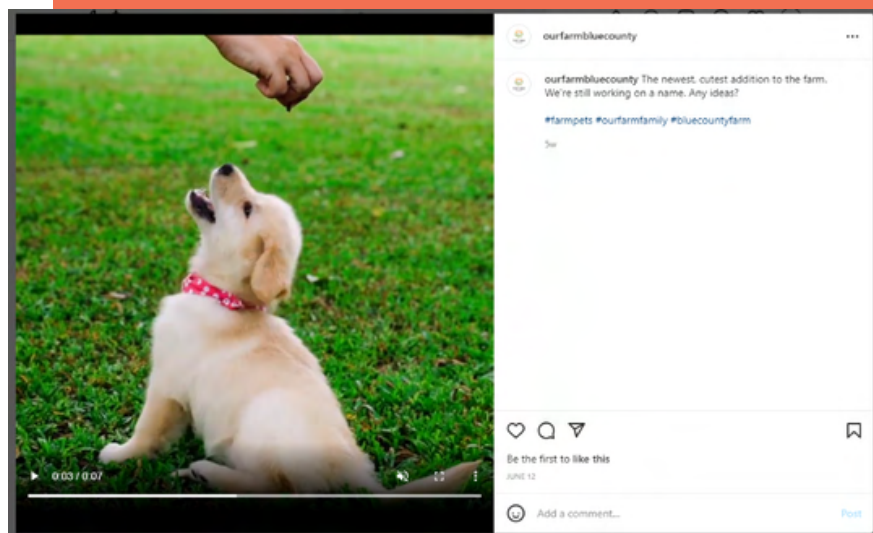
CONTENT IDEAS

Not sure what to post on social media? As with newsletters, we suggest following the 80-20 Rule: 80 percent of posts should educate or entertain, and only 20 percent should directly promote/sell (that 20 percent usually involves a call to action). Here are a few ideas on what you could share with your community.

STORIES FROM THE FARM

Social media is perfect for sharing anecdotes and little moments about your work and life.

- Introduce members of the team, including owners, staff, family (if comfortable) and pets.
- Share successes, daily tasks, and even lessons learned. Occasionally highlighting the challenges of farming can help customers to relate.
- Talk about the land or capture the beauty of the farm in different seasons.
- Share personal moments in your down time, such as a hobby or family activity.
- If it fits your personality, include some jokes and lighter moments, like a minor mishap, funny looking vegetable or a silly photo of a pet or your kids.
- Share content that you find inspiring, like a beautiful sunset or favourite quote, and explain why it is meaningful for you.



INFORMATION + EDUCATION

Sharing relevant information in short, social-media friendly bits, can engage your followers and build trust.

- Talk about a specific farming practice you use and why.
- Feature a specific crop or farm product. Show how you grow or produce it. Highlight its nutritional benefits or other unique properties.
- Share tips for using or storing produce.
- Provide recipes, and encourage customers to share their own recipes and photos. Create a category or album to gather these recipes. You may also compile them on your blog.
- Posts links to your own blog posts and other industry experts.



COMMUNITY BUILDING

Social media is all about relationships. Actively working on community building will generate more engagement and interaction with followers.

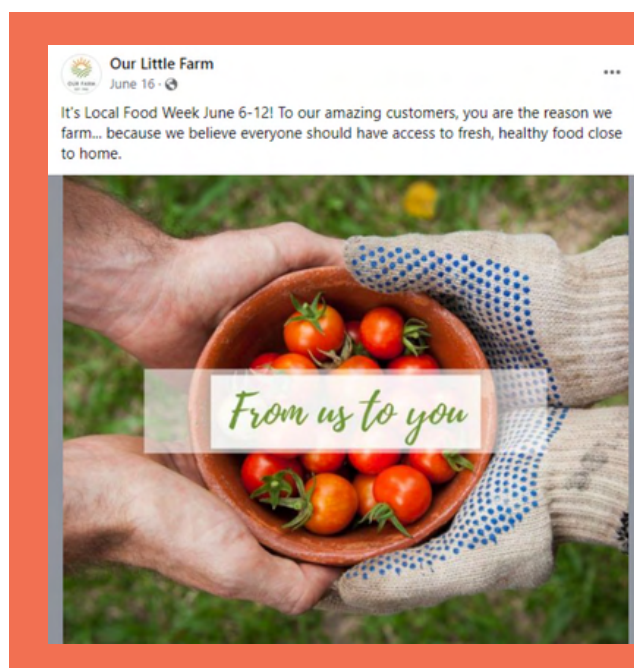
- Post about community events.
- Tag restaurants or other businesses that support your farm.
- Connect with a network of farmers in the region.
- Make customers feel part of your farm. Take the opportunity to thank your CSA members, farmers' market regulars, and long-term customers.
- Encourage users to share recipes, or photos from their own gardens.
- Post a poll question to start a direct conversation and help you determine what your customers really want. If you are looking for feedback on a new product or other topics, just ask!
- Ask CSA members for input on what crops they would like to see more of
- Share a picture of your customers at a delivery or pickup (with their permission).



HOLIDAYS + CELEBRATIONS

The immediate nature of social media makes it an ideal way to recognize both traditional holidays and more light-hearted celebrations.

- Keep a calendar of holidays and other special days to acknowledge on social media.
- Look for other fun, industry-specific holidays e.g., June 3: National Egg Day, August 8: National Sneak Some Zucchini Into Your Neighbour's Porch Day.



ANNOUNCEMENTS + PROMOTION

Promotion on social media usually involves a specific call to action you would like the viewer to take, such as:

- Order online
- Visit us at the farmers' market
- Sign up for our CSA
- Get tickets to our Fall festival
- Join us for u-pick at the farm.



#HASHTAGS

Instagram hashtags are a way to categorize your content so it can be found by interested users who search for or follow these tags. Hashtags are an essential way to increase your reach and to connect with more members of your target audience, but to see a benefit, it's important to use them consistently, strategically and creatively. To create a hashtag in your post, simply add a # sign followed by unbroken text describing the topic of your post, either literally or more creatively. Consider a mix of industry- and product-specific hashtags with other fun, genuine and interesting tags. Popular hashtags (with 10,000+ posts) can be combined with more targeted tags like the name of a farmers' market you attend. Note that hashtags are not commonly used on Facebook and may make it obvious you are repurposing content.

SAMPLE HASHTAGS

#[city of service] #[region of service] #[product you grow/produce]
#SupportLocalFarmers #KnowYourFarmer #SustainableAgriculture
#LocalFoodMovement #EatLocalGrown #CertifiedOrganic #OrganicFarming
#LocalAndOrganic #RegenerativeFarming #OrganicFarming #FarmToTable
#FarmFresh #UrbanFarming #LocalFarm #FarmFamily #[farmers' market]

PHOTOS + VIDEOS

Photos or videos should be included in most if not all your posts. When you are working around the farm, hosting an event, or out in the community, take photos or short videos to share! As you go about your daily tasks, keep an eye out for inspiring, funny or informative scenes, and take the time to set up more deliberate photos of your products, scenes from the farm, etc., to announce latest news and special features. Video is ideal to create short tours, tutorials and demonstrations.

STORIES, REELS, EVENTS + EVERYTHING ELSE

Instagram and Facebook both offer a variety of different ways of sharing content beyond straight posts. As you continue to develop your social media marketing, it is worthwhile to learn about these different post types and how they can be used to your advantage. You can find articles on these topics and more on sources like [Hubspot](#) and [Sprout Social](#).



PHOTOGRAPHY + VIDEO TIPS

In digital marketing, one of the best steps you can take is to make photography a priority. Compelling images are beneficial for newsletters and essential for engaging audiences on social media, especially Instagram. Photography is a learning process like everything else, but it's possible to improve with some basic tips.



CHOOSE THE RIGHT SUBJECT

- Choose a clear, interesting subject. This could mean something that is aesthetically pleasing, like a bright red strawberry, or emotionally compelling, like a baby animal snuggling with its mother.
- Include people in your pictures: staff, customers, and yes, yourself! Customers want to know who they are buying from and to identify with others enjoying your products.
- Plan to photograph interesting events you know will happen at certain times, such as harvest parties, planting days, or the first CSA box of the year.

LEARN THE BASICS

- Find good lighting. When possible, shoot in the morning or the hour before sunset to get a soft glow on your subject. Avoid glare, harsh shadows or washout from mid-day sun. Adjust the exposure in your camera or tap on different focus areas with your smartphone to see how it affects the light and shadows.
- Pay attention to layout. For example, if you are posting mostly on Instagram, you may prefer a square cropping when taking images. If you are using images in multiple channels, leave some space to allow for various crops.
- Edit photos if needed to brighten, crop or otherwise adjust the image. If you use a filter, keep it consistent to create a uniform look to your images.



TAKE YOUR TIME FOR IMPORTANT PHOTOS

- Arrange products in good light, against interesting backdrops (e.g., a wooden cutting board). Think about texture or contrasting colors that will create a certain mood.
- Take a moment to clean up the background before taking a picture.
- Try different camera positions, including up close at ground level.

BE READY IN THE MOMENT

- Keep your phone with you while doing your regular activities so you can easily snap a photo of a fun, interesting or meaningful moment. People love spontaneous, authentic images and using your phone makes it easy to post directly to social media!



DON'T SHY AWAY FROM VIDEO

Videos get better reach on social media, increase your search ranking, and build trust with customers. Videos for social media and newsletters don't have to be professional productions; you can get started with a smartphone and a few basic tips.

According to Forbes, **90%** of consumers say videos help them with buying decisions, and **64%** say that watching videos makes them more likely to purchase.





- Make sure your video is well lit by shooting outside or near a bright window.
- Include captions so your video can be played and understood with the sound off—surprisingly, the majority of users prefer to watch videos without sound. You can generate and then edit captions directly in Youtube, Facebook and Instagram, or add them through a variety of video editing applications.



- If your video does include sound, record in a quiet area, close to the microphone, to ensure the best sound quality possible. You should still disable the option to auto-play sound when posting.
- Shoot for mobile. Opt for a vertical orientation and make text large enough to read on a small screen.
- Hold the camera still. If you don't have a steady hand, use a tripod, phone stand, or even a table to ensure your footage isn't shaky.
- Show your face. Just like with photos, sharing videos of yourself helps create trust with your viewers and increases engagement.
- Trim your video if it's too long. Generally videos being shared on social media should be under 60 seconds, although there are some exceptions to this. It's also important to trim off any dead air time at the beginning of your video, so you get to the action within the first few seconds.

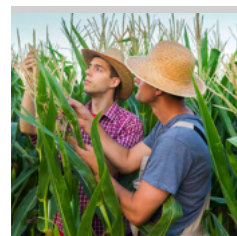
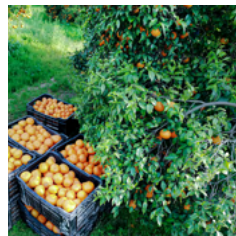


GET HELP

- Find talent within your team. If you have an employee with digital media or photography skills, make use of those talents. Encourage other workers on the farm to contribute photos and video as well, giving a different view of the farm.
- Hire or trade with a professional photographer, or connect with a student who may want to build a portfolio.
- Solicit photos from customers, with permission to share in your marketing.

A WORD ABOUT STOCK PHOTOS

- Although it's more authentic and meaningful to use images from your farm most of the time, there may be times when it's appropriate to use stock photos, for example as a background for a quote. Some good resources for free photos include [Pexels](#) and [Unsplash](#). There are also stock photos and graphics available within Canva, making it easy to add text, frames or other layouts.



TIME SAVING TIPS



The number one reason small business owners struggle with marketing is a lack of time and resources. Consider these tips to make your marketing hours as efficient as possible.

- Prioritize what works. If you have really limited time, focus on one or two marketing channels you can do well.
- Use a content calendar to plan your posts and newsletter content ahead of time, so you're not scrambling or forgetting when it comes time to post.
- Batch-create content of a similar type or theme. For example, if your content calendar includes weekly posts with tips for using or storing produce, it will be more efficient to create all of these posts at once, using the same format and template.
- Repurpose content from another format or a previous year. Although you don't want to reuse everything, it makes sense to repurpose certain core content, such as cutting down a blog post into smaller bits to share on social media, or keeping a stockpile of recipes to post at relevant times during the year.
- Automate your email marketing. It takes a bit of time to set up initially, but ultimately it is a huge time saver to create automated emails or sequences that get triggered at certain points (for example, when someone makes their first purchase).
- Use social media scheduling tools. Like automated email marketing, scheduling your social media posts takes some time upfront but saves a lot of time in the end.

Looking for ready-to-use templates to save you time? You can find links to our newsletter and social media templates as well as planning tools on the [Resources page](#).



TAKING THE NEXT STEPS

The information and tools in this guide are intended as a launching point for your digital marketing. If you haven't already, take the time now to conduct a marketing audit, develop a marketing strategy, and begin planning your upcoming content. Over the next year and beyond, continue to evaluate, refine and expand your marketing efforts. There will always be new directions and next steps to explore in digital marketing: with an open mind and a strategic focus, you can continue to grow your digital presence and cultivate success.



RESOURCES

CUSTOMIZABLE TEMPLATES

The following templates were designed to help you with planning and content creation. We have included examples to show what the templates could look like in use, but encourage you to customize each tool to best fit your needs.

PLANNING TEMPLATES (FOR GOOGLE SUITE)

Note that these templates require a Google account to access, which is free to set up. You will be prompted to save a copy of the files in order to use them. We have also included versions of the Digital Marketing Audit and Digital Marketing Strategy templates on pages 30-36 of this guide.

- [Digital Marketing Audit](#)
- [Digital Marketing Strategy](#)
- [Content Calendar](#)



NEWSLETTER TEMPLATES (FOR MAILCHIMP)

These templates were designed as an easy starting point for small farms looking to create seasonal newsletters. The templates are set up with a variety of content sections you can choose from based on your needs; when you create a newsletter, simply delete the sections you are not using for that campaign. Remember that your final product should be short and sweet!

We have also provided an example of a completed newsletter using these templates.

Note that these templates require a Mailchimp account to access, which is free to set up.

- [Spring/Summer Newsletter Template](#)
- [Fall Newsletter Template](#)
- [Winter/Holidays Newsletter Template](#)
- [Sample Summer Newsletter](#)

SOCIAL MEDIA TEMPLATES (FOR CANVA)

These simple template sets can be used to bring a consistent look to your Instagram or Facebook posts. As with all the templates, we encourage you to modify these to meet your needs and brand.

Note that these templates require a Canva account to access, which is free to set up.

- [Instagram templates](#)
- [Facebook templates](#)



FREE TOOLS + RESOURCES

DESIGN

- [Canva](#): Online graphic design tool that can be used to create social media posts, logos, videos and more. Free version includes access to a large template library.
- [Pablo](#): Free, simple tool to quickly create graphics such as photo quotes. Integrated with Buffer for scheduling on social media.



CONTENT CREATION + SEO

- [Google Trends](#): Google website that analyzes the popularity of given search terms in Google search engine. Useful for doing keyword research and planning content.
- [Google Analytics](#): Web analytics service offered by Google that tracks and reports website traffic. Can help you to identify trends and patterns in how visitors engage with your website.
- [Grammarly](#): Online typing assistant that makes suggestions to improve written content. Free version checks for grammar, spelling, punctuation, conciseness and tone.

SCHEDULING

- [Hootsuite](#): Feature-rich social media management tool that lets you manage scheduling, engagements and analytics.
- [Buffer](#): Easy to use tool that centralizes social media scheduling.
- [Meta Business Suite](#): Free tool that centralizes Facebook and Instagram business accounts. Lets you schedule posts, respond to messages, access analytics and more in one place.

OTHER

- [Google My Business/Google Business Profile](#): Google product that lets you create and manage free business listings in Google Maps so that people can see your business when doing a local search.
- [QR Code Generator](#): Online tool to create scannable barcodes that can redirect users to a particular URL or other information.

STOCK PHOTOGRAPHY

These sites offer high-quality photography and videos that are royalty-free and safe for commercial use.

- [Pexels](#)
- [Unsplash](#)
- [Pikwizard](#)

FURTHER READING

- [Beginner's Guide to SEO](#): Comprehensive introduction to Search Engine Optimization.



DIGITAL MARKETING AUDIT

Use this tool to help you identify strengths, immediate gaps, and possible future steps for improving your digital marketing.

STRATEGY AND BRANDING

	YES	NEXT STEP
We have an overall marketing strategy and a digital marketing plan	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
We have a professional logo that reflects our business	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
We have identified colours and fonts that reflect our business	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

WEBSITE

Our website loads quickly	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Our website works properly on mobile	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
The navigation menu is clear and easy to use	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
The colours, fonts, images and overall design reflect our business	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Contact information is up to date and contact form is working properly	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Hours are correct	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Products, team and other key information is accurate and up to date	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Social media profiles links are displayed on home page	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Email newsletter opt-in form is displayed on home page	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
All links on the site function and external links open in a new tab	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>



	YES	NEXT STEP
We have planned content for the coming season (Blog posts, News, Events, Testimonials)	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Website is being backed up regularly, website platform and plugins are up to date, and any security issues are resolved (If you are managing your site yourself)	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

BONUS POINTS ★

Headings reflect search keywords we are targeting	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Google Analytics is set up and used to analyze data on home page, top-performing pages, etc.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

EMAIL NEWSLETTERS

We have an active email list set up	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Email newsletter opt-in form is displayed on our website	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Our email newsletter is promoted on social media and other communications	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Newsletters include links to our social media accounts in the footer	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
We have set up automatic welcome email and follow up sequence	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Content we send out is an appropriate length and mix of information, entertainment and promotion	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Subject lines are of recommended length and follow best practices	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
We have set up templates that reflect our brand and follow best practices for design	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
We use high quality images and include alt-text	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Emails include a clear "Unsubscribe" link	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>



BONUS POINTS



YES NEXT STEP

We have segmented lists for targeted emails

We conduct A/B testing to ensure you have the best possible opens and clickthroughs

We check analytics to evaluate newsletter performance

SOCIAL MEDIA

We have prioritized one or two platforms and disabled any unused social profiles

Our social media profiles are complete and up to date:

- profile photo is professional and displays properly
- profile information is up to date
- hours are correct
- link(s) in Instagram profile are up to date
- cover image in Facebook is up to date and displays properly

We have shared our social media profiles with existing contacts

We have a planning calendar set up

We have a regular schedule for checking comments/messages/reviews and engaging with followers

We have set up templates to save time and ensure consistent look

Content we post is an appropriate mix of information, entertainment and promotion

BONUS POINTS



We use analytics tools to learn which posts are most engaging for our followers

We have experimented to find the best use of other post types such as Reels and Stories



GOOGLE MY BUSINESS

YES NEXT STEP

We have a Google My Business account set up

Our profile and contact information is up to date

Hours are correct and any upcoming holidays hours have been added (e.g., statutory holidays or other closures, extra hours for special event)

We have a regular schedule for checking reviews and approving any updated information from Google users

We respond to all reviews with appreciation and/or attempts to resolve issues



DIGITAL MARKETING STRATEGY TEMPLATE

OUR MARKETING GOALS

What do you hope to achieve with your marketing? How will you measure success? Be specific.

OUR CUSTOMERS

Who do you sell to or plan to sell to? What do they have in common (demographics, values)? What needs would your products fulfill? Are you targeting consumers or distributors/retailers?



OUR COMPETITION + CONNECTIONS

Who else could fulfill the needs your customers have? Who offers complementary products or services? How can you build connections to support your business and marketing?

OUR STORY

Why are you farming? What makes you passionate about this work? What do you want customers to know about you and your farm?

OUR BRAND

Define your brand and the products you sell. Why will customers choose you over competing options (other farms, grocery stores, growing their own food, etc)?



OUR VOICE

What is the personality you want to convey about your brand? How do you want customers to recognize you? You can use the list below as a starting point.

helpful

earnest

playful

humble

calm

knowledgeable

humorous

rugged

quirky

dependable

upbeat

down-to-earth

innovative

idealistic

strong

determined

charming

old-fashioned

DIGITAL MARKETING CHANNELS

What digital channels will you make use of to help you achieve your marketing goals?

Channel	Goals (what you want to achieve with this channel)	Actions (how you will achieve goals)
Website + online shop		
Email newsletter		
Social media		
Google Business profile + local directories		
Content marketing		

