Farm Incubator Case Studies:

A supplement to the Farm Incubator Toolkit

Developed by the National Incubator Farm Training Initiative (NIFTI)
Published by the New Entry Sustainable Farming Project (New Entry)

Farm Incubator Case Studies

A supplement to the Farm Incubator Toolkit

Developed by the National Incubator Farm Training Initiative (NIFTI)

Published by the New Entry Sustainable Farming Project (New Entry); Lowell, MA

Tufts University
Gerald J. and Dorothy R. Friedman School of Nutrition Science and Policy

Case Study Participants

Minnesota Food Association Big River Farms Training Program, Marine on St. Croix, MN - Glen Hill, Executive Director, Minnesota Food Association

Community CROPS Growing Farmers Incubator, Lincoln, NE - Kirstin Bailey, Program Manager

Cultivate Kansas City, Kansas City, KS - Katherine Kelly, Executive Director, Cultivate Kansas City and Rachel Pollock, New Roots for Refugees Coordinator, Catholic Charities

Dirt Works Incubator Farm, John's Island, SC - Nikki Seibert, Sustainable Agriculture Program Director, Low Country Local First

Farley Center Farm Incubator, Springdale, WI - Janet Parker, Farm Incubator Facilitator

Groundswell Farm Incubator, Ithaca, NY - Joanna Green, Director, and Devon Van Noble, Farm Manager

Growing Farms, Duluth, MN - Jamie Harvie, Executive Director, Institute for a Sustainable Future

Headwaters Farm Incubator, East Multnomah Soil and Water Conservation District (EMSWCD) Portland, OR - Rowan Steele, Farm Incubator Manager

Horn Farm Center for Educational Agriculture, York, PA - Jon Darby, Farm Manager; David Dietz, Board Member; and Nedette Otterbein, Executive Director

The Intervale Center, Burlington, VT - Maggie Donin, Beginning Farmer Specialist

Lansing Roots, Greater Lansing Food Bank, Lansing, MI - Laura Wies, Program Manager

Rosita's Farm, Hartselle, AL - Karen Wynne, Farm Owner and Manager

Production

Editor: Eva Agudelo Winther

Production: Meaghan Overton

For additional information about this document, please email: eagudelo@comteam.org, or call: (978) 654-5731. This document is available only in electronic format. Please contact New Entry for permission to use any or all of this document for educational purposes. This publication can be viewed online at http://nesfp.org/nifti/casestudies.

Production of this document was supported by the Cedar Tree Foundation and the Claneil Foundation. NIFTI is a program of the New Entry Sustainable Farming Project (New Entry).

Introduction

The case studies in this compilation were developed from in-depth interviews with incubator staff at 12 farm incubator projects in the US. These case studies can be found in the appendices of the NIFTI Farm Incubator Toolkit, but are also available here as a standalone document. Many incubator projects profiled in these case studies also provided worksheets, example documents, or other tools. You will find links to those documents in each case study. The following profiles offer detailed and in-depth information designed to support start-up incubators and experienced projects alike as we strive to improve and expand the services we offer to beginning farmers.

The Farley Center Farm Incubator

Linda and Gene Farley Center for Peace, Justice, and Sustainability

Springdale, WI

"The Linda and Gene Farley Center for Peace, Justice and Sustainability is dedicated to socially progressive change, community partnership, sustainability and ecological justice."

Basic Statistics:

Structure: Hybrid (nonprofit + farmers' co-op)

Year Founded: 2010

Number of Farmers: 9 businesses, 24 adults involved

Number of Staff: 8 (6 PT, 2 unpaid)

Size: 10 acres

Plot size: .125-2 acres

Rent: none

Time limit: no

Scope of operations: Vegetable production, organic practices (certification will be complete in fall 2013)

Website: http://farleycenter.org/index.php/farm-incubator/intro-to-farm-incubator#

Background

Springdale, WI is a small town (pop. 1904) about 16 miles southwest of Madison, WI. The area around Springdale is rich in farming, especially corn and soybeans. According to Janet Parker, the Farley Center Farm Incubator Facilitator, the Farley Center Farm Incubator is a project that grew out of both the region's organic farming activity and the need for social justice advocacy for new and beginning farmers.

The story of the Farley Center Farm Incubator began long before its founding in 2010. Linda and Gene Farley owned farmland near Madison, and for about 15 years, they had welcomed a few Madison families to plant gardens on the land. Janet Parker worked with community gardeners in Madison, and she introduced to the Farleys several urban gardeners who wanted to expand their operations and grow for market. By 2009, several of the families were growing vegetables for sale at farmers markets, and one grower was selling Mexican specialty crops wholesale to Latino groceries. In 2010, the Farley Center for Peace, Justice and Sustainability was founded as a non-profit. The land was donated by the Farley family, and the informal farming arrangements with the family became the farm incubator. Most of those first growers on the Farley land were recent immigrants, from Asia, Latin America and Africa. Some came with very strong farming skills, drawing on millennia of farming tradition in their home countries, while others were beginners. A small group of farmers and Farley Center staff applied for and received a Beginning Farmer and Rancher Development Project (BFRDP) grant in 2010 to fund the Farley Center Farm Incubator and its associated programs. A neighbor has provided an additional 20 acres of farmland rent-free, making it possible to bring new farmers into the incubator

Project Structure

The Farley Center Farm Incubator welcomes any beginning farmers to apply, and is particularly focused on immigrants and socially disadvantaged farmers, including primarily Latinos and Hmong immigrants. The Farley Center does extensive outreach

among these communities to recruit both incubator participants and incubator staff. In keeping with the Farley Center's social justice and partnership ethics, all decisions about the function and mission of the incubator project are made in collaboration with the farmers. There are nine farm businesses cultivating at the incubator in 2013, and about 15 more people (family members and workers) are regularly at the Center helping those nine farmers. Only one of the growers is full-time farming during the growing season; all the others have off-farm jobs also.

Curriculum: The curriculum at the Farley Center Farm Incubator began as a relatively informal, farmer-driven process. Workshops and trainings were offered on an as-needed basis with few requirements for attendance or participation. Over the last couple of seasons, however, the Spring Rose Growers' Cooperative (see sidebar for more information) and incubator staff have begun coordinating and formalizing the incubator curriculum. The Farley Center Incubator also relies on some conference opportunities in the area, like the annual Immigrant and Minority Farmers Conference and the MOSES Organic Conference.

Infrastructure: The Farley Center farmland was already in agriculture, but very little infrastructure for vegetable production was in place -- there was just one small tractor, a tiller, and some very limited irrigation. Each season the farmers have contributed sweat equity, dramatically improving the facilities and equipment at the incubator. Farmers and incubator staff discuss infrastructure priorities at the end of each growing season and the farmers build or install the infrastructure improvements themselves. For the 2013 growing season, major infrastructure improvements included a boost in irrigation, installation of a second cooler and a second hoophouse, and the purchase of additional farm equipment to add to the project's capacity.

Markets: The Farley Center farmers sell at farmers markets, to grocery stores and restaurants, to schools, and through two collaborative, multi-farm CSAs. One CSA is managed by the Spring Rose Growers' Cooperative, and the other is managed

"The farmers are at the center of the infrastructure improvements. They make all the decisions and set priorities for what to do first, and put time and energy into the building projects."

-Janet Parker

Farm Incubator Facilitator

Spring Rose Growers' Cooperative:

One of the most unique aspects of the Farley Center Farm Incubator is its close partnership with the Spring Rose Growers' Cooperative. When the incubator was founded in 2010, the four farm businesses that were already farming on the land decided to form a cooperative. The Spring Rose Growers' Cooperative, with the support of a USDA Small Socially Disadvantaged Producer Grant, has since implemented extensive technical assistance programming aimed at producers like themselves.

Today the Cooperative has 8 farm members, some of whom are also Farley Center incubator farmers. The Farley Center shares offices with the Growers' Cooperative in Madison.

The partnership between the Farley Center Farm Incubator and the Growers' Cooperative extends to many aspects of the incubator's operations, including joint staff meetings, shared planning, training coordination, and collaborative decision-making.

For more information about the Spring Rose Growers' Cooperative, visit their website at http://springrosegrowerscoop.com.

by the farm incubator. The two CSAs have about 100 members combined. Because farmers market opportunities are fairly saturated in the greater Madison area, the Farley Center has also begun to create new markets to reach customers who may not always have access to existing farmers' markets. For example, incubator farmers and staff have started farm stands at a Madison WIC clinic and at a VA hospital.

Transition: The Farley Center Incubator does not have a formal process for transitioning farmers off the incubator site. Some participants have moved on to their own land, and the Farley Center has supported them through that transition. However, there is no limit to the amount of time a participant can farm on the incubator site. For new and beginning farmers who are interested in finding their own land, the Farley Center has established a successful land link program to connect new farmers with landowners in the Madison area. The Farley Center's transition programs may evolve in the future, and Farley Center staff and farmers are currently having conversations about how to make the land link program more useful.

Project Management

An application is required of all potential participants who are interested in farming at the Farley Center Farm Incubator. There is no fee to apply, and the Farley Center Incubator does not charge rent for its incubator plots. Incubator staff used to ask for a business plan along with a potential participant's application, but this is no longer required for first-year growers. Janet explains, "We don't require a business plan first anymore. We start from many of the farmers' strength and passion, which is production, and we help them out on the business and marketing side. Farmers know when they apply that they need to complete organic certification and a business plan by the end of their first season."

Communication: At the Farley Center, "interpretation is the piece that pulls it all together." A significant portion of the incubator's USDA BFRDP grant money was spent on interpretation services - providing professional quality interpreters, translating all of the incubator's important documents into multiple languages, and hiring staff with cross-cultural and bilingual capacity. One of the most innovative communication strategies at the Farley Center is the Spring Rose Growers' Cooperative YouTube channel. Farmers and staff have created a series of videos and radio spots in Hmong and Spanish, covering information about how to build a low-cost cooler, how to build a hoophouse, and more. In addition to interpretation, regular monthly meetings are critical to maintaining good communication at the incubator.

Definitions of Success: Like everything else at the Farley Center Farm Incubator, the project's definition of success is developed in partnership with the incubator farmers. Currently, the incubator does not have a formal definition of "success" for participants, but farmers are in ongoing conversations about what success means to them in the context of their participation in the incubator project. Some of the most common definitions mentioned in these conversations include:

- a feeling of great pride in being pillars of their community,
- dedication to growing socially appropriate food that is not always accessible,
- the pleasure of being their own boss and teaching others,
- defraying food costs for family and friends,
- bringing in income (in some cases equal to a minimum wage job), and
- using land in an environmentally sensitive way.

Successes and Challenges:The farmers' accomplishments are the big success of the first three years of operation of the incubator. There are thousands of Hmong farmers in Wisconsin, but Hmong growers at the Farley Center and in Spring Rose Growers Cooperative are the first in the state to certify organically and to market through CSA. The nine incubator farmers are making their farming dreams a reality and also contributing their time, brains and muscle to building the farm incubator. In just three years, the incubator has transformed from an idea and a few acres of farmland into an organic farming hub where immigrants and other beginning farmers share fields, hoophouses, coolers, tractors, and profitable marketing. Across language barriers, incubator farmers who emigrated from Asia, Latin America and Russia share farming tips, tools, camaraderie and business strategies with US-born beginning farmers.

The biggest limitation the Farley Center Farm Incubator is currently facing is a need for more land. A few private landowners have offered plots of land to the incubator, as has the county parks department, but water access is limited on some of them. The incubator will need to find more land soon, because there will likely be new farmers joining the incubator project in 2014.

Plans for the Future:

The future of the Farley Center Farm Incubator is, like most other things, a decision that will be made by the farmers. Janet explains, "I think we're at the place now where the farmers involved are going to be making more big decisions about the future of the programs. I suspect that there will be more farmers coming on next year and we would like to be able to continue providing access to land, equipment, and marketing support."

Additional Resources:

Spring Rose Grower's Cooperative YouTube Channel, http://www.youtube.com/user/SRGC2013

Farley Center Incubator Fact Sheet, 2013
http://nesfp.org/nifti/fcfactsheet

Farley Center Farm Incubator Application, 2014
http://nesfp.org/nifti/fcapplication

Farley Center Land Link Meet-Up Flyer
http://nesfp.org/nifti/fclandlink

This case study relies primarily on information gathered during a phone interview on July 15, 2013 with Janet Parker, Farm Incubator Facilitator of the Farley Center Farm Incubator. Additional information was compiled from a nation-wide survey of farm incubator projects conducted in May 2013 and from the Farley Center website.

Author: Meaghan Overton
NIFTI Program Associate
http://nesfp.org/nifti

Headwaters Farm Incubator Program

East Multnomah Soil and Water Conservation District

Gresham, OR

"...providing the resources necessary to help farmers overcome the institutional, cultural, and financial barriers which greatly inhibit the development of new farmers and farm businesses; and, in doing so, help keep good farmland in production while adding to the diversity of the local 'farmscape.'"

Basic Statistics:

Structure: Government agency (special purpose district)

Year Founded: 2013

Number of Farmers: 5

Number of Staff: 1 (FT)

Size: 30 acres

Plot size: Varies, but most farmers begin at about an acre

Rent: Starts at $150/acre/year and increases by 25% each year

Time limit: 4 years

Scope of operations: Open to all types of production that fit a 4-year business model, requires organic and conservation practices.

Website: http://www.emswcd.org/farm-incubator

Background:

Gresham, OR is the fourth-largest city in Oregon (pop. 105,594). The Headwaters Farm Incubator Program is located on a 60-acre property just outside of Gresham, and about 20 miles east of downtown Portland, OR. As part of the East Multnomah Soil and Water Conservation District (EMSWCD), the Headwaters Incubator Program (HIP) is one piece of a broader array of conservation programs including conservation practice cost-share initiatives, urban outreach and education, stream care, and environmental land conservation.

HIP was founded in 2013 as a response to the aging of the farmer population in Multnomah County, where the average age of farmers is 58 years old. Rowan Steele, Farm Incubator Manager, explains that EMSWCD established the Headwaters Incubator to "make sure there will be an abundant supply of local, skilled, knowledgeable farmers" to take over land as farmers retire. In addition, EMSWCD wants to use the Headwaters Incubator Farm as a demonstration site for conservation agriculture practices to show others how to use "modern agricultural technologies to improve production while concurrently protecting and enhancing the land resources on which production depends." Because the EMSWCD is a special purpose district of local government, HIP is completely funded through local property taxes and is governed by EMSWCD's publically elected board of directors.

Project Structure:

The Headwaters Incubator Program seeks beginning farmers with agricultural experience who already have many of the skills necessary to be a successful farmer, but lack the resources to get a farm business off the ground. There are 5 farm businesses currently growing on 6 acres at Headwaters Farm site, and Rowan expects to add 3-5 more farm businesses each year until the entire 30-acre site is in incubator production. At capacity, HIP will be able to host around 15 farm businesses at any given time. Incubator participants can rent land for 4 years, and the

cost of rent increases each year until it is comparable with market-rate rent. Participants also have access to equipment and infrastructure at reduced cost. There is no limit on incubator plot size, as long as the farmer has a feasible business plan to support their desire for a particular amount of land. To encourage conservation practices, HIP offers free water to any participant using drip irrigation instead of overhead irrigation systems.

Curriculum: There is no formal curriculum at the Headwaters Incubator Program, but offering educational opportunities to incubator participants is an important aspect of the incubator project's operations. To that end, workshops and other educational experiences are being developed in collaboration with the farmers who began growing on the incubator site in 2013. So far, HIP has hosted a nutrient management workshop that was taught by Oregon State University Extension Service and the Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS). The workshop was open to the public to allow other growers in the region to learn alongside incubator participants. Rowan also plans to work with NRCS and other outside partners to put together several other workshops, including sessions on record-keeping and farm finance, irrigation efficiency, and general conservation agriculture practices.

Infrastructure: Building infrastructure has been a major focus for HIP in its first season. Prior to its acquisition by the EMSWCD, the incubator site had been in nursery production for over four decades. Rowan says that the past history of the site has been "a blessing and a curse." Because the site had been in agriculture, there was a well, some basic irrigation mainline, and the land was relatively clear. However, the ball and burlap style of nursery production had depleted the topsoil throughout the site, and removing all of the trees has proven to be quite a challenge. Converting one large parcel of land to accommodate 15 farm businesses has required a great deal of site development. In 2013, HIP planted cover crops on the entire 30 acres of incubator land, built a propagation house, installed a walk-in cooler, and expanded the irrigation infrastructure to encourage the use of drip irrigation. Whenever possible, Rowan is trying to plan for the

"If I had it to do again, I would have spent a full year on site development before we brought anyone on. That wasn't possible in this situation, but it's really hard to simultaneously manage and develop a program and farm. Take as much time as you need before putting the program in motion."

-Rowan Steele
Farm Incubator Manager

Deciding How Much to Charge

When Rowan and EMSWCD were developing the policies and procedures for HIP, they found that rent prices varied widely among incubator projects. After researching rent policies at other incubators and consulting with local experts about agricultural rent prices in the region, HIP decided to implement a graduated rent strategy. The rent structure at the Headwaters Incubator Program in 2013 is described below:

Market rate for comparable land/infrastructure: $600/acre/year. Includes basic fertility, spring tillage, access to wash station, restroom, and an office with work space.

- *Year 1:* Participants pay 25% of market rate ($150/acre)
- *Year 2:* Participants pay 50% of market rate ($300/acre)
- *Year 3:* Participants pay 75% of market rate ($450/acre)
- *Year 4:* Participants pay 100% of market rate ($600/acre)

Rowan and EMSWCD hope that this rent structure will ease participants into the true cost of agricultural land, and will ultimately develop stronger farm businesses.

future development of the incubator while meeting the immediate needs of the farmers who are currently on the incubator site.

Markets: The Headwaters Incubator Program does not currently provide access to markets for participants; rather, incubator farmers are responsible for finding their own sales outlets for their farm products. The incubator farmers who began growing at Headwaters Farm in 2013 have been selling at farmers markets and restaurants, and one farmer has established a flower CSA. Participants are encouraged to use the novelty of the farm incubator model and the publicity surrounding the establishment of HIP as a marketing tool for their own farms. In the future, the HIP may consider starting a farmstand or some other type of cooperative market outlet for participants.

Transition: Planning for farmer transition off the incubator site will be an important focus of future planning efforts at HIP. The Headwaters Incubator plans to offer participants assistance with securing a loan and finding land after participants have completed their 4 years on the incubator site. Rowan would like to explore the feasibility of using local farmland conservation programs as a means of transitioning incubator graduates onto their own land. Another potential resource for transition assistance is ifarm, a local program with Friends of Family Farmers. ifarm connects retiring farmers with beginning farmers to help keep farmland in production. Rowan plans to further develop HIP's partnership with ifarm as the incubator's transition plans take shape.

Project Management:

The application process for the Headwaters Incubator Program is competitive. All potential incubator participants must submit an application, resume, and farm business plan. The incubator steering committee and EMSWCD staff then grade each applicant on their experience, market strategy, weed, pest and fertility management strategy, and overall likelihood of success. The applicants with the highest scores are then offered a spot on the incubator site. Farmers are required to follow specific organic and conservation agriculture practices that are outlined in HIP's Farmers' Manual. Rent is tied to the market rate for agricultural land in the greater Portland region, and varies depending on the participant's tenure on the incubator site (see sidebar for more details).

Communication: To help keep the lines of communication open on the incubator site, Rowan holds a formal meeting of all farm incubator participants once a month. The meetings are scheduled for 3 hours, but are typically 1-2 hours long. Rowan explains, "People have other things going on. It's really difficult

to get everyone in the same room at the same time." Because gathering everyone in one place is such a challenge, much of the communication between Rowan and the incubator participants is informal and unscheduled. Many participants have other jobs and work on the incubator site during the evening and weekend hours. Rowan tries to catch up with all of the participants whenever he can rather than relying on formal scheduled meetings. Among participants, communication is generally good. There is "immediate diffusion of techniques and knowledge" from farmer to farmer. This collegial, supportive relationship is integral to the success of participants' farm businesses.

Definitions of Success: A successful participant at the Headwaters Incubator Program should "not only be a viable independent economic entity, but also be a good steward of the land." The Headwaters Incubator aims to develop farm businesses that are sustainable both financially and environmentally.

Successes and Challenges: For Rowan, establishing a good program structure and putting the resources in place for future incubator expansion have been the major successes of HIP's first year. The incubator was able to use NIFTI resources to connect with ALBA, Intervale, and other long-standing incubator projects. Picking and choosing from other programs' resources and policies to find things that work for the Headwaters Incubator has been much more effective than trying to develop all of the incubator's policies and procedures from the ground up.

Dealing with site development challenges has been the biggest challenge for the Headwaters Incubator Program so far. The incubator site was transitioning between owners for almost a year before the incubator's first season. Because the site was not being actively managed, Canada thistle went to seed. Addressing this serious weed problem was even more complicated because HIP is wholeheartedly dedicated to organic and conservation agriculture practices. Unlike a conventional operation, the incubator farmers couldn't use chemicals to kill the weeds. Rowan's solution to the thistle problem was to host a "thistle weeding party" in July 2013. Farmers, volunteers, and incubator staff came together to turn this huge challenge into an opportunity to build a strong community around the new incubator project.

Plans for the Future: Even though it is only in its first season, HIP is looking to the future. Rowan explains, "Everything that's going in now is all done with a broader vision in mind - to fill out our roughly 30 acres of incubator farms." HIP will continue to focus on building soil fertility and expanding infrastructure to fully support 15 farm businesses over the next several years.

Additional Resources:

HIP Application, 2013
http://nesfp.org/nifti/hipapplication

HIP Business Plan Outline, 2013
http://nesfp.org/nifti/hipbusinessplan

HIP Farmers' Manual, 2013
http://nesfp.org/nifti/hipmanual

See the EMSWCD website for information about HIP costs, program expectations, and more.
http://www.emswcd.org/farm-incubator/incubator-program-info.

This case study relies primarily on information from a phone interview on July 10, 2013 with Rowan Steele, Farm Incubator Manager of the Headwaters Farm Incubator Program. Additional information was compiled from a nation-wide survey of farm incubator projects conducted in May 2013 and from the EMSWCD website.

Author: Meaghan Overton
NIFTI Program Associate
http://nesfp.org/nifti

Incubator Farms Project

Horn Farm Center for Agricultural Education

Hellam Township, York County, PA

"The Horn Farm Center brings people together to directly experience sustainable agriculture, promote the rich heritage of our lands, and to make known the fundamental importance of local agriculture to the health and well-being of our community, our economy, and our environment."

Basic Statistics:

Structure: Nonprofit

Year Founded: 2010

Number of Farmers: 4

Number of Staff: 2 (both part-time)

Size: 187 acres

Plot size: .125-2 acres

Rent: $150/acre, $75 administration fee

Time limit: 3-5 years

Scope of operations: fruit/vegetable production, organic practices

Website: http://www.hornfarmcenter.org/futurefarming.html

Background

The Horn Farm Center for Agricultural Education is located on 187 acres just outside of Hallam, PA (pop. 2673). The Horn Farm Center land has been farmed continuously for over 250 years, and the entire property was donated to York County, PA in 1981. According to David Dietz, Horn Farm Center Board Member, the Horn Farm Center was created as a community response to potential development of the farm property about 13 years ago. Most of the Horn Farm Center land is currently being leased to the Horn Farm Center and farmed conventionally by a local farm family. The Horn Farm Center Incubator Farms Project currently occupies 8.4 acres of the Horn Farm Center site, and this portion of the land is being farmed under organic practices.

Initially, the Horn Farm Center focused on community gardening, education, and outreach. As the Horn Farm Center grew over the next few years, the Board of Directors started to think more about how to support new farmers in addition to their community focused programming. In 2009 and 2010, David and other Modern Homestead Farm Committee members visited the Seed Farm and the Intervale Center to learn about the farm incubator model. Impressed by what they saw, the committee developed the Incubator Farms Project and recommended it to the Horn Farm Center Board.. As David puts it, the Horn Farm Center "jumped in feet first...with examples." The incubator project began in 2010 with the help of a core group of volunteers, generous donors who financed a pole barn for the site, a supportive county government (the Horn Farm Center pays $1 in rent each year), and some local grant money for farm equipment.

Project Structure

The Horn Farm Center is open to all beginning farmers, but tries to recruit farmers who are interested in farming in the York County area in particular. In its third growing season (2013), the Horn Farm Center Incubator Farms Project has four farmers on the incubator site with plans to recruit more participants for next

year. Financially, the Project is funded through rent and fees paid by the incubator farmers as well as through private grants and donations. Unlike many other farm incubator projects, the Horn Farm Center does not rely on federal grant programs like the Beginning Farmer and Rancher Development Project (BFRDP). In addition to farmers' fees and the strong support it enjoys from private donors, the Horn Farm Center Incubator Farms Project also works hard to engage volunteer labor and community participation in incubator events. The Horn Farm Center's Modern Homestead Farm Committee, Execitive Director and Farm Manager oversee the operations of the Incubaotr Farms Project.

Curriculum: There is no formal farmer training curriculum at the Horn Farm Center Incubator Farms Project. During the application and interview process, Project overseers try to determine whether potential incubator participants have the farming knowledge they will need to be successful at the Horn Farm Center. In the future, the Horn Farm Center would like to expand its capacity to help participants with the business aspects of farming. Modern Homestead Farm Committee members and Horn Farm Center staff are having ongoing discussions about how to offer more assistance with business planning, tax preparation, insurance, and financing.

Infrastructure: Though there was little infrastructure in place on the incubator site before the project started in 2010, the Horn Farm Center was extremely fortunate to have high-quality soil and a site that had already been in agriculture. David Dietz explains, "our biggest asset is the land." From that strong foundation, the Incubator Farms Project has gradually added important pieces of infrastructure each year. During its first season, the Project had a pole barn and some equipment, but not much else. Irrigation and a walk-in cooler were added to the incubator site in 2012, and the Horn Farm Center Incubator Farms Project finished an ambitious greenhouse construction project in May 2013.

Markets: Farmers at the Horn Farm Center Incubator Farms Project generally find their own markets, and the Modern

"In general, the small-scale farming community is tight-knit and supportive of each other. Our competition is the 99.6% of food that is imported into the county, not each other."

-Jon Darby

Horn Farm Center Farm Manager

Growing a Greenhouse, Building a Community

When Project overseers and board members considered building a greenhouse in the winter of 2012, the community pitched in to make the project a reality. Initial estimates for the construction of the greenhouse were approximately $14,000 - a huge investment that was not feasible for the Horn Farm Center to finance alone.

Project personnel began to look outside the organization for help. Two longtime Horn Farm Center supporters donated $5,000 in seed money to get the greenhouse started, and support for the greenhouse project continued to grow. United Natural Foods, Inc. (UNFI) soon donated an additional $1,000 toward the greenhouse construction.

To cover the remaining labor costs, the Horn Farm Center looked to its volunteers. Over four months (February - May 2013), countless volunteers donated 750 hours to the construction effort. Nedette Otterbein, Executive Director of the Horn Farm Center, says "That's the kind of community building we're talking about."

On May 25, 2013, volunteers, board members, farmers, and staff gathered to celebrate the grand opening of the 24x72 foot greenhouse. Since its opening, the greenhouse has played a critical role in expanding the capacity of the Horn Farm Center Incubator.

Homestead Farm Committee and the Center's staff provide tips when they hear about good market opportunities. All of the incubator farmers participate in the Horn Farm Center's on-site farm stand. Three of the four farmers growing on the incubator site in 2013 are also running their own CSA programs. The CSAs are of varying sizes - some are small (5-6 shares), and some are medium-sized (25-40 shares). Two of the farmers sell at farmers markets, and some are pursuing restaurant sales as well.

Transition: There is a 3-5 year limit on participation in the Horn Farm Center Incubator Farms Project. Because the Project began only three seasons ago, no one has transitioned off the incubator site yet. Jon Darby, Horn Farm Center Farm Manager, doesn't anticipate that any of the current incubator farmers will transition to their own land after the 2013 growing season. However, farmer transition is a frequent topic of discussion at Horn Farm Center meetings. In particular, board members want to help preserve farmland in the York County region. Horn Farm Center staff and board members will be "exploring [farmer transition] in earnest in the next year," and plan to work with outside organization like Pennsylvania Farm Link and the Pennsylvania Association of Sustainable Agriculture.

Project Management

An application is required of all potential participants who are interested in farming at the Horn Farm Center Incubator Farms Project. There is no fee to apply. Applicants must have at least two years of farming experience, and the application asks a series of open-ended questions about the potential participant's farm plans to help Project overseers determine whether an applicant is serious about farming. The Horn Farm Center Incubator Farms Project doesn't require a business plan at the time of application to the incubator project, but it is a later requirement of the Project. Jon Darby explains, "We meet with [the farmers] on a periodic basis and ask them to develop a business plan." In the future, Project overseers are considering implementing a more formal business planning process as part of a participant's first season or two on the incubator site.

Communication: The Modern Homestead Farm Committee, which meets monthly, has formal check-ins with each farmer twice a year - once at the mid-point of the season and once after the season has ended. The check-ins include a financial review and a discussion of the participants' business plan and goals. On the incubator site, farmers often help each other with ideas and labor. There are no formal grower's meetings, but there is a high level of cooperation among participants. The incubator project is a regular meeting item at Modern Homestead Farm Committee

monthly meetings, and several board members, as well as the Farm Manager, serve on this committee.

Definitions of Success: The Horn Farm Center Incubator Farms Project is still exploring and developing its definition of success. In many ways, success is defined by the incubator participants themselves through the business planning process. Nedette Otterbein, Executive Director, explains, "When we ask our farmers to put together their business plans, they have to define goals. Are they achieving those goals? If they are, that's a success." In addition to achievement of business goals, Project overseers also use the semi-annual financial review to gauge participant progress. If a farmer's financial status is improving from year to year, that is considered a success. A participant's transition to independent farm operation is the last piece of the Horn Farm Center's definition of success. Because the incubator's main goals are to grow new independent farm businesses and preserve farmland, transitioning farmers off the incubator site will be critical.

Successes and Challenges: For the Project's overseers and board members at the Horn Farm Center, the incubator project's successes and challenges are two sides of the same coin. Over its first three years in operation, the incubator project has grown incredibly quickly. The Horn Farm Center has cultivated a dedicated community of volunteers, built a reliable and supportive group of donors, and added significant infrastructure to the site. These are all tremendous successes, but keeping up with everything is often a difficult task. The Project has the services of only 2 part-time (20 hours/week) staff and a volunteer board. Nedette emphasizes that "learning how to clarify roles so Jon [the Horn Farm Center's Farm Manager] doesn't burn out" was something the organization had to learn along the way. A more global challenge facing the Horn Farm Center is the need for extensive community education about the importance of small-scale organic agriculture.

Plans for the Future

Ideally, the Horn Farm Center would like to continue to expand the Incubator Farms Project. The Project has an excellent relationship with the farmer who is renting the rest of the Horn Farm Center land, so there is a great deal of room to expand and think creatively about how to farm more of the land sustainably, in keeping with the Horn Farm Center's mission. In the short term, the Project plans to extend the irrigation infrastructure on the site, work on developing partnerships with nearby sustainable agriculture organizations, and begin planning for farmer transition off the incubator site. One day, perhaps all 187 acres will be part of the incubator project!

Additional Resources:

Project Overview, 2013
http://nesfp.org/nifti/hfcoverview

Project Application, 2013
http://nesfp.org/nifti/hfcapplication

Project Application Information, 2013
http://nesfp.org/nifti/hfcapplicationinfo

Farm Manager Profile, 2013
http://nesfp.org/nifti/hfcfarmmanagerprofile

Horn Farm Center Event Flyer, Spring 2013
http://nesfp.org/nifti/hfceventflyer

This case study relies primarily on information gathered during a phone interview on July 9, 2013 with Jon Darby, Farm Manager; David Dietz, Board Member; and Nedette Otterbein, Executive Director at the Horn Farm Center. Additional information was compiled from a nation-wide survey of farm incubator projects conducted in May 2013 and from the Horn Farm Center website.

Author: Meaghan Overton
NIFTI Program Associate
http://nesfp.org/nifti

Farms Program

The Intervale Center

Burlington, VT

"By stewarding 350 acres of the Intervale, implementing programs and enterprises and sharing our place and work with people from around the world, we are building a stronger community food system where farm businesses flourish, land and water resources are clean and communities are vibrant and healthy."

Basic Statistics:

Structure: Nonprofit

Year Founded: 1988

Number of Farmers: 2 incubators, 11 mentors

Number of Staff: 1, 15 for the entire Intervale Center

Size: 170 acres, 350 acres for the entire Intervale Center

Plot size: .4-27 acres

Rent: $156/acre/year, plus $588 land management fee per year (land management fee increases by 20% in years 4 and 5)

Time limit: 5 years

Scope of operations: open to all types of production, requires organic practices

Website: http://www.intervale.org/what-we-do/farms-program/

Background

The Intervale Center is located on 350 acres of rich, fertile soil within the city limits of Burlington, VT (pop. 42,417). Will Raap, founder of Gardener's Supply Company, founded the Intervale Center in 1986 in conjunction with an Intervale cleanup and restoration effort. Since its founding 25 years ago, the Intervale Center has grown into a nationally recognized center for sustainable agriculture with many interrelated community food system programs. The Intervale is currently home to a conservation nursery, a food hub, a gleaning and food rescue program, a farm incubator program, and more. Intervale land is also open to the public for recreational use 365 days a year.

The Farms Program, Intervale's farm incubator, is the oldest farm incubator project in North America. The Farms Program began in 1989 when three small gardens merged together to become the Intervale's first incubator farm. The incubator added two additional incubator farms in 1990, and has continued to grow and develop into one of the nations most well-respected farm incubator programs. Land conservation was the initial goal of the Farms Program, and the project's mission has evolved over time to focus more explicitly on helping farmers develop the business skills they need to build new farm enterprises. About five years ago, the Farms Program separated the existing Intervale farms into two categories: mentor farms and incubator farms. Mentor farms have no limit on their land tenure, but they must work with incubator farmers and take on more responsibility. Incubator farms, on the other hand, are limited to 5 years at the Intervale.

Project Structure

The Farms Program is open to beginning farmers who have 1-3 years of on-farm experience (preferably in a management capacity) and who are ready to write a business plan for their proposed farm enterprise. Maggie Donin, Beginning Farmer Specialist, explains that it is not unusual for the Intervale Center to reject a potential farmer's application: "We tell lots of

applicants to go get more experience and apply again in a year or two. We want people who are ready to take the next step to start their businesses." There are 13 farm businesses leasing land at the Intervale in 2013, and 2 of those farm businesses are enrolled in the Farms Program.

Curriculum: At the Intervale Center, farmers are expected to take the initiative to address their educational needs. Each incubator farmer is paired with a mentor farmer, and the cooperation between farmers is critical to the success of incubator farm businesses. The Farms Program is not based on a formal curriculum and is not a training program. However, farmers who need technical assistance can often access other Intervale Center resources. For example, farmers with 3 years of operation and at least $15,000 in revenue can participate in the Farm Viability Program, which provides in-depth business planning services. The Farms Program also has very strong relationships with outside partners and can refer farmers to appropriate resources.

Infrastructure: The Farms Program operates on "some of the richest and most fertile soil in the Northeast." Farmers are required to follow organic practices to maintain high levels of soil quality, and the Intervale Center has developed a master land use plan to support the continued health of the soil. Because the Farms Program has been in operation for more than two decades, incubator farmers have access to extensive equipment and infrastructure. However, the Intervale Center is unique in that it does not own all of the infrastructure on the incubator site. The Intervale sold all of the farm equipment and two greenhouses to the farmers, who formed a Limited Liability Corporation (LLC) called the Farmers' Equipment Cooperative. The farmers self-manage all of the infrastructure, and the Intervale Center has a 40% ownership stake in the business.

Markets: As with most other parts of the Farms Program's operations, accessing markets is the responsibility of each individual farmer. The Intervale Center encourages farmers to use the Intervale name and story as part of their marketing and branding strategies. The Intervale Food Hub also purchases

"We've learned a lot of lessons over the years that have really helped us. It's important that we have a consistent message across the organization. We also keep really good records to help us compete for grants. And we collect farmer reports at the end of every season and use that data to help support our work."

-Maggie Donin

Beginning Farmer Specialist

Advice for New Incubator Projects

When a new incubator project is gearing up for its first season, planning for the distant future can seem like the least important thing on a very long to-do list. But Maggie believes that long-term planning should be an integral part of any incubator project's first few years. She shared a few pieces of advice for new incubators:

Create a plan for managing visitors to your site. "When we started out, there was no program around what visitors mean. Staff were spending lots of time with groups and that wasn't really budgeted." The Intervale Center now charges fees for its services and offers free public tours once a month during the summer.

Develop a master land use plan from the beginning. As your incubator project grows, traffic to the site will likely increase. Maggie encourages new incubator projects to "think big about the potential for growth in the beginning."

Find the appropriate level of farmer support. Only a portion of Maggie's time is dedicated to the Farms Program, and she is the only staff member. The operating budget for the incubator is minimal. For the Intervale Center, this level of support is comfortable and sustainable long-term. Each incubator project is different, but finding a sustainable level of farmer support is important.

agricultural products from some of the incubator farms, but incubator farmers must approach this market outlet like any other farmer who wishes to sell products to the Food Hub. In the future, Maggie sees a possible opportunity for the Farms Program to work on developing its market research capabilities. She would like to help farmers learn how to determine what products are in demand and how to incorporate formal market research into their business plans.

Transition: Conversations about transitioning off the Intervale Center land start at the very beginning of a farmer's participation in the Farms Program. Maggie and other Intervale staff work with incubator farmers to help them draft a list of land criteria, and encourage incubator participants to think ahead as they move through their 5 years on the incubator site. The Intervale Center facilitates connections between incubator farmers and outside resources like the Vermont Land Trust and financial institutions. Farmers are encouraged to take out a small loan to help them establish relationships with lenders and build a good credit score. Once an incubator participant has identified a piece of land for their transition, they can take advantage of the Farm Viability Program if they meet the criteria for participation.

Project Management

The application process for the Farms Program takes 5-6 months to complete and consists of an incubator staff review, and a farmer review. If an applicant has enough farming experience to be successful and shares the Intervale's dedication to building a strong community food system, the applicant is then asked to submit a business plan. Once the business plan is complete, the applicant presents their business plan to the entire Intervale farming community. The farming community provides feedback, and incubator participants are chosen through a community decision-making process. Incubator farmers can rent land at the Intervale Center for up to 5 years.

Communication: Between Farms Program project staff and participants, communication is usually on an as-needed basis. However, each incubator farmer is required to participate in a formal end-of-year evaluation with incubator staff. Maggie notes, "farmers who tend to be successful do cultivate a closer relationship with the Intervale Center." The most frequent communication on the Farms Program incubator site is among participants. Farmers (both mentors and incubators) have close relationships and support one another on a daily basis. Building this farm community is central to the Intervale Center's mission, and helps combat the isolation many beginning farmers experience.

Definitions of Success: Success can mean several different things for participants in the Farms Program. Overall, Maggie considers the Farms Program a success if it is achieving its goals of giving farmers the ability to access land and the chance to form close relationships with others. For individual incubator farms, "success" could be defined in any of the following ways:

- An incubator farm that continued farming at the Intervale Center as a mentor after participating in the Farms Program;
- A Farms Program participant who farmed on the incubator site and successfully transitioned onto their own land; or
- Someone who came to the Intervale Center to try out their business, and who decided that farming isn't for them.

Successes and Challenges: The long history of the Farms Program is full of many success stories. Over the last 25 years, the Intervale Center has developed the Farms Program into a nationally recognized model for new farmer development. Maggie regularly consults with other incubator projects around the country, sharing resources and helping new projects get off the ground. On a small budget and with only one staff member, the Farms Program has contributed to the success of over 40 farms since 1989. Combined with other Intervale Center programs, the Farms Program continues to make measurable progress toward building a sustainable community food system in Burlington.

The Farms Program has also dealt with its share of challenges over the last quarter-century. Finding a good balance between providing guidance to beginning farmers and supporting their independence is one of the continual challenges incubator staff face. Because the Farms Program operates with a small staff and budget, enforcing land use protocols, organic standards, and livestock policies is difficult. Incubator staff rely on farmers to enforce policies among themselves as a community.

Plans for the Future: The Intervale Center is asking big questions as it looks to the future. Maggie and the Executive Director of the Intervale Center are currently analyzing the effectiveness of the incubator model in general, and the Farms Program in particular. They hope to use some of the data they've collected throughout the Farms Program's history to determine whether forcing farmers to leave the incubator site is the best model for the Intervale's goals and mission. Maggie mentions that the Intervale Center often gets offers for land, and the Intervale is thinking seriously about whether they should manage a new property, perhaps using a different farmer development model. The Intervale Center is also working on plans for adapting to climate change. These plans are in the beginning stages, but could include taking some fields out of production or changing land use policies to protect the sustainability and health of the Intervale.

Additional Resources:

Farms Program Application Packet, 2013
http://nesfp.org/nifti/intervaleapplication2013

Intervale Lease Template
http://nesfp.org/nifti/intervaleleasetemplate

Farms Program Farm Report, 2013
http://nesfp.org/nifti/intervalefarmreport

Farmer Equipment Cooperative, LLC Policies and Procedures, 2013
http://nesfp.org/nifti/intervaleFECpolicies2013

This case study relies primarily on information gathered during a phone interview on July 11, 2013 with Maggie Donin, Beginning Farmer Specialist at the Intervale Center. Additional information was compiled from a nation-wide survey of farm incubator projects conducted in May 2013 and from the Intervale Center website.

Author: Meaghan Overton
NIFTI Program Associate
http://nesfp.org/nifti

Big River Farms Program

Minnesota Food Association

Marine on St. Croix, MN

"Our mission is to build a more sustainable food system. We seek to impact local food production, grow more sustainable food producers, and enhance their connections to markets and resources."

Basic Statistics:

Structure: Nonprofit

Year Founded: 2007

Number of Farmers: 23

Number of Staff: 5 (3 full-time, 2 part-time)

Size: 45 acres

Plot size: .25-3 acres

Rent: $350/acre/year ($87.50 for ¼ acre for first-year participants)

Time frame: 3 years

Scope of operations: vegetable production, certified organic

Website: http://www.mnfoodassociation.org

Background

The Minnesota Food Association (MFA) and its farm incubator, Big River Farms, are located in Marine on St. Croix, MN (pop. 689). Marine on St. Croix is outside of the Twin Cities area, about 30 miles northeast of downtown St. Paul, MN. MFA has worked to develop a more sustainable local food system in Minnesota since 1983. Initially born out of a desire to preserve the St. Paul farmers' market, MFA has evolved over the last two decades to focus specifically on land-based training for immigrant farmers.

The story of MFA and Big River Farms is one of continuous reinvention. MFA's first 15 years of operation were focused on citizen advocacy and growing the local food movement in St. Paul and across Minnesota. In 1998, MFA began its first farmer training program. The New Immigrant Agriculture Project was a nonprofit extension program that provided technical assistance to the area's immigrant farmers. MFA shifted away from the extension model in 2005, when it began leasing land to provide hands-on training. Big River Farms was founded in 2007. By 2008, MFA and Big River Farms were completing organic certification, operating a 380 member CSA, managing 13 wholesale accounts (including national chains like Chipootle and Supervalu), and training immigrant farmers. Eventually, however, Big River Farms reached a point where the farm manager could not manage the farm and run the incubator program at the same time.

MFA had to make a decision – would Big River Farms be focused on production for market or on farmer training? In recent years, Big River Farms has scaled back its production significantly to spend more time and energy on developing the skills of its farmers-in-training. Glen Hill, Executive Director at MFA, explains: "What we want is to be a training farm. We want to help our farmers understand on a smaller scale what it takes to grow quality certified organic produce, to follow procedures for harvest, packaging, and shipping, to understand invoices, and to create budgets."

Project Structure

In the 2013 growing season, Big River Farms had 120 CSA members, 5 wholesale accounts, and 23 farmers on the incubator site. While the Big River Farms program is open to any beginning farmer, MFA structures its programs to meet the specific needs of the area's immigrant farmers. The Big River Farms program serves Southeast Asian, African, Latino and other immigrants from the greater Twin Cities area. Initially MFA allowed farmers to rent up to 5 acres from the beginning of the program, but Glen quickly found that "fields went to weeds and weeds went to seed." Now, Big River Farms staff work with farmers to determine how much land they will rent based on how much labor they will have on the farm and how often they will be on the incubator site each week. First year farmers can rent .25 acres in their first season. In their second season, farmers may expand their operations to as many as 3 acres after consultation with Big River Farms staff. All incubator farmers must agree to complete organic certification for their plots. Incubator staff provide training and assistance throughout the organic certification process, and the cost of certification is covered in the land rental fee.

Curriculum: The Big River Farms program is a 3-year farm business incubator program that utilizes a mix of required classroom training, in-field consultation, and optional field trips. Each "farm" pays a $250 annual training fee to cover the cost of workshops and field trips. First year farmers are required to participate in a winter classroom series of 8-12 workshops covering organic farming, business planning, and marketing. Second year farmers are required to participate in 6 of the 8 business planning workshops offered by Big River Farms. After their second year at Big River Farms, farmers are not required to complete any classroom training. However, all farmers are required to participate in several short in-field skill sessions, and all are also encouraged to attend 3-4 field trips to nearby farms.

Infrastructure: The incubator site for Big River Farms was a former corn and soybean farm. Though the land was already in agriculture, MFA staff has had to spend significant time and

"Farmers' markets are good, but really you're never going to get anywhere. It's a huge amount of work and you just keep going because you want to do it. You're never going to make a sustainable farming operation just selling at farmers' markets – you need to get into other markets as well."

-Glen Hill

Executive Director, Minnesota Food Association

GAP Certification

In 2007, farmers in the Big River Farms program were looking for access to markets that might be more lucrative than the farmers' markets in the area. Accessing wholesale markets was difficult – many farmers couldn't meet the standards required by wholesale buyers for food safety and food handling infrastructure. Incubator staff decided that the program needed to become GAP certified to help immigrant farmers become competitive in wholesale markets.

The Big River Farms program was GAP certified for three years (2007-2009) and sold to major buyers including Chipotle and Supervalu. However, the GAP audit became increasingly intrusive and expensive as the program added more farmers. Training began to suffer as staff focused more on producing for the wholesale market.

Big River Farms stopped GAP certification in 2009, in part because the process was so stressful. Ultimately, GAP certification was not worth the cost – both in monetary terms and in farmer and staff morale. Incubator staff decided instead to train and enforce food safety protocols on their own. Staff approach training this way: "The intention is to get [the produce] to the buyer in the same beautiful condition it is in your field, and we're going to teach you how to do that."

energy rebuilding soil fertility and managing weeds throughout the site. In 2013, Big River Farms consisted of a 60-100 acre site, of which 40 acres was tilled. Fifteen acres were in vegetable production, and the other 25 acres were in cover crop. Each "farm" at Big River Farms pays a $200 annual infrastructure fee that covers use of the walk-in cooler, access to irrigation mainline, use of the washing station and packing area, storage space in the barn, use of MFA's tools, and access to offce equipment.

Markets: Helping farmers understand how to develop and maintain market relationships is a critical part of the mission of Big River Farms. Rather than focusing on farmers' markets, Glen explains that the Big River Farms Program is most interested in connecting immigrant farmers to more lucrative wholesale markets [see sidebar]. Big River Farms acts as a broker. The incubator buys produce from the farmers, aggregates it, and sells it to distributors. Big River Farms takes a portion of the sale, but as Glen describes, "we've decided that until we reach a certain scale, the 'cut' we take doesn't cover the cost" of running the program.

Transition: The time frame for participation in the Big River Farms program is 3 years. In practice, however, many farmers leave the program before they have "completed" the curriculum. "Some farmers come in with a clear idea of what they want to learn, and then they leave, regardless of the curriculum or the length of the program," says Glen. Fortunately, Big River Farms gets regular calls from property owners who want someone to farm their land. The combination of available farmland and Big River Farms' emphasis on developing market relationships means that farmers who leave the program have a good chance at establishing a successful farm business. In the future, Big River Farms wants to work on helping farmers establish relationships with landowners.

Project Management

Potential participants in the Big River Farms program are asked to fill out a general application with contact information, descriptions of their farming goals, and an overview of their farming experience. After a potential farmer has completed the application, incubator staff schedule a sit-down interview with the applicant. Glen explains, "The interview is to help them assess whether they have the time, effort, and money to invest in farming." Most applicants to the Big River Farms program are accepted into the program. Overall, incubator staff are looking for applicants who are interested in producing for market, committed to learning organic farming practices, and dedicated to running a farm business. A formal business plan is not a requirement of the program, but the majority of Big River Farms' curriculum

emphasizes the realities of owning a farm business in the U.S.

Communication: Most of the participants in the Big River Farms program have off-farm jobs. As a result, regular, scheduled communication can be difficult. Most communication is one-on-one between farmers and incubator staff. The Training Coordinator schedules regular field visits with each farmer to answer questions, give advice, and check on farmer progress. Workshops and in-field skill sessions provide a venue for communicating with farmers as a group. Additionally, each farmer is invited to attend the Annual Immigrant and Minority Farmers Conference. This provides a unique opportunity for farmers to meet and network with one another.

Definitions of Success: MFA and the Big River Farms program want to help participants become independent farmers on their own land. However, MFA staff realize that running a small farm is incredibly difficult. At Big River Farms, success is not only measured by the number of independent farmers who "graduate" from the program, but also by how well participants understand the realities and challenges of running a small farm business. A successful farmer at Big River Farms is able to navigate the complexities of wholesale markets, understands organic certification requirements, and has a solid farm business plan.

Successes and Challenges: The Big River Farms program's ability to reinvent itself over time is one of the major successes of the program. In its evolution from a nonprofit extension program to a full-fledged farm incubator training program, Big River Farms has continued to think about how it can best serve the immigrant farmers in the Twin Cities area. Glen describes the organization's evolution this way: "No one I have seen yet has a corner on how you work with immigrant communities in developing sustainable farming and certified organic vegetable operations. We used to think that we did, but we don't. It's challenging, and exciting." One of the biggest challenges at the Big River Farms program is resistance from participants who are not interested in the record-keeping and training required to achieve organic certification. Educating producers and getting their buy-in is an ongoing struggle for incubator staff.

Plans for the Future: The Big River Farms program would like to continue developing markets for its farmers in the future. The incubator program recently received a grant for market development, but 40% of the budget for the grant was later eliminated. While the program looks for more funding, incubator staff have tried to work on market development in addition to their other responsibilities. MFA would like to hire a marketing coordinator to help find markets, build a market portfolio for each farmer, and help participants put together business plans.

Additional Resources:

Schermann, Michele. Food Safety Plan For You, 2008. University of Minnesota. http://datcp.wi.gov/OnFarmFoodSafety/uploads/pdf/FSP4U.pdf

Training Classes 2013 http://nesfp.org/nifti/mnfoodclasses2013

Big River Farms Training Program: Program Fees http://nesfp.org/nifti/mnfoodfees

Video overview of Big River Farms Program http://www.mnfoodassociation.org/video-mfas-farmer-training-program

This case study relies primarily on information gathered during a phone interview on July 26, 2013 with Glen Hill, Executive Director at the MN Food Association. Additional information was compiled from a nation-wide survey of farm incubator projects conducted in May 2013 and from the MN Food Association website.

Author: Meaghan Overton
NIFTI Program Associate
http://nesfp.org/nifti

Growing Farmers Training Program

Community CROPS (Combining Resources, Opportunities, and People for Sustainability)

Lincoln, NE

"Community CROPS helps people work together to grow healthy food and live sustainably."

Basic Statistics:

Structure: Nonprofit

Year Founded: 2007

Number of Farmers: 8

Number of Staff: 2 (both full-time)

Size: 5 acres (currently undergoing expansion)

Plot size: .125 for first year, opportunity to expand to .25-.5 acres

Rent: $200 first year, cost increases in years 2-3

Time limit: 3 years

Scope of operations: fruit/vegetable production, organic practices required

Website: http://www.communitycrops.org

Background

The Growing Farmers Training Program is a program of Community CROPS (Combining Resource, Opportunities, and People for Sustainability). The Growing Farmers incubator site is located at Prairie Pines, a 145-acre tract of land 8.5 miles northeast of downtown Lincoln, NE (pop. 262,341). Prairie Pines was gifted to the University of Nebraska after owners Walt and Virginia Bagley placed a conservation easement on the entire 145-acre property. The property is managed by the University of Nebraska School of Natural Resources, and is intended to be a place for agricultural and environmental education. Growing Famers occupied 5 acres of land at Prairie Pines in 2013.

Prairie Pines was a new location for the Growing Farmers Training Program in 2013. Community CROPS started Growing Farmers in 2007 and quickly realized that the program would need more space than its 5-acre training facility at Sunset Community Farm could provide. Kirstin Bailey, Program Manager of the Growing Farmers Training Program, says, "We had been on the lookout for a larger training facility for awhile. This land became available as a gift [to the University of Nebraska] and the timing was right."

Community CROPS ran a successful Kickstarter campaign to help them transition completely to the new 5-acre site at Prairie Pines before the beginning of the 2013 growing season (see sidebar). Former graduates of the incubator program continue to farm at Sunset Community Farm, and some may rent from the landowner at Sunset Community Farm in the future. Community CROPS plans to expand the incubator over the next five years, and also plans to work closely with the University of Nebraska to add research, training, and other elements to the Community CROPS incubator project.

Project Structure

Growing Farmers initially worked with refugee and immigrant populations in the greater Lincoln, NE area. Over time, however, the program has broadened its mission to include all beginning

farmers. The Growing Farmers Training Program is comprised of two different programs: a winter workshop training series and a 3-year incubator program at Prairie Pines. Growers who want to farm on the incubator site at Prairie Pines must first complete the winter workshop series. In the 2013 growing season, Community CROPS hosted 8 growers on the incubator site. First year participants can rent .125 acres, with the opportunity to expand to .25 or .5 acres in their second or third years. All of the farm products grown at the Prairie Pines incubator site are Certified Naturally Grown, meaning that no synthetic chemicals are used on the incubator site. Community CROPS also coordinates a 170 member multi-farm CSA that distributes produce from Growing Farmers graduates, incubator participants, and staff. Growing Farmers employs two full-time staff and also hosts AmeriCorps volunteers each season.

Curriculum: Completing the Growing Farmers winter workshop curriculum is the first step for farmers who are interested in growing at the Prairie Pines incubator site. The workshop series runs from January to April, and classes are scheduled on Saturdays from 9am to 4pm. Each workshop series usually has about 25 farmer participants. The cost for the entire series of workshops is $350, and there are scholarships available for participants who need help affording the registration fee. The topics covered in the workshops begin with a basic "explore farming" class, and then progress to discussions about production planning, business planning, financing, marketing, risk management, field management, and good agricultural practices (GAPs). The Growing Farmers workshop series also offers participants the opportunity to get feedback from local producers about their business plans and organizes farm tours during March and April each year. Whenever possible, Growing Farmers brings in established producers to help participants establish connections with the local farming community.

Infrastructure: The Prairie Pines incubator site was a 5-acre hayfield before Growing Farmers moved from its previous site at Sunset Community Farm. Growing Farmers staff spent most of 2012 preparing the Prairie Pines site before incubator participants

"We're in the business of starting businesses."

– Kirstin Bailey

Growing Farmers Training Program Manager

Crowdfunding

Like many farm incubator projects, Community CROPS is constantly seeking new sources of funding. When the incuator decided to relocate to Prairie Pines in 2012, the organization needed to raise money quickly to fund infrastructure improvements. Community CROPS turned to crowdfunding – a fundraising method that relies on small donations from many investors.

Community CROPS estimated that the infrastructure costs associated with relocating the Growing Farmers program would be about $28,000. After an anonymous donor contributed $10,000, Community CROPS ran a successful Kickstarter campaign in October 2012, raising an additional $12,295 from 152 backers.

Sharing the incubator's story and explaining where donors' money would go was critical to the success of Community CROPS' Kickstarter campaign. Staff updated supporters regularly, focusing on Growing Farmers' previous success. The project description put it this way: "You aren't funding a pipe dream – you're investing in a project with a proven track record and very clear and tangible goals."

The Kickstarter project page is available at: http://www.kickstarter.com/projects/communitycrops/build-a-better-training-farm.

began farming on the site for the 2013 growing season. With funding from a private donor and a successful Kickstarter campaign (see sidebar), Growing Famers staff added a well pump, irrigation infrastructure, electricity, tool sheds, wash stations, and cold frames to the incubator site. In the future, Kirstin plans to expand the incubator site onto other land at Prairie Pines. She explains, "we need to evaluate how many plots we have available…we're interested in expanding if we have the staff." Kirstin is also considering adding a second stage to the Growing Farmers program where participants who have graduated can continue to rent land near the incubator site.

Markets: The Growing Farmers multi-farm CSA program is the primary sales outlet for incubator participants. The Growing Farmers CSA had 170 members in 2013. CSA members have the option to purchase a work share, which benefits beginning farmers by providing extra labor during harvest periods. Community CROPS staff grow about 25% of the produce in the CSA shares, and the rest of the produce comes from beginning farmers on the Prairie Pines incubator site, Growing Farmers graduates, and former Community CROPS staff. All Growing Farmers incubator participants must attend at least one CSA pickup to understand "what it's going to take" to run their own CSA program.

Transition: Growing Farmers participants can farm on the Prairie Pines incubator site for 3 years. Transitioning off the incubator site is a step-by-step process and an ongoing conversation that starts soon after participants begin the winter workshop series. During the winter workshop series, Growing Farmers staff emphasize the realities of farming and try to help participants develop a solid business plan. During years two and three, incubator participants are encouraged to register with the land Center for Rural Affairs' land link program. Growing Farmers staff work with participants during their last year on the incubator site to help them secure financing through the Farm Services Agency or other lenders.

Project Management

All beginning farmers who want to participate in the Growing Farmers incubator program must first complete the winter workshop series. There is a short application for the winter workshop series, which costs $350. If potential participants have attended at least 7 of the 9 workshops, they are then eligible to complete an application to farm at the Prairie Pines incubator site. They must also meet with Growing Farmers staff to ensure that they are a good fit for the Growing Farmers incubator program. Fees for the incubator program increase each year to help participants gain an understanding of the costs associated

with running an independent farm business. See the "Additional Resources" section for the Growing Farmers 2013 fee schedule.

Communication: Many participants in the Growing Farmers program have off-farm jobs and family obligations. To stay in regular contact with participants, Growing Farmers staff communicate with participants primarily through email. In addition, farmers participate in Monday "walk-and-talks" with Kirstin, the Growing Farmers AmeriCorps volunteer, and Tyler, the incubator site manager. Tyler is most participants' daily point of contact. He is on the incubator site 30+ hours per week and sees most participants at least once a week.

Definitions of Success: While participants are farming on the incubator site, Kirstin says that success is "having two different avenues to sell their products, feeling pride in what they're growing, and getting their names out there." Access to the multi-farm CSA program is important, but Growing Farmers staff want participants to understand that they need to have more than one market outlet to run a successful farm enterprise. Kirstin also says that she wants beginning farmers to "taste success" while they are in the Growing Farmers program. After farmers leave the incubator, Kirstin defines success as participants finding their own land and continuing their farm businesses.

Successes and Challenges: The Growing Farmers Training Program's transition to Prairie Pines has been a major success for the incubator project. The decision to relocate was not easy, but the benefits of the Prairie Pines location will help Growing Farmers expand its capacity to serve beginning farmers in Lincoln and the surrounding area for years to come. One of the challenges Growing Farmers has faced over the last several years is staff turnover. Kirstin is the third Program Manager in the incubator's seven-year history. She explains, "Our staff keep leaving to start farms!" Most of the former Growing Farmers staff are still involved in the CSA program and in the larger Community CROPS network. However, it has been difficult at times to manage the growth of the Growing Farmers program with so much turnover in program staff.

Plans for the Future: Growing Farmers' move to Prairie Pines was just the first step in a long-term plan to triple the size of the incubator site over the next five years. Kirstin has other plans for the future as well. She would like to create more opportunities for incubator graduates to rent or buy land. She explains, "Community CROPS is the only program like it in the area. We get 2-3 calls a year with options for land, and we'd love to connect graduates to some of that land." Kirstin also plans to further develop Growing Farmers' partnership with the University of Nebraska.

Additional Resources:

Farm Application 2014
http://nesfp.org/nifti/communityCROPSapp2014

Program Fees 2014
http://nesfp.org/nifti/communityCROPSfees2014

Winter Workshop Application 2013
http://nesfp.org/nifti/communityCROPSwinterapp2013

Winter Workshop Schedule 2013
http://nesfp.org/nifti/communityCROPSwintersched2013

Timeline and Expectations
http://nesfp.org/nifti/communityCROPStimeline

This case study relies primarily on information gathered during a phone interview on July 9, 2013 with Kirstin Bailey, Program Manager of the Community CROPS Growing Farmers Training Program. Additional information was compiled from a nation-wide survey of farm incubator projects conducted in May 2013 and from the Community CROPS website.

Author: Meaghan Overton
NIFTI Program Associate
http://nesfp.org/nifti

Juniper Gardens Training Farm

Cultivate Kansas City

Kansas City, KS

"Cultivate Kansas City, Kansas City's Center for Urban Agriculture, is a catalyst for the production and consumption of locally grown food in Kansas City neighborhoods."

Basic Statistics:

Structure: Nonprofit

Year Founded: 2008

Number of Farmers: 17

Number of Staff: 4 (2 full-time, 1 part-time, 1 seasonal)

Size: 8 acres

Plot size: .25 acres

Rent: none

Time limit: 5 years

Scope of operations: vegetable production, organic practices required

Website: http://www.cultivatekc.org/farms/juniper-gardens.html

Background

The Juniper Gardens Training Farm is located in an urban neighborhood in southwest Kansas City, KS (pop. 146,453), about 8 miles from downtown. Juniper Gardens is home to Cultivate Kansas City's Farm Business Development Program and a large community garden. The incubator site occupies 8 acres of previously vacant land owned by the Kansas City, KS Housing Authority.

Juniper Gardens is a program of Cultivate Kansas City, a nonprofit organization that aims to "build a healthier, more economically and environmentally sustainable community" through urban agriculture and community building. Cultivate Kansas City was founded in 2005, and the organization began the Juniper Gardens incubator program in 2008. Cultivate Kansas City has continued to expand its programs and capacity, and began working with policymakers in 2010 to pass new codes that better support urban food production and enhance food access.

The farm incubator at Juniper Gardens grew out of a collaboration between Cultivate KC and the Refugee Women Program of Catholic Charities of NE Kansas to assist the program's community gardeners in selling their excess produce at a local farmers market. The two organizations then jointly developed the farm business incubator program, with the farm itself called the Juniper Gardens Training Farm and the refugee component of the Farm's work branded as New Roots for Refugees. Since the incubator was founded in 2008, the two organizations have developed particular areas of responsibility for program management and development. Broadly speaking, Catholic Charities provides marketing support and translation services to participants at the Juniper Gardens incubator. Many incubator participants are referred to Juniper Gardens through Catholic Charities as well. Cultivate Kansas City provides production and agricultural training, business planning assistance, and land access. Katherine Kelly, Executive Director of Cultivate Kansas City, explains: "We use both organization's capacities to maximize how much we can do and to share the funding burden."

Project Structure

Growers must be refugees or low-income farmers from NE Kansas City, KS to participate in the Juniper Gardens farm incubator. In the 2013 growing season, Juniper Gardens hosted 17 incubator farmers, all of whom were introduced to the program through Catholic Charities' New Roots for Refugees program. The incubator is a four-year program and does not charge a land rental fee to participants. However, participants do pay some of the costs associated with seed, utilities, and marketing in a tiered fee structure. Growers pay nothing in their first year. In their second year, growers begin paying for seed and some supplies. Growers in their third year pay for seed, supplies and water, and growers in their final year of participation pay for seed, supplies, water, and marketing costs. Growers receive access to a .25-acre plot, soil preparation, equipment, and supplies in addition to technical assistance.

Curriculum: The main curriculum for the Juniper Gardens incubator program is comprised of a series of weekly workshops from January-April. If a participant completes the workshop series, they become eligible to sign a lease agreement with Cultivate Kansas City for a .25-acre plot on the incubator site. Once a grower begins farming on the incubator site, the curriculum is more informal and based on issues as they arise. Participants also do field walks every other week during the growing season with an interpreter and a Cultivate Kansas City staff member.

Infrastructure: Most of the site development for the Juniper Gardens incubator was completed during the incubator's first three years of operation, funded in part by a Refugee Agricultural Partnership Program (RAPP) grant and a Beginning Farmer and Rancher Development Program (BFRDP) grant. Because the site was vacant urban land, developing the site for agriculture was difficult. Rachel Pollock, New Roots for Refugees Coordinator, says, "The first couple of years it was a miracle the farmers stayed because it was so hard. Now everyone uses in-ground raised beds." Most of the structures on the incubator site are

"If we were to disappear, would our folks be able to keep farming? I use that as a guide when we're thinking about how we want our program to work."

-Katherine Kelly

Executive Director, Cultivate Kansas City

Building Self-Sufficiency

The overarching goal of the Juniper Gardens Training Farm is to help growers establish their own independent farm businesses on their own land. In 2010, Juniper Gardens implemented a system called "Juniper Bucks" to help participants learn about the true costs of running a farm enterprise.

Juniper Gardens does not charge rent. However, participants pay a portion of the cost for seed, utilities, and water on a tiered scale. First-year participants pay no fees. Second year participants pay for seed costs. Third year participants pay for seed and water usage. In the fourth and final year of the program, participants pay for seed, water, and marketing costs.

Whether participants are paying fees or not, all participants use "Juniper Bucks" to integrate the cost of supplies, seed, water, and transportation from the very beginning of the program. Participants use Juniper Bucks to "shop" for their supplies and other costs.

Rachel explains, "Of course its messy, but it really does help... when we first started [the incubator] we had a truck we used to take people to market. Participants didn't value all the supplies. Now that [participants] have to 'buy' them, they are more careful

mobile. Cargo containers of various sizes are used for wash stations, and storage. One cargo container has been modified with an air conditioner to create a low-cost walk-in cooler.

Markets: New Roots for Refugees works closely with Juniper Gardens participants on developing their market strategies. Each farmer operates their own independent farm enterprise under the New Roots for Refugees brand. Rachel explains, "Each farmer grows what they want to, sets up their own stall at markets, and sells their own CSA shares." All participants must sell at one farmers' market, and are encouraged to sell at two markets. In addition, a partnership with the KCK Greenmarkets allows for a farmers' market on the incubator site once a week during the growing season. CSA sizes vary widely among participants. Some farmers have one or two CSA members, while others have as many as 13. As participants prepare to transition off the incubator, New Roots for Refugees helps growers develop a brand and logo for their farm. The ultimate goal is to help farmers become self-sufficient.

Transition: Throughout their participation at Juniper Gardens, Katherine and Rachel work to prepare growers for a successful transition to their own land. Katherine says, "We strive for farmers to exhibit success and independence and be ready to move off of the training farm in 4 to 5 years. As [participants] earn money, save, and learn more they take on more responsibility and more of the costs." Growers commit to saving $3 of every $10 they sell at market to help them build their own farm enterprises. During their fourth year on the incubator site, Rachel spends a great deal of time with potential graduates to help them find housing and land. Rachel describes the transition process this way: "Kansas City is in a unique position in that land is pretty inexpensive and fairly available...buying a half-acre or 2 acres is doable." Four participants graduate each year.

Project Management

Farmers who are interested in growing at Juniper Gardens must fill out an application and attend an interview. Most participants are referred by Catholic Charities. In some cases, potential participants farm at community gardens for 1-2 years to get more production experience before entering the incubator program. Rachel and Katherine say that they are looking for participants with vegetable gardening or farming experience, some marketing experience, and family support for their farm business plans. Before they begin farming at the incubator site, participants must complete a series of weekly workshops that take place January-April before the growing season. In exchange for a .25-acre plot, seed, supplies, and production and marketing support, farmers

agree to attend workshops, sell at least 10 times at their assigned farmers market, sell produce through the CSA, and save $3 of every $10 sold at market for transition off the site.

Communication: There are many different language and cultural groups working together at Juniper Gardens. With 17 farmers, their families, and 30 community gardeners on the site, it's "always chaotic," says Rachel. The partnership between New Roots for Refugees and Cultivate Kansas City is critical to communication at the incubator. New Roots for Refugees provides extensive translation services and helps coordinate scheduling among staff, farmers, and interpreters. Both Katherine and Rachel say that communication can be very challenging, but is also an incredibly rewarding part of their work.

Definitions of Success: "Helping people realize whatever the American dream is for them" is the foundation of success at Juniper Gardens. For Katherine, successful participants are able to articulate what they want after they move on from the program. Rachel, who works closely with farmers on marketing and farmers' market sales, success means that participants "become suppliers to markets and CSAs." Participant income for farmers' market and CSA sales ranges widely, from about $2,500 per year to $15,000-$17,000 per year, depending on the participant. Any farmer who makes more than $1,000 per farmers' market is "doing really well," says Rachel.

Successes and Challenges: One of the biggest challenges at Juniper Gardens is ensuring good communication among all of the different groups of people working together at the incubator site. In particular, challenges sometimes arise around the management of shared resources. Rachel explains, "How staff are perceived to treat different refugee groups has sometimes been a flare point. Managing those relationships has required staff attention." However, Katherine and Rachel both see the challenges in their work as opportunities as well. Juniper Gardens is unique in that it serves so many different language and cultural groups, and Katherine and Rachel have worked hard to develop procedures that support communication and collaboration among incubator participants.

Plans for the Future: The Juniper Gardens Training Farm is currently exploring the process of organic certification. However, language and documentation practices will definitely be challenges Katherine and Rachel will face if Juniper Gardens decides to move forward with certification. Other plans for the future include expanding the incubator and possibly developing wholesale accounts for participants. Juniper Gardens participants are interested in producing animals and fruit crops, so the incubator may also expand production into these crop categories.

with [the supplies]."

In the 2013 season, Juniper Gardens began posting all participants' water bills so participants can see other farmers' water usage. Every participant gets a water bill even though Juniper Gardens covers water costs for the first two years. Rachel says, "Juniper Bucks are a great way to start applying some hard numbers" to the cost of running a farm operation.

This case study relies primarily on information gathered during a phone interview on July 15, 2013 with Katherine Kelly, Executive Director of Cultivate Kansas City, and Rachel Pollock, New Roots for Refugees Coordinator at Catholic Charities of Northeast Kansas. Additional information was compiled from a nation-wide survey of farm incubator projects conducted in May 2013 and from the Cultivate Kansas City website.

Author: Meaghan Overton
NIFTI Program Associate
http://nesfp.org/nifti

Dirt Works Incubator Farm

Lowcountry Local First

Johns Island, SC

"Lowcountry Local First advocates for the benefits of a local living economy by strengthening community support of our local-independent businesses and farmers."

Basic Statistics:

Structure: Nonprofit

Year Founded: 2012

Number of Farmers: 6

Number of Staff: 3 (1 full-time, 1 part-time, 1 contractor)

Size: 10 acres

Plot size: 1-2 acres

Rent: $2,000 for access to land and equipment per year

Time limit: 3 years

Scope of operations: fruit and vegetable production; organic practices required.

Website: http://lowcountrylocalfirst.org

Background

The Dirt Works Incubator Farm is located in the South Carolina Lowcountry, an area on the South Carolina coast that is rich in agriculture and plantation farming history. Dirt Works operates on 10 acres of land on Johns Island, SC, about 20 miles southwest of downtown Charleston, SC. Johns Island is the largest island in South Carolina at 84 square miles, and has a population of 14,000 people. Though much of South Carolina agriculture is focused on large-scale commodity crops, the Charleston area has a vibrant small-scale farming community.

An initiative of Lowcountry Local First (LLF), Dirt Works Incubator Farm is part of LLF's larger Growing New Farmers Program. The Growing New Farmers Program aims to support the development of new farm businesses in the Charleston area in three interrelated and consecutive phases: providing access to training through apprenticeships, lowering barriers to entry through the Dirt Works Incubator Farm, and helping to establish new farm businesses through a land-matching program.

The apprenticeship program began in 2010. In just three years, the apprenticeship program graduated more than 80 participants and grew to accommodate 20-30 apprentices on Charleston-area farms each season. As apprentices began graduating from the program, LLF staff noticed that participants were asking for resources to help them start their own farm operations. Nikki Seibert, Director of Sustainable Agriculture, said that "it became clear that people were ready to be incubated." After touring the Intervale Farms Program in Vermont and nearby farms in North Carolina, LLF applied for and received a USDA Rural Development Grant in July 2012. Dirt Works Incubator Farm began operations in the fall of 2012. A land-matching program will be the final phase of LLF's Growing New Farmers Program and is currently in development.

Project Structure

Participation in the Dirt Works Incubator Farm is open to any

beginning farmer, though preference is given to producers who plan to farm in the Charleston area. As intended, the Growing New Farmers apprenticeship program serves as an outreach and recruitment tool for the incubator. Three of the 6 first-year farmers on the incubator site in 2013 were graduates of the apprenticeship program. After its first season in 2012/2013, Dirt Works was at capacity: 6 farmers were producing on 8 acres of land, one acre was set aside for farm mentor use, and one acre was being used as a demonstration farm. The incubator may expand in future seasons to accommodate more participants.

Curriculum: Business planning is integral to the structure of the curriculum at Dirt Works. Farmers are required to check in with incubator staff every six months to help monitor participants' progress toward creating viable marketing and business enterprise plans. The content of the curriculum at Dirt Works is individualized and participant-driven. Each applicant to the incubator project is required to complete a new farmer survey and skills assessment to determine what kinds of training will be most helpful. Incubator staff use these skills assessments to create a schedule of monthly growers group meetings and field trips. Attendance at the grower's group meetings and field trips is optional, but incubator staff are thinking about creating a participation requirement in future seasons. Nikki wants to make sure that participants understand that they are "not just leasing land, [they're] part of a program." In addition, Dirt Works contracts with a mentor farmer who consults with incubator participants on an as-needed basis.

Infrastructure: Dirt Works Incubator Farm operates on 10 acres of privately owned agricultural land in the middle of a 60-acre vegetable farm. The property owner donated Dirt Works' lease, and the property owner's cousin farms the remaining 50 acres of the property. Because the incubator site was already in vegetable production, most of the essential infrastructure was already in place. LLF installed two wells, purchased a tractor, and bought essential tools before the inaugural growing season.

"Being an incubator farm makes this piece of land very public. Three times we've had charter buses on site, and I have given more than 25 tours in just our first year. I didn't realize how much of my time would be spent showing people the project."

- Nikki Seibert

Director of Sustainable Agriculture, Dirt Works Incubator Farm

Farming Realities

One of the overarching goals at Dirt Works is to help participants understand and plan for the realities of running a farm business in a low-risk environment. Although no one could have expected it, the incubator's first season provided multiple opportunities for participants to gain experience with some of farming's inherent challenges.

The weather provided a hefty dose of reality when the 2013 season turned extremely rainy. In an area like John's Island, most land is very close to sea level. Farmers were dealing with crawfish in their fields, struggling to save flooded crops, and facing significant losses. Nikki explains, "Many farmers weren't making as much money as they had projected, and they didn't budget for a significant loss. They couldn't pay rent."

Nikki sees the silver lining in the challenges Dirt Works faced in its first season. She hopes that a difficult first year will help participants understand how critically important financial planning and budgeting are to the long-term success of any farm business. Dirt Works decided to charge reduced rent for part of the first year, which softened the impact of the weather for many participants. Hopefully, participants will incorporate these lessons into next year's crop plans and budgets.

Markets: Participants at Dirt Works are primarily responsible for finding their own markets. Nikki and the rest of the incubator staff assist participants with branding, marketing, and generating exposure for incubator participants. Market outlets for Dirt Works participants are varied. Several farmers sell to area restaurants, two farmers maintain wholesale accounts, three farmers have CSA programs, and 5 of the 6 farms at Dirt Works sell as a group under the Dirt Works label at the Charleston farmers' market. So far, Nikki says that Dirt Works farmers "are mostly breaking even." She notes, however, that participants paid reduced rent during the 2012/2013 season because the incubator site was still being established.

Transition: Because the Dirt Works Incubator Farm is still so new, LLF is just beginning to think about how farmers will transition off the incubator site. If a 3-year timeline turns out to be too short, LLF is open to extending the incubator program to 4 years. Nikki hopes that the incubator project's focus on business planning will help participants prepare themselves to move successfully onto their own land. Having viable plans for financing, crop production, and general business operation will ultimately be the participants' responsibility. To help participants find suitable land in the Charleston area, LLF is currently working on developing a land-matching program. This land-matching program will be the final phase of the Growing New Farmers Program.

Project Management

To apply for the Dirt Works Incubator Farm, participants must complete an application that includes a business plan, a budget, and a crop plan. The applications are reviewed by a selection committee. The committee chooses participants based on their likelihood of success, previous farming experience, and the strength of their farm enterprise plans. Once participants begin the incubator program, they are required to complete new farmer assessments. The assessments are used both to help shape the incubator's curriculum and to monitor participant progress over time. Participants sign a 3-years lease for a plot that is 1-2 acres in size. Though they do not need to be certified, participants are required to follow organic farming practices. Farmers pay $2,000 per year for access to land and equipment (Dirt Works charged reduced rental fees from 2012 to Spring 2013). Participants who are unable to make regular payments can work with LLF staff to create a payment plan.

Communication: Weekly meetings are the main venue for communication among incubator participants. All participants on the incubator site meet on Wednesdays for group chores and to discuss any farm issues or ideas. Nikki joins this meeting every

other week. In addition, Nikki conducts informal one-on-one meetings when there is an opportunity to spend time with one of the participants. The farm mentor schedules meetings with individual participants as well on an as-needed basis. So far, Nikki's biggest communication challenge has been dealing with shared infrastructure problems. She explains, "something will break, and no one will tell me. I think a lot of it is that the farmers are so overwhelmed and busy, they just make do with what they have."

Definitions of Success: The specifics of what "success" means for participants at Dirt Works will likely evolve over time. However, Dirt Works and LLF are dedicated to supporting the development of independent, sustainable, small-scale growers in the Charlestown area. Participants who succeed at Dirt Works should be able to create a viable farm business plan that anticipates the realities of farming [see sidebar]. They should also understand how to budget and secure financing for their business. Ultimately, the measure of success for Dirt Works will be whether incubator "graduates" continue their farm businesses after leaving the incubator site.

Successes and Challenges: As the first farm incubator project in South Carolina, Dirt Works and LLF have focused a great deal of time and energy on community education and outreach in their first season. Nikki says, "People didn't understand what an incubator was, or what a packing shed was. We had to show it to people to help them understand it." Nikki explained that this lack of familiarity with the incubator model, the legacy of racism in South Carolina, and a history of unequal access to traditional farm assistance programs impacted LLF's ability to attract participants from traditionally underserved backgrounds. "The majority of our applicants were white and predominately male. People are skeptical…a nonprofit working with farmers is a unique thing where we are." However, Nikki is beginning to see some changes. "We have people who drive 3 hours or more to come to our trainings because there's no sales pitch, we're welcoming, and there are no strings attached."

Plans for the Future: Developing a land-matching program for incubator participants is the next project LLF plans to undertake, and conversations were ongoing throughout the 2013 growing season. Beyond the land-matching program, however, Nikki sees many possibilities for the future of the Growing New Farmers Program. For example, LLF may create a formal certificate program for the Growing New Farmers apprenticeship program in partnership with one of the area's technical colleges. LLF would also like to expand the size of the Dirt Works Incubator Farm by about 5 acres to accommodate more participants. The landlord is supportive, so a future expansion is a definite possibility.

Additional Resources:

Dirt Works Incubator video
https://vimeo.com/73345422

This case study relies primarily on information gathered during a phone interview on July 19, 2013 with Nikki Seibert, Director of Sustainable Agriculture at the Dirt Works Incubator Farm. Additional information was compiled from a nation-wide survey of farm incubator projects conducted in May 2013 and from the Low Country Local First website

Author: Meaghan Overton
NIFTI Program Associate
http://nesfp.org/nifti

Farm Enterprise Incubator

Groundswell Center for Local Food and Farming

Ithaca, NY

"Groundswell's mission is to engage diverse learners and empower them with skills, knowledge and access to resources so they can build sustainable land-based livelihoods and equitable local food systems."

Basic Statistics:

Structure: Nonprofit

Year Founded: 2011

Number of Farmers: 2

Number of Staff: 1 (part-time)

Size: 9.5 acres

Plot size: .25 acres, possibility to expand after first year

Rent: $100-$325 per ¼ acre per year

Time limit: 3 years

Scope of operations: vegetable and fruit production, open to small-scale livestock

Website: http://www.groundswellcenter.org

Background

The Groundswell Farm Enterprise Incubator is located in Ithaca, NY (pop. 30,054) on land owned by the EcoVillage at Ithaca. The EcoVillage contains several farms, small businesses, two cohousing neighborhoods (a third is currently under construction), and extensive green space on a 175 acre site 2 miles west of downtown Ithaca. The organizational structure of the incubator site is complex. The lease for the incubator site is an agreement between the EcoVillage and the Center for Transformative Action (CTA), which is the program that sponsors the Groundswell Center. The incubator currently occupies 9.5 acres of a larger, 55-acre parcel that is owned by the EcoVillage and is also in a conservation easement held by the Finger Lakes Land Trust. Because the incubator site is under a conservation easement, the Finger Lakes Land Trust requires that the Groundswell Center have an agricultural conservation plan in place to sustainably manage the incubator site.

The Groundswell Center began its first farming programs in 2010. The Center currently offers farmer training in sustainable production, organizes the Finger Lakes CRAFT group, and administers a sustainable farming certificate program. Planning for the Farm Enterprise Incubator began in August 2011. Devon Van Noble, Incubator Coordinator, met with farmer consultants and other local experts who had experience in farmer training and permaculture design principles. Devon then brought together an Oversight Team of 5 local farm business mentors to structure and implement the Farm Enterprise Incubator in April 2012. The Oversight Team is still very involved in farm incubator operations, and is responsible for reviewing and selecting applicants, guiding the direction of the incubator, and developing policies. The Farm Enterprise Incubator celebrated its inaugural growing season in the spring of 2013.

Project Structure

The Groundswell Farm Enterprise Incubator is open to any

beginning farmer, but the Oversight Team prioritizes applications from farmers who meet the USDA definitions of "limited resource" and "socially disadvantaged" producers, farmers who are New Americans or immigrants, and applicants from the local community. In its first season, the Farm Enterprise Incubator had 2 participants farming on the incubator site with plans to add more participants in 2014. The incubator is funded through federal and local grants, foundation grants, and some individual private donations. The program did not collect program fees in 2013 because the farm infrastructure was not yet completed, but the Oversight Team plans to begin charging program fees in the 2014 growing season.

Curriculum: In the incubator's first year of operation, participants were not required to participate in a formal curriculum. However the Oversight Team has decided that future participants must complete Groundswell's winter Farm Business Planning Course before their second year of farming. Groundswell also offers other educational opportunities for interested participants. Farmers can complete a certificate in sustainable farming, take classes in sustainable production, and participate in the Finger Lakes CRAFT, a community of experienced and beginning farmers which offers monthly farm tours and seasonal potluck gatherings. In addition, each incubator participant is matched with an experienced farmer mentor. Groundswell pays mentor farmers for 20-30 hours of mentoring activities per season. In the first year, these meetings with farmer mentors were relatively unstructured and happened on an as-needed basis, roughly twice a month. The Oversight Team is considering implementing a more formal mentoring structure for future seasons.

Infrastructure: The 9.5-acre site for the Groundswell Farm Enterprise Incubator is part of a 175-acre contiguous parcel owned by the EcoVillage at Ithaca. The site was not previously in agriculture, but it was an open space recreational area for a number of years before it was converted to agricultural use. Devon Van Noble, Farm Manager of the Groundswell incubator, did most of the labor required to get the incubator site ready for participants in addition to his program development

"We were aware early on that there were lots of reasons that someone might not want to do an internship on a farm in complete isolation from their community, and that [people might not have] the resources or ability to do so. Everyone is gradually beginning to understand that... maybe this incubator thing makes sense."

– Joanna Green

Executive Director of the Groundswell Center

Groundswell Fees

One of the most unique aspects of the Groundswell Farm Enterprise Incubator is the project's fee structure. Many incubators charge flat fees, or increase fees by a certain percentage for each year of participation in the program. At the Groundswell incubator, the Oversight Team decided to include socioeconomic status and participant background as additional factors that determine how much participants pay for access to land and infrastructure.

The Oversight Team decided that fixed costs like land rent, annual field prep, and equipment and tool access would be discounted based on income level and background. Access and rental fees range from $100-$325 per year.

Variable or usage-based costs like cooler access, water, and fuel increase gradually over time. First-year participants pay 60% of the utility and service fees, second-year participants pay 80%, and third-year participants pay 100%. This fee structure ensures that Groundswell both addresses access issues for disadvantaged producers and provides a realistic sense of the financial realities of running a farm business.

For detailed information about Groundswell's fee structure, see the Additional Resources section.

responsibilities. He installed deer fencing throughout the incubator site and completed an extensive mainline irrigation project in 2013. Devon has also been working to enhance soil fertility and plant cover crops. The Groundswell incubator provides access to mainline irrigation, a tool shed, a walk-in cooler, high tunnels, tools, and tractor services.

Markets: Participants at the Groundswell incubator are responsible for finding their own markets for their farm products. In the future, the Groundswell Center may focus more on developing markets for participants. Joanna envisions many possibilities for market development including wholesale markets, participation in a local food hub, and helping participants tap into less-saturated regional markets. Because farmers' markets and other sales outlets around Ithaca are relatively saturated, finding untapped market opportunities is a priority for new farmers, and the Oversight Team is considering how best to assist them in that process, given limited staff resources.

Transition: Because the incubator is just beginning, Joanna and Devon expect that it will take time to understand the typical progression of incubator participants at the Groundswell Farm Enterprise Incubator. However, Devon is very clear about the overall goal of the incubator project: "Our current goal is support those producers who are aware of how to grow their product and are serious about developing a commercially-viable enterprise but need to develop certain skills and resources. We hope to help them use the 3 years to take whatever critical next steps they need to take to establish their farm enterprise." Groundswell is also planning a pilot project for 2014 which would enable a group of Karen Burmese refugees to farm collectively at the incubator.

Project Management

Applicants to the Groundswell Farm Enterprise Incubator are asked to complete both an application and a personal data form. The application includes open-ended questions about applicants' ideas for the production, marketing, finance, and planning of their farm business enterprise. The personal data form collects information about demographics, previous farm experience, and finances. Previous farming experience is required of all applicants, as is a demonstrated farm business concept. Applicants do not need to have a formal or written business plan. The Oversight Team reviews applications and selects incubator participants based on their fit with the incubator program, the strength of their business concept, their ability to meet the financial obligations of the program, and their previous farming experience.

Communication: Devon is in regular contact with incubator participants by phone, email, and in-person. During the inaugural

season of the incubator, communication was focused mostly on meeting participants' immediate needs while the incubator's site infrastructure was being developed. Devon and Joanna hope that Devon will have more time in future seasons to meet on a weekly basis with incubator participants. Cross-cultural communication is one area that the Oversight Team is intentionally working to improve. The Oversight Team is reaching out to local partners with experience in immigrant services (ESL professionals, Catholic Charities, etc.) to help enhance Groundswell's ability to meet the needs of New American farmers.

Definitions of Success: The Oversight Team is still developing its definition of success for participants at the Groundswell incubator. However, Devon and Joanna have several ideas about what "success" might mean for incubator participants:

- Participants are involved in the marketplace and selling their products. Ideally, they will make a profit over time.
- Participants know what their production, financial, and marketing goals are, and can monitor those goals.
- Participants learn whether commercial farming is actually a career they want to pursue without investing all of their resources.

Successes and Challenges: The biggest achievement (and the biggest challenge) for the Groundswell Farm Enterprise Incubator so far has been the start-up of the incubator project. Developing a recreational site into a productive farm incubator is no small feat, and Devon's ability to install essential infrastructure and run the incubator project simultaneously was critical to getting the incubator up and running. Joanna explains, "In looking back over last year, if we had anyone but Devon doing this it could have been a fiasco…it's amazing the amount of infrastructure work that seems really obvious now that we should have contracted out, but we didn't really understand all of the organizational [tasks] that would have to happen as well." It is important to note that Devon is a part-time employee (25 hours/week), though he spent significantly more than 25 hours per week on the incubator project during the 2013 season.

Plans for the Future: The Oversight Team is carefully considering their next moves, and aren't about to jump into anything new before the incubator project is well established. There are several great opportunities in the Ithaca area, however, including offers from private landowners who want incubator participants to rent their land. Groundswell is collaborating with the local Cornell Cooperative Extension program to organize a land-link program to connect graduates from the incubator (and other beginning farmers) with these landowners. Eventually they may be able to expand the incubator onto one or more other sites.

Additional Resources:

Incubator Application 2013
http://nesfp.org/nifti/groundswellapp2013

Groundswell Fees 2014
http://nesfp.org/nifti/groundswellfees2014

Personal Data Form 2013
http://nesfp.org/nifti/groundswellpersdata2013

Fee Worksheet 2013
http://nesfp.org/nifti/groundswellfeeworksheet2013

This case study relies primarily on information gathered during a phone interview on July 24, 2013 with Joanna Green, Executive Director of the Groundswell Center, and Devon Van Noble, Farm Manager of the Farm Enterprise Incubator. Additional information was compiled from a nation-wide survey of farm incubator projects conducted in May 2013 and from the Groundswell Farm Incubator website.

Author: Meaghan Overton
NIFTI Program Associate
http://nesfp.org/nifti

Lansing Roots Incubator Farm

Greater Lansing Food Bank

Lansing, MI

"Lansing Roots is designed to help limited resource and/or socially disadvantaged individuals from the greater Lansing area begin successful market gardening and farming enterprises through an incubator farm setting."

Basic Statistics:

Structure: Nonprofit

Year Founded: 2012

Number of Farmers: 8

Number of Staff: 2 (1 FT, 1 PT); also hosts Americorps service members.

Size: 5 acres, expanding in 2014

Plot size: .25 acres for first year, option to expand to .5 acres or more

Rent: $155/season for .25 acre plot

Time limit: 5 years

Scope of operations: fruit/vegetable production, organic practices required

Website: http://www.greaterlansingfoodbank.org/lansing-roots.html

Background

The Lansing Roots Incubator Farm is a program of the Greater Lansing Food Bank (GLFB). GLFB is headquartered in Lansing, MI (pop. 113,196) and works to meet the emergency food needs of people in 7 counties in mid-Michigan. The Lansing Roots Incubator Farm is located on 5 acres of land near Mason, MI (pop. 8,252), about 12 miles southeast of downtown Lansing. Lansing Roots rents the incubator site from the Hunt Holt Kiwanis Charity, owners of a a 100-acre property called Der Happy Hallow.

GLFB had been planning to start a farm incubator project for several years before starting Lansing Roots in 2012. The desire to begin a farm incubator came out of discussions with participants in GLFB's Garden Project. The Garden Project has been in operation for more than 30 years, and supports a network of more than 90 community gardens in the greater Lansing area. When Garden Project participants began expressing interest in gardening for market sales and beginning their own farm operations, GLFB jumped at the opportunity to take the next step.

In October 2012, Lansing Roots was awarded a three-year, $365,000 Beginning Farmer and Rancher Development Program grant to support the operations of the farm incubator. In just a few short months, Lansing Roots developed the incubator site, created program materials, and secured additional funding for critical infrastructure improvements. The incubator welcomed its first farmers onto the incubator site for the 2013 growing season.

Project Structure

During its first year in operation, Lansing Roots welcomed 8 incubator farmers onto the incubator site. Lansing Roots also hosted an AmeriCorps service member who developed a demonstration farm on a half-acre of the 5-acre incubator site. The demonstration farm hosts workshops, creates hands-on learning opportunities, and provides produce that is distributed to GLFB partner agencies. Lansing Roots is open to all beginning farmers, but incubator staff are particularly concerned

with meeting the needs of limited resource and historically underserved individuals from the greater Lansing area. At least 70% of participants at Lansing Roots must be from limited resource or socially disadvantaged groups. First year farmers rent .25-acre plots, and participants can expand to .5 acres or more in future years. To ensure that the incubator project is accessible, Lansing Roots offers payment plans, scholarships, and fee waivers for participants with financial need. In addition, the land rental fee ($150/.25 acre per season) can be waived if participants complete a 15 hour work share on the demonstration farm.

Curriculum: Lansing Roots mixes formal training with informal skill sessions and demonstrations to provide a well-rounded learning experience for participants. Farmers at Lansing Roots must be committed to creating a business plan, keep detailed records, and participate in 75% of workshops. The mandatory workshops cover topics like 4-season hoophouse growing, Integrated Pest Management, business and enterprise planning, and more. Most of Lansing Roots' formal workshops are presented by Michigan State, the Lansing Urban Farm Project, or other outside partners. About half of the informal sessions are conducted by outside partners. All participants are also required to complete a safety and maintenance course before using rototillers and other specialized tools. In addition to the planned curriculum of workshops, Lansing Roots staff plans to offer preseason planning assistance consultation in the 2014 season.

Infrastructure: GLFB looked at several different sites before settling on 5 acres in Der Happy Hallow. Some of the factors GLFB considered when choosing a location included access to the location, the amount of work needed to develop the site, water access, and results of soil tests. The ability to rent more land in the future was also extremely important, as Lansing Roots plans to expand in 2014. Lansing Roots signed a long-term (5 year) lease with Der Happy Hallow, which is managed by a board of directors. To get the site ready for participants, Lansing Roots had to work quickly. Before the first season, Lansing Roots staff tilled the entire site, installed irrigation trenches and a deer fence, and built a hoophouse. There was a well on the site already, but it

"We had a lot of expectations [about what participants would need] in our initial plan. We found that many of our farmers already have markets and are growing crops that are very specialized. We learned that the needs of each of our participants are different, and we have to be flexible."

-Laura Wies

Lansing Roots Program Manager

Food Bank + Incubator

When Lansing Roots was awarded a BFRDP grant in 2012, the grant marked the first time the USDA and a Feeding America Food Bank partnered to start a farm incubator project. For the Greater Lansing Food Bank (GLFB), starting a farm incubator was an innovative way to further one important aspect of their organizational mission, to "promote, encourage, and emphasize self-help programs toward the goal of self-sufficiency."

The GLFB Garden Project was the starting point for Lansing Roots. Over the 30 years that the Garden Project has been in operation, GLFB staff heard from many participants that they wanted to grow food for market. GLFB started Lansing Roots to bring potential small-scale producers and consumers together to improve food security, help producers earn more income, and lower the barriers to entry faced by many new and beginning farmers.

So, why did a food bank start an incubator? Laura Wies, Lansing Roots Program Manager, explains: "We started Lansing Roots because we want to do more than provide emergency food….it's important to also decrease people's emergency needs for food by helping people grow food for supplemental or primary sources of income."

required some work to become fully operational. During the 2013 season, Lansing Roots staff also purchased a tractor and installed a pole barn. Laura Wies, Program Manager, emphasized that the investment into the incubator site was critical to the mission of Lansing Roots: "Lowering the barriers to entry means that you have to provide that level of infrastructure for participants."

Markets: Lansing Roots provides farmers with assistance finding markets and selling their crops, and also helps facilitate sales to restaurants and wholesale accounts. Several of the workshops included in the curriculum are designed to help farmers develop a marketing plan and understand the legal and insurance requirements that are involved in selling farm products. In addition, Lansing Roots coordinates group sales at local farmers markets, and all participants are eligible to participate. In the future, Laura would like to provide more assistance with market planning and market access.

Transition: The time frame for participation at Lansing Roots is two to five years. Because the incubator is just getting started, Lansing Roots and GLFB are still working on their plans to support participant transition off the incubator site. Laura mentioned that participants could become eligible for financing through the USDA Farm Services Agency after three years, and connecting participants to FSA financing could be an important piece of Lansing Roots' transition plans. Lansing Roots also intends to work closely with participants throughout their time at the incubator to ensure that they are ready to transition onto their own land after five years.

Project Management

There is an application process for anyone interested in farming at Lansing Roots. The Lansing Roots application includes demographic questions and requests information about languages spoken, translation services, and English proficiency. Applicants are asked to provide information about their previous farming and business experience, time available for farming, and anticipated challenges the farmers think they'll face. The application does not currently require a formal business or crop plan. Rather, applicants answer open-ended questions about their farm business ideas. Laura says that Lansing Roots plans to work with potential participants in the future to help them enter the incubator program with a business plan. Overall, Lansing Roots staff are looking for applicants who have some background in farming or gardening, have a clear idea of what they'd like to do, and have the time to commit to their farm business.

Communication: As the Program Manager, Laura is the only full-time staff member at Lansing Roots. She is responsible for

communicating with the farmers, and meets with each of them about once a month. Laura also checks in with participants when she is at the incubator site. The curriculum at Lansing Roots provides ample opportunity for participants to communicate with one another. Required workshops and informal skill sessions give farmers a chance to share their experiences, and the demonstration farm helps participants learn about innovative farming practices. However, finding interpreters and providing translation services has been an ongoing challenge for Lansing Roots. Three of the eight participants in 2013 were Bhutanese and required translation services. As Lansing Roots welcomes more participants, incubator staff will continue to work with participants to find appropriate translation resources.

Definitions of Success: Lansing Roots grew out of GLFB's Garden Project as a way to help Garden Project participants earn supplemental or primary sources of income from farming. As such, the definition of success for Lansing Roots is focused on participants' abilities to sell their farm products. Laura says, "We really do expect our farmers to sell and be starting a farm business." In the short term, success means $1,000 or more in sales during a growing season. In the long term, Laura defines success as participants who continue to farm, transition to their own farms, or continue to participate in farming in some way.

Successes and Challenges: One of the biggest successes so far for Lansing Roots has been the partnerships the incubator has built to help complement Lansing Roots' services. Laura says that Lansing Roots was "designed to utilize outside resources" rather than attempting to provide everything participants need through the incubator project alone. In particular, the University of Michigan's Organic farmer Training Program and the Lansing Urban Farm Project have been strong supporters of Lansing Roots. One area that presents opportunities for further growth at Lansing Roots is the incubator's capacity to serve the needs of its culturally and ethnically diverse participants. Interpretation services, finding sources for ethnic crop varieties, and providing access to translated materials are all areas that Lansing Roots would like to work on as the incubator develops.

Plans for the Future: Lansing Roots has several plans for the near future. The incubator will add participants for the 2014 growing season, and also plans to expand the incubator site. In the longer term, Laura is thinking about the sustainability of the incubator after the three-year BFRDP grant ends. GLFB is actively searching for new funding sources to provide some security for the incubator. GLFB and Lansing Roots have also begun working on long-term planning in an effort to balance the mission of the incubator to serve limited resource and socially disadvantaged farmers with the need to sustain the program over time.

Additional Resources:

Lansing Roots Application 2014
http://nesfp.org/nifti/lansingrootsapp2014

Lansing Roots FAQ 2013
http://nesfp.org/nifti/lansingrootsFAQ2013

Lansing Roots Farmer Guidelines 2014
http://nesfp.org/nifti/lansingrootsguidelines2014

Lansing Roots Press Release 2012
http://nesfp.org/nifti/lansingrootspressrel2012

This case study relies primarily on information gathered during a phone interview on July 9, 2013 with Laura Wies, Program Manager at Lansing Roots. Additional information was compiled from a nation-wide survey of farm incubator projects conducted in May 2013 and from the Lansing Roots website.

Author: Meaghan Overton
NIFTI Program Associate
http://nesfp.org/nifti

Rosita's Farm Incubator Program

Rosita's Farm

Hartselle, AL

Basic Statistics:

Structure: Sole proprietorship

Year Founded: 2013

Number of Farmers: 2

Number of Staff: 2 (both part-time)

Size: 25 acres

Plot size: 1 acre

Rent: no rent (fees for training events and equipment use)

Time limit: no specific timeline, ideally 1-2 years

Scope of operations: fruit, vegetable, and livestock production

Website: http://rositasfarm.com

Background

Rosita's Farm is located in northern Alabama on 25 acres just east of downtown Hartselle, AL (pop. 14,322). The nearest major metropolitan area is Huntsville, AL (pop. 182,956), about 35 miles to the northeast. Huntsville is home to Alabama A&M University, one of Alabama's three land-grant Universities. Alabama A&M's Small Farms Research Center is one of Rosita's Farm's organizational partners.

Rosita's Farm and its founder, Karen Wynne, are also active participants in Alabama's burgeoning sustainable agriculture community. In addition to organizing community events at Rosita's Farm, Karen also has a long history working with many partners across the state. She maintains a soil consulting business, served as the director of the Alabama Sustainable Agriculture Network (ASAN), and helped establish other pieces of the food system like the Madison City Farmers Market, the North Alabama Farm Food Collaborative, and the North Alabama Food Policy Council.

Karen's work with national and state-wide organizations like the Natural Resource Conservation Service (NRCS) and ASAN laid the groundwork for Rosita's Farm. Karen explains: "I had been working with small farmers in the southeast for about ten years and was not satisfied with my ability to offer new and beginning farmers enough support." Karen and her husband, Santiago, decided to start a farm incubator project on their 25-acre family farm to work one-on-one with beginning farmers and be a larger part of their local agriculture community.

The receipt of a Beginning Farmer and Rancher Development Program (BFRDP) grant in 2012 got the project off the ground, and Rosita's Farm partnered with nearby Tune Farm to begin operations in 2013.

Project Structure

Rosita's Farm Incubator is open to all beginning farmers, and is particularly focused on working with beginning farmers who plan to start their businesses in northern Alabama. Karen envisions Rosita's Farm as a place where new and beginning farmers can access marketing and business planning support for 1-2 years before (or while) launching their farm business enterprises. She says, "The thing about Alabama is that we have plenty of land. We don't need to find .25 acre plots...Most people who are starting to farm are farming family land. It's a matter of incubating them at their location." Rosita's partner farm, Tune Farm, will provide more long-term land access as the incubator project develops. Rosita's Farm welcomed two participants in its first growing season. Karen has been trying to start the incubator slowly, making sure that the incubator is well organized before doing a lot of promotion.

Curriculum: Instead of developing an on-farm curriculum from scratch, Rosita's Farm focuses on connecting participants to the numerous training opportunities that already exist in the area. Karen says, "I find that there are a lot of training opportunities for farmers. I could spend most of my time at farm workshops, conferences, and field days." In 2013, Rosita's Farm co-sponsored the local Extension office's inaugural Farming 101 course, an eight-week training during the winter months that is geared toward new and beginning farmers. About 50 new and beginning farmers attended the course. In the future, Karen hopes to offer the Southern Sustainable Agriculture Working Group's (SSAWG) Growing Farm Profits course in the winter. She would also like to offer a set of on-farm training courses on hands-on topics (tractor and equipment safety, etc.) as needed. Finally, Karen plans to organize field trips to help participants learn about other farming systems.

Infrastructure: Because Karen started Rosita's Farm on her own farmland, all of the infrastructure she needed was already in place. She already had a tractor, irrigation, basic equipment,

"Communication is so important, and I feel like there are so many people working toward the same goal who don't know how many other people are working toward that goal. If we take the time to make sure we are keeping in touch with each other, we could be much more effective."

- Karen Wynne

Founder and Owner, Rosita's Farm

Partnerships

Karen's hopes that Rosita's Farm will be a place where new and beginning farmers can access business planning and marketing support for 1-2 years as they prepare to launch their farm businesses. But she realizes that some potential farmers need additional support.

Karen's background as both a director of the Alabama Sustainable Agriculture Network (ASAN) and a soil/agriculture consultant has given her an opportunity to build relationships with many different organizations. In particular, nearby Tune Farm (Falkville, AL) and Alabama A&M Extension (Huntsville, AL) have been critical partners during Rosita's Farm Incubator's first season.

Working with several different partners has been challenging at times. Karen explains, "There is lots of waiting for everyone to figure out what their role is." However, she says that connecting with organizations and people who share similar goals and want to strengthen the local food system in and around Hartselle is important for the long-term viability of all of the partners' individual organizations.

To maintain good communication among all of the incubator project partners in future seasons, Karen has planned a facilitated meeting for the winter of 2013/2014.

and a barn on site. Karen and Santiago raise cattle, so livestock infrastructure was already installed as well. Most of the new infrastructure improvements Karen implemented at Rosita's Farm were minor adjustments. The barn now has a dedicated area for movies and meetings where Rosita's Farm Second Sunday potlucks are held, and the office has been set up as a library and computing center. Rosita's Farm does not charge rent for incubator plots, but participants pay fees for training events and equipment usage.

Markets: Creating new market outlets for beginning farmers and helping them build economically sustainable farm businesses is a critical piece of what Karen wants to do at Rosita's Farm Incubator. Rosita's Farm has been working in partnership with Tune Farm in Falkville, AL and Happy Heart Market in Hartselle, AL to develop a multifarm CSA that will allow small and organic vegetable farms in the area to sell as a group and utilize Happy Heart Market's existing infrastructure. Rosita's Farm has applied for a Specialty Crops Block Grant to help formally establish the multifarm CSA project in 2014.

Transition: Having just completed its first season, Rosita's Farm Incubator is still too new to know exactly how transition off the incubator will work. Karen would like to focus on the business planning aspect of farm business development, while Tune Farm might provides more long-term incubation and land access. Ideally, Karen would like participants to be at Rositas for 1-2 years. Tune Farm could have a longer timeline for participation. Karen says, "We want to target people who are ready to get established on their own piece of land. We'll help them put together business plans and marketing plans, and provide education and market access more than land access."

Project Management

The formal application process for Rosita's Farm Incubator is still being developed. Karen has been very intentional about starting the incubator project slowly. She says, "I need to be sure that someone can make a living farming around here before I can encourage anyone to start farming." Karen has been creating a realistic budget for expenses and yields for a market garden so that Rosita's Farm can do a better job projecting production levels and potential income for future participants. After the incubator is more established, Karen plans to increase her outreach efforts to bring in new participants. Overall, Rosita's Farm Incubator is looking for participants who are ready to start a farm business and need support developing their marketing and business plans.

Karen says, "I really want to create some successful small farms and show that it can be done."

Communication: Karen communicates with both of Rosita's Farm Incubator's participants on a regular basis. Communication is informal and ongoing. Because Karen lives on the incubator site, she interacts with participants frequently. Rosita's Farm Incubator also communicates with the greater Hartselle community through its Second Sunday Potlucks. Every month during the growing season, Rosita's Farm welcomes the community onto the incubator site and shares information about how things are going at the incubator. As the incubator grows, Karen plans to do more outreach with the local chamber of commerce, nearby schools, and other potential community partners.

Definitions of Success: Success for participants at Rosita's Farm Incubator will be defined by the participants themselves. Karen explains, "I suspect that success will be a matter of sending each participant on the best path for their future, and that may not be farming. One of our [participants] has decided to become an accountant, and while she is in school she will be our bookkeeper and we plan to have her help us set up other participants' books. While she won't be a farmer, hopefully she can work with small farmers to help them with their businesses and recordkeeping."

Successes and Challenges: Developing partnerships with other organizations has been one of the biggest successes for Rosita's Farm so far (see sidebar). One challenge that Karen has been working to address is a lack of models for expenses and income in small-scale farming in Alabama. As the local food movement continues to grow, Karen has found that farmers' markets are different now than they were when she was selling at markets several years ago. For future seasons, Karen plans to develop realistic projections for market gardens and small-scale farm businesses to help participants understand "what they're going to be getting into."

Plans for the Future: Karen has many plans for the future of Rosita's Farm Incubator, but the next step in developing Rosita's Farm Incubator will likely be hiring a farm manager. Karen has been filling both the program management and farm management roles at the incubator site and her husband has been taking care of the maintenance responsibilities on the farm. To focus more on offering business planning services, providing educational opportunities, and cultivating partnerships, Karen will need a farm manager to take over the day-to-day production and farm maintenance responsibilities.

Additional Resources:

Rosita's Farm Progress Report 2013
http://nesfp.org/nifti/rositasreport2013

This case study relies primarily on information gathered during a phone interview on July 15, 2013 withKaren Wynne, Founder and Owner of Rosita's Farm. Additional information was compiled from a nation-wide survey of farm incubator projects conducted in May 2013 and from the Rosita's Farm website.

Author: Meaghan Overton
NIFTI Program Associate
http://nesfp.org/nifti

Growing Farms

Institute for a Sustainable Future

Duluth, MN

"Growing Farms is a community based, sustainably developed, urban edge agricultural social enterprise organization devoted to education around food and farming and the cultivation of new farmers."

Basic Statistics:

Structure: Nonprofit

Year Founded: 2010

Number of Farmers: 3

Number of Staff: 0 (volunteer Board of Directors)

Size: 20 acres

Plot size: .5-1 acre

Rent: $125/acre per year

Time limit: 3-5 years

Scope of operations: vegetable production, organic practices required

Website: http://www.duluthcommunityfarm.org

Background

Growing Farms (formerly called Duluth Community Farm) is located in Northeast Minnesota. The incubator site is on 20 acres of land just north of Duluth, MN (pop. 86,277) about 7 miles from downtown. Duluth is the fourth-largest city in Minnesota and is home to the University of Minnesota Duluth (UMD). The incubator is an "urban edge" program, easily accessible to downtown Duluth and regional markets for agricultural products.

The initial spark for the Growing Farms incubator came from Randy Hanson, a professor at the UMD who started a student-run organic farm at the University. Students who were involved in the farm were excited to continue farming, but didn't have a place to farm after graduating from UMD. Participants in the region's Farm Beginnings Program were also seeking a place to practice their skills and access land. Jamie Harvie, Vice President at the Institute for a Sustainable Future, says that the incubator was "a piece that was missing" in the region's sustainable farming community and food system.

Growing Farms is a program of the Institute for a Sustainable Future and was founded in 2010 by a steering committee of several organizations in the region with extensive experience in food and farming in Northeast Minnesota. Growing Farms has no paid staff. Rather, a 7-member, volunteer Board of Directors makes decisions about the polices and procedures for the farm incubator program. The incubator began with one farmer in 2010, and has added one farmer each year.

Project Structure

In the 2013 growing season, Growing Farms hosted 3 beginning farmers. Participation at Growing Farms is open to any beginning farmer, though participants need to have some previous farming experience and a viable farm enterprise plan to be successful on the incubator site. Participants can lease plots of .5-1 acre in

size for 3-5 years. The incubator has 20 acres of land, of which 14 acres is arable. In future seasons, Growing Farms plans to add participants at a pace of approximately one beginning farmer per year. Growing Farms is governed by a 7-member Board of Directors and has no paid staff. The budget for the incubator project has been very modest, approximately $3,000 per year since the incubator's founding in 2010.

Curriculum: There is no formal curriculum at Growing Farms. Jamie and the other board members provide recommended resources and farm mentors for incubator participants. Growing Farms also strongly recommends that participants complete a Farm Beginnings program before their first growing season. In the future, Growing Farms may work to establish a relationship with the Midwest Organic and Sustainable Education Services (MOSES) to allow incubator participants to attend MOSES' annual "Organic University" conference.

Infrastructure: Growing Farms has a 5-year, low-cost lease on the 20-acre incubator site. When Growing Farms began in 2010, there was extensive weed pressure on the entire site. Most of the site had been tilled in the last several years, but the fields had been allowed to go to seed. Volunteers on the Steering Committee donated their time to till the soil and help build fertility before farmers began growing on the site. In 2011, the site was "brush hogged" and a 2.5 acre section was tilled and cover cropped. Each year, a small section of the site has been tilled and cover cropped to accommodate new growers. There is an irrigation pond for gravity irrigation.

The site does not have electricity or running water, but there is a small shed and market stand on the site. Farmers are responsible for their own fencing and equipment, but Growing Farms helps facilitate access to necessary infrastructure for participants.

Markets: Farmers are responsible for finding their own markets at Growing Farms. Local producers and farm mentors provide

"What's been most important for us in finding producers is to demonstrate that whoever is applying is serious. If they aren't ready it's easier to say, 'Come back in a year or two.'"

- Jamie Harvie

Vice President, Institute for a Sustainable Future

No staff?

The Growing Farms incubator program is unique in that it has no paid staff. The incubator was founded by a Steering Committee of organizations with experience in local food system development.

In 2013, Growing Farms transitioned from the Steering Committee to a Board of Directors that governs the incubator program. The board is comprised of seven seats and involves many of the original founding organizations. The primary function of the board is to ensure that producers maintain good farming practices.

One of the major benefits of running Growing Farms as a volunteer-led organization is that there are no salary costs. The budget for Growing Farms was $3,000 or less each year from 2010-2013. In addition, the lack of paid staff also encourages producers on the incubator site to be very independent.

Jamie emphasizes that Growing Farms is meant to serve a specific need in Northeast Minnesota, and he does not see the program growing dramatically in the near future: "We're just keeping our fingers on the pulse. As long as we get one new producer a year, we're happy. If [the incubator] doesn't get bigger than that, we're fine with that."

support, ideas, and advice to participants to help them access markets. In addition, the MOSES program provides resources and discounted services to beginning farmers. Growing Farmers participants are encouraged to participate in MOSES and other regional food system organizations. In the future, assistance with marketing and wholesale/institutional delivery might be added to the Growing Farms program if growers are looking for more market support.

Transition: Initially, Growing Farms had a 3-year time frame for participation in the incubator program. However, Jamie and other members of the steering committee learned that "the soil building takes some time." As a result, the Growing Farms timeline has been extended to 5 years. When the incubator was founded in 2010, the Steering Committee started thinking about participants' eventual transition off the incubator site. Jamie and other board members have been working with a local land trust to develop a model to move farmers off the incubator an on to available land. The specific procedure for transition off the incubator is still being developed, and will likely be tailored to each individual participant.

Project Management

An application and a farm enterprise plan are required for any beginning farmer who wants to participate in the Growing Farms incubator program. Applications are screened by the board, and strong applicants are then required to submit their farm enterprise plan. The board reviews farm enterprise plans to ensure that potential participants have a viable business idea and enough experience to be successful on the incubator site. The board looks for participants who have a passion for farming, a full understanding of the challenges they will face, and have shown that they have prepared themselves to take on a farm business on the incubator site. Some previous experience is required, and a farm beginnings course is strongly encouraged. Farmers are responsible for their own insurance, recordkeeping, supplies, fencing, and other supplies. In addition, farmers are required to follow organic practices.

Communication: Because farmers on the Growing Farms incubator are expected to operate independently, communication between growers and the board is informal and on an as-needed basis. There is no staff, so there is no farm manager or program manager visiting the site regularly. Jamie says that he and the rest of the board "keep our ear to the ground to see if conflicts come up," but the producers are self-governing and tend to collaborate well with one another. Farmers on the Growing Farms

incubator site share fencing and water line, and regularly support one another by sharing advice, labor, and resources.

Definitions of Success: Growing Farms does not have a formal definition of success for participants in the incubator program. Ideally, participants come to the incubator with production knowledge and a viable business plan. After 3-5 years of hands-on farming, participants should be prepared to find their own land to continue growing their farm businesses. Growing Farms has not yet "graduated" any participants from the incubator site, so the definition of success for the program is still being developed.

Successes and Challenges: Starting and running a farm incubator with a volunteer board has been one of the biggest successes for Growing Farms. With a very small budget and limited capacity, Jamie and the rest of the board have been able to add a producer each year, continue to build soil fertility, and work to build partnerships with other complementary organizations.

On the other hand, starting Growing Farms as a volunteer-led organization has also been a challenge. There is not a consistent presence on the incubator site daily, so the program can't offer a formal curriculum or more intensive production and marketing support. Because the program's capacity is limited, Jamie says that they "have to say 'no' to the producers, even though [we] want to help." In addition, the infrastructure of the site is less than ideal. There is no well, no electricity, and minimal infrastructure.

Plans for the Future: Growing Farms plans to transition the farm incubator to an independent nonprofit organization. Currently, the incubator project is a program of the Institute for a Sustainable Future. Other plans for the future include installing a well and building new partnerships with regional food system organizations. No matter what the future holds for Growing Farms, the incubator's commitment to local food will remain front and center. Jamie explains, "like many places [in the US], we have the potential to feed our region from local producers."

Additional Resources:

Growing Farms Application 2012
http://nesfp.org/nifti/growingfarmsapp2012

Growing Farms New Farmer Enterprise Plan 2012
http://nesfp.org/nifti/growingfarmsenterpriseplan2012

This case study relies primarily on information gathered during a phone interview on July 3, 2013 with Jamie Harvie, Vice President at the Institute for a Sustainable Future. Additional information was compiled from a nation-wide survey of farm incubator projects conducted in May 2013 and from the Growing Farms website.

Author: Meaghan Overton
NIFTI Program Associate
http://nesfp.org/nifti