

Countryside Alliance Rural Shops Survey 2020

66% of those surveyed said they had seen an increase in sales since the beginning of the pandemic.

COVID-19 has been a difficult time for many rural businesses. Whether it has meant adapting a business, furloughing staff or responding to unprecedented demand for services, the one thing we all know is that the dedication and hard work that has been going on behind the scenes to keep the show on the road has been a herculean effort.

We have also seen many acts of heroism - from small acts of kindness that put a smile on someone's face, to bringing the whole community together. The support that you have offered to others and the role you play in your community cannot be underestimated. You might not be working on the NHS front line, but you are certainly are on the front line for our rural communities.

66% of those surveyed said they had seen an increase in sales since the beginning of the pandemic. When it came to surveying just how much those sales had increased by, 64% said their sales had grown between 20% and 50%. However, that is only part of the story. When asked if the closure of the hospitality industry had negatively impacted their business, 50% answered that it had.

We also asked those who took part, which products in particular saw the greatest increase in sales. The most common answers were meat, vegetables, and dairy products, as well as staple food items such as flour, eggs, and bread. The mixture of these answers shows that local communities are relying on rural shops for their everyday goods. We hope that those who may not have been using their local shops beforehand, will continue to do so as and when restrictions ease.

When asked if they felt if they had received enough support from the government and local authorities, 71% responded yes. Whilst some commented that they would have liked more frequent communication with their local authorities, and more advanced warning of changing restrictions, the majority of those surveyed felt that they have received a good amount of support.

In gaining this insight, we wanted to see just how much people were beginning to rely on the unsung heroes of our rural communities by supporting local and shopping with small businesses.

As we continue to live under restrictions, there are some glimmers of a return to a different kind of normality, although this could still be many months away. In the meantime, we want to thank those who are working tirelessly and remaining open, adapting however they have to in order to serve their local communities. We want to ensure you that your hard work is recognised and is greatly appreciated.

Survey results

66% of those surveyed said that had seen an increase in sales since the beginning of the pandemic

- The remaining 34% said that had not

When asked how much they had seen sales increased, the results show:

- 11% of those surveyed said they had seen sales increase by 10%
- 18% of those surveyed said they had seen sales increase by 20%
- 20% of those surveyed said they had seen sales increase by 30%
- 12% of those surveyed said they had seen sales increase by 40%
- 14% of those surveyed said they had seen sales increase by 50%
- 6% of those surveyed said they had seen sales increase by 60%
- 5% of those surveyed said they had seen sales increase by 70%
- 4% of those surveyed said they had seen sales increase by 80%
- No one said they had seen sales increase by 90%
- 8% of those surveyed said they had seen sales increase by 100%

When asked if they had lost business from the hospitality industry due to restrictions being placed on pubs and restaurants, the result was split, with 50% saying that they had, and 50% saying they had not.

The 50% who answered that they had lost business from the hospitality industry were then asked how much trade they had lost. The answers we received were in varying context with some giving an overall percentage and some specifying how much they had lost per week or month. Many respondents specified that whilst they had lost a percentage on their income, that amounted to 100% of income related to the hospitality industry.

51% of people surveyed said that they had started to offer a click-and-collect or 'ring to place your order' service during the COVID-19 outbreak as a way of adapting their business to meet customers' needs.

- 12% said that did not have to adapt their business in any way
- 66% offered a delivery service
- 50% began offering a range of payment methods
- 11% increased their opening hours
- 33% said they had increased their product range to include non-meat products such as milk, bread, and fish

- 30% hired more staff
- 22% reduced their number of staff
- 27% reduced the service that they offered

When asked which products in particular saw the greatest increase in sales, the most popular words and phrases from the responses we received were 'meat', 'vegetables', 'dairy products', 'dried goods', 'staple products' and 'fresh produce'.

63% of those surveyed said that customers were not asking more about the origin of the meat that was on sale.

- 37% responded that their customers were asking more about the origin of the meat that was on sale.

71% felt that they had enough support from the Government and Local Authorities

- 29% said they did not feel that they had enough support.

When that 29% was asked what further support they would have liked, 22% of people said that they would have liked more advanced warning from the Government and Local Authority on the impact that would be felt, and the actions that would need to be taken when new restrictions were put into place.

38% of those who took part in this survey were village shops.

- 20% were butchers
- 15% were farm shops
- 26% chose the option 'Other' and when asked to clarify, we received a mixture of results including trade stands, a Wild Game Butchery, cafes, independent grocery stores and pet, livestock, and equestrian supplies.