

The Farm Shop

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In July of 2014, I landed at the London Heathrow Airport, rented a standard transmission car, yes standard, and attempted to drive myself in heavy London traffic out to the English countryside to meet friend and colleague, Susan Slocum. Sue and I were interviewing farm shop owners, which are plentiful in the UK, as part of a multi-year research and outreach project on agritourism. Sue is an associate professor of Tourism and Events Management at George Mason University and one of my former graduate research assistants. Sue and I spent several days interviewing farm shop owners and tourism organizations. I bravely drove without incident, but many close calls, the left stick shift car on the left side of the road in heavy traffic and on single track rural roads. Sue, a former UK resident, did the hard part, she contacted the farm shop owners or managers to schedule our interviews.

During our research efforts we discovered that farm shops provide many benefits to farmers and consumers alike. For farmers, market diversification and a year-long revenue stream are highlights, and for consumers, access to local products and direct communication with farmers is their take-away. However, we never imagined that replacing

lost markets (restaurants, schools, etc.) for direct market farms during a pandemic would be one of them. But that is exactly what happened. Farm shops, in many varieties and colors have expanded around the country. A farm shop is a permanent or semi-permanent structure where farm products from a specific farm or multiple farms, both fresh and processed (such as jams, honey and cheese), are offered for direct sale to consumers. Shops are normally open to the public year-round and may be located on a farm or in nearby towns or cities. Many farm shops feel like elaborate farm stands and may even have the word stand in their name.

In Utah, several farm shops were up and running prior to COVID-19, but since the pandemic we have seen others pop up. Why? Access to new direct-to-consumer markets and control. COVID-19 has led to uncertainty regarding market access and future regulations. As growers seek to replace lost markets they can take control by opening farm shops or stands on their own or in cooperation with other growers. Also, as you are aware, consumer interest in local foods has increased during the pandemic and farm shops cater well to consumers seeking to buy local in a more “familiar” retail environment ([There's a Big Appetite for Farm-to-Consumer Shopping](#)). Farm shops are open daily and their products are promoted to consumers via websites and social media, thus they are very convenient for shoppers (For more information on social media marketing see [social media marketing](#)).

For those of you who may be considering opening a farm shop or working with a current shop, here are a few suggestions.

1. *Select a good location* – The best location for a farm shop is one close to a busy road or intersection as long as the speed limit isn't too high. Select a site near corners or other small businesses like bakeries. Easy access with plenty of parking space is important, and a building with lots of open space or an open-air section is ideal and helpful. The shop must be visible and easy to identify, but any signage should be in accordance with county or city regulations.
2. *Source products carefully* – When possible, the grower should sell their own produce or products. Products provided by others may be priced high, resulting in lower profits. If outside products need to be sourced, use local sources whenever possible. Local suppliers respond more rapidly and innovatively than their conventional counterparts, especially in situations where there is sudden high demand or other unforeseen circumstances. Also, delivery times are more predictable, and

the probability of product recalls is significantly lower. Provide a variety of products to customers, focusing on value-added products such as cheese, jam, jelly, honey, juice, salsa, etc. This broadens product offerings to foods that are ready to eat, and convenience is key! Be aware, however, of codes and regulations regarding these products. Overall, remember that product quality is crucial. Frequent product testing, farm visits and safety inspections will not only result in high-quality products but will earn customer trust.

3. *Become educated and connected* – When building a farm shops business, start small and build up over time. Education is key. Attend conferences, extension programs, DOA workshops, etc. Visit farmers' markets, farms, talk with growers and invite them to visit. Sourcing items from farmers' markets is a good way to establish relationships with local food artisans, highlight local products and learn more about local preferences. Building relationships with local providers allows farm shop owners to provide input on what products or varieties should be grown or processed in the future. It will also help customers recognize the business as a supporter of the community and local economy. People want to be educated about the food they eat and will have more respect and trust for businesses that are transparent about where their products come from. Allow consumers and farmers to connect with one another. Use websites, social media, and face-to-face meetings to help customers reach out to farmers when they have questions or comments. Don't be afraid to promote! Let your customers know what's going on and why it's important.
4. *Diversify* – Find ways to diversify and set the farm shop apart from other offerings in the community. Selling produce with interesting names and colors is a great way to start. Consider adding a restaurant, café, bakery, or butcher's shop to expand the array of available goods and services. Those elements provide additional incentive for customers and add an element of uniqueness to the farm shop. Be a pick-up-point for CSA baskets. This will attract customers to the shop while showing them where they can get additional local foods. Join local labeling programs such as Utah's Own. This allows the community to recognize the shop as part of the local economy. Work with local chamber of commerce and visitors' bureaus to expand the shops promotional opportunities. Conduct tasting events, dinners, and tours as opportunities for the community to sample products and start a club rewards program

to encourage repeat business and gather customer feedback.

For additional information on farm shops check out the following:

- Developing a food or agricultural tourism business at <https://extension.usu.edu/apec/agribusiness-food/FoodAgritourism>
- Extended season marketing opportunities (like farm shops) at <https://extension.usu.edu/apec/agribusiness-food/extendedseasonopps>
- Farm Shops Extension publication at https://diverseag.org/files-ou/FS6Farm_Shops-4.2format5-14.pdf

That's all for now. If you have a topic you would like to see covered in a future blog, feel free to contact me.

Stay healthy!

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Online workshops, courses, webinars, and podcasts:

- Financial Health For Tribal Producers Webinar Series: [Financial Health](#)
- Idaho AgBiz Webinars: <https://www.uidaho.edu/cals/idaho-agbiz>
- Cultivating Success Webinars: <https://www.cultivatinguccess.org/home>

Resources:

- USU Extension COVID-19 Resources: <https://extension.usu.edu/covid-19/>
- *Marketing in Motion* Blog Posts: <https://extension.usu.edu/apec/news/>
- UDAF Utah's Own Program: <https://www.utahsown.org>
- UDAF COVID-19 Resources: <https://ag.utah.gov/covid-19-news-and-updates/>
- Taxes and Federal Programs: <https://ruraltax.org>

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