



Technical Assistance: Online Stores

Getting Started:

1. **Decide if your farm needs an online store.** Some products are more appropriately sold online than others. As a general rule, value-added products (i.e. jam, yarn, etc.) can be sold online because they can be packaged and sent right away. Other farm products can be sold online if it somehow increases the convenience of the shopper. For example, online payments for CSA memberships may be convenient to have online, but may not require an entire online store unless you also have other products you wish to sell. Farm products can also be pre-sold online and then available for pick-up. This will likely only be popular for hard-to-find items or bulk orders so that they can be ready to go before the customer comes around for pick-up. Be sure that you will have the time to be able to follow up with online orders in a timely fashion.
2. **If you choose to create your own online store, do some research.** There are many websites offering to help create online stores for individual websites. Some of them are more of a DIY-style, while others produce a standard “storefront.” Be sure that you understand all of the fees involved in this process. Some stores like this that have a “host” other than your website will charge monthly fees, transaction fees, and/or setup fees. They may also have limits to the number of products you can advertise or the number of transactions allowed per month. Be sure that you really understand what you are getting before making an agreement. If you plan to do a large amount of sales, it will likely pay off to have your own store set up by a designer. This will cost a lot more upfront, but will likely pay off over time with fewer monthly fees.
3. **Find a designer for your online store.** Unless you are incredibly tech-savvy, you will want to hire a designer to set you up with an online store. Online store set-up will require an initial investment, so you should be sure to weigh the potential costs and benefits of having an online store. As with any kind of website design, seek out a designer that you connect with. It is important that you are able to communicate your needs to your designer, so don't be afraid to shop around and find out what is out there before making a decision.