

Maintaining a connection with customers is critical for direct market farmers and ranchers. Social media (specifically, email, Facebook, and blogging) can help producers stay in touch with their customers!

### Email

*Email is a quick and efficient method for maintaining contact with customers – but how do you build and use a customer email list? Here are some suggestions:*

- Have an email sign-up list in your stall at each market – encourage customers to sign up. Offer specials through emails that are only available to customers who are on your list.
- Make sure your website includes a “Contact Us” page on your website that allows website visitors to sign up for email updates. Assure your customers that you won’t share their addresses!

### *Email updates – what do customers want to know?*

- Customers like to receive updates on product availability, recipes and farm-related events.
- Use your emails to build community – emails can be a less expensive than printed materials.
- Don’t overdo it – send emails only with information your customers need!
- Photos are great, but they can slow down your customers’ email program. Consider other social media outlets.
- Always include your contact information and web address.
- When sending a group email, put your customers’ email addresses in the bcc field – this eliminates the possibility of their addresses being used for other purposes.
- If you’re not comfortable composing customer emails, consider working with a company like Constant Contact ([www.constantcontact.com](http://www.constantcontact.com)) to help manage your email marketing efforts.
- Be concise! Customers may not read to the bottom of your email if it’s too long.



### Facebook

Social media websites like Facebook can be a great way to stay connected with current customers and to attract new customers! Setting up a Facebook page for your farm or ranch is easy!

#### *Set-up*

- The first step is to create a personal Facebook account. If you don’t already have an account, simply go to [www.facebook.com](http://www.facebook.com) and follow the step-by-step procedures.
- Once you have a personal account, you can create a page for your farm by clicking on “Pages” on left-hand menu.
- A “Pages” page will open in your browser. Click the “+ Create a Page” button at the top right and follow the instructions. Use your farm or ranch name as the page name.

#### *Building a Following*

- Once you have 40 “likes” for your page, Facebook will assign you a page name that corresponds with your farm name (for example, [www.facebook.com/flyingmulefarm](http://www.facebook.com/flyingmulefarm)).
- Invite your personal Facebook “friends,” email contacts and real live customers to “like” your page.



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***Tips on Posting to your Page***

- Post photos and updates to your farm page regularly – keep your page fresh and interesting!
- Post updates about the products you're offering. For example – post a photo of your market stall!
- Offer specials to customers that mention a specific post.
- Cross-post to other pages you've "liked" – restaurants that carry your products, for example.

**Instagram**

***Instagram is a very real-time social media outlet that utilizes photos that can connect with your Facebook, making posting a picture much easier. In addition, 'hashtags' are used to help supporters indicate when they post photos of your products.***

- The first step is to create a personal account at [www.instagram.com](http://www.instagram.com), you can link your Facebook too.
- From the main page create a "Hashtag," a short phrase that describes your farm (ie. #flyingmule).
- You can post pictures and use your hashtag, the photos can also be linked to your Facebook page.
- You can tell your friends and promote followers at farmer's markets and events to look for your hashtag.
- You can create a contest for customers using your hashtag all while promoting your product.
- When used consistently, Instagram creates a relationship that goes beyond the weekly farmer's market where customers can purchase your products.

**Pinterest**

***Pinterest is a photo interest sharing sight where people can search, group, and share their interests for their friends to see.***

- Post photos of your farm, your products, and uses for your products.
- Be creative! - Tag your photos with search terms such as "farming" "local grown" "fresh fruit" "buy local" etc.

**Blogging**

***In many ways, a web-log, or blog, is a longer format version of a Facebook post. Many producers use blogs to keep customers up-to-date on happenings on the farm, to share recipes, or to create photo albums. To get started:***

- The easiest websites to use for creating a blog are [www.wordpress.org](http://www.wordpress.org) or [www.blogspot.com](http://www.blogspot.com).
- A blog can be used much like a farm journal—customers are interested in the day-to-day activities on farms and ranchers.
- Pictures are worth a thousand words! Be sure to include photographs of the farm. On many blogs, you can also add sound files and video.
- For examples of blogs, check out <http://ucanr.edu/blogs/FoothillFarming/> and [www.flyingmule.blogspot.com](http://www.flyingmule.blogspot.com).

**Integrating your Farm's On-line Presence**

Email, Facebook, Instagram and blogging should be integrated—along with your farm website. Email can link customers with blog and website to help educate customers about your farm. Facebook can drive existing and new customers ("friends" of your farm's friends) to your more detailed information sources (like your blog and website). Facebook and Instagram are a great tool for informing customers in real time about your product availability at specific markets. Get creative and have fun!

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