

GUIDES · FOR FARMS

# Run a Farm Stand

A short checklist for opening, stocking, pricing, and promoting a roadside stand.

FREE GUIDE

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## Before you start

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A farm stand can be a table at the end of the driveway, an honor-box shed, or a small store. The best ones share a few habits: they're easy to find, easy to buy from, and reliably stocked. This guide is a checklist for getting there.

It is not a legal guide. What you can sell, how it has to be labeled, and what you owe in tax all depend on the product and on your town. I point you to the people who decide those things, and I list who to call.

**Where this comes from.** The rules below are from Cornell Small Farms and a Cornell Cooperative Extension educator quoted in a Watertown Daily Times column, checked October 11, 2026. Rules change, so confirm with the offices named here.

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# Set it up

*Do these before you put out the first table.*

## 1. Call before you build

| Question                                                             | Who to call                                           |
|----------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------|
| Can I put a stand here? Are there limits on size, parking, or signs? | Your town or county, for zoning and sign rules        |
| Am I covered if someone gets hurt or sick?                           | Your insurance agent. Ask about liability for a stand |
| What can I sell, and how must it be labeled?                         | NYS Department of Agriculture and Markets             |
| Do I charge sales tax?                                               | NYS Department of Taxation and Finance                |
| Is this someone else's land?                                         | The landowner. Get permission first                   |

A Cornell Cooperative Extension educator told a reporter that New York requires no special permits to operate a *simple* farm stand. Anything beyond a simple stand, such as prepared or processed foods, needs a call to Agriculture and Markets first.

**Sales tax.** Cornell Small Farms says a farm that makes taxable sales needs a Certificate of Authority from the state, that you should apply at least 20 days before you start, and that you file returns every quarter even in a quarter with no sales. Ask Taxation and Finance which of your products are taxable.

## 2. Location and signs

- **Be easy to see and easy to stop at.** Customers should be able to pull off safely and park without blocking the road.
- **Put your hours on a sign.** If you're open limited hours, say so. A stand that's sometimes closed with no explanation loses customers.
- **Check the sign rules** with the town before you paint a large one.
- **Name it.** A clear name and a simple "what's here" line, such as "Eggs, tomatoes, honey," work better than a long list.

## 3. Price and display

- **Price everything.** People won't ask. Put a price on each item or each bin.
- **Know your market.** Look at what nearby stands, farmers markets, and grocery stores charge. A Cornell workshop on starting a farm stand lists "competitive pricing" as a core topic.
- **Show your best.** Keep the display full, clean, and shaded. Pull out what's past its best.
- **Use round numbers** when you can, to make change easy.

#### 4. Take payment

- **Staffed stand:** keep a small cash box with change, and consider a card reader or a payment app.
- **Honor box:** use a locked or bolted box, put the prices where people can see them, and expect that a little will go missing. Some farms put a card-payment code on the sign.
- **Know what you owe.** Keep a record of what you sell, since you'll need it for the tax office. See step 1.

#### 5. Keep it stocked

The same Cornell workshop names "keeping the stand stocked" as part of day-to-day operations. Customers come back to a stand that has something every time. Plan what you'll put out on busy days, and keep a short list of what to restock each morning.

#### 6. Get found

- **Be on the Hudson Valley Almanac.** You can submit a listing. A stand with hours and an address is easy for visitors to find on the map.
- **Ask your county Cornell Cooperative Extension office** about listing your stand in a local-food guide.
- **Post when you're open and what you have.** See my guide *Farm Social Media in 30 Minutes a Week* for a simple routine.

#### Before you open, check:

- ☐ I called the town about zoning and signs.
- ☐ I asked my insurance agent about liability.
- ☐ I called Agriculture and Markets about what I plan to sell.
- ☐ I asked Taxation and Finance about sales tax.
- ☐ My hours and prices are on the sign.
- ☐ I have a payment plan and a cash box.

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This is a checklist, not legal or tax advice. Checked October 11, 2026.