

# E-Commerce Platforms in Kentucky

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## Overview

The COVID-19 pandemic accelerated the adoption of ecommerce platforms in on-farm retail markets and among farm market vendors. The need for cashless online payments pushed many producers—who previously relied on word-of-mouth marketing and manual invoicing—into establishing online stores using a variety of ecommerce platforms.

These platforms have since become a standard part of many agricultural businesses. Common tools used by Kentucky producers include Square, Shopify, GoDaddy, and peer-to-peer payment systems such as PayPal and Venmo. This publication compares commonly used and less common ecommerce platforms, incorporating feedback from Kentucky users on factors such as online payments, store development, reporting features, and time commitments.

## Assessment Factors

Most on-farm retail markets and farm market vendors operate with limited time, labor, and financial resources. As a result, ecommerce platforms must meet practical business needs without requiring extensive setup or management.

The following assessment factors were identified based on feedback from Kentucky producers:

- Typical use
- Price range
- Data reporting capabilities
- Inventory tracking
- Online presence (website integration or development)
- Customer service availability
- Time commitment for setup

- Convenience of use

## Popular Ecommerce Platforms in Kentucky

### Square

Square is widely used across different agribusiness models, including farm markets, on-farm stores, and online sales. Users report that the platform is flexible and customizable, allowing businesses to tailor it to their needs. It is often praised for its ease of use and adaptability as businesses evolve.

Square also offers strong customer service and support. Some users noted limitations in data reporting depending on business needs, but most found the available data sufficient.

### Shopify

Shopify users report high satisfaction with its user-friendly design and ability to support both simple and advanced online stores. Many producers begin with basic features and expand into more complex functionality as their business grows.

Compared to other platforms, Shopify is often viewed as less complicated and easier to manage while still providing strong customization options.

### GoDaddy

GoDaddy is commonly used to establish a website domain and create an online presence. It offers helpful resources such as FAQs and guides to assist users during setup.

While GoDaddy performs well for building websites and online stores, it does not provide the same level of integration for in-person transactions as platforms like Square. Some businesses use GoDaddy for their website and Square for payment processing.

### PayPal

PayPal is often used for invoicing and cashless payments. It is particularly useful for businesses with a smaller number of transactions or wholesale operations.

However, it may not be ideal for operations with large product inventories or high transaction volumes, as managing invoices manually can become time-consuming.

## Venmo

Venmo is primarily used for peer-to-peer cashless payments and is commonly adopted by farm market vendors. It requires minimal setup and is convenient for quick transactions.

However, Venmo does not provide features such as inventory tracking or detailed data reporting. It is best suited as a short-term or supplemental payment solution rather than a full ecommerce platform. Users should also be aware of tax reporting requirements, such as receiving a Form 1099-K after reaching certain payment thresholds.

## Comparison of Popular Platforms

Platform	Typical Use	Data	Inventory	Online Presence	Time Commitment	Convenience
Square	Online stores, storefronts, farm markets	Yes	Yes	Yes	1–4 hours	High
Shopify	Online stores	Yes	Yes	Yes	1–4 hours	High
GoDaddy	Online stores, websites	Yes	Yes	Yes	1–8 hours	Moderate
PayPal	Invoicing, payments	Limited	No	No	0.5–1 hour	Varies
Venmo	Cashless payments	No	No	No	0.5–1 hour	Short-term convenience

## Uncommon Ecommerce Platforms in Kentucky

### GrownBy

GrownBy is a platform designed specifically for farmers. It allows customers to browse products, pay online, and arrange pickup. The platform is highly customizable and adaptable to different business needs. Customer support is strong and includes email and video assistance.

## Food4All

Food4All is a farm-focused ecommerce platform that connects producers directly with customers through localized online hubs. It provides assistance with online store setup and marketing and emphasizes building direct relationships between producers and consumers.

## Ecwid

Ecwid allows producers to quickly establish an online store or integrate one into an existing website. It is similar to platforms like Square and Shopify and offers flexibility depending on the level of customization needed.

## Toast

Toast is commonly used by agribusinesses that include restaurants or prepared food operations. It supports both online and in-person ordering and is especially useful for operations with high transaction volumes. Startup costs may be higher than other platforms, but it can be valuable for more complex businesses.

# Comparison of Uncommon Platforms

Platform	Typical Use	Data Inventory	Online Presence	Convenience
GrownBy	CSA, online stores, farm markets	Yes Yes	Yes	Varies
Food4All	Online stores	Yes Yes	Yes	Varies
Ecwid	Online stores	Yes Yes	Yes	High
Toast	Restaurants, storefronts	Yes Yes	Yes	Varies

## Conclusion

Ecommerce platforms have become an essential component of modern agricultural businesses. While many platforms are available, selecting the right one depends on matching platform features to the specific needs of the operation.

Square was identified as one of the most widely used platforms in Kentucky due to its flexibility across different business types. Platforms such as Shopify, GoDaddy, and

others also provide valuable tools for building online stores, managing inventory, and improving marketing efforts.

Rather than asking whether to adopt an ecommerce platform, producers should focus on determining which platform best fits their business model and operational needs.

## How Extension Can Help

The Cooperative Extension Service provides resources to help producers evaluate and implement ecommerce tools, including:

- Agricultural Economics Extension  
<https://agecon.ca.uky.edu/extension>
- Center for Crop Diversification  
<https://www.uky.edu/ccd/>
- Marketing for All  
<https://www.uky.edu/ccd/marketing-all>

## Additional Resources

- CSA Innovation Network: Farmer-to-Farmer Ecommerce Platforms  
[https://www.csainnovationnetwork.org/files/ugd/658585\\_441c9ac98c95465fa2365f962cc72096.pdf](https://www.csainnovationnetwork.org/files/ugd/658585_441c9ac98c95465fa2365f962cc72096.pdf)

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