

GUIDES · OFF-SEASON

# Keep It Going in Winter

Ten small jobs for the quiet months, so your customers remember you and your spring starts ahead.

FREE GUIDE

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## Before you start

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When the season ends, a lot of small farms and makers go quiet. The stand closes, the markets wrap up, and the posts stop. Then spring comes and they have to find their customers all over again.

It doesn't have to go that way. Winter is the time to look at what happened, stay in touch with the people who bought from you, and get ready for next year. None of it takes much time. This guide has ten small jobs in three parts. Do one a week and you'll be done by the time the snow melts.

**This is not a rules manual.** What you can sell, and what you need to sell it, depends on your product and changes over time. Where a rule matters, I tell you who to ask. And if you're not sure about something, call before you do it.

### The 10 jobs

- **Part 1, Close the season well:** count what happened, update your hours, and handle the paperwork.
- **Part 2, Stay in touch:** keep posting, keep your list, and offer something for winter.
- **Part 3, Plan next year:** get ahead on deadlines, learn something, and rest.

If you haven't set up a Facebook Page or a Google Maps listing yet, my free guide *Put Your Farm on the Map* walks through it. Winter is a good time to do that, too.

# Part 1: Close the season well

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*Look back, tell people what to expect, and take care of the paperwork.*

## 1 Count what happened

Sit down once with whatever records you have: a notebook, a card reader's reports, or a cash box tally. Write down three things:

- What sold best, and what didn't sell
- Which markets or days were worth the trip
- What you wish you'd had more of

One page is plenty. You'll use it in Part 3, and it's much easier to write now, while you still remember the season.

## 2 Tell people your winter plans

Update your hours on every place customers look: your Facebook Page, your Google Maps listing, and your website if you have one. If you're closed, say when you'll reopen. If you're open on a different schedule, say that. Check the buttons and settings on your own screen, because they change from time to time.

Then post one clear message: *"We're closed for the season. We'll be back in the spring. Thank you."* A short, friendly post stops people from showing up at a closed stand, and it keeps them thinking about you.

## 3 Take care of the paperwork

Two quick checks now will save you a headache later.

**Sales tax.** If you're registered with a Certificate of Authority, New York says you still file a return every quarter, even in a quarter with no sales. Check your due dates with the Department of Taxation and Finance ([tax.ny.gov](http://tax.ny.gov)).

**Insurance and registrations.** Look at when your insurance, market applications, and any state registrations renew. Put the dates on your calendar.

Cornell's small farms program ([smallfarms.cornell.edu](http://smallfarms.cornell.edu)) has plain-language guides on sales tax and other basics for farm businesses.

## Part 2: Stay in touch

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*Customers forget quickly. A little contact all winter keeps you on their mind.*

### 4 Keep posting, even a little

One post a week is enough. You don't need to be selling anything. Good ideas for a quiet month:

- A photo of the farm in the snow, or of what you're working on
- What you're planning for spring
- A recipe or tip that uses your products
- A thank-you to the customers and markets you worked with

Short and real beats polished. Your customers like seeing the people behind the table.

### 5 Start (or keep) a list

A list of email addresses or phone numbers belongs to you, and no website can take it away. If customers asked you to tell them when you're back, write down their names. Keep it in a notebook or a simple spreadsheet. Only add people who asked to be on it, and tell them what you'll send. Then send a note once or twice over the winter.

### 6 Offer something for winter

Look back at your Part 1 notes. Is there something you can offer in the quiet months? Some ideas that small producers use:

- **Pre-orders** for spring, holidays, or gifts. A free Google Form works as an order sheet, and I show how in *Put Your Farm on the Map*.
- **Gift certificates** or gift boxes for the holidays.
- **Winter markets.** Many farmers markets move indoors or keep going through winter. See the *Farm Stands Open in Winter* guide for ones in the Hudson Valley.
- **A workshop or class**, if teaching is something you enjoy.

Before you add anything new, ask whether it needs a license or registration. Call the NYS Department of Agriculture and Markets ([agriculture.ny.gov](http://agriculture.ny.gov)) if it's food you make, and the Tax Department if you'll collect sales tax. Do that first.

## Part 3: Plan next year

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*Get ahead while everyone else is resting.*

### 7 Check the deadlines

Spring comes fast, and many deadlines come before it. Make a short list for the next year:

- ☐ Market applications: when do they open and close?
- ☐ Insurance and registration renewals
- ☐ Seed, supply, and packaging orders
- ☐ Dates for any classes you want to take

Ask the markets you want to join when applications open. Some fill early.

### 8 Learn one thing

Pick one skill that would help your business and learn it this winter. It might be taking better photos with your phone, keeping simple records, or setting up card payments. Cornell's small farms program ([smallfarms.cornell.edu](http://smallfarms.cornell.edu)) has free guides for farm businesses. The Cornell Cooperative Extension office in your county can also tell you what classes are coming up.

### 9 Check your Almanac and Google listings

Make sure the information people find about you is right. Look at your Google Maps listing, your Facebook Page, and your Hudson Valley Almanac listing. Fix the hours, add your reopening date, and update anything that's changed. If your Almanac listing needs a change, send me the correction through the site.

### 10 Rest

Farming and making are hard work, and the quiet season is part of the cycle. Sleep, spend time with your family, and don't feel guilty about slowing down. The jobs in this guide take an hour here and there. They aren't a second full-time job.

See you in the spring.

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