



Direct Sales and Short Supply Chains

An introduction to models and management for farmers and growers

The Landworkers' Alliance



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Acknowledgements

With thanks to all our members and supporters who shared their experiences, models and pictures, and commented and edited the draft.

Improving this Guide

The resources we produce are based on the experiences and expertise of our members and rely on your feedback and updates to remain relevant and contemporary. Please send comments to support@landworkersalliance.org.uk

Support and Advice from the LWA

The Landworkers' Alliance is able to provide some support and advice on direct sales models to members and farmers, growers, foresters and land-based workers transitioning to agroecological systems. If this would be of use please use the contact form on the member support page of the website and we will direct your enquiry to people best placed to assist you.



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The guidance, information and opinions offered in this document are for general information only and should not be relied upon nor used as a substitute for legal advice. You should always take advice from your own legal adviser on your specific circumstances.

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Introduction

In recent decades the farm gate share of the retail pound has fallen significantly. To maintain viability farms have had two broad options. The first has been to specialise and expand, focussing capital-intensive production on a few key outputs. The low-price and high-volume supply chains that these farms rely on are often international in reach, increasingly consolidated, and increasingly dominated by a few processors, distributors and retailers. They tend to lead to lower farm gate prices, lower social returns, and fewer local benefits. The 'race to the bottom' this approach has created is the main driving factor behind the closure of 33,500 commercial holdings in the UK between 2005 and 2015¹.

The second option has been to stay small and diversify, focussing labour intensive production on selling a wider range of products into local markets and achieving a retail price to maintain viability. Farms that have chosen this option tend to provide significantly higher benefits for the community, economy and environment.

The wider value of these local, agroecological businesses is gradually being understood and recognised. The communities in which these businesses are based

¹ (2015) Defra. Agriculture in the UK 2015. Page 13 and Defra (2011) Agriculture in the UK 2011. Page 18
Available from www.gov.uk/government/statistics/agriculture-in-the-united-kingdom



have opportunities to work on the land, learn about growing food and the local wildlife and ecosystems, and to expand their social network. Local food consumption is linked with improved access to healthy, affordable food leading to healthier diets and reduced food waste. Ecological production methods improve soil, water quality, increase habitats and biodiversity and help mitigate climate change. They tend to increase farm income and resilience, supporting higher rates of employment, providing a foundation for more resilient local economies as well as reducing energy use in production and lowering greenhouse gas emissions from food processing, packaging, transport and waste².

The most recent detailed research on wider economic benefits of direct sales and local supply chains in the UK was produced by the Campaign to Protect Rural England (CPRE) in 2012³. They found that money spent in local food networks will be re-circulated within the local economy for longer and could be contributing £6.75 billion of total value to local economies. They found that spending in smaller independent local food outlets supports three times the number of jobs than at supermarkets. And that enterprises involved in local food played a key role as cornerstones for many other local businesses. The CPRE research confirms earlier work carried out by the New Economics Foundation (NEF) on the local multiplier effect⁴. NEF showed that spending £10 in a local food outlet is worth on average £25 to the local economy, as it gets re-spent locally several times (a local multiplier of 2.5) whereas every £10 spent in a supermarket leads to only £2.40 being spent in the local area.

This work was taken further by researchers from the University of Gloucestershire in 2013 who calculated the social return on investment in local food. They concluded that every £1 invested in local food returns between £6 and £8 to society in the form of social and economic outcomes including health and well-being, training and skills.⁵

However, despite the benefits, setting up or transitioning to direct sales models is not always an easy route because it requires farmers and growers to learn a range of new skills and develop more complex businesses, often becoming retailers as well as producers. This has put many producers off developing local markets.

² (2017) A matter of scale: a study of the productivity, financial viability and multifunctional benefits of small farms (under 20ha). R. Laughton for the Landworkers' Alliance and Coventry University

³ (2012) From Field to Fork: The value of England's Local Food Webs. Campaign to Protect Rural England

⁴ (2002) The Money Trail: measuring your impact on the local economy using LM3. The New Economics Foundation and the Countryside Agency

⁵ (2013) A social return on investment approach, final report. Professor Paul Courtney, Countryside and Community Research Institute (CCRI), University of Gloucestershire.



With this document we are aiming to make the pathway easier and focus farmer-led innovation on overcoming some of the barriers so that more producers can create sustainable and resilient livelihoods from direct to customer and short supply chain sales of local food.

This guide covers some of the basic questions and signposts readers to resources that those starting or converting to direct sales models may find useful. It includes an introduction to ten different direct sales models and overviews on some of the more challenging parts of small farm business management, including legal structures and accounting software. Each section includes links to further resources.

The right sales model for you and your enterprises is going to be unique, and will take time, thought, trial (and error) to develop. It would be impossible to cover all the possible avenues and options so we encourage you to treat this as a source of inspiration and ideas that need to be tailored to your context. Innovation, adaption, courage and communication are essential for this, and the scope for successful enterprises is wide.

We encourage you to get in touch with us, and others operating similar models, to talk through your situation and develop your ideas. We hope you find this guide useful and welcome your feedback and improvements.

Choosing the right direct sales models for your farm

Farmers and growers use many different direct sales models, modifying and adapting elements to their distinct situation. In making decisions about which to use, multiple factors will need to be weighed up, such as location, capital requirements, running costs, sustainability, personal preferences, experience, and staff. In this document we look at some of the more common direct sales models in the UK, and some emerging models. There is a huge amount that could be written about each one, but we aim to provide an overview and a source of inspiration for developing the right model for you.

Many farms will operate a combination of models, for example running a box scheme and farmers market whilst supplying local wholesale, or running a farm shop with pick your own and online sales for specific times of year or products.

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We encourage you to think carefully about what you want and need from your enterprise and to create business plans and budgets that will help you understand the capital and labour requirements of your plans, and give you a sense of the risk involved. It is invaluable to visit other farms that are either producing similar products and running similar models or are in your area and can help you understand local market dynamics.

And finally, if you are starting a land-based business for the first time it is wise to start small and simple. It's easy to underestimate the realities of running multiple enterprises, and they can look easier and more profitable on paper! That said ambition and determination are important qualities for growth and we encourage you to build steadily towards the enterprise you want to run.

Box Schemes

Box schemes provide customers with a pre-boxed or bagged mix of fresh, or in the case of meat, sometimes frozen, produce. They are generally run either by farmers and growers themselves, or by independent companies, cooperatives or community groups, which buy produce from a network of farms.

Different schemes offer customers different levels of choice over what they get in their boxes varying from a selection of produce picked by the producer or scheme operator based on what's in season, and/or the best value, to bespoke boxes in which customers select from a list of available produce. Typically, customers commit to a weekly or biweekly box on a monthly basis and can opt out at any time, but some operators offer one-off boxes.

Box schemes vary considerably, and can include all combinations of vegetables, fruit, eggs, meat, fish, dairy, and cupboard items. Boxes and bags can be collected from the farm, delivered to customers, couriered across the country, or delivered to community hubs or collection points at a certain day and time to be collected by customers.

The most widely used box scheme model is a range of options for weekly vegetables. Prices typically vary from £8 - £20 per box and will contain on average 5 – 15 items of seasonal veg each week. Box schemes are also widely used for meat, with customers getting a selection of cuts up to a certain value on a less regular basis.

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As customers are generally not choosing the produce they receive many producers will put in recipes and lists of the produce in the box, as well as updates on the farm. This can help connect people to the farm, improving retention and increasing support, as well as make potentially unusual or unappealing produce more accessible.

Usually producers will want to keep their box scheme going year-round, and not lose customers in the hungry gap, as it can take a great deal of work to attract customers back. Those running box schemes often look to extend their season as much as possible, and to establish good relationships with other local producers for produce to buy-in during their hungry gap. Some box schemes drop from providing a weekly box to one every fortnight in the hungry gap.

During the summer, when many box scheme customers are on holiday, or if there is surplus produce for other reasons, producers often look to sell it through other routes such as wholesale to other shops or schemes, or processing into other products. A few box schemes donate surplus to their local food bank and doing so can be a good way to get involved in developing schemes to support people experiencing household food insecurity to access fresh and healthy produce.

The advantage to growers and farmers of the weekly or fortnightly box is it provides a secure and regular income, and allows the creation of long-term customer relationships. Ashurst Organics in Sussex, for example, has had many of its customers throughout the 27 years it's been operating a box scheme.

As with any new business development, there are a number of aspects of a box scheme that need to be researched and considered, for example: establishing whether there's a market, and the characteristics of your market; deciding on collection or delivery (or both) and calculating the costs and time commitment this requires; working out the contents of your boxes, sale prices and profit margins; staffing seasonal fluctuations in labour; deciding what packaging you'll use; and deciding how much choice you will give customers and whether you'll offer the option of adding other items to their boxes.

The Community Supported Agriculture Network provides an [A-Z Guide to setting up a CSA](#), and although aimed at CSA schemes, it includes advice on business planning, establishing a market, working out quantities, distribution options, funding and more that are relevant to box and bag schemes.

If you want to find local producers to supplement your own produce, the [Resources](#) section lists directories of organic and local producers. There are also local and national produce wholesalers, including wholesalers who specialise in supplying

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home delivery box schemes, and specialist wholesalers providing meat, dairy, etc. (see Wholesalers section). Wherever possible we encourage creating relationships with other local producers to help fill gaps for produce.

Barcombe Nurseries has a short video illustrating the production of their vegetable boxes, from receiving orders to harvesting, box assembly, and distribution which can be viewed here:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=nEneDDrAFoE&feature=youtu.be>

Advice from those running box schemes is that you start simple! It's generally easier to add options and choice than to take them away, but finding a system that works for your needs before taking on what may be unnecessary admin, delivery driving or packing is important.

Advantages

- Relatively secure and regular income and workflow across the year.
- Allows the creation of long-term customer relationships and strong trust to develop.
- In some cases packaging can be collected and reused.
- Individual customers will be more forgiving of imperfect produce than wholesalers.
- Relatively low overheads
- Can streamline harvesting and distribution into one or two days per week.

Disadvantages

- Can require regular deliveries of small orders unless collected from the farm or dropped at 'pick up points'.
- Multiple customer accounts to manage, and potentially significant amounts of customer service required
- Need to produce or offer a wide range of crops / variety of products. This can involve storing large amounts of crops.
- Fewer opportunities for 'upselling' and 'cross-selling' mean customers might be buying less produce than they would if they had a wider range of choice
- Time and logistics for packing boxes can be onerous and demand



Community Supported Agriculture (CSA) Schemes

In Community Supported Agriculture, producers and consumers share the risks and rewards of production. Customers become members of the scheme, and contribute varying degrees of support to the farm. Typically these include committing to buying produce or receiving a 'share' for a season or other predetermined period of time, but can also be through volunteering time and skills or through buying a community share in the farm or business. Often the payment for the produce, or some of it, is made up front. This not only helps farmers with cash flow at the start of the season or while livestock are growing but also reduces waste as the CSA is then growing for a known audience. However, we encourage CSAs to allow options for weekly or monthly payments to make sure the high upfront cost isn't a barrier to accessing the scheme for people on low incomes or without savings.

CSAs are often set up as CICs but can also be limited companies or sole traders. Many of them adopt a cooperative model. CSAs most often develop in one of two ways: as 'producer-led' CSAs where producers recruit a membership but retain all or most of the responsibilities and decision making or 'community-led' CSAs where a group from the local community sets up and manages enterprise which then employs the farmers/growers to produce for them. More about the choices of legal structures and what it means for decision making and ownership of a CSA is found in the [Legal Structures](#) section below.

Distribution is most often collection from a hub or collection point or from the farm, but can also include pick-your-own shares and home delivery. Members generally pay on a monthly, annual or bi-annual basis. The long-term commitment of members makes it easier for CSA farms to offer sliding scales of price and retain the ability to forecast income and production needs.

As with box schemes the most widely used models are vegetables and meat, though there are farmers in the UK using the model for milk and other dairy products, eggs, fish, bread, flowers and many more. It is also used for wine, with customers taking some of the risk in advance and getting a share of the wine produced.

There are a huge range of CSA models and there is significant scope for development in the UK. Community investment is what sets CSAs apart from a standard box scheme model and at the other end, being set up primarily as a commercial business is what distinguishes them from community farms and gardens where benefit to the community is utmost. However, in practice many CSAs are not



dissimilar to well-established community-based box schemes that have high levels of community support and engagement with the farm.

There are an increasing number operating on very innovative frameworks including:

'Pay what you can – take what you need' - In this model members are presented with the running costs of the farm at an annual AGM and make anonymous contributions until the running costs are met, then take a share of the harvest on a weekly basis without it being packaged for them.

'Self-pack CSA' – In this model the customers come to the farm or another collection point and pack their own produce according to lists provided by the producers. This can include a higher degree of flexibility in what the share includes.

'Self-Harvest CSA' – In this model customers harvest the produce as well as packaging it. Growers are typically on hand to assist with harvesting advice and use marker systems and lists to indicate what is available for harvest each week.

'CSA market stall' – in this model customers buy credit at the beginning of the season to assist farms cash flow and then gradually use this up buying produce from a market stall.

'Full farm or full diet CSA' – A CSA, usually from a cooperative of producers, covering a full diet in which members have access to meat, milk, fruit, vegetables, eggs, bread, flour, pulses, preserves etc

'Meat share' – probably the oldest form of CSA and a model that has existed for as long as farming, in which customers pay a contribution up front or commit time or other responsibilities (eg checking sheep on common land, feeding or watering stock) to the raising of animals in exchange for a share of the meat.

The CSA model has a number of advantages. A committed customer base to purchase the farm's produce along with regular income, which means that the farmer begins the year with a clear demand, and in many, cases some upfront finance. It also means that once a strong customer base is established there much less need for further marketing.

Many CSAs also create a strong volunteer base of supporters who help with a wide range of tasks including growing/farming but also marketing, financial management, event planning etc. This can help keep costs down at the same time as having an important social aspect. Many CSA volunteers say that the social aspect of being involved in a CSA has hugely improved their physical and mental health.

Because the community are invested in the farm in a regular and tangible way and most CSAs supply locally and so are known, even by those who don't purchase from

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them, in times of need the farm can benefit for their support in ways which are much less likely for a business operating on a standard financial transaction model.

CSA members often collect their produce directly from the farm which reduces the need for packaging. A relatively clear market also means the farmer is producing for a known audience and so there is likely to be little waste.

An opportunity to connect people to the land and grow knowledge on the risks and hazards of farming; Because members most commonly come on to the farm, whether to collect their produce, volunteer labour or take part in a social event, they are immediately linked to the place their food is produced and the people producing it and understanding of good food and the impact food production has on our planet grows too. Communication between the producers and consumers is also often more direct than in other models.

Relatively simplified administration - Although the forecasting and packing can be complex compared to some operations focused on a few key outputs, the degree of customer commitment can reduce the administrative burden in comparison to box schemes and online shops.

As with box schemes, customers are generally not choosing the produce they receive and so many CSAs will include recipes and lists of the produce in the weekly share, as well as updates on the farm.

The CSA model does have some disadvantages. They require commitment from members, which can reduce potential customer base, and when horticultural they need to produce enough different products to supply an attractive share throughout. A CSA scheme will require interest and support, and often needs a few committed people to help get things up and running. CSAs management can also require a significant input into communicating with members and supporting volunteers.

The biggest CSA in Wales, Cae Tan, has put together a helpful video showing out how they set up, including how they decided to manage the hungry gap, how their membership has grown, and at what point they become profitable:

<http://www.caetanrsa.org/en/>

Advantages

- A committed customer base to purchase the farm's produce.
- Regular, most often upfront, income which improve cash flow and

Disadvantages

- Requires sufficient numbers of committed members.
- As a horticultural CSA need to produce a range of products



- increase financial stability.
 - Volunteers to help with harvesting and other CSA administrative and management tasks.
 - Very short supply chain means less packaging and waste and very low/no transport costs.
 - The support of the wider CSA community.
 - An opportunity to increase public knowledge and understanding of good farming.
 - Greater access to grants depending on model (if set up as a CIC, for instance).
 - Relatively low overheads
 - Can act as a hub both for other business and the local community
- Fewer opportunities for 'upselling' and 'cross-selling' mean customers might be buying less produce than they would if they had a wider range of choice

In the [Resources](#) section there are links to extensive information on CSAs produced by the CSA Network, to the CSA Network Facebook page, and growers and farmers groups where you can ask questions and get support.

Farm Shops

Farm shops vary from fully staffed buildings selling a full range of fresh, frozen and packaged produce, sometimes with cafes and other amenities attached, to limited opening hours for specific crops or types of produce and 24-hour unstaffed honesty based systems. As such the time commitment and investment required varies significantly.

Farm shops provide a direct relationship with customers, a permanent outlet for produce which requires less packing and transport than some models, and can provide a location to host events.

Market research shows that the most viable farm shops are those offering a sufficient range of produce to make a journey for customers worthwhile. Although the need for a wide range of produce is lessened in settings where there's regular footfall and passing trade.



Unstaffed honesty shop approaches can be useful ways to test the market, and in many cases can grow into significant sales outlets for farms, providing a surprisingly high turnover with very low overheads.

You don't always need to get planning consent for a farm shop. In some cases permitted development rights allow the conversion of an existing farm building into a farm shop if the shop is less than 500m², but you will need to look into the planning law in your area.

As with most new business ventures a business plan is recommended, but when considering a farm shop, especially when it involves a big investment, a plan is critical. You'll need to establish that you can draw in enough customers, and the capital and time you invest in the shop will be paid back from profits over time. You'll need to look into: planning permission; fire-safety; registering as a food retail business; VAT; compliance with Payment Card Industry Data Security Standard; health and safety and food safety requirements; providing parking, including handicapped parking; and access. You may also need to consider: sourcing bought-in produce; waste packaging obligations; and licenses for processing and handling food.

On the plus side, you may be able to secure a grant towards capital costs of setting up the shop and/or to pay for business planning (see LWA's Guide to Grants and Fundraising). It's strongly advised to take advantage of free business planning support if this is available, as a strong business plan is invaluable. It's also critical to ensure you or a person in your team has a head for figures; by staying on top of your profit and loss and cash-flow will you ensure the long-term viability of a farm shop, and in turn your farm business.

This guide can't cover all the aspects that would need to be considered when planning a farm shop business. Unicorn Grocery Cooperative has prepared a free guide to setting up a grocery shop which includes the cost of shop fitting, guidance on pricing, IT, presenting fruit and vegetables, health and safety, permits and licenses and much more: www.unicorn-grocery.co.uk/grow-a-grocery.php.

Advantages

- There are no deliveries, customers come to you.
- You can sell the produce you specialise in, and buy in other produce.
- You get the retail price for your

Disadvantages

- Farm shops, other than those operating with honesty boxes, require regular staffing.
- Shops require maintenance and have high overheads.
- Can be expensive to set up.



- produce.
- If it's just a stall with an honesty box, it requires little of your time to staff.
- You can add other business and ranges of produce to your farm based on a known footfall
- Ability to upsell and cross-sell by offering a wide range of produce
- Administration can be complex
- Potential for waste harvesting for unknown demand, and maintaining the feeling of abundant produce.

Online Shops

Online shops create opportunities for national distribution, offering customers a choice of produce without the commitment of a box scheme or CSA, and providing producers with wider access to markets than a farm shop or market stall. This can be especially useful for producers in remote areas where delivery or collection logistics are complicated, or for farmers producing more specialised products where customers are unlikely to have a regular order and demand from the community in the vicinity of the farm is insufficient to meet the supply.

However, an emerging outcome of the COVID-19 pandemic is an increase in online shopping and an increased demand for home delivery, creating opportunities for farms able to market online.

Online shops are successfully used for a huge range of produce and there are a number of software options that can 'plug-in' to your existing website, or be the basis for a new one.

Online shops vary considerably in the delivery of their produce. In some cases producers use them as an ordering mechanism that fits into a farm collection or local delivery route, whereas in others farms use a delivery company, courier, pallet distribution or the post office for nationwide delivery of orders.

We look at packaging and courier services for online shops later in this guide.

For farmers and growers who do not want to set up their own online shop front, they might like to link up with a [food hub](#) that will market and distribute their produce online. In this scenario farmers and growers receive a purchase order from the hub with a list of orders for each week. They then harvest and prepare produce to fulfill the purchase order and deliver it to the hub for packing and distribution

Advantages

Disadvantages

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- Low overheads for staffing and premises
- Increased potential customer base through national distribution
- You can sell the produce you specialise in
- You get the retail price for your produce, unless you sell through a food hub which will require a mark-up
- Not having to do deliveries create opportunities for farms in remote areas
- Opportunities to take advance orders e.g. selling meat boxes in advance of slaughter dates
- Harder to develop customer retention because of absence of face-to-face contact
- Requires good online marketing and web skills, or a budget to hire someone for this work
- Harder to predict cash flow and sales volumes

Farmers' Markets

There are about 650 farmers' markets in the UK and a large number of other markets where farms are able to sell produce. Farmers' markets are usually weekly or monthly, with larger markets often held at the weekend, and the smaller ones more likely to take place during the week.

Selling directly from a market stall has a number of advantages: it's a simple way to test the market for your produce; you can run a stall as and when you have produce to sell; it offers direct contact with customers and builds connections, support and feedback; and requires no investment in premises.

The challenge can be that after a busy week, you'll need to pick and/or pack, travel and set up, often at the weekends. You'll need to estimate sales so that enough produce can be harvested and prepared for each market day. If the market is quiet, you've no guarantee of selling all of the produce and so will need a contingency plan for surplus perishable products. On the other hand a good market can be an effective way to sell a high volume of produce in a few hours, build relationships with customers and provide welcome social opportunities.

many farmers' markets will only allow you to have a stall if your produce is local, which can be defined as up to 30 to 50 miles, depending on the market. Applications for a place in a farmers' market are usually made through submitting a form with a small fee. A stall rental for the day is typically around £25, but ranging from £5 to



£75. Traders have to agree with the market's rules and regulations. This includes such things as a commitment to attend a minimum number of markets per month, and to have a display board with your farm's name, certification number, etc. The most important rule for certified farmers' markets is that the stallholder must have produced the food they are selling. An example of rules can be downloaded from [Bath Farmers Market](#).

You can find your local farmers markets using the [Information Britain website](#).

Advantages

- Simple way to test the market for your produce or introduce new produce ideas.
- You can run a stall as and when you have produce to sell.
- Direct contact with customers and builds connections and support.
- Requires no investment in premises.
- Sense of community between the stallholders.

Disadvantages

- After a busy week, you'll need to pick and/or pack, travel and set up, often at the weekends.
- Need to estimate sales so that enough produce can be harvested and prepared for each market day.
- If the market is quiet, you've no guarantee of selling all of the produce.
- Need to be a good communicator.

Milk Dispensing Machines

Milk dispensing machines create opportunities for producers to sell milk at a retail price to customers on a self-service basis, reducing the time, costs and waste of bottling. They allow for unstaffed set-ups and create opportunities to add fresh milk to markets, CSA collection points or other shops. If a community has a central hub such as a school, pub, shop or community centre a milk dispensing machine can go some way to replacing milk delivery rounds with a quicker and easier centralised drop-off.

Depending on the model, milk-dispensing machines accommodate between 100 and 400 litres. The machines can be stored indoors or in a sheltered spot outdoors, they maintain the milk at the correct temperature and regularly agitate it. Machines vary, but depending on the model, customers can pay for milk by token, coins, bank notes and/or contactless card.

There are a range of models and service options from a number of companies in the UK and Europe, prices upwards of £5,000 + VAT. One retailer of the machines



estimates a two-year pay-back period which will obviously depend on the initial investment and volume of sales.

It's advised to contact Environmental Health and to check your insurance. Anyone involved in cleaning the vending machine will need to have a food hygiene certificate, which can be obtained online for about £20.

Most milk sold direct from the farm is unpasteurised 'raw milk' and there is considerable demand for it. However, there are specific rules governing the sale of raw milk and it is illegal to sell in Scotland. More information can be found by following the this link: www.food.gov.uk/safety-hygiene/raw-drinking-milk

Advantages

- Allows milk to be more accessible to customers and increases sales.
- No delivery rounds.
- Milk sales at its retail price.
- Customers can bring their own bottles, reducing packaging time and materials

Disadvantages

- Reduces customer contact, unless alongside market stall or shop
- Requires an initial large investment.
- Machine needs to be regularly cleaned and needs to be maintained.

Milk Rounds

Milk rounds create a direct link between customers and producers and bring producers a retail price for their milk. Milk rounds facilitate the reuse of packaging, creating a reduction in packaging waste and, if an electric vehicle is used for delivery, it also substantially reduces GHG emissions from distribution.

Milk rounds can operate with the regularity and commitment of box schemes and CSAs, with customers subscribing, and can be combined with an online shop to add other dairy produce such as butter, yogurt, kefir and cheeses and a wider range of farm produce.

Traditionally milk rounds were expected to be finished by 8am, which means a round could start at 3am, but there are examples of successful dairies delivering in the afternoon, such as [North Aston Dairy](#).



Existing producers running milk rounds recommend carefully researching your local market and delivery costs before investing in additional kit, branding and marketing.

As with vending machines, most milk sold direct from the farm is unpasteurised 'raw milk' and there is considerable demand for it. However, there are specific rules governing the sale of raw milk and it is illegal in Scotland. More information can be found by following the this link: www.food.gov.uk/safety-hygiene/raw-drinking-milk

Advantages

- Milk sales at its retail price.
- Significant reduction in packaging waste.
- Direct relationship with customers.
- Ability to add other produce onto delivery round

Disadvantages

- Can involve a very early start to the day and significant staff time in deliveries
- Multiple client accounts.
- May need to chase late payments.
- Cash-flow needs to allow for late payments.

Restaurants, pubs and cafes

Restaurants, pubs and cafes typically place larger orders than households and have a higher demand for speciality produce. Depending on your area demand can be consistent throughout the year, or peak in the summer when fresh produce is most abundant and the tourism season is at its peak. Restaurants are often willing to pay more for fresh, local and speciality produce that they can't sourced from a wholesaler.

In many cases restaurants, pubs and cafes will prefer to order on a monthly, weekly or bi-weekly basis from an availability list. However some farms have succeeded in establishing relationships with more commitment where restaurants commit to a specified minimum weekly spend, or where the farmers and growers send a 'share' based on what's in season up to a specified value. In the case of meat many chefs will want a high volume of certain cuts, but other restaurants, particularly those where chefs have control over the menu and change it regularly may be interested in whole carcasses for butchery in-house.

Many producers supplying restaurants, pubs and cafes advise getting chefs onto the holding where possible to show the set up and explore the produce available. In



many cases chefs will be interested in produce that would be undesirable to households. Growers also advise keeping your own production priorities in mind before offering to grow produce specifically for a specific chef as demand, personnel and restaurant management can change from one season to another, however, creating direct relationships with chefs can bring other benefits to the farm including options for on farm events and meals.

In many cases the stress and time pressures of commercial kitchens, combined with the expectations of customers mean chefs will be less tolerant of dirty, low quality or erratic supply of produce and will favor well presented produce that requires minimal cleaning before use.

If you do decide to start supplying a restaurant, you may find the following experiences from other growers and farmers helpful:

Advice to Small Scale Farmers Wishing to Work With Restaurants, Female Farmer UK: <https://femalefarmeruk.com/2018/12/20/advice-to-small-scale-farmers-wishing-to-work-with-restaurants/>

Advantages

- Larger orders than households and demand for higher value produce.
- May only need small quantities of products relative to wholesale customers.
- Fewer deliveries and less packing than box schemes.
- Opportunity to work with chefs to influence menu towards what is seasonally abundant.
- Opportunities to produce more speciality products

Disadvantages

- Chefs can be notoriously finicky and may have particular packaging, cutting and portion requirements.
- Chefs may only want to work with certain cuts of meat.
- Produce must be consistent and reliable.

Short supply chain wholesale

Fruit and vegetable wholesalers report a continued growing interest in both local and Organic produce and for most types of produce, demand outstrips supply. Many existing box schemes and shops across the country are also in need of extra produce to supplement their own and can be further potential wholesale customers.



Wholesale can bring opportunities for producers to specialise in certain crops or products that can be produced profitably in their situation and will allow refinement of the production process and economies of scale in production. However, it will place different demands on your business. You'll need timely delivery, accurate forecasting of crop maturity and volume, and consistency in quality. If you're a beginning farmer it's advised to gain experience before selling to a wholesaler; individual consumers are reportedly more forgiving in your beginning learning years than a busy wholesaler.

It's also advised that you consider keeping your most profitable, convenient and/or enjoyable direct market sales, and add wholesale into your business once your farm hits a certain size or you feel is able to meet the demands of wholesale buyers.

The LWA supports a model of producers connecting with buyers and distributors in urban areas through cooperative models that can combine the volume of wholesale buyers with reliable relationships and low risks. Good examples of these include the [Manchester Veg People](#) and the [Better Food Shed](#) in London

The [Resources](#) section of this Guide provides contact details of existing organic wholesalers in the UK.

Unicorn Grocery have shared their internal guidance for buying in fresh fruit and vegetables, including from small-scale UK growers here:

<https://www.unicorn-grocery.coop/wp-content/uploads/documents/Veg-Trading.pdf>

There is a comprehensive guide to selling into wholesale providing guidance on: approaching wholesalers; setting prices; crop planning; and more. From FamilyFarmed.org in the United States:

- Wholesale Success: A Farmer's Guide to Selling, Postharvest Handling and Packing Produce
<https://static1.squarespace.com/static/5a6b36f28fd4d259ba4fae16/t/5a7e00cc71c10b2ebf7df534/1518207192816/Wholesale-Success-Manual.pdf>

Advantages

- Access to an established customer base in a market where there is strong and growing demand.
- Streamlined storage, packaging and transportation needs.
- Simplified sales process.
- Possibly reduced staff time that

Disadvantages

- Gross income per acre is generally lower.
- Wholesale buyers usually only purchase a limited number of crops per farm.
- Wholesale buyers usually demand higher standards in postharvest



otherwise would be needed packing individual vegetable boxes, staffing farmers markets, etc.

- Wholesalers are more capable of absorbing peak production and excess volume than direct retail markets.
- Easier to create time for holidays and time away from the farm than year round sales models

handling and storage practices which can require greater investment in on-farm cooling and storage.

- Payment may take longer than individual customers.
- Little direct contact with your customers.

Mobile Sales

A mobile store operates in a similar way to a market stall. A mobile stall can operate out of any vehicle or trailer that is suitable for the produce. For example [Sussex Peasant](#), uses a truck for their mobile shop, and [Home Farmer](#) uses a converted horse box for their mobile milk dispenser.

Mobile stores visit different locations on different days of the week, bringing produce to the heart of a community. This is particularly beneficial in places where a community has lost its local amenities. By providing a temporary market, the mobile stall also provides a place for people to meet and to learn about and engage with local produce. By operating in different locations each day, sales are more concentrated than if a shop or stall is available to customers every day. This helps to increase revenue and improve viability.

If the mobile store sells on behalf of a number of local producers, it can save each farm a significant amount of staff time compared with producers setting up and staffing an individual market stall. It also means that a wider range of produce can be offered to customers even through the hungry gap.

Setting up and packing away a mobile stall will be less time consuming than having to set up and pack away stalls in multiple venues and can bypass the need to spend time finding suitable venues. On the down-side, trucks do break down, the day may need to start early in the morning, setting-up and then staffing the stall is hard-work and a long day. In addition, unless the mobile stall can tag onto some existing community convergence or activity, work may need to be done to create demand and routine in customers minds.

To operate a mobile stall, you'll need to be licensed as a food retailing business, obtain a street trading license, and ensure you comply with Environmental Health



and Trading Standards. In the sections below we look at packaging choices and options to receive payments.

Advantages

- Sales are more concentrated than at a shop or stall available to customers every day.
- The set-up is less time consuming than a market stall.
- If operated on behalf of a group of producers, a mobile stall saves the time of each producer staffing their own market stall separately.
- The innovative and attractive model attracts new customers.
- Local produce is 'showcased' and promoted.

Disadvantages

- Requires initial investment in the mobile stall and refrigeration.
- Trucks break down and require maintenance.
- Harder to predict cash flow and sales volumes
- May require an early start to the day and a lot of staffing time

Food Network / Hub

A group of local producers can organise into a local food network and sell their produce collectively directly to customers, offering a wide range of produce normally found at farmers' markets. The customer places one order, makes one payment, and has just one collection or delivery, while producers retain their autonomy.

[Tamar Valley Food Hub](#) is an example of a thriving food hub, serving the Plymouth area and with eight collection points most Fridays and a delivery service. Tamar Valley Food Hub includes 50 producers and after covering operation costs, is able to give the producers 85% of the normal retail asking price.

Existing food hubs in the UK typically source and / or distribute within a 30-mile radius, but this range, can of course be set by those involved. The range of produce available at the hub does need to be sufficiently wide ranging to be attractive to customers. The hub needs part-time access to physical space(s) for packaging the customers' orders ready for collection and/or delivery and access to a delivery vehicle or part-time workers willing to use their bikes and cars to make deliveries.

Software developed over recent years, most notably the not-for-profit [Open Food Network](#), enables shoppers to place a single order for products from multiple



suppliers, produces purchase reports for the relevant suppliers and provides suppliers with packing reports, integration to accounting systems and much more.

Some existing food hubs add to the core activity, by for example, organising local food related social and educational events. Tamar Valley offers opportunities for their customers to visit producers and take part in food related activities such as bee-keeping and orchard management.

The Open Food network provides [guidance on setting up a local food hub](#), and those already established and establishing may be happy to share their experiences.

Go Local: <http://halff.org.uk/go-local/>

Stroudco: <https://www.stroudco.org.uk/>

Tamar Local Food Hub: <http://www.tamarvalleyfoodhubs.org.uk/>

Advantages

- Producers receive near to retail prices.
- Customers are offered a wide range of local produce and home delivery.
- Builds connections between local producers and between producers and buyers/eaters

Disadvantages

- The food hub model is still establishing itself, and in many areas, there isn't yet a critical mass of producers.
- The time needed to research web platforms for food hubs may deter producers from joining.
- Requires coordinated deliveries.
- Requires a space for packing and possibly collection points.
- Food hubs make a mark-up on producer prices which makes food more expensive to the buyers/eaters, or means producers get a wholesale price

Pick your own

In pick your own schemes producers open farms or fields for customers to pick their own produce, typically but not always filling baskets or tubs and paying on the basis of units or weight. Pick your own farms have historically been widely used in soft fruit, especially strawberries, raspberries and currants, squash/pumpkins and Christmas trees, but can be adapted to a much wider range of produce. There are examples of 'self harvest' CSAs where, with support and guidance from the growers, customers harvest their entire veg share.



Pick your own schemes bring people to the farm creating opportunities for further up-selling and cross-selling, and work well alongside a box scheme or CSA collection, a farm shop or café. However, they have also worked as stand alone attractions and people are often willing to travel to a PYO as a fun family day out.

A great advantage for producers of pick your own schemes is that the costs of harvesting, packing and delivering produce is largely removed, and many people when picking for themselves are less fussy about quality and may well choose produce growers would otherwise grade out. However, in doing so producers give up control over harvesting quality and risk greater damage to plants. Demand can also be hard to gauge, and so back up plans for processing unpicked fruit could be worth considering.

Advantages

- Producers receive near to retail prices.
- Harvesting, packaging and delivery costs are removed
- Brings people to the farm and creates opportunities for up-selling and cross-selling
- Low infrastructure requirements

Disadvantages

- May be harder to predict demand and ensure full crop is sold
- Location dependant

The website www.pyo.co.uk provides a search function of pick your own farms that may be of use to farmers thinking of setting up a pick your own scheme.

Catering

A further direct sale route that some farmers and growers have chosen is to run catering businesses alongside their production. Selling produce through on-farm restaurants and cafes, or using produce from the farm in events catering.

Setting up an operation like this requires either developing or partnering with people who have the skills to run a food service business. However, it can provide a significant income stream that is likely to add a distinct selling point to the catering, as demand for high quality fresh local produce increases. It can also integrate well with other sales outlets and make use of produce that may otherwise be graded out.

Examples of farm-based catering operations include on-farm cafes, often alongside pick your own schemes and farm shops, catering for weddings and festivals and



pizza nights baking with flour grown and milled on the farm, fresh vegetables, meats and cheeses.

Partnering with a chef to organise occasional farm feasts can also be a good strategy for attracting customers to your other sales avenues and highlighting the quality of your produce.

Advantages

- Can add significant value to produce
- Can create outlets for produce that would otherwise be graded out or lost to gluts

Disadvantages

- Requires the time and skills to run a food service enterprise
- Location dependant and re requires

Food Hygiene and Safety

Food Safety and Hygiene in England, Wales and Northern Ireland are the responsibility of the [Food Safety Authority](#) and in Scotland they are the responsibility of [Food Standards Scotland](#) as a result rules are difference in the different administrations and producers should check the situation in their area with the relevant authority.

As a food business, even just selling vegetables, you'll need to contact your local authority and register with the environmental health department. Make sure you start your registration with the environmental health department at least 28 days before you intend to start trading. Registration of your food business is free and can't be refused. Follow this [link](#) for more information

Once you've registered, they'll then advise you on the rules and regulations that you must follow, which will depend on the types of food you will be selling. As well as explaining the regulations that apply, the environmental health department will recommend you take common sense steps to maintain food hygiene.

Food businesses that make, prepare or handle meat, fish, egg or dairy products must have strict food hygiene procedures that everyone follows to reduce the risk of contamination with bacteria. You may need to be approved (rather than simply registered) if your business supplies mainly trade customers rather than directly to the public, and you may also need to register with the Food Standards Agency (FSA)



rather than just your local environmental health department. It is advisable to discuss this with your Local Authority.

There are some exemptions to this for example if you business supplies products of animal origin to other businesses (including caterers) on a marginalised, localised and restricted basis.

As part of the registration or approval process, food and drink producers must submit a written food safety management system, based on 'hazard analysis critical control point' (HACCP) principles. Go to <https://myhaccp.food.gov.uk/> to access an online tool provided by the Food Standards Agency to help small food manufacturers develop a system based on HACCP principle

Once registered, you may be inspected by your local authority. Preparing thoroughly for your inspection means your business has the best chance of getting a top rating in the Food Hygiene Rating Scheme.

As all food businesses are slightly different, it can be confusing as to what is needed to comply with Food Safety Law. A good starting point is to follow the advice on the Food Standards Agency website. <https://www.food.gov.uk/business-guidance/setting-up-a-food-business>

The Food Standards Agency provides a number of free specific training courses for businesses covering allergens, traceability, labelling, vacuum packing and root cause analysis. They can be accessed [here](#):

The environmental health department will ask that you have (not exhaustive):

1. A Food Safety Management System based on Hazard Analysis and Critical Control Points (HACCP) procedures. There are a number of ways of achieving this and it will depend on the size and nature of your business. Essentially this is a document that lays out how you ensure the food you produce is safe to eat. It is supported by your records, such as temperature, cleaning or training records. The [myHACCP](#) site can help you develop a HACCP procedures.
2. The relevant training in food safety and hygiene. The type of food safety training will depend on the type of business you operate. Level 2 food hygiene training is a good starting point for most food business operators, however if you only sell low risk products such as fruit and vegetables it may not be appropriate. Your environmental health department will be able to advice you. The type of training required should be commensurate with



the type of food businesses. Induction training should be given to all new staff and should always cover the basics of food hygiene. There are a number of different training providers out there. Check that they are accredited to a recognised awarding body. Some local authorities run courses themselves, which can be useful if you want help with setting up your business too

3. Premises will need to ensure that they have enough clean and pest-free space to carry out tasks hygienically; access to toilets and changing facilities for staff to change their cloths (if applicable); separate sinks for hand-washing and washing produce (if applicable); adequate ventilation, lighting and drainage; food storage and transportation which prevents contamination and maintains necessary temperatures; and where relevant, frozen and/or chilled storage.
4. Food labels on prepacked food which list additives in the ingredient list and declare whether any of the 14 allergens are present in food; to keep your food allergic customers safe, you must follow the allergen information rules by providing accurate allergen information and handling and managing food allergens adequately in the kitchen
5. A log to show where you buy and supply your food or food ingredients to and from.

Based on their assessment of your premises, recordkeeping and processes, an Environmental Health Food Safety Officer will calculate the score of your premises from 25 (very poor) to 0 (perfect) using the Food Law Code of Practice. Scores are finalised by adding together the points scored in each of the three categories (hygiene, structural, and management compliance) and making sure there is no significant failing in any category.

The Food Hygiene Rating Scheme is run by the [Food Standards Agency](#). It's government led and operates in England, Wales, and Northern Ireland. It's dedicated to assessing the hygiene levels of restaurants, takeaways, food shops, and cafes. And it's all about making sure food in the UK is safe to consume. Scotland has a similar system called the [Food Hygiene Information Scheme](#).

In England, it's not a legal requirement to display your food hygiene rating or certificate, but the Food Standards Agency encourage all businesses to display it. In Wales and Northern Ireland, it is a legal requirement that businesses display their certificates in a prominent place like the front door or in a window.

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Sustain has a page of advice on food hygiene and a free check-list for volunteers handling food, *Essentials of Food Hygiene*:

<https://www.sustainweb.org/foodcoopstoolkit/foodhygiene/>

<https://www.sustainweb.org/images/sustain2/Essentials%20of%20food%20hygiene.doc>

The CSA Network has a guide, *Rules and Regulations*, which covers Environmental Health:

<https://communitysupportedagriculture.org.uk/resource/rules-and-regulations/>

Food information and packaging

When packaging food or drink products, producers must ensure that 'mandatory food information' is provided on the packaging or on a label attached to the packaging.

The required information includes, for example:

- The name of the food.
- A list of ingredients.
- Allergen information.
- A nutritional declaration.
- Net quantity
- Storage conditions
- Name and address of manufacturer, packer or seller
- A 'best before' or 'use by' date.

When supplying non-prepacked food to other food businesses, producers must provide them with the mandatory food information, so that suppliers at every stage in the food chain can meet their obligation to provide information to their customers.

Slaughter and Butchery

All farmers considering selling their meat direct to the public or through short supply chains will need to think about who is going to slaughter and butcher their stock, where this will happen and what your customers criteria for slaughter and butchery are.

Slaughter and butchery regulations are particularly complex and the food safety implications of errors are high. Therefore producers should take special care must to ensure all regulations are met.

Other than exceptions for slaughter of poultry and lagomorphs (rabbits, hares and edible rodents) and on-farm cutting rooms which are explained below, slaughter and



butchery must be done at a Food Standards Agency (FSA) approved premises by training and certified staff.

As a result slaughterhouses are an essential part of the infrastructure necessary to support high welfare local food systems. The closure of many smaller slaughterhouses in recent years has had negative implications for producers who have little option but to transport livestock further afield.

Options for Slaughter and Butchery

Other than setting up an approved slaughterhouse on your farm, or making use of the exemption for poultry and lagomorphs, you have no option but to use an approved abattoir for slaughter.

For butchery you have 3 main options:

1. Many abattoirs or cutting plants are happy to hang, cut and process meat for a fee.
2. If a high street butcher cuts up an animal for a farmer, the farmer cannot then sell it on. However, if there isn't a licenced cutting room anywhere near you (or there is but they won't take your meat) the local authority may sometimes make an exception, but don't assume that's the case. Alternatively you may be able to establish the meat supply and sale as a co-operative or partnership venture with the butcher.
3. Alternatively you can set up an on-farm facility or rent one on another farm, and either do the butchery yourself, or hire a butcher to do the cutting to your specifications. The main benefit of doing the processing yourself is that you can have more control over the quality and specifications of the cutting. However it involves time, equipment and storage costs and compliance with regulations.

Finding abattoirs and cutting rooms

The [FSA produce a list of approved food processing plants](#) which includes slaughterhouses and cutting plants.

If you are an organic certified farmer and you want to continue organic certification through to sales then you will need a certified abattoir. The [Soil Association](#) produces a map of organically certified abattoirs

If you want to sell Halal or Kosher meat you will need to find a slaughterhouse that provides these services. Unfortunately there is currently no list of which slaughter



houses can offer Halal or Kosher slaughter so you will have to speak to abattoirs in your area.

In any case it's worth shopping around and listening to what's on the grape vine about local abattoirs. Go and visit and ask to look around.

A good abattoir will be happy to show you around while slaughtering is in process and will show you the range of services on offer. Some abattoirs offer a cutting and packing service and you need to check the quality of the cutting and packing and also the labelling

On-farm cutting rooms

On-farm cutting rooms that supply on a 'marginal, localised and restricted' basis are exempt from approval by the FSA but may still need to be approved by the local authority.

In UK law, marginal means either up to 25% of the business turnover or weight of food products, or up to 2 tons per week (this can be averaged over a year, but does not include wild game meat). Localised means the meat is supplied within the supplying establishment's own county plus the greater of either the neighbouring county or counties or 50 km/30 miles from the boundary of the supplying establishment's county. Restricted means the business has a retail outlet supplying the final consumer with part of its production of meat.

For more information see: [Operational policy for the approval of food establishments undertaken by the Food Standards Agency](#)

Small-scale poultry and lagomorph slaughter

Producers intending to undertake small-scale on-farm slaughter of poultry or lagomorphs must be registered with the local authority, have a certificate of competence for slaughter and comply with food hygiene and labelling regulations.

Small is interpreted as (i) under 10,000 birds or lagomorphs per year; or (ii) producers annually slaughtering over 10,000 birds or lagomorphs who are members of an appropriate assurance scheme and who either (a) dry pluck by hand or (b) slaughter for 40 days per year or less. Localised means the meat is supplied within the supplying establishment's own county plus the greater of either the neighbouring county or counties or 50 km/30 miles from the boundary of the supplying establishment's county, and additionally anywhere within the UK in the two weeks preceding Christmas or Easter and for geese, Michaelmas (late September).



For more information see: [Operational policy for the approval of food establishments undertaken by the Food Standards Agency](#)

Animal welfare in transport

Farmers have a legal responsibility to ensure their animals are transported in a way that won't cause injury or unnecessary suffering to them. You can view detailed information [here](#) and [here](#)

In brief, when moving animals, you must transport them in a way that won't cause them injury or unnecessary suffering. Law that governs the welfare of animals during transport applies to anyone who transports live, vertebrate animals in connection with 'economic activity' - ie a business or trade

Welfare during transport rules requires all journeys to be logged (date, time, duration etc). For journeys up to eight hours involving any species of animal as part of an economic activity, you must have an Animal Transport Certificate (ATC) or similar document. Although, if you are a farmer transporting your own animals under 50 kilometres, then you are exempt from ATC requirements.

If you're transporting animals for less than 65 kilometres (about 40 miles), it's not necessary for vehicles to be authorised or for drivers/handlers to hold certificates of competence. However, an ATC is required and your drivers and handlers must have had some form of relevant training (though this can be gained through a combination of on-the-job instruction and practical experience).

Drivers or attendants responsible for transporting farmed animals over 65 kilometres must hold a relevant certificate of competence. These are independently assessed qualifications specific to the person's role - ie driver or attendant. The species and duration of journeys involved is also a factor in the qualification. The person taking the qualification can include:

- those involved in journeys of under eight hours (they can be assessed by a theory test)
- those involved in journeys over eight hours (they must also pass a practical assessment)

Raw Milk

The sale of raw drinking milk and cream is legal in England, Wales and Northern Ireland. It can only be sold directly to the consumer by:

- Registered milk production holdings at the farm gate or farmhouse catering operation (for England and Wales see [here](#), for Northern Ireland see [here](#))
- farmers at registered farmers' markets

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- distributors using a vehicle as a shop such as a milk round
- direct online sales
- vending machines at the farm

It's illegal to sell raw milk and cream in any other setting. In addition, the bottle must display the warning "this product has not been heat-treated and may contain organisms harmful to health", and the dairy must conform to higher hygiene standards than dairies producing only pasteurised milk.

Sales of raw milk and cream are completely banned in Scotland.

Organic and Biodynamic certification

Organic and Biodynamic farming and food production is governed by a number of regulations. It is illegal to describe a food product as "organic" if it has not been certified as being organic by a registered control body.

All foods sold as organic must originate from growers, processors and importers who are registered with an approved certification body and subject to regular inspection.

Certifying your farm and products as organic or biodynamic comes with costs and record keeping requirements, and its relevance to your market will depend on the type of direct sales or short supply chain model you use. Some enterprises with direct links to customers who have close connections to the farm find it unnecessary as customers can check they are happy with the farming practices on their own terms. In many other cases, especially wholesale or sales to restaurants, pubs, cafes and shops where the customer does not visit or have a direct relationship with the farm, organic or biodynamic certification can highlight your production practices. This can add an important margin to produce and help you access markets that would otherwise be inaccessible.

Organic control bodies in the UK include:

Organic Farmers & Growers CIC (GB-ORG-02)

www.ofgorganic.org

Soil Association Certification Ltd (GB-ORG-05)

www.soilassociation.org/certification/

Biodynamic Association Certification (GB-ORG-06)

www.bdcertification.org.uk

Irish Organic Association (GB-ORG-07)

www.irishorganicassociation.ie

Organic Trust CLG (GB-ORG-09)

www.organictrust.ie

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www.landworkersalliance.org.uk



Quality Welsh Food Certification Ltd (GB-ORG-13)
www.wlbp.co.uk

OF&G (Scotland) Ltd (GB-ORG-17)
www.ofgorganic.org

Organic Food Federation (GB-ORG-04)
www.orgfoodfed.com

The Biodynamic Association is the only certifier of Biodynamic farms and food products in the UK

In addition to Organic and Biodynamic certification, the Pasture Fed Livestock Association certifies meat and dairy raised on 100% pasture and preserved pasture forage.

In order to become certified by an organic control body it is necessary for the producer to apply to one of the bodies to be registered with them. The requirements of each of the organic control bodies varies and it is recommended that those wishing to convert to organic status check which of the bodies most suit their type of production.

Once an application has been received, the organic control body will carry out inspections of the producer's farm and/ or any processing unit(s).

If the organic control body is satisfied that the requirements for organic status have been met it will issue a Certificate of Compliance and will notify the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (Defra) who will enter the farm onto a national register.

The process of converting to organic usually takes 2 years though it might take shorter or longer depending on your situation, for example:

- 3 years for established orchards of perennial soft, top and vine fruits
- 12 months for grass for pig and poultry grazing if no banned products have been applied to soil over the previous 12 months
- 2 years for land intended for ruminant grazing and annual crops

The organic control body will thereafter carry out annual inspections as well as unannounced spot checks to ensure that the standards are maintained.

What are the requirements for organic producers?

In order to achieve organic status a number of criteria must be met. Those wishing to convert to organic status should check with the individual organic control bodies as



to their specific requirements. Broadly speaking the main conditions which must be met include

- Not using artificial fertilisers, herbicides and pesticides, growth promoters, genetically modified organisms or products produced from or by genetically modified organisms.
- Using crop rotation and other forms of husbandry in order to maintain soil health and fertility and weed control, pests and diseases;
- The use of organic seeds and seed potatoes unless such seeds or seed potatoes are unavailable (in such circumstances approval from the organic control body should be obtained);
- The use of seed mixes for grass and forage which must contain at least 65% organic seed in terms of their weight;
- The use of breeds and strains of livestock appropriate for use in organic systems (for example the use of slow growing strains of poultry);
- The use of appropriate accommodation to house livestock and to ensure that livestock have access to pasture and open air areas where appropriate (for example, there are rules relating to the maximum number of poultry that can be contained in a house and rules relating to grazing, air space, ventilation, feed and water);
- The feeding of livestock with feeds which are 100% organic unless such feed is unavailable in which the rules are relaxed (in such circumstances approval from the organic control body should be obtained);
- The feeding of suckling animals only with natural milk;
- The use of livestock manure or organic material for fertility building;
- Longer withdrawal periods on medicines and livestock treatments

The requirements apply to all parts of the production and processing chain and there are rules relating to the composition and labelling of organic produce.

Trading Standards

Your local county or unitary council's trading standards department works to ensure a fair-trading environment. It makes sure that consumers can be confident that they know what they're buying as well as how much of it. For produce sales, some key points to respect are:

- Use scales calibrated by a trading standards department. Second-hand scales are acceptable.
- When you list produce indicate metric weights, e.g. "250g". If you also use imperial this should be in smaller text.
- When you list produce indicate clearly what the produce is you are selling, for instance "tomatoes".
- Some produce, known as "countable produce", may be sold by the number of items (e.g., eggs). Others may be bunched (e.g., asparagus), while others must be sold by weight.



Trading standards for box schemes

There is also specific weights and measures guidance on bag and box schemes. This covers all selling methods where the seller is selecting a variety of items of fresh fruits or vegetables and placing them in a container for sale. Weights and measures law generally requires the weight of pre-packed foods to be made known to customers. However, for packs of fresh fruits and vegetables, you may sell "by the box" if one or more of the following conditions apply:

- The box contains more than 5kg of produce, or
- The box contains three or more different types of fresh fruits and vegetables.

Licencing

The UK government [website](#) provides a search function for any licences that you may need with results for England, Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland.

Other than food business registration and premises approval discussed above the most common licences businesses will need for direct sales are alcohol licences and market stall licences which you must apply for from your local authority if you are trading from a market stall in England or Wales. However, its worth checking the search finder to be sure that you have all the necessary licences you need for your enterprise, and are making use of any exemptions that you are eligible for.

Alcoholic drinks

If your business involves selling alcohol you must have a licence or other authorisation from a licensing authority - usually a local council.

Generally the premises that is selling the alcohol will need a licence (even temporary and mobile ones) and a designated premises supervisor will need a personal licence.

More information on licencing can be found here:

England and Wales: www.gov.uk/guidance/alcohol-licensing.

Scotland: www.gov.scot/Topics/Justice/policies/drugs-alcohol/alcohol-licensing.

Northern Ireland: www.nidirect.gov.uk/articles/selling-alcohol-licensed-premises-and-registered-clubs.

Producers of alcoholic drinks must also be registered for duty with HM Revenue & Customs (HMRC). Registered producers must pay duty on their products and



comply with a wide range of record-keeping requirements. For more information, go to www.gov.uk/topic/business-tax/alcohol-duties.

You can apply for an exemption from registration if you make, or expect to make, less than 7,000 litres of cider or perry in a rolling 12-month period.

Small-scale beer producers may be entitled to reduced rates if you produced no more than 60,000 hectolitres of beer in the previous calendar year. The reduced rates are part of the [Small Breweries' Relief scheme](#) and have a sliding scale. Reductions start at 50% for production of 5,000 hectolitres or less and decrease for larger production volumes.

Producers that supply alcohol to other businesses must also be registered with HMRC's Alcohol Wholesaler Registration Scheme (www.gov.uk/government/publications/excise-notice-2002-alcohol-wholesaler-registration-scheme).

All drinks with an ABV (alcohol by volume) of more than 1.2% must be labelled with their alcoholic strength.

Waste disposal

Food and drink producers must ensure that all trade waste they produce in the course of their business is disposed of by a licensed waste carrier. There is a directory of licensed waste carriers at <https://environment.data.gov.uk/public-register/view/search-waste-carriers-brokers>.

Some types of waste, including waste food that contains products of animal origin, must be stored and collected separately from other waste. For more information, go to www.gov.uk/guidance/how-food-businesses-must-dispose-of-food-and-former-foodstuffs.

Waste water produced by food and drink production businesses may be classed as 'trade effluent', which means that sewers consent must be obtained from the local water company to discharge it into public waterways.

Health and Safety

Farms have to comply with health and safety laws and have a responsibility to make sure, as far as possible, that people working on or visiting the farm are in a safe environment. In practice this means you'll want to ensure that your business:

The Landworkers' Alliance

A union of farmers, growers, foresters and land-based workers, working to create socially just and environmentally sustainable food and land use systems for everyone
www.landworkersalliance.org.uk



For the most up to date information on Health and Safety on farms and useful guides and checklists go to the [Government website](#)

- Conducts regular risk assessments (see below);
- Keeps a log book to record accidents;
- If necessary, has signs pointing out hazards;
- Provides toilets, hand washing facilities and drinking water;
- Keeps tools and machinery clear of the main access points;
- Has a system in place for routine inspections and testing of equipment and machinery and for ensuring that action is promptly taken to address any defects;
- Ensures staff and volunteers are trained in safe handling/use of substances and for their safe storage;
- If necessary, provides inductions and/or training to staff and subcontractors;
- Ensures users of the farm are aware of fire-fighting equipment, and fire safety procedures;
- Has a first aid box which staff, volunteers, and if applicable - members - know where to find; and
- At least one of your staff or volunteers is trained as a first aider.
- Has contact numbers and address / directions for closest A&E services in a clearly accessible place. It's worth investigating the local hospital services in advance to be certain of the kind of injuries they are able to treat.

If you have five or more employees, you need to have a written health and safety plan or policy. If you are applying for grants, particularly if you want to work with children, many funders as well will require you to have a health and safety policy in place. So, although it is not a legal requirement with less than five employees, this is best practice whether you are applying for grants or not. Health and Safety law requires that all employers or the self-employed assess their own risk, and the risk to anyone working for them regarding their working environment. The risk assessment will only need to be written down if you employ 5 or more people, however it is advised to do so in any case, especially in agricultural situations where potential risks are high and their consequences severe.

You can find some examples of health and safety policies adopted by other farms by searching online.

This is Canalside Community Food's Health and Safety policy document:
<https://www.canalsidecommunityfood.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2019/01/Canalside-Health-Safety-Policy-January-19.pdf>



This is Sutton Community Farm's Health and Safety policy document (and risk assessment):

https://docs.google.com/document/d/1mrH2HRIdOVNjFo4USZlwtWz2_rMDgYIPKwepNXPBvIM/edit

Risk assessments

Risk assessments should be carried out at least twice a year for each specific job and whenever circumstances change significantly, for instance changes to site layout, introduction of livestock or new activities for volunteers or visitors. You should have at least two people carry out risk assessments as people perceive risk differently. You need to walk around the farm identifying potential risks, e.g. fire hazards, trip hazards, or risks of injury.

A risk assessment should be an on-going process and reviewed regularly, especially if anything changes or if someone spots a hazard. It is important to keep the risk assessment up to date.

A risk assessment lays out the potential risks, how likely they are to happen and how to avoid them. Most of this is common sense, but having it down on paper will ensure you consider all the risk elements, how to avoid danger and how to give the right information to staff and volunteers on tackling each task. Don't forget to take the weather into consideration. Wet and slippery ground can cause different hazards and risks when working on hot, exposed sites in a heatwave.

You will need to have a log-book accident book to record any accidents and review these in the risk assessment process to prevent recurrence or minimise known risk factors. An Accident Book is an essential document for employers and employees, who are required by law to record and report details of specified work-related injuries and incidents.

It enables businesses to comply with legal requirements under social security and health and safety legislation, including [Reporting of Injuries, Diseases and Dangerous Occurrences Regulations \(RIDDOR\)](#) requirements.

A copy can be bought via the HSE website by following this link <https://www.hse.gov.uk/pubns/books/accident-book.htm>

You can find templates and examples of risk assessments on the Health and Safety Executive website for all types of farming, for example using machinery: hse.gov.uk/agriculture/topics/machinery/riskexample.htm



Moss Brook Growers have made their risk assessment available to download (see Appendix):

http://www.sustainweb.org/pdf/MLFW_MossBrook_Appendices.zip

Volunteers

All volunteers should undertake a health and safety induction. They should also have a briefing at the start of each session and new task, pointing out the particular hazard, despite how regularly those volunteers may carry it out. Basically, don't forget about it. You may work on the farm daily but volunteers and visitors to the site don't! Avoid the temptation to take short cuts and make sure all equipment is in good working order. Some farms ask their volunteers to sign a disclaimer. Accidents do happen, despite your best efforts. So make sure you have adequate insurance in place (see Insurance section) and that you can show you did all you could have reasonably done to prevent them happening.

Children and vulnerable adults

Many farms serving the local community welcome children on site. If you do, it's sensible to insist that they be under the supervision of a parent or appropriate adult at all times up to a certain age. Children are less aware of risk and more likely to have accidents, so you may need to write a risk assessment specifically aimed at reducing risks for children on site. See the farm through their eyes and address hazards they might encounter.

If you are running lots of sessions for schools or pre-schools you may need to put in more safety measures to protect them e.g. fences around ponds. The same situation applies to vulnerable adults, so you may need to ask some people to be accompanied by their carers at all times.

See the [Resources](#) section for links to more information.

Fire safety

You must carry out a fire risk assessment at your premises and take fire safety precautions to help protect you, your staff and customers. The type of precautions you need to have will depend on the outcome of the fire risk assessment. In many cases farms pose a higher fire risk as they will often store flammable materials like hay and straw, and fuel for machinery.

If you are planning to adapt your premises, it is a good idea to get fire safety advice before you start the work. You can get advice from your [local fire authority](#).



For more information, see the [fire and explosion pages](#) of the Health and Safety Executive website.

Legal Structures

As a farmer or forester, you can carry on your trade without any thought to legal structures, such as co-operatives, community interest companies, charitable incorporated organisations, and limited companies. Many will be sole traders, and that will suit your needs. It's not the intention here to walk you through legal structures in detail but rather point you to resources in case you want to learn more about:

- The differences between an incorporated (e.g. co-op) and unincorporated (e.g., sole trader) business.
- The different legal structures that you can choose from if you wish to incorporate, such as a limited company, community benefit society, workers cooperative, charity, etc.
- Further resources.

Understanding Incorporation

Although the publication *Simply Legal* from Coops UK is written for co-operatives, Section 3 explains what incorporation is, looks at the advantages and disadvantages of incorporating, and considers when incorporation may be appropriate: <https://www.uk.coop/resources/simply-legal>

Legal Structures

Coops UK, the CSA Network, the National Council of Voluntary Organisations, the Plunkett Foundation and the Transition Network have all produced guides on legal structures. They're all aimed at slightly different audiences, as follows:

- *A Brief Guide to Legal Structures* from the Plunkett Foundation is aimed at cooperative and community businesses: <https://plunkett.co.uk/wp-content/uploads/Brief-Guide-to-Legal-Structures-March-2016.pdf>
- *Introduction to Legal Forms* from NCVO is principally aimed at voluntary organisations: <https://knowhow.ncvo.org.uk/setting-up/setting-up-a-charity/legal-forms-for-non-profits-1>
- *Legal Structures* from the CSA Network is principally aimed at CSA schemes: <https://communitysupportedagriculture.org.uk/resource/legal-structures/>



- *Organisational Types and Structures* from the Transition Network is aimed at any project or business: <http://www.reconomy.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/09/Do-ocracyHandbookREconomy2016.pdf>
- *Simply Legal*, from Coops UK is principally aimed at cooperatives, including community benefit societies: <https://www.uk.coop/resources/simply-legal>

Additional Resources

Charlie Cattell provides training and advice to organisations who want to incorporate, as well as free information sheets: <https://www.charliecattell.net/legal-structures>

As well as their Simply Legal guide to legal structures, Coops UK also have a guide to governance for community and cooperative businesses: <https://www.uk.coop/resources/simply-governance-guide>

Insurance

Insurance is always essential, but changing or adding to your sales model may mean you need to stop and check your existing insurance policy. It's worth calling your existing provider and talking to them about your proposed changes.

The CSA Network and Community Land Advice have both produced guides to insurance. The guides review several types of insurance including Public, Employers and Product liability:

<https://communitysupportedagriculture.org.uk/resource/insurance/>

<https://en.communitylandadvice.org.uk/en/resource/overview-insurance>

Below is a non-exhaustive list of the primary insurance types to consider:

Public liability insurance covers claims made against the policyholder for injury, loss or damage caused to any person as a result of negligence. School groups or groups of vulnerable adults may need special insurance cover, possibly with special facilities (such as for hand washing) as a condition of cover. Check with your insurer and make sure you are covered before inviting them.

Employer's liability provides insurance against potential injury to employees and volunteers.

Product liability is required if you intend to sell any farm produce for consumption. This will protect the policyholder from the cost of claims arising where products sold from the farm cause injury or illness, or damage to someone else's property.

Asset protection will cover farm machinery or IT equipment for any losses due to theft, fire,



flood, or accidental damage.

Buildings insurance covers buildings in case of structural damage.

Stallholder insurance adds in income protection for markets missed due to accidents, and can add insurance for equipment you use at the stall.

Where to go to for insurance? You'll want to go to an insurer that understands your set-up and has experience of dealing with farms and businesses that engage with the local community. Farmer and grower forums, such as the Landworkers' Alliance and Organic Growers Alliance forums or Market Gardeners Facebook pages are good places to ask fellow growers for recommendations (see Resources), and the guides above point to a few recommended providers.

VAT

Most food is zero-rated for VAT and so for the vast majority of farmers and growers it is well worth registering even when you are below the threshold of compulsory registration because you will be able to claim VAT back on the input and set up costs of your business.

However, some food that farms sell direct to the public is standard rated and so your pricing and accounting must reflect this. Standard rated foods include catering, alcoholic drinks, confectionery, crisps and savoury snacks, hot food, sports drinks, hot takeaways, ice cream, soft drinks and mineral water.

Furthermore, it is now an obligation for VAT registered businesses with a turnover about £85,000 to keep digital records if you want to reclaim vat and to make returns via the Government gateway. To do this you must use software that is compatible with HMRC. It is worth checking accounting software before purchasing it to be sure it will be compliant if you anticipate going over this threshold, this will save a costly and tedious change of system later on.

More information on VAT can be found here: <https://www.gov.uk/vat-rates>

Software

Selling Platforms

There is now a number of online systems and software for direct sales, and the options are growing. The software / systems are designed to provide your on-line shop, take payments (credit and direct debit), and then store and manage the data



for you, for your accounts, newsletters, packing and distribution lists, and to manage stock. Most offer a trial period. Below is a non-exhaustive list of existing online systems and software available.

Farmers and growers suggest not forgetting that while small, you may be able to manage purely with an Excel spreadsheet, or even just a book!

We've omitted some from this list, including Local Food Nodes and Reko which are interesting models (even though they are based on proprietary software), but don't yet have enough presence here in the UK and may detract from similar models establishing themselves, notably the Open Food Network which is the only [open source](#) software widely available and building a global network of small-scale food enterprises.

Website	Details
Boxmaster	<p>A box management solution with UK-based technical support designed for medium to large size box schemes, it includes features specific to box-schemes, such as allowing for substitutions and to set up holidays, and to import price lists from UK wholesalers such as Infinity Wholefoods.</p> <p>Cost: 2% of turnover through Boxmaster up to the first 150 deliveries per week; 1% of turnover through Boxmaster for further deliveries.</p> <p>Example user: Barcombe Nurseries</p>
Bucky Box	<p>Designed in New Zealand to help support a local food system and designed specifically for local food producers. Bucky Box has mixed reviews by users, with some swearing by it. <u>It has no support service.</u></p> <p>Cost: £35 a month + 0.5% per delivery, capped at 15p</p> <p>Example user: Ashurst Organics</p>
Oooby	<p>This software is designed for groups of farmers who together want to sell into a local food hub, from where the produce is either collected by, or delivered to, customers. Supports customisable boxes.</p> <p><i>Still establishing itself in the UK.</i> First UK user: Bristol Veg Boxes</p>
Open Food Network	<p>The OFN is a social enterprise developed in support of local food. It's designed to direct shoppers and buyers to local food producers in their area and to allow on-line ordering (and payment) of produce for collection either from the farm, via home delivery or from a local food hub. It offers customers a fair degree of choice, particularly as the number of food producers in any given area grows. It's considered to be more complicated than necessary for a simple box scheme. There</p>



are good reviews of the platform, including that it provides good support. Users suggest investing time in learning all its features.

Costs: From £1 per month or a reducing % of turnover as turnover increases - see [pricing schedule](#) .

Example user: [Down Farm](#)

Oxton Organics [Oxton Organics](#) (box scheme) had bespoke software developed for them, and the developer can share this with other box schemes. The software has all the features of other box scheme software such as Boxmaster, and can also produce Soil Association reports.

Cost: personalised quote will be provided upon request from DMS Studio, <http://www.dmstudio.co.uk>, 01386 881779

[Food Commerce](#) An e-commerce platform providing online shop, delivery slots, click and collect and picking lists, that allow customers to change their orders and take payment after collection or delivery

Cost: £49/month up to 100 orders and 49p per order thereafter

There are a wide range of online shop 'plug-ins' that can be built into your website. We have not reviewed the range of options here but information is freely available on the internet.

Sustain provides a list of web platforms for small-scale producers:
https://www.sustainweb.org/coronavirus/selling_platforms_for_food_orgs/

Accounting Software

Accounting software allows you to record and report your farm business finances. The software allows you to download transactions from your bank account, so there's no need for manual data-entry. It categories transactions so that you can track expenses and income, and automates reporting, such as monthly and annual profit and loss and cash-flow.

If you're just starting your search for accounting software, it won't take long before you discover that there are an overwhelming number of accounting products. Here we've provided prices for the products currently used by small-scale growers and farmers: Sage, QuickBooks, Xero, and Wave.

Accounting software is no longer something loaded onto a computer but rather in the 'cloud' and accessible by anyone with the log-in, and from either a computer or mobile phone. All the online selling platforms (above) integrate with one or more of these accounting packages, but check which ones.



Expect to pay a monthly fee, which is upwards of £10+VAT per month. There is one product which provides many of its services for free, see below, and they all can either be trailed for free for between 30 days and 3 months, or are half-price for the first six months.

Wave

Most of Wave's services are free, so if you're a sole trader or have just a few employees, it's worth considering. It's also one of the accounting software that the Open Food Network can integrate: <https://www.waveapps.com/accounting>

Sage

Sage is popular with small farm business owners. Accounting Start for sole traders and microbusinesses is free for 3 months, then £12 + VAT a month: <https://www.sage.com/en-gb/sage-business-cloud/accounting/>

QuickBooks

Quickbooks includes free phone and on-line support. It's offering a 60% discount for the first six months, so Simple Start is currently £5 per month, rising to £12: <https://quickbooks.intuit.com/uk/#price>

Xero

Xero is aimed at larger businesses, including allowing for unlimited users. Xero offers a free 30-day trial, and then its Standard package is £24pm. (Not sure this is correct- suitable for small users) <https://www.xero.com/uk/pricing/>

Route Planning

There are a number of software options for route planning that can help you streamline your delivery route if doing multiple drop offs. These can be particularly useful if your deliveries are regularly changing, and can provide functions like tracking your delivery, that may be useful to some producers.

Crop planning and record keeping

In recent years there have been a number of new software options to replace the traditional notebook or excel spreadsheet in helping farmers and growers plan complex cropping or grazing schedules and keep track of their records.



Direct sales models often add complexity to farm businesses and it is worth working out systems for planning your production and learning from what has worked or not worked, as well as keeping records that you have to keep for certifiers, quality assurance schemes, trading standards etc

Simple record keeping systems like a daily notebook, voice memos, or photos with a date signature are a good place to start, as are printed sheets to make notes of essential records. Don't underestimate how quickly things can slip your mind as busy days go by!

For planning complex operations some form of spreadsheet or software is likely to be useful. Good clear systems can take things off your mind and help you plan ahead, allowing you to forecast work flow and focus on what needs to be done, and can make systems easier to communicate, helping others to take on more responsibility.

There are quite a few software options available that integrate parts of the process, reducing manual data entry and making information more accessible to others. However, they all take time to get used to and most cost for a subscription. When well used they are likely to save you time, but this must be weighed up against your loss of control over the software.

We haven't reviewed the options here but are keen to hear from farmers and growers about what systems they have found useful and worthwhile. These are all from the US.

[COG Pro](#)

COG-Pro is designed to keep track of records from the point of developing your seed order right through to recording harvest yields and sales. If used to its fullest extent, growers can track seeds through the entire growing process using lot numbers from seed packages, generate seed records (e.g. demonstrate your search and use of organic seed), produce fields plans, seeding records, fertility records and harvest records.

COG-Pro costs \$79/year for its crop module, \$129 for the crop and GAP modules or the crop and livestock modules or \$159 for the crop, GAP and livestock modules. There are prices for a 2 year subscription that provides a discount. <https://cog-pro.com>

[VeggieTables](#)

VeggieTables is designed for small to midsize organic farms and has all of the features of COG-Pro with a few additional features, like labour and expense tracking. It also supports multiple user accounts so different individuals can enter data, allowing you to better manage workers.



One of the most compelling features is that it works offline, so you can make changes while working without a signal (i.e. in the field) and sync the changes to the cloud later when you have Internet access.

It costs \$89/year plus \$19 per additional user <http://veggietables.org/>

[AgSquared](#)

Brings together a range of functions from farm mapping and crop planning to record keeping and harvest records. Tasks can be assigned to specific dates or time periods. Work plans can then be generated and printed for specific days, weeks or months. Once completed, planned tasks can be checked off and then become records of tasks completed.

AgSquared subscriptions come in three levels. 'Simple Farm' is \$10 user/mo for up to 5 users / 'Total Farm' costs \$50 / user/ mo There is also a third-tier option called Enterprise that is a fully customizable solution <http://www.agsquared.com>

[Farmbrite](#)

Has a whole range of features from crop planning to harvest, farm mapping and weather, livestock management, genealogy records and grazing, equipment and maintenance records and a whole accounting section to track your profits and expenses.

You can plan your crops from seed order all the way to your harvest profits. Make notes quickly with the use of QR codes in the field. Track your livestock records and health on the go. Track vaccination and growth records, bill of sale, genealogy charting, grazing and more. You can also track your profits and expenses in the accounting section, track your equipment records, services, images and files and keep a To-Do list by the map of your farm.

Pricing is set up so you can either pay as you go or all at once. It starts at \$15 a month/\$165 a year for Basic, or \$30 a month/ \$275 a year for Crops or Livestock, or \$50 a month/\$385 a year for their Professional version that has everything. <https://www.farmbrite.com/>

[Tend](#)

Tend is an all-in-one platform that allows farmers to plan their crops, keep records, manage daily operations and track sales, all in a user-friendly platform available on any device connected to the web. You can create a work plan to achieve production targets, automatically generated tasks, projections of your yield & income, seed ordering amounts, and a map of where each crop will be planted. It also has an online sales feature with integrated pick and pack lists

\$39 / mo or \$399 / yr <https://www.tend.com/>

Payments

There are now many companies offering a card payment processing service, and each have a slightly different offering. If you are able, research the different options, ask plenty of questions and reach an understanding of the fees for each offering. For example, consider that as well as transaction fees, there may also be different fees for processing refunds. Find out exactly how much your business will be charged for each type and value of transaction so you can compare your options and find the most suitable online payment solution for you. There are also independent brokerage firms (like comparethemarket.com), who you can contact for advice specific to your business needs. Sometimes they can broker a better rate on your behalf. However, they don't have partnerships with all of the service providers:

www.acceptcards.co.uk and 01422 372 818

www.annectouk.co.uk and 03333 447 010

Card Readers

Card readers can process payments with just your smartphone or laptop. Payments can be taken via the card reader (pictured), on the phone or via your website. Fortunately for small businesses, the majority of card readers are contract free, have no monthly fee, and no minimum sales volume. They transfer payments to your account within 1-3 working days and can text or email customers with receipts. There is no need to set up a merchant account with a bank to use a card reader so you can get up a running fairly easily.



Table 1: Example card readers and pricing

	i-Zettle	Square	SumUp
Card reader cost	£29 + VAT	£19 + VAT	£19 + VAT
Transaction fee, card reader	1.75% Example: 26.25p on a £15 order	1.75% Example: 26.25p on a £15 order	1.69% Example: 25.35p on a £15 order
Transaction fee, website	All charge 2.5% Example: 37.5p on a £15 order		

Direct Debits



A direct debit is an instruction from a customer to their bank, authorising you to collect varying amounts from their account, provided that you give your customer advance notice of the collection amounts and dates. So typically, for a veg box, or week of milk, your customer would receive an email with the weekly total, and unless they ask it to be stopped, the amount would be transferred from their account to you in the following days.

Direct debit can work out cheaper than either using a card reader or by taking a payment via your website, but this depends on the transaction amount. However, direct debit is definitely less time consuming than card payments and is well-worth considering; for regular customers, you won't have to ask for payment details every time you need to take payment.

Table 2: Example direct debit providers and pricing

	GoCardless	Stripe
Monthly Fee	None	None
Charge per transaction	1% plus 20p Example: 35p on a £15 order	1% plus 20p Example: 35p on a £15 order

More information about using direct debit can be found here:
<https://www.bacs.co.uk/Services/bacsschemes/directdebit/Pages/Collecting.aspx>

Online Payments

There are two main ways to accept card payments online, either using a 'payment gateway', or a 'payment service provider'.

To use a payment service provider, you won't first need to set up a merchant account, which is needed to use a payment gateway. Payment service providers deal with the entire process of taking payments and paying them into your account.

Table 3: Example payment service providers and pricing

	Shopify	Stripe
Monthly Fee	£23	None
Charge per transaction	2.2% plus 20p Example: 53p on a £15 order	1.4% plus 20p Example: 41p on a £15 order



To use a 'payment gateway', you first need to set up a merchant account which will have its own associated fees. The merchant account is needed to hold the credit card payment received by the payment gateway before it can be transferred into your bank account.

Table 4: Example payment gateways and pricing

	Sage Pay	Braintree
Monthly Fee	£20.90	None
Charge per transaction	Credit card: 2.09% Debit card: 0.74%	1.9% + £0.20

Phone Payments

You can accept card payments over the phone. There are a number of services that allow businesses to take payment details using any credit or debit card and these include those that issue you with a card reader (above).

Pay by Link

Pay by Link allows businesses to send customers a unique link, taking them to a secure payment page for them to complete their transaction. Pay by Link is especially valuable for newer businesses who may not have a website live yet, or those who want to take orders through email or via social media. Providers offering Pay by Link include Ayden, Trust Payments and Worldpay.

Courier Services

Couriers and appropriate packaging can allow you to sell your produce to markets further afield. Determining the best courier services for your products will take time. There are many variables that affect the price of the service: location, the weight and size of the produce, how fast the delivery needs to be, whether you're operating at a scale or part of a group that can negotiate prices, and so forth. You may also want to ensure the courier company has a good reputation. Comparison websites such as parcelmonkey.co.uk, parcelhero or parcel2go.com allow you to compare prices to send a single package with some of the larger couriers and postal services. But

The Landworkers' Alliance

A union of farmers, growers, foresters and land-based workers, working to create socially just and environmentally sustainable food and land use systems for everyone
www.landworkersalliance.org.uk



there are companies that aren't included in the comparison websites that will give you a better price if you're committed to sending multiple packages with them and prepared to set up a business account. Trust Pilot provides service ratings for the different courier services: <https://uk.trustpilot.com/categories/parcelservice>

Producers sending highly perishable products such as frozen meat and unpasteurised milk use insulated packaging with overnight courier services such as Parcel Force AM and APC-Overnight. Producers who are in a position to deliver locally within built up areas such as Edinburgh, Brighton and London, can consider bike couriers including Zedify. Zedify is also unique in providing a nation-wide zero-emission courier service.

Most couriers won't insure perishable produce but are prepared to deliver them. Alternatively, there are couriers that provide temperature controlled delivery, but these are considerably more expensive.

Packaging

Plastic, glass, paper, cotton, jute or bio-polymer?

Deciding which type of packaging to use is difficult, with each type of packaging having advantages and disadvantages, and with both innovation and research constantly changing what's available, and our understanding of what is and isn't the more sustainable of options.

Regardless of the innovations, direct sales models that reuse packaging, particularly where it doesn't need to be washed, will always be the best option for the environment and for cost. For example, Cae Tan CSA is able to distribute their members' vegetables into wooden boxes which are collected by members in their own reusable bags. Ashurst Organics make use of second and third hand boxes and continue to collect and reuse them. Riverford commissioned a study comparing packaging used in its box scheme with supermarket packaging. The study found Riverford's boxes used 82% less plastic packaging.

At this point in time, there's still the need for some packaging that is unlikely to be reused. Whichever packaging option you choose, it's advised by growers and farmers to communicate your choice of packaging to customers. An example of statements on packaging, from Community Farm in Bristol and Unicorn Grocery, can be read here:



<https://www.thecommunityfarm.co.uk/about-us/a-statement-on-plastic-waste/>
<https://www.unicorn-grocery.coop/packaging-choices/>

It is also advised that you opt for packaging which states 'compostable at home'. Biodegradable bags are more-often-than-not only biodegradable if customers dispose of them in the food waste bin collected by their council.

The [Food Climate Research Network](#) is a good first stop for the latest reliable and free information on packaging's impact on the environment. Riverford is also a good source of information on packaging, as the company has done a lot of research for their own produce sales:

<https://www.riverford.co.uk/ethics-and-ethos/thoughtful-packaging>

Non-insulated boxes

Many growers and farmers recommended first just making use of existing boxes which bought-in produce arrives, and speaking with other local farms for boxes they're looking to get rid of. Box schemes also make use of reused food crates collected from restaurants and pubs and bought from EBay and auction houses. When you need to buy boxes, there are a plethora of box manufacturers to choose from. It's recommended to either order customised boxes, or customise them yourself with a large stamp with your farm branding. This will increase the likelihood of the box being returned and will market your farm. Those running box schemes can ask customers to have their box ready to be collected at the same time their next box is delivered.

Costs vary with size and degree of customisation, but start at £0.66 +VAT per box.

There are too many box manufacturers to list them all. Here are just a few:

Box Manufacturers	Link
Atlas Packaging, North Devon	https://www.atlaspackaging.co.uk/box_type/subscription-box/
Carters Packaging, Cornwall	https://www.carterspackaging.com/Shop/Food-Packaging-Food-Service-Supplies/Produce-Boxes
L&J Pallets & Packaging, West Midlands	https://www.palletsandpackaging.co.uk/fresh-produce-packaging/
Produce Packaging, Kent	https://www.producepackaging.co.uk/products/boxes/hand-erected-boxes/10kg-airflow-hand-erect-tray-plain-'cfp'.aspx

Raja, Bedfordshire	https://www.rajapack.co.uk/cardboard-boxes/types-boxes/produce-boxes/produce-tray_PDT718584.html
T&B Containers, Lincolnshire	https://www.tbcontainers.com/fresh-produce

Insulated boxes

Insulated boxes allow producers to deliver and mail fresh and frozen produce which needs to be maintained within a specific temperature range. For some time no natural option has been available. Now a company in Staffordshire, [Wool Cool](http://www.woolcool.com) produces all-natural insulated boxes using wool for the insulation. They are happy to provide a set of samples free of charge. The cost of wool-insulated boxes and liners varies with size, and degree of customisation, and are upward from £2.63 +VAT per box.

<https://www.woolcool.com/food/> and <https://3rsustainableproducts.co.uk/>

Produce bags

For produce bags, growers and farmers have a wide range of choice. Below we've compiled a non-exhaustive list of produce bags with comments from LWA members on their benefits and disadvantages.

Type of Bag	Comments	Costs (excl. VAT)
Paper 	Low cost, made from recycled paper and biodegradable - even in home composters - paper bags can however rip, are reused by customers less than other types of produce bags, and become soggy when used for wet winter vegetables.	From less under £0.01, but varies considerably with size, supplier and quantities ordered.
Sources: BHGS Horticultural Supplies ; Carters Packaging ; Green Stationary Company ; Infinity Foods ; Nutley's Kitchen Garden ; Soil Association ; Suma Wholefoods .		
Cellophane looking bags Plant fibre 	Plant-based, reusable, biodegradable and good for displaying produce, but considered to be poor for preserving produce; leafy vegetables and herbs can sweat and wilt.	From £0.03, depending on size and supplier

Sources: [Infinity Foods](#); [Suma Wholefoods](#).

Opaque Bio Bags Thistle fibre		Preserves produce well, and can be reused by customer in compost bins, but has a poor appearance and an unusual smell.	From £0.08
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Sources: [BHGS Horticultural Supplies](#)

Green Bio Bags 'Plant-based'		Preserves produce well, and can be reused by customer in compost bins, but has a poor appearance.	From £0.06
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Sources: [BHGS Horticultural Supplies](#)

Clear plastic Polythene		Low cost, light weight, plastic displays and preserves produce well, and can be reused by customer. Some report significantly improved sales of salad leaves and loose leafy greens when packaged in plastic. But it is plastic!	From £0.02, depending on size
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Sources: [BHGS Horticultural Supplies](#)

Carrier bags

Type of Bag		Comments	Costs (excl. VAT)
Degradable plastic		Light weight, low-cost, degradable, plastic bags are reused by customers, but although they're degradable, they're still plastic, meaning that they can still pollute the wider environment if not disposed of correctly.	From £0.01, but varies with size and supplier.

Sources: [BHGS Horticultural Supplies](#); [B&P Wholesale](#); [Green Stationary Company](#)

Jute



As possible alternative to boxes in box schemes. Natural, strong, biodegradable and can be wiped clean, jute bags can be customised; if they're not returned to the farm, they can advertise your business. On the downside, they're an investment, and may only be viable if customers contribute to the cost.

From £1.98, depending on size, supplier, and quantity ordered. From £2.16 with single colour print.

Sources: [Carters Packaging](#); [Go Jute](#)

String



Natural, strong, and biodegradable. On the downside, they're an investment, and may only be viable if customers contribute to the cost.

£2.40.

Sources: [Suma Wholefoods](#).


Fruit and Vegetable Nets

A company in Austria has developed a home compostable vegetable net made from beechwood: <https://vpz.at/en/packnatur/>

Elastic bands

Elastic bands can be used when produce can be bunched, minimising packaging and showing off the veg. They're also affordable at around £3.00 for 1lb of bands. Stockists include: [BHGS Horticultural Supplies](#) and [Carters Packaging](#).

Punnets

Type of Punnet	Comments	Costs (excl. VAT)
Plastic 	Light weight and low cost, plastic punnets although advertised as recyclable, are only recycled in counties with the necessary recycling facilities.	From £0.03, varies with size, supplier and quantities ordered.

Sources: [BHGS Horticultural Supplies](#); [Carters Packaging](#)



Recycled paper and card



Biodegradable and compostable, and a pleasant aesthetics, these are more expensive than their plastic equivalent.

From £0.09, varies with size, supplier and quantities ordered.

Sources: [B&P Wholesale](#); [Nutley's Kitchen Garden](#); [T&B Containers](#)

Root bags

Type of Root Bag

Comments

Costs (excl. VAT)

2-ply paper



100% recyclable and compostable, these are also an attractive way to package root vegetables. However, customers can be reckless with their sacks, using them for home composting, failing to return them, or leaving them out in the rain!

From £0.37, varies with size and supplier.

Sources: [Soil Association](#)

Jute



Jute bags can be customised; if they're not returned to the farm, they can advertise your business. They're fully biodegradable and are less likely to be ruined if customers leave them out in the rain. On the downside, they're an investment, and may only be viable if customers contribute to the cost.

From £1.02, and from £1.24 with single colour print, depending on quantity ordered

Sources: [Go Jute](#)

Egg boxes

Type of Box

Comments

Costs (excl. VAT)

Moulded pulp



Low cost, recycled and recyclable, there's hard to find any disadvantages of the standard egg box! If you're starting small though, you may be able to enlist a volunteer to collect existing egg boxes from the community and reuse them.

From £0.03 (½ dozen box), depending on supplier and quantities ordered

Sources: [B&P Wholesale](#); [Carters Packaging](#); [Nutley's Kitchen Garden](#)

Bottles

Type of Bottle

Comments

Costs (excl. VAT)

1 litre glass bottles - milk



Aesthetically pleasing, reusable and non-polluting once it's been manufactured, glass can however smash and is, according to the Food Climate Research Network, only reducing GHG emissions if part of a reuse scheme (e.g., milk round).

From £1.03 depending on quantities ordered.

Sources: [Carters Packaging](#); [Wares of Nutsford](#)

1 litre plastic bottles

Recycled plastic



Low cost and recyclable across the country, but still plastic ...

From £0.66 depending on quantities ordered.

Sources: [Plastic Bottles](#); [Plastic Bottle Shop](#)

Vacuum Pouches

Type of Pouch

Comments

Costs (excl. VAT)

Biodegradable pouch


Corn starch, cassava & eucalyptus fibre.




Not certifiable due to containing cornstarch, this pouch is however biodegradable and compostable, even, according to the manufacturers, in home composters.

From £0.14 depending on size, and quantity ordered

Sources: [The Vacuum Pouch Company](#)

Recyclable pouch		Plastic pouch which can be recycled where local authorities recycle mono PE materials.	From £0.07 depending on size, and quantity ordered
Polythene			

Sources: [The Vacuum Pouch Company](#)

Non-recyclable pouch		More affordable, this pouch can't be composted or recycled.	From £0.02 depending on size, and quantity ordered
Polythene & nylon			

Sources: [Polybags](#)

Wholesalers: Fresh Fruit & Vegetables

To source wholesale fruit and vegetables, you could look first to support small farmers and growers in your area by contacting them about growing wholesale produce for you. If this isn't possible, most towns and cities will have a wholesaler.

They'll have a wide range of produce and so you'll probably be able to get everything you want in one place, and they're also likely to offer free local delivery, but are unlikely to offer much organic produce. There are wholesalers that specialise in supplying organics. These include:

Supplier	Delivery Area	Contact Details
BE Organics, London	UK wide	http://www.be-organic.co.uk/ 0208 297 2506
Better Food Shed	London, but currently only open to members of the Better Food Traders Network	zosia.walczak@growingcommunities.org 020 7502 7588
Evergreen Organics, London & Bristol	Southern England	https://www.evergreenorganics.co.uk/

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0333 121 3444

Choice Middlesex	Organics,	UK wide but focus on London and the Home Counties.	https://www.choice-organics.com/ 0208 848 3289	
Langridge London	Organic,	UK wide	https://langridgeorganic.com/ 0207 622 7440	
Organic Wholesalers, Manchester	North	UK wide	www.organic2000.co.uk 0161 223 4944	
Phoenix Wholesalers		UK wide	https://www.phoenixorganics.ltd.uk 01885 483771	
Seasons, Row	Forest	Collection only	https://seasonsforestrow.co.uk/ 01342 82 4673	
Shillingford Organics, Exeter		Exeter, Ashburton Buckfastleigh	Totnes, and	https://www.shillingfordorganics.co.uk/ wholesale@shillingfordorganics.co.uk
Skylark Herefordshire	Organics,	Herefordshire, most of Worcestershire and some of Shropshire		http://www.skylarkorganics.co.uk/wholesale.html 01885 483 969
South Organic Growers	Devon	South Devon		http://www.southdevonorganic.co.uk/
Watson & Lampeter	Pratts,	UK wide		https://www.watsonandpratts.co.uk/wholesale/ 01570 424404

It's advised that you talk with the wholesaler about their substitution policy; if you're promised your customers that they'll never receive air-freighted produce, you'll need to check that the wholesaler won't substitute your order of Kent cherries with cherries flown in from the USA.



Wholesalers: Wholefoods

Whether to supply a farm shop, or to offer as 'add-ons' to box scheme customers, you may need to look further afield than local producers for cupboard items. Don't forget to get tax advice, as there are tax and VAT implications for some rateable food products, most notably juice.

Supplier	Delivery Area	Website
Essential Trading, Bristol	England & Wales	https://essential-trading.co.uk/
Greencity, Glasgow	Scotland, except the Highlands and Islands	https://www.greencity.coop/
Highland Wholefoods, Inverness	Highlands, Islands and north-east Scotland	http://www.highlandwholefoods.co.uk/
Infinity Foods, Brighton	UK and Ireland	http://infinityfoodswholesale.coop/
Lembas, Sheffield	90-mile radius of Sheffield	https://www.lembas.co.uk/
Rainbow Wholefoods, Norwich	East Anglia	https://www.rainbowwholefoods.co.uk/
Suma, Halifax and London	UK wide	www.sumawholesale.com

Resources

Networks, Associations and Unions

Landworkers Alliance is a member organisation providing support and resources to its producer members, including social networking and training.

<https://landworkersalliance.org.uk/>

The CSA Network provides support and resources to members of emerging and existing CSA schemes. Their resources are also helpful to non-CSA small-scale farms. Their free-to-download resources include advice on business planning,

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insurance, funding, health and safety and certification:
<https://communitysupportedagriculture.org.uk/help-advice/resources/>

The Farm Retail Association, is a member organisation providing support and resources to its farm shop members.
<https://farmretail.co.uk/about-us/>

Organic Growers Alliance is a member organisation, providing its organic fruit and vegetable producer members with a magazine, forum, technical advice, and regular events.
<https://organicgrowersalliance.co.uk/>

Specialist Cheese Makers association Member association for specialist cheeses
<http://www.specialistcheesemakers.co.uk/>

Pasture fed Livestock Association Member association for pasture fed livestock
<https://www.pastureforlife.org/>

National Craft Butchers Association Member Association for craft butchery
<https://nationalcraftbutchers.co.uk/>

The Charcuterie Board Member association for cured meat producers
<https://thecharcuterieboard.org/>

National Association of Cider Makers Member association for Cider and Perry producers
<https://cideruk.com/>

Raw Milk Producers Association Member association for raw milk producers
<https://rawmilkproducers.co.uk>

Food and Farming Directories

Better Food Traders has created a searchable database of 'Better Food Producers' which they define as 'a food business trading for social purpose'
<https://betterfoodtraders.org/find-a-better-food-trader/>

Farms to Feed Us is a database of small-scale food producers across the UK who supply fresh produce that has been 'grown in a resilient farming system'.
<https://bit.ly/farmstofeedus>

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The Grocer Directory of Manufacturers and Suppliers is not specifically concerned with organic food but the index lists 150 companies producing organic foods: Also provides lists of suppliers, wholesalers and A – Z of organic products.

<http://www.grocerdirectory.co.uk/>

The Organic Growers Alliance and the Landworkers Alliance have produced a simple Mutual Support Directory listing spare produce, job offers, and business advice offers.

<https://tinyurl.com/yaoq95sq>

The Soil Association have a number of directories:

- Certified organic box schemes
<https://www.soilassociation.org/organic-living/buy-organic/find-an-organic-box-scheme/>
- Local independent retailers
<https://www.soilassociation.org/organic-living/buy-organic/find-your-local-independent-retailer/>

Farmers and Growers Groups

Online groups provide an excellent source of information on a range of topics, as well as support and offers of work, equipment, etc.

- Organic Growers Alliance
<https://www.facebook.com/OrganicGrowersAlliance/>
- UK Organic Market Gardeners
<https://www.facebook.com/groups/1214414278648144/>

Farmers Blogs and Videos

Female Farmer UK is written by a new entrant smallholder based in Kent. She's written on selling to restaurants, small-scale farming problems, lambing kit essentials and more: <https://femalefarmeruk.com/category/small-scale-farming/>

Small Farm Future is also written by a new entrant smallholder, based at Vallis Veg in Somerset. Chris is also a director of the Ecological Land Cooperative. He's written dozens of post including on planning permission, the use of perennial versus annual crops and more: <https://smallfarmfuture.org.uk/>

Guidance on Environmental Health and Food Safety

The Health and Safety Executive provides essential information and guidance on health and safety in agriculture.

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hse.gov.uk/agriculture/index.htm

The Federation of City Farms and Community Gardens have written a comprehensive fact sheet on health and safety on community growing sites.

https://www.farmgarden.org.uk/system/files/hscommgrowingsites_0.pdf

The Federation of City Farms and Community Gardens has designed a set of free-to-use signs to encourage farm visitors to wash their hands.

www.farmgarden.org.uk/resources/clean-hands-zone-toolkit#ISPjgElmfMTRdkSh.99

The Food Standards Agency provides Information on starting a food business, including how to register.

<https://www.food.gov.uk/business-guidance/starting-a-food-business>

Guides to Financing Community & Small-Scale Food Businesses

From Making Local Food Work:

- Food & Finance: How Small-Scale Food Enterprises Raise the Money to Grow

https://www.sustainweb.org/publications/food_finance/

- Financing Community Food

https://www.sustainweb.org/publications/financing_community_food/

Guides to Setting Prices

From Making Local Food Work:

- A Healthy Profit - a Simple Guide to Pricing the Food You Grow

https://www.sustainweb.org/publications/a_healthy_profit/

The Soil Association also publish monthly price data for horticulture, arable, and livestock: <https://www.soilassociation.org/farmers-growers/market-information/price-data/>

Guides to Selling Wholesale

Cornell University in the United States has produced a comprehensive learning resource for farms that want to sell to the local wholesale market. Their resources include case studies, presentations, discussions, activities, videos and written materials.

<https://smallfarms.cornell.edu/>

From FamilyFarmed.org published *Wholesale Success: A Farmer's Guide to Selling, Postharvest Handling and Packing Produce*

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<https://static1.squarespace.com/static/5a6b36f28fd4d259ba4fae16/t/5a7e00cc71c10b2ebf7df534/1518207192816/Wholesale-Success-Manual.pdf>