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## ENGAGING WITH BUYERS

**Congratulations!** Your business is up and running, and you’re looking to start engaging buyers for your product. There are a few things you’ll want to consider when deciding what kinds of businesses and organizations to contact.

- **Volume:** How much product do you have available? Can you consistently meet the demand needs of a larger institutional buyer, or should you focus on a buyer with a smaller customer base and perhaps more flexibility?
- **Seasonality:** Will your product be available to buyers who are looking for something year-round, or is it available only during a select growing season? Some organizations or businesses operate seasonally, so it’s important that you consider your growing season as well as your monthly revenue needs.
- **Time commitment:** Does your schedule allow you the flexibility to staff a table at a farmers market every weekend? Are you able to deliver products to buyers

who require them on specific days of the week? Are you able to dedicate the time needed to get products packaged and delivered in a timely manner?

- **Your story:** Are there buyers that may be more likely to engage with your company because of your unique story or location? Many businesses and organizations have a deep commitment to supporting small farmers.

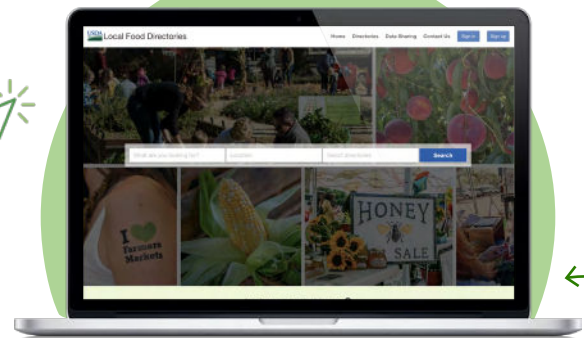




## TYPES OF BUSINESSES TO CONSIDER

- **Restaurants:** Local restaurants are more likely to have control over their menu and daily specials and who they source from.
- **Retailers:** Grocery stores, co-ops, specialty food stores, and florists
- **Community-supported agriculture:** CSAs are models in which consumers subscribe to receive a weekly or biweekly share of the harvest of a farm or group of farms. You could be a part of a community-based CSA, work in collaboration with another farmer, or start your own.
- **Food hubs:** Food hubs are aggregators of local and regional food products that distribute those goods to institutional buyers and sometimes individuals.
- **Farmers markets**
- **Institutions**
  - Colleges, universities, and K–12 schools

- **Consumer packaged goods (CPG) companies**
  - Are there companies that use ingredients that you grow?
  - Are there companies that sell produce you grow who may be interested in adding you as a grower?
- **Caterers**
- **Food distributors**



The USDA website has a [local food directory](#) that may be helpful in finding **CSAs**, **farmers markets**, and **food hubs**.



**Note:** It's generally easier to work with colleges and universities that are **self-operated** (meaning that they don't contract with an outside foodservice provider). If the dining team's email address ends in the school's name and ".edu," as opposed to Aramark, Compass, Sodexo, Chartwells, etc., then the institution is most likely self-operated.

- Culinary programs (higher education, community-based)
- Corporate cafeterias





## STARTING THE CONVERSATION



Remember that the person you are speaking with is just that—a person. **You are offering a valuable item that could be just what they're looking for.** The worst they can say is no.

- Introduce yourself and state why you are contacting them:
  - “My name is John, and I’m a local mushroom farmer. I can see that your menu focuses on local goods, and I was hoping to speak with someone in charge of your fresh produce purchases.” (restaurants, institutions)
  - “I was hoping to get more information about your program and understand whether or not our farm would be a good fit.” (food hubs, community-based CSAs)
  - “I noticed your farm has an established CSA. I was wondering if you might be interested in adding local mushrooms to your boxes.” (other farms with CSAs)
  - “I see that you include shiitake mushrooms in your product ingredients. I was wondering if you’d be interested in sourcing those from my farm.” (CPGs)
  - “Could I speak to your buyer for perishables or fresh produce? I’d like to understand the requirements for being considered as a vendor.”
- Remember, you may come across an interested buyer or an acquaintance of someone who may be interested at any time. **It’s a good idea to have your contact information and price list ready to share wherever you may be.** You could carry business cards that include your web address or have a printed price list ready to hand out when needed.



- **Your packaging can also speak for you!** Someone may see your packaging in a store, in their CSA box, or at a friend’s house. This is a great opportunity to showcase your brand and enable people to get information about your website or product so they can recommend it to friends, family, or even the chef at their favorite restaurant.

## CONSIDERATIONS AND QUESTIONS YOU MAY WANT TO ASK

- **Program details** (most relevant for food hubs)
  - How does the program work?
  - What kinds of programs do they have?
  - What kinds of organizations do they distribute to?
- **Location**
  - Are they able to source from your area, or do they have geographical restrictions? Some food hubs are able to sell only products grown in surrounding counties or grown within a certain number of miles.
  - Where would the product need to be delivered? Or are they able to pick up from your farm?
  - Would the size of the buy be large enough to warrant the distance traveled for delivery?
- **Fit**
  - Do the products they sell or the foods they serve align with what you’re selling?
  - Do they already have a vendor selling a similar product?



**Just because they don't currently offer products like yours doesn't mean they wouldn't be interested in adding it.**

- **Volume**

- What kind of volume can they support? How many pounds per week would they typically order?
- Do they have volume minimums? Would you be required to deliver a minimum number of units or pounds each week?
- Do their needs align with what you can produce?
- Do their needs warrant the time and effort you'd have to put in and distance you'd need to travel?

- **Requirements**

- Do they require any certifications, licenses, or insurance coverage?
- What are their packaging requirements? **Consider both how the product is delivered and how it is packaged for retail.**

- **Timing**

- How soon would they expect delivery?
- How frequently would they order?
- Does the need fluctuate seasonally?
- What days would orders be placed?
- What days would orders need to be delivered?

- **Pricing and payment**

- Who determines pricing?
- Are they willing to share what they typically pay for a similar product?
- Be ready to send them a price list for each of your items. When considering how to price your items, be sure you understand not only what they cost to produce but also what the fair market value is and what kind of competition you may be dealing with. If a buyer will be purchasing a significant volume from you or making multiple purchases over time, it may be worth accepting a lower price than you would for a one-time or smaller-volume sale.
- **Is payment tendered upon delivery? If not, what are their terms?**

- **Other information**

- Are there items they would like to buy but cannot find locally currently? This may help you determine what to grow or produce in the future.
- Do they have recommendations for other local businesses that purchase local food and may be interested in your items? This may be particularly relevant when speaking to restaurants and chefs, as restaurant owners often stay connected to one another.



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