

Farm Management on an Incubator Farm

A Brief Overview

History and Context

Affordable access to farmland is a key limiting factor for beginning farmers. Thus, New Entry provides ¼ - 1-acre plots of land for prospective farmers who have completed our six-week business planning course and turned in a completed business plan and farm site application. Our incubator farm sites are at the core of our organizational programming, and many of our other programs (such as farmland matching, and the World PEAS CSA) have arisen in direct response to the needs of farmers on the training sites. For example, the World PEAS CSA provides market access and fair prices to farmers, while the farmland matching program helps farmers find land once they have graduated from the farm sites. New Entry farm site access is designed for individuals who wish to start a sustainable small farm business, rather than for those who want to grow food solely for home consumption.

We have had various incubator sites in operation since 1998 and currently operate on approximately six acres on two separate, peri-urban farm sites. For a detailed history of the New Entry farm sites, visit: http://nesfp.nutrition.tufts.edu/resources/nta_faq.html.

Staffing and Key Partners

The farm sites are operated by a full-time staff member, employed by New Entry. In recent years, the farm manager has also served the role of technical assistance coordinator. This means that in addition to maintaining the farm sites, essentially a half-time position, the farm manager also conducts on-site and off-season training as well as one-on-one technical assistance for New Entry program farmers. Combining these positions requires a diverse mix of skills that are not always available in a single individual, such as the ability to maintain farm equipment alongside the desire to apply for grants and teach business planning classes in the off season. Thus at different times in New Entry's history the position of farm manager has been separate from that of training and technical assistance coordinator. The challenge in this arrangement is a disconnect between the on-site day-to-day relationships with beginning farmers and knowledge of the broader context surrounding them as individuals and new business owners.

The farm sites also benefit from 1-2 skilled interns during the growing season who assist the farm manager with general maintenance and support.

Resources

Below is an approximate budget for operating our incubator farm sites. Your budget may differ significantly depending on land costs (or lack thereof), utility rates or availability in your location, labor costs, etc. Please note that these are ongoing, rather than startup, costs and do not reflect the cost of putting in irrigation infrastructure or purchasing new equipment, etc. A separate budget should reflect these startup costs.

.5 FTE Farm Manager	\$ 27,400
Seasonal Intern	\$ 3,000
Equipment (purchase, repair, etc.)	\$ 4,300
Site Prep	\$ 1,200
Farm Supplies	\$ 4,400
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Total	\$ 40,300

Key Activities

- Maintain all equipment, land, and buildings
- Repair all power equipment (tractors, etc.)
- Winterize equipment and irrigation
- Mow/weed whack all grasses (except for cultivated field edges. That is the farmers' responsibility)
- Maintain forest edges (mow back brush, remove fallen trees, etc.)
- Supervise intern who assists with all tasks
- Cultivate cover crops
- Plow fields for farmers

Goals/Strategies

Support and encourage the next generation of sustainable farmers

- Provide affordable land access to beginning farmers
- Provide affordable access to farm infrastructure and basic tools to beginning farmers
- Provide on-farm conditions that facilitate the creation and ongoing operation of successful, sustainable small farm businesses

Lessons Learned

- Make sure all expectations, policies, and procedures are clearly and explicitly stated and provided in writing at the outset of a new farmers' tenure on the incubator site.
- Account for the fact that some of your land will have to be fallowed in different years and not all of it will be available to farmers every season.
- Care for all equipment and infrastructure carefully and well and make sure that farmers are trained at the beginning of the season to do so as well.
- Think through what makes sense to provide to farmers in terms of farm maintenance and infrastructure and what hinders their ability to understand the full and complex challenges (both financial and in terms of labor) of farming. This is a fine line to walk, and likely to be different for every program depending on your program goals and organizational culture.
- Two interns are preferable to one, for farm safety reasons as well as company, especially if the farm manager cannot always be present to supervise.