

According to the U.S. Census Bureau Rhode Island has a population of over 1 million people, and as demand for local foods increases, there's an opportunity to get more of your farm fresh food to local eaters. This marketing guide will help you tap into the buying power of Rhode Islanders and New Englanders, with a focus on direct farm-to-consumer marketing.

You may encounter some challenges when marketing your new business, such as choosing the right farmers market, how to advertise your CSA, or whether to sell products year-round, but the resources and materials below will help you navigate the beginning farmer journey.

There is something here for every farmer involved with direct sales. You may be:

- a new farmer in Rhode Island,
- an experienced farmer looking to increase the direct sales of the food you grow,
- or, a well-seasoned farmers market veteran looking for the right forms to fill out.

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## **1) Requirements to Sell**

**New Business Registration.** First and foremost, all new businesses in the state need to complete the [RI Business Application and Registration \(BAR\)](#). Another resource is [business.gov](#), which will take you through the registration process, step by step.

New businesses must also register as a corporation, LLC or sole proprietorship through the [RI Secretary of State Office](#). This way you will be registered with the state.

In most cases, you will need to register your business with the IRS to get an EIN (employer identification number) which you will need for filing taxes, etc. This may depend on the scale of your operation. Visit [business.gov](#) for more information on EINs.

Is the food you'll be selling taxable? If you're unsure check with the RI Division of Taxation at (401) 574-8955.



**Town Hall / City Hall Requirements.** Each town may have specific vendors licenses. Please check with the town you will be selling in. See [contact information](#) for every City Hall in RI.

### **RI Department of Health Licenses.**

For licensing information and the RI Food Code from the Department of Health visit their website: <http://www.health.ri.gov/licenses/food/> . Below are direct links to a few that might be of particular interest.

- [Food Peddler application](#) if you are selling meat, dairy or prepared foods.
- [Farm Home Kitchen application](#) if you cook approved foods in your farm kitchen.
- There may be other licenses required if you handle meat (see below), seafood or operate a mobile food cart. Contact Ernest Julian at the Office of Food Protection at RI Department of Health at (401) 222-2749 or [ernest.julian@health.ri.gov](mailto:ernest.julian@health.ri.gov) if you have questions about which licenses you need.

**Meat Producers Retail License.** If you plan to sell farm-raised meat, you will need to apply for a Retail License from the State of Rhode Island. This license will allow you to sell both at the market and at your farm. The [Rhode Island Raised Livestock Association](#) (RIRLA) has prepared guides and resources for you in this process, including wholesale permit, contact information for people and procedures.

- [RIRLA Permit Information](#)
- [RIRLA Operational Plan](#)
- [RI DOH Requirements and Application for Meat Processors](#)

RIRLA is an organization that has resources for farms raising livestock, no matter how small the farm – their website not only has a wealth of information on licensing but also classified ads, vet listings, classes and workshops for livestock producers, as well as member access to grain discounts and local slaughterhouse slots.

**Insurance / Product Liability.** Insurance protects you in the unlikely event that someone gets hurt, sick or injured as the result of an act by you. Many markets require it. You should have proper insurance in place for the types of products that you sell, which include a General or Farm/Business Liability policy. Shop around for a good policy quote!

**List your farm online.** This is not a requirement, but as soon as you have all of the appropriate licensing in place, sign on to [Farm Fresh Rhode Island](#) and create a profile for your farm! Millions of people search the site each year to find local farms and this listing will start to get the word out about your new operation. On the website you can list the produce you grow, where you are selling, if you have a farmstand, csa, pick your own, etc.

## **2) Direct Marketing through Farmers Markets**

There are 45 farmers markets throughout the state of Rhode Island and many considerations to determine the right fit(s).

### **Which Market is for You?**

**Strategic Considerations.** A successful stand at a farmers market can be an excellent way to generate income, introduce people to new products, attract community members who may have never seen a

ripe tomato the day it was picked, and inspire others to grow their own food. Additionally, it is always good to consider the following when thinking about joining a market:

- Is a market appropriate for your business?
- Do you have enough food for a three-hour market?
- If you can't go to market, who do you want representing you?
- Do you have the time and energy to travel to a market and set up your stand?
- Are you planning on expanding your growing capacity in upcoming seasons?
- If you are applying to many markets, have you thought about the differences between the markets?
- Do you want to sell to your community or further from home? What matters most to you?

In your considerations, think about what benefits appearing at a market might hold for you, but also keep in mind all that the Farmers Market asks of you and your farm.

**Find a Market Manager.** You can talk to the market manager to get a better idea of who is selling and buying at their markets, which may help you make your decision. See our [list of farmers markets](#) across the region. The Market Manager contact information is on the left side of the page.

**Farm Stand Considerations.** Selling at a Farmers Market is a great experience. You just want to make sure that your original market (whether that be at a Pick-Your-Own operation or a Farm Stand) is not completely phased out with this new endeavor. One suggestion is to make a flier telling your current customers about your new endeavor.

**Types of Products Allowed.** You need to know if your product mix is a good fit for the farmers markets where you want to sell. Here are a few examples:

- Class A or Buying In?
  - "Class A" markets only allow you to sell what you grow.
  - Some markets allow you to "buy-in" a certain percentage of produce from local farms after all vendors have run out of their own crops (for example, people who buy in blueberries can't sell them until all the Class A blueberries are sold).
  - Still other markets allow you to buy-in items, as long as you maintain a certain percentage of your own.
- RI Farms or Regional?
  - Some markets allow only vendors and food from RI, while others accept foods produced in MA, CT and elsewhere in New England.
- Food only or Crafts too?
  - There are also markets with no rules like this whatsoever. This last style of market can be challenging and may confuse customers about the concept of a farmers market.

**Find a Market.** See our [list of farmers markets](#) across RI and the region.

## a) Equip Your Table

It is important to maintain a professional and consistent appearance at the market, the farm stand, or at a special event. Having the appropriate supplies, signs, scales, and an aesthetically pleasing set-up may give your farm the edge.

**Market Supplies.** You will probably have to provide your own transportable tents, tables and chairs. Make sure that you'll be comfortable for the entirety of the market and that it's manageable for the number of people working the market to move and set up. Don't forget to

tie down your tent. Some roll over in a gust of wind! Consider weights, stakes and bungees. To keep delicate produce moist on hot days, you may want to bring a spray bottle for misting them.

**Weights & Measures.** Do not forget a scale if you are going to sell items that are not pre-packaged. You can bring either a hanging or an electronic scale to market, and you must make sure that you get the scale inspected by the Department of Labor and Training's Weights and Measures Department once a year so that you can make sure you are giving your customer a fair pound of squash... or that you aren't selling two pounds for the price of one! Market scales must be "sealed for trade" or legal for trade.

- Scale sealers can be contacted [online](#) or by calling John Shaw at (401) 462-8568 or via email [john.shaw@dlt.ri.gov](mailto:john.shaw@dlt.ri.gov).

**Prices and Labels.** Bring a cashbox, calculator and laminated price sheet for your reference. Bring cards to label each item on the table names and with prices. If possible, laminate the cards to withstand moist produce and the rain. Also consider labeling foods in Spanish or another language if it's commonly spoken in the area of the market. It will help you communicate with customers.

**Cash.** Don't forget cash. You can never have enough quarters and ones for making change!

**Packaging.** Consider how much packaging you will use. It's easy to use too many bags and containers, which will turn off some customers who shop at markets for environmental reasons and also be a waste for you and your bottom line. (Although many customers will bring their own reusable bags, make sure you do have some plastic bags available.)

**Hand Truck.** Another item that may be of use at a farmers market is a hand truck. The hand truck can save you a lot of time moving hundreds of pounds of produce, and could be the difference between needing to hire an extra hand to set up and clean up your market table.

**Keeping Your Food Fresh during the Market.** Growing beautiful produce is the first step. It still needs to reach eaters as fresh as possible. Here are a few tips to keep your food safe and looking beautiful.

- For fresh vegetables and fruit, it's fine to keep them out for a few hours on a mild day.
- Some vegetables do great in the sun -- tomatoes and peppers, for instance. Use the temperature tolerances of your products to guide the arrangement of your display.
- Provide shade in your display to protect heat-intolerant produce from wilting.
- Some greens absolutely need to be out of the sun. Spraying or misting delicate greens with water helps on a hot day.
- Don't tie closed plastic bags containing greens. The build up of perspiration clouds customers' view and is not good for the greens' longevity. Customers may not cook every day and often decide what to buy based on how long they think it will last. Learn how to best store your veggies and teach your customers. You'll increase their loyalty.
- Keep greens and herbs like basil in containers or flats with a low-level of water for the bottom of their stems to drink from. But don't let the leaves of the herbs sit in the water!
- The shade of trees or buildings can be priceless. If you have a choice of location, figure out where the sun falls on the market to help pick your spot.
- Remember, you can always rotate your items out of the sun if it is getting too hot. They will cool off under your table, in the shade or cooler.
- Aesthetics are important.

- If you are selling meat, dairy or egg products, then you will need to keep them in coolers with ice.

For More Information on Food Safety, please see [FoodSafety.gov](http://FoodSafety.gov) or [USDA's Basics for Handling Food Safely](http://USDA's Basics for Handling Food Safely).

## b) Products, Packaging and Pricing

**Product Considerations.** Depending on the rules of the market, you may only be allowed to sell products grown or made by you. These restrictions on local markets are designed to support both the health of the community and the robustness of the market. Respecting these guidelines as well as your fellow vendors is crucial for long-term market viability. For example, if you sneak non-local fruit into the market at your stand, you will diminish the trust customers (and other farmers) have in your stand, and undermine their understanding and appreciation of seasonality and RI grown fruit. Use the market as a chance to highlight what your farm does best, whether it's a special hot pepper jam, heirloom beans, or beautiful braided garlic. Giving yourself a niche helps customers remember you and draws on your strengths as a producer.

**Packaging.** Some vendors sell by the piece, others by weight, or by bunch or bag. Selling by the piece implies that each piece is approximately the same size or otherwise equivalent. If you decide to sell by weight, a display of a stated amount of that product can assist customers. For example, bag up a pound of green beans priced \$2/lb to show people. (Often people will just go for the pound, for instance, if that's what you show them.) These signs should be beautiful, and uniquely you! It is another way to attract your customers.



**Specialty Items.** At many markets, you are pre-approved to sell a specific set of items. This was determined by your application and your discussions with the market manager. These items cannot change without telling the market manager. For example, if you are a vegetable grower you cannot bring jams or cider without discussing it with the manager first. Imagine how your business would be affected if a vegetable vendor all of a sudden started to buy apples in to sell at their table without any prior notice on their application. Please respect your fellow producers and make sure you communicate with your market manager about these issues.

**Pricing.** It can be difficult to know how to price a product. Some other things to consider:

- It takes more than one farm to have a farmers market, and price wars can jeopardize a market. Growers turn to direct sales at farmers markets to make a fair living, but cut-throat competitiveness can undermine the spirit of the market and farm viability.
- Factor in the socioeconomic demographics of your market customers when you set your prices. One market may be in a community of mostly lower income families and another in one of those with a higher disposable income.
- You may want to be strategic and bring seconds (and deals on seconds) to the market where you think they will be sold.
- Be prepared to explain your pricing. People are curious, more than anything, about their food. Take it as a compliment that they want to know more.

**Labeling.** Clear labeling of your products is important in furthering the relationship between you and your customers. This, too, is a valuable form of communication. Consider the following when labeling what is on your table.

- Are your labels large and simple?
- Are they typed or hand-written?
- What is the name or variety of each item?
- Can you make small suggestions on how to prepare certain items? (e.g. "great for stir frying" or "super sweet!")
- Is there any nutritional information available?
- Do you want to use color in your labels?
- Do you have translations in Spanish for your labels?



**Playing Nice.** Most of the information presented here about selling at farmers markets has been about you, your presentation, and your produce. What hasn't been expanded on is the amazing diversity of personalities that are at any given market. They are your new friends and coworkers. You make the market what it is so make the most of the situation. Every farm has its own draw, and the number of people at your market is dependent on that, so that should be acknowledged if/when conflicts come up. The market is a place of work and a community space, and everyone needs to work together to ensure that. The market manager is always there to help with anything if it arises.

**Leftovers.** You have many options when you have an excess of product at the market.

- 1) As the market is coming to a close, you might have customers who are interested in purchasing your seconds (items that aren't at top market quality).
- 2) You could try giving bargains on your remaining product. This can be a useful way to clear out the day's product, but may also encourage customers to count on your end-of-the-day blow-out sale.
- 3) Alternately, if you go to a market two days in a row or more, some produce can maintain their quality to come back to market consecutive days. In fact, harvesting enough heartier produce for more than one market day at a time can streamline your process.

**Donations.** Another option is organizing with your market manager and other vendors at the market to donate leftover food and products to a local soup kitchen, food bank or shelter. There are many people and small food pantries in your community who would appreciate it. Check out Farm Fresh RI's [Farm to Pantry program](#) for more ideas and information or contact the agencies below.

- [The Food Bank of Rhode Island](#) and [Emergency Food Pantry list](#)
- [Amos House](#)

## c) Tips for Selling More

**What does your booth look like?**

- Use a white tent: Bright light makes the product look best.
- Show your farm's name (out in front and inside - BIG LETTERS are key!)
- Use an attractive layout.



- Hide those boxes! Make it look clean and neat!
- Hang signs at eye level, not at waist level
- Are you certified organic? Let the browsers know!

#### **How do you place your product?**

- Stagger the height, utilize corners.
- Use hanging baskets - let people smell and see up close.
- Make things easy to reach – prop up low sitting baskets.
- Use tablecloths and coverings to create ambiance.
- Don't forget color! Make the customers want to shop with you.
- Offer samples, especially of unusual veggies, jams or new products.

#### **What do you say and how do you stand?**

- The customer is always right - tell them yes!
- If the price seems high to them, offer a sample.
- Try not to sit or wear sunglasses - seem attentive without being watchful.
- When you talk to your customers, it is all about them. What does your product do to benefit them? Make the product personal.

#### **What are you selling?**

- Study the trends - sell something that is "with the times."
- Visit Whole Foods, Eastside Market, Stop and Shop and markets for ideas about packaging, new products, etc.
- Use a label - make your product uniquely yours – and brand your farm.
- Don't miss an opportunity to brand your goods. Name your pickles after your husband or your salad mix after your daughter - people love it!



#### **Is your booth distinctive?**

- Make your booth warm and welcoming, with a display that stands out and tells the story of your farm.
- Use photos! People want to know about your life and your farm. Make your space personal.

Other Farmers Market Resources:

- [USDA – Farmers Markets and Local Food Marketing](#)

## **3) Accepting WIC, Senior Nutrition Vouchers, EBT and Credit Cards**

Being able to accept WIC, Senior Nutrition Vouchers and EBT is a great way to increase sales as well as expand your clientele base.

**WIC.** WIC stands for [Women, Infants and Children](#). The national program is funded by the US Farm Bill and administered in RI by the Department of Health. WIC provides nutrition-based food assistance to low-income pregnant women, and mothers with children up to five years in age.

There are a few types of WIC checks, some of which can be used at grocery stores and some at farmers markets. Know which are which to avoid costly bank mistakes:

- **[WIC Farmers Market Nutrition Program \(FMNP\) checks](#).** The vouchers are \$5 each and say "Farmers Market". These checks can only be used for fresh RI grown fruits, vegetables and cut cooking herbs sold at approved farmers markets. Customers usually receive three \$5 vouchers for an entire season and they expire on October 31. Farmers must deposit them by the end of November, but are encouraged to deposit the checks throughout the season to make more money available to the program.
- **WIC Fruit & Vegetable checks.** These vouchers range from \$6, \$10, or \$15 and say "Fruit and Vegetable". These checks can be used for most fresh, frozen and canned fruits and vegetables at approved farmers markets and grocery stores. White potatoes, herbs, dried fruits and prepared vegetables are not allowed. Customers receive these checks monthly all year long, so farmers can accept them at winter farmers markets. Farmers must deposit them within 30 days.
- **Regular WIC checks.** These checks look similar but are for a variety of non-produce items including bread, milk, and baby formulas. They can only be used at grocery stores, **not** at farmers markets.



In order to accept WIC FMNP vouchers, you must fill out a Farmer Agreement with the Department of Health along with a crop plan. In addition, your market must have at least 3 farms participating and be approved by the Department of Health.

- Contact Lauren Piluso (401-222-4637; [Lauren.Piluso@health.ri.gov](mailto:Lauren.Piluso@health.ri.gov)), the Farmers Market Nutrition Program Coordinator at RI Department of Health, or your local WIC office for details about WIC acceptance.
- Rhode Island Department of Health – [Information for WIC Vendors](#).

**Senior Nutrition Checks.** The Senior Farmers Market Nutrition Program (SFMNP) provides low-income seniors with \$5 checks that can be exchanged for locally grown fruits, vegetables and herbs from farmers markets, roadside stands, and community-supported agriculture programs. To accept Senior Nutrition checks, a vendor needs to be authorized by the Rhode Island DEM Division of Agriculture.

- Contact Peter Susi (401-222-2781 x4517; [peter.susi@dem.ri.gov](mailto:peter.susi@dem.ri.gov)), the Senior Farmers Market Nutrition Program (SFMNP) Coordinator at RI DEM Division of Agriculture for details about SFMNP acceptance.
- [Overview and regulations of the SFMNP](#)

**SNAP & EBT.** SNAP (Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program) provides supplemental assistance to low-income residents of the towns/neighborhoods of your market on debit-like cards called Electronic Benefits Transfer (EBT) cards. SNAP was previously called Food Stamps. Currently, as of January 2012, approximately 1 in 7 Rhode Islanders receive SNAP, which averages a

little over \$100 per month to spend on food. It adds up to millions of dollars a month being spent on food in Rhode Island and that's a huge opportunity for your farm if your market accepts SNAP.

Most markets in Rhode Island that accept EBT use wireless card-reading machines and metal coins called Fresh Bucks. Learn more about [how Fresh Bucks work](#).

SNAP can be used to purchase most groceries, including dairy and meat. SNAP dollars cannot purchase hot prepared foods, unpackaged baked goods or nonfood items. SNAP can be used for food plants.

- [SNAP eligible foods](#)
- [SNAP at Farmers Markets rules](#)
- [Fresh Bucks acceptance agreement](#)

**Credit Cards.** Most markets in Rhode Island that accept credit and debit cards use wireless card-reading machines and \$5 metal coins called Fresh Bucks. Learn more about [how Fresh Bucks work](#).

- Contact Sarah Lester ([sarah@farmfreshri.org](mailto:sarah@farmfreshri.org)), Markets Coordinator at Farm Fresh RI, for details about Fresh Bucks acceptance.

**Pricing for WIC, SFMNP, and SNAP.** Many of the food assistance program checks and the Fresh Bucks coins come in price-specific amounts for which you cannot provide change. It is helpful to have items available that add up to an even \$5 for WIC and Senior customers. Be flexible and proactive to help these customers find the right mix of food to add up to the designated amount.

**Most of these checks can only be used to purchase fresh fruits and vegetables. This is a federal law. If you are selling prepared foods or local soaps you cannot accept these checks.**

Also, most people use their checks right before they're about to expire at the end of October -- be prepared for a rush!

## 4) Events and Customer Promotions

Many markets will host special events to encourage more customers to come and spend time at your market. Work with the market manager to play a larger role in these events.

Plan a calendar:

- October's a good time for a harvest festival
- May Day could be a brilliant leafy greens event
- Auction your jam at the holiday craft bazaar
- Organize cooking demos that feature local farm ingredients

See what you can accomplish with other vendors!

Markets may organize a "Seniors Day" or "Chef's Tour" or a similar event to welcome certain populations to the market. Make signs that highlight your specials, post images on your table that show your customers what a day in the life of your farm is like. Remember, the more you share with them, the more they will want to be a part of your community.



Being at a market is a great way to showcase who you are. Be creative. Have a special on your greens because it's getting greener out -- or just because you have way too much mizuna!

Send customers home with your product, plus a little something extra. Give them a pin, a pen, a hug. Tell them to come visit the farm. Have people sign up for your emails or "Like" your farm on Facebook. The market manager works to get folks to the market, but your email reminders are also helpful to the shoppers.

Make your farm stand out with events, flyers, and little treats for shoppers and they will be undoubtedly loyal to you.

## 5) Community Supported Agriculture (CSA)

A CSA (Community Supported Agriculture) subscription is another way for you to sell your produce. Unlike a farmers market where people will pay for their food at the time of their purchase, members pay for CSAs in advance and receive an assortment of produce every week for a specified amount of time. This continues for as long as a CSA lasts, a time frame that the farmer decides. The members get local delicious food, while you get some early-season financial stability and support.

A CSA is set up so that you receive financial support to cover your initial costs before you grow anything, this includes seeds, any big expenses, some support before you can make any money selling food, etc. In the early spring (February, March), folks will sign up to be part of your CSA. Membership in the CSA is based on shares (or percentage) of the harvest and you have to take that into account when you start your CSA. Some CSAs ask for a check as payment for each share, others ask for a payment as well as time working and learning on the farm. The choice is up to you and your model.

**Creating Community.** Beyond being a way to support your farm, a CSA is a great way to form community. If you think about it, a number of people trust you to grow food for them, which is paramount in our times. These people can be more than just your shareholders, they can be your friends. Often farmers with CSAs will ask for folks to come to volunteer on the same day so they can meet each other. Other times the farmers will organize potluck lunches or dinners either on their farm or nearby, or ask for volunteers to help distribute food on delivery / pick up day.

**Distribution.** Again, every farm is different when it comes to the best way to run their CSA, but here are a few ways people distribute their shares of the harvest:

- Many farmers convert a room on their property or take their garage and convert it into their CSA distribution room once a week or twice a week. The number of shares you have may determine the number of days you have a CSA pickup. If there are a lot of members, it may make sense to split up their pick up for two days.
  - If a farmer has limited time for monitoring a CSA room, they can leave instructions on a white board, along with a scale, for customers to select and weigh produce themselves.
  - A second option is to have volunteers run the pick-up. Utilizing volunteers is a great way to engage your members in the whole process from seed to table.
- Some CSAs designate that members pick up their shares at a farmers market. Farmers Markets are often easily accessible and this tactic encourages folks to "supplement" their CSAs with other items at the market, thus fostering the greater farmers market community.
- You can always have a "swap table" at your CSA pick up where customers can exchange items that they strongly dislike.

- Including recipes and cooking tips for the specific items in each week’s CSA might add a bit more work for you, but can help your customers engage with their food and encourages them to try new things.
- Lastly, a number of large CSAs bring their shares to a designated central location, such as a downtown street or popular shopping center.

**Meat CSAs?** Some small farms are exploring modifying the CSA model for selling farm-raised meat. For example: selling pork shares where the customers buy a quarter pig or half cow early in the season, and pick up their meat later in the year when the animal has been slaughtered and butchered. If you’re interested, [check out this explanation](#). This type of CSA is only happening on a very small scale at this time.

**Payment Options for your CSA:**

- You can have specials for families, couples, or a flat rate for individuals.
- Some customers volunteer on the farm to pay for part of their shares.
- Using EBT as payment for a CSA share is also a possibility, though the payment needs to be broken down into installments, as opposed to up front due to USDA regulations. Just Food in NYC has been very successful at organizing CSAs that accept EBT. [Learn more about their work with EBT](#)

As CSAs become more and more popular, there are a variety of programs for customers to choose from. Look into CSA Fairs in your community that provide a good opportunity to showcase what your CSA has to offer.

- [Farm Share Fair](#) – hosted by theMOVE in Somerville, MA.
- RI CSA Fair at the [Wintertime Farmers Market](#) in Pawtucket, RI.

See the [CSA page](#) on our Local Food Guide for more info about current CSAs in RI. Or any of the following resources:

- [Sharing the Harvest: A Citizen's Guide to Community Supported Agriculture](#)
- [The Real Dirt on Farmer John movie](#)
- [USDA CSA information page](#)

## 6) Food Safety Plan, GAP Certification, and Organic Labeling

### a ) Organic Labeling:

Some farmers choose to become certified organic. Depending on your product, you may be able to charge a premium price for your products if it is certified organic. Customers may be looking for the assurance that the food you raise is free of chemicals, and organic certification is one way to make your growing practices clear from a branding standpoint. In Rhode Island, the DEM is a great source for information on getting certified organic.

**What is Organic?** Definition from the USDA: “Organic is a labeling term that indicates that the food or other agricultural product has been produced through approved methods that integrate cultural, biological, and mechanical practices that foster cycling of resources,

promote ecological balance, and conserve biodiversity. Synthetic fertilizers, sewage sludge, irradiation, and genetic engineering may not be used. “

**Organic Certification Program in Rhode Island** through the [Department of Environmental Management](#)

### **b) GAP certification**

GAP certification has become a popular addition to, or completely independent of, organic certification. Good Agricultural Practices, or “GAP”, are standards meant to ensure food safety for the products you grow; these standards have come about in response to incidents where produce has caused outbreaks of illness. Some wholesale buyers such as supermarkets, restaurants or food service buyers require their producers to be GAP-certified as a condition of purchase. Third party GAP certification is voluntary and not required by law.

For more information about guidelines and how to become GAP-certified, visit the website for the [Rhode Island GAP Grower Certification Program](#): or read more from the [New England Extension Food Safety Consortium](#).

### **c) Food Safety Plan**

Similar to GAP certification, a Food Safety Plan is an additional business practice that will minimize the risk of food contamination, while creating a clear message about your products to your customers. The plan might also improve your ability to gain entry to wholesale and retail markets. Visit this [online tool through the On-Farm Food Safety Project](#) to help you create a customized Food Safety Plan, implement your plan, and prepare for a Food Safety Audit.

## **7) Selling Direct on the Farm**

### **a) Farm Stands**

Selling your products direct from your farm can be a good way to engage your customers and show them where their food comes from. Depending on your location, selling at a farm stand could be more economical than selling at farmers markets, depending on your labor situation and a variety of other considerations. Direct from the farm sales can encompass a variety of scenarios, from a simple honor system stand with a jar to hold money, to an elaborate roadside farm stand that sells your products and a variety of other locally-grown or bought-in items to round out the selection.



Some considerations before you begin selling from the farm:

- Check your town zoning – does your town allow permanent farm stands? What are the local regulations on signage?
- Licenses – check to make sure you have the required licenses at the town and state level to make retail sales.
- Parking - Is there a place for customers to park or pull over?
- Labor and staffing – will you have staff on hand at all times, or will it be an honor system? How many hours can you dedicate to staffing an on-farm store? Some farm stands choose to have limited hours to concentrate their selling on one or two days of the week if labor (that means you!) is in short supply and you feel that your product is

best sold in person so you can explain the benefits or why it is special. Others decide an honor system maximizes sales without requiring additional labor.

- Storage and refrigeration – do you have power available and meet the regulations for storing your product at the right temperatures?
- Visibility & local traffic – do you have enough people passing by to make your farm stand viable?

Some great examples of farm stands:

- Phantom Farms in Cumberland ([www.phantomfarms.com](http://www.phantomfarms.com))
- Schartner Farm in Exeter ([www.schartnerfarms.com](http://www.schartnerfarms.com))
- Young Family Farm in Little Compton (<http://youngfamilyfarm.com/>)

## **b) Pick Your Own Operations**

Pick your own operations are most often beneficial for farms with berries, orchards, or pumpkins in production. These types of operations can be a wonderful draw for customers, especially for families looking to entertain young children in the summer and fall. If you offer a pick your own operation, consider adding new and fun elements to the experience for customers: hayrides, musical entertainment, petting zoo, or having extra food and beverages available for purchase or sampling are just some of the options.

Other considerations:

- Insurance: customers will be wandering around your farm, likely unsupervised – make sure your insurance policy is updated to cover you for this.
- Parking – will customers be able to park right near the fields or orchards or will you need to transport them?
- Restrooms – not a necessary element, but they might make it easier for families to stay a while on your property – even port-a-potties can be a good investment for the season.

A [useful resource for farmers](#) from the University of Wisconsin Extension program on Pick Your Own operations.

Some local examples of thriving Pick Your Own operations:

- Sweet Berry Farm in Middletown ([www.sweetberryfarmri.com](http://www.sweetberryfarmri.com))
- Salisbury Farm in Johnston (<http://www.salisburyfarm.com/>)

## **c) Agritourism and Events**

Some farmers and producers choose to bring the public to their farm in other ways, for special events, tours or education. You might consider renting space at your farm for events or putting on your own that can tie into your production season and help you sell more product direct from the farm.

[New England Farmways](#) is a local organization that was established to help make local farms more accessible to visitors. In addition, they provide a variety of service to help farmers grow and run successful on-farm businesses.

Examples of farms with events:

- Escobar's Corn Maze in Portsmouth (<http://www.escobarshighlandfarm.com/>)

# **8) Social Media for Farmers**

Social Media tools are continuing to build momentum and it's important for your farm to get on board! Free online websites such as Twitter, Facebook and Youtube can be great resources to connect with your customers about products, and educate the community about your farm and practices. These sites can also serve as a support system for you and your fellow farmers, as well as a platform for reaching out to policymakers. Here are a few quick examples of how to get started with social media sites:

- **Facebook** - A great example of a producer using Facebook to connect with customers is [Aquidneck Honey](#).
- **Twitter** – [Wishing Stone Farm](#) often highlights recipes, or their farmers market schedules, or links to articles on farm policy.
- **Blog** – An urban farm in Providence called [Backyard Farms CSA](#) put together a blog that utilizes great photos to showcase the farmers' day-to-day activities. To set one up quickly and easily, try Wordpress.com or tumblr.com. Flickr is a free photo sharing site if you have lots of pictures to share!
- **Youtube and Vimeo** – Videos that tell your farm's story are also a great way to transport customers to your farm! Silverbrook Farm in Dartmouth, MA produced [a video](#) that describes the farm's history and current operations.
- **Email Services** – Free email tools like MailChimp, Constant Contact, and MyEmma.com can offer pre-built templates, that look very professional, and can keep you connected to your fans, customers, supporters etc via email.
- **Googlemaps** – You can set up your farm listing on Google Maps as a “place” so that when you google the name of your farm, the listing will show on the map. This can be a great resource, especially for visitors to the farm.

#### **Other Social Media Resources:**

- [Your Guide to Social Media Survival](#)

## **9) Additional Resources:**

- [Direct Marketing: Communicating Your Brand – Pam Knight Communications](#)
- [NCAT Sustainable Agriculture Project – Direct Marketing](#)

## **Final Words**

Thank you for your efforts in growing a local food system that values the environment, health and quality of life of Rhode Island farmers and eaters. You have made an incredible first step toward securing land for preservation, food for delicious consumption, and furthering your success as a businessperson, salesperson, farmer, community organizer, and general inspiration to the thousands of people who shop at farmers markets in the state of Rhode Island and throughout New England.

[Contact us](#). We are happy to answer your questions or connect you to the people who can.

*The Farm Fresh Rhode Island Team*