

How to Build a Great Small Farm Website

Make your farm—and farm-related businesses more accessible—learn how to build a website for your farm. From your content to your font, we have helpful tips.

By Sue Weaver

A good sales website presents your message to the world, 24 hours a day, 365 days (and nights) a week.

A website costs little to establish and maintain, in know-how, time and money. With a few nights of computer classes at your public school or library under your belt or a good book or two about Web development at hand, you can build a farm business website to be proud of.

Here are some things to consider.

Decide What Your Website Is About

Websites exist for one or more of three purposes: To sell something To inform, or To increase name recognition.

Good farm websites incorporate all three.

It's especially important to include educational content on a farm-related website—and to update it frequently—so visitors look forward to coming back again.

Example: For a good example of what we mean, visit Jack and Anita Mauldin's Boar Goat website.

Write Good Sales Copy

To learn how, invest in a rural enterprise marketing book or two like Ellie Winslow's *Marketing Farm Products: And How to Thrive Beyond the Sidewalk* and *Growing Your Rural Business from the Inside Out*.

Or, download a free copy of Jennifer-Clair V. Klotz's full-length U.S. Department of Agriculture Agricultural Marketing Service publication, *How to Direct-Market Farm Products on the Internet* (it's a huge file but worth the wait).

Choose a Worthy Hosting Service

Don't submit to the temptation to use freebie hosting!

Visitors despise the advertising banners and annoying pop-ups that are part and parcel of free Web hosting and the pages they generate sometimes freeze older computers.

Furthermore, freebie sites equate with cumbersome Web addresses. Which will your customer remember: "freewebs/~freesites/WorldsBestBison.html" or "WorldsBestBison.com."

Select a Great Domain

Providing you don't use freebie hosting service, your domain name is your Internet address.

Make it short, catchy, and memorable.

Let's say you raise Babydoll Southdown sheep. TeddybearFaces, CutestSheep, and SouthdownSweeties are all still available as .com domains at the time this article was written.

"SweetSheep.com," however, is already taken—but you could still register "SweetSheep.net," "SweetSheep.info," "SweetSheep.biz," or "SweetSheep.us," if you like.

Or, personalize an already-taken address with dashes (Sweet-Sheep.com), underscores (Sweet_Sheep.com), numbers (SweetSheep1.com), or additional words (MySweetSheep.com).

Lose the Bells and Whistles

Farm marketing guru, Ellie Winslow, says, "If the website is for business, don't distract your visitor and don't wear him or her out with moving icons, streaming banners and other technically advanced stuff that doesn't actually promote your

marketing goals.”

According to How to Direct-Market Farm Products on the Internet: 75% of website visitors expect high-quality content, while 66% value ease of use; 58 % won't revisit slow-loading websites and 54% avoid dated sites; and only 12% visit to view cutting-edge technology.

Watch Those Loading Times

Savvy Web designers recommend single page downloads no greater than 180 Kb.

This precludes large numbers of images, high-resolution photos, and techie frou-frou.

Instead, use 72 pixels per inch thumbnail photos linked to large, glorious versions, each on a stand-alone page (and always choose good photos if you use them).

Avoid Highly Patterned Backgrounds

They tire visitors' eyes and copy gets lost in the morass.

Include Contrast

Strive for clear contrast between font and background colors.

Again, don't give your visitors eyestrain.

Nix Frames

Sites that use frames are frequently cluttered, confusing, and they rarely print out well.

A basic definition of frames: They are a way to display more than one page in a single web browser window. Each page can have its own scroll bar; with frames, a browser window can include both static and changing content. For example, a static frame can be used as a table of contents while another frame presents the different areas of a web site.

They load poorly in some browsers and on many computers, overfilling the screen and sometimes blocking access to a site's best features.

Choose Fonts With Care

If in doubt, use everybody-has-'em fonts like Ariel or Times New Roman.

Include the Basics on Every Page

Because search engine users don't necessarily enter at the beginning, place contact information and your business logo on every page, along with a link to your site map or home page.

Triple-check for Typos and Misspellings

Don't make visitors grit their teeth.

About the Author: Sue Weaver is a Hobby Farms and Hobby Farm Home contributing editor. She helps Martok the goat tell his story online in the Mondays with Martok blog.