The Farm Incubator Toolkit:

Growing the Next Generation of Farmers

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

The Farm Incubator Toolkit:

Growing the Next Generation of Farmers

Developed by the National Incubator Farm Training Initiative (NIFTI)

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

Authors

Eva Agudelo Winther, NIFTI Coordinator
Meaghan Overton, NIFTI Program Associate
Preliminary research conducted by Callie Heron

NIFTI Project Partners

Agriculture and Land-Based Training Association (ALBA), Salinas CA, www.albafarmers.org

International Rescue Committee (IRC) New Roots, San Diego CA, www.rescue.org

The Intervale Center Farms Program, Burlington VT, www.intervale.org

Minnesota Food Association Big River Farms Training Program, Marine on St. Croix MN, www.mnfoodassociation.org

The New American Sustainable Agriculture Project, Lisbon ME, www.cultivatingcommunity.org/programs/nasap.html

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

New Entry Sustainable Farming Project, Lowell, MA - Eva Agudelo Winther, NIFTI Program Coordinator

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 in electronic format or as a printed copy. The latter may be obtained by contacting New Entry at the above locations. 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/farmincubatortoolkit.

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).

Acknowledgements

The New Entry Sustainable Farming Project (New Entry) is an ongoing partnership between the Tufts University Gerald J. and Dorothy R. Friedman School of Nutrition Science and Policy and Community Teamwork, Inc.

The Friedman School is the only graduate and professional school of nutrition in North America and is located in Boston, MA. Its mission is to improve the nutritional well-being of people worldwide through the creation of new knowledge, the application and dissemination of evidence-based information, and the education and training of future leaders in the field. http://nutrition.tufts.edu/

Community Teamwork, Inc. (CTI) is a non-profit community action agency based out of Lowell, MA. Its mission is to assist low-income people to become self-sufficient, to alleviate the effects of poverty, and to assist low-income people to participate in the decisions that affect their lives. CTI is an advocate and catalyst for systemic change on issues that affect low-income people, including education, workforce training, housing, economic development, and civic engagement. www.comteam.org

The National Incubator Farm Training Initiative (NIFTI) also receives generous support from:

The Cedar Tree Foundation
www.cedartreefound.org

The Claneil Foundation
www.claneilfoundation.org

NIFTI gratefully acknowledges the contributions of its project partners, case study participants, and survey respondents.

NIFTI Project Partners:

Agriculture and Land-Based Training Association (ALBA): Salinas, CA
www.albafarmers.org

International Rescue Committee (IRC) New Roots: San Diego, CA
www.rescue.org

The Intervale Center Farms Program: Burlington, VT
www.intervale.org

Minnesota Food Association Big River Farms Training Program: Marine on St. Croix, MN
www.mnfoodassociation.org

The New American Sustainable Agriculture Project: Lisbon, ME
www.cultivatingcommunity.org/programs/nasap.html

Case Study Participants:

Community CROPS Growing Farmers Incubator:
Lincoln, NE
www.communitycrops.org

Cultivate Kansas City:
Kansas City, KS
www.cultivatekc.org

Dirt Works Incubator Farm:
John's Island, SC
www.lowcountrylocalfirst.org

Farley Center Farm Incubator:
Springdale, WI
www.farleycenter.org

Groundswell Farm Incubator:
Ithaca, NY
www.groundswellcenter.org

Growing Farms: Duluth, MN
www.duluthcommunityfarm.org

Headwaters Farm Incubator, East Multnomah Soil and Water Conservation District (EMSWCD): Portland, OR
www.emswcd.org/farm-incubator

Horn Farm Center for Educational Agriculture:
York, PA
www.hornfarmcenter.org

The Intervale Center Farms Program:
Burlington, VT
www.intervale.org

Lansing Roots, Greater Lansing Food Bank:
Lansing, MI
www.greaterlansingfoodbank.org/lansing-roots.html

Minnesota Food Association Big River Farms Training Program:
Marine on St. Croix, MN
www.mnfoodassociation.org

New Entry Sustainable Farming Project:
Lowell, MA
www.nesfp.org

Rosita's Farm: Hartselle, AL
www.rositasfarm.com

Contents

Section 1:
Introduction

1.1 About The Toolkit

The National Incubator Farm Training Initiative (NIFTI) is a program of the New Entry Sustainable Farming Project (New Entry), which has trained and assisted the next generation of beginning farmers in Massachusetts since 1998. NIFTI provides comprehensive one-on-one consulting, educational resources, and professional development opportunities for dozens of organizations that run land-based beginning farmer training programs throughout North America.

The Farm Incubator Toolkit brings together the real world experiences of practitioners in the highly specialized field of land-based training and support systems for small-scale sustainable farmers.

New Entry started NIFTI in 2012 and since then, in concert with our project partners, we have provided over 120 hours of technical assistance to 43 organization, run seven webinars with over 500 attendees, and organized a national gathering of incubator project staff in October of 2012. At the First Annual Farm Incubator Field School, NIFTI provided over 35 attendees with a 250 page compendium of advice, examples, and tools for starting and operating a farm incubator. Although these documents were well received and of significant benefit to incubator project staff as they developed and began implementing new incubator projects, it was ultimately only a rough draft of the toolkit you now hold.

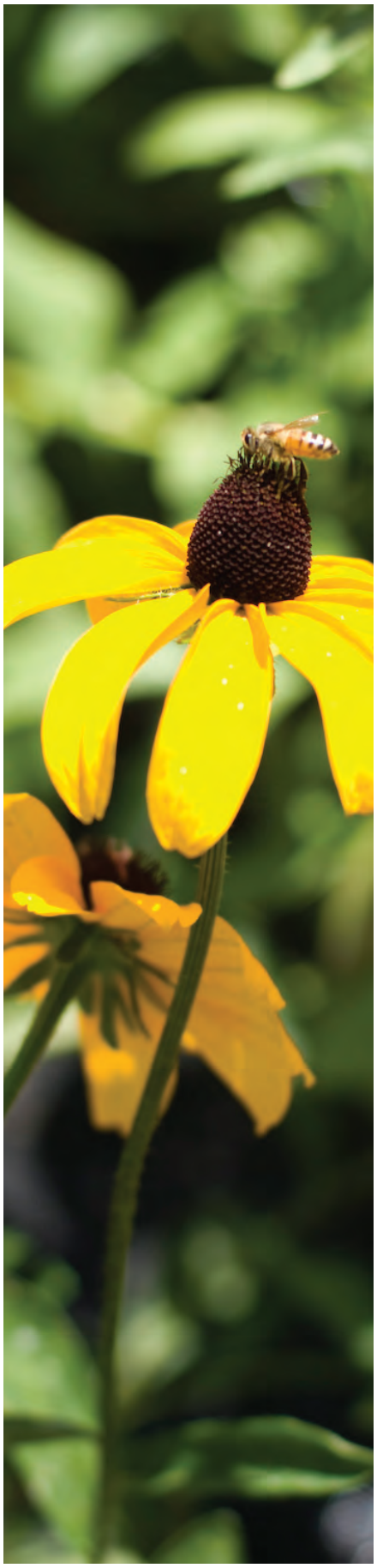
Just as every farmer is unique, every incubator project deals with unique circumstances in terms of geography, climate, target audience, land access, budget limitations, organizational structure, etc. It would be impossible to create a guide to running farm incubators that provides one path to running a successful program. What this guide offers instead is a context for your work and a compilation of what you should be considering as you develop your farmer training programs, organized into topic areas that represent some of the common needs and issues of farm incubators. Based on our experiences working with dozens of well-established and startup projects across the country, NIFTI has gathered examples of farmer leases, farm-site policies, application criteria, and many other templates that you can adapt for your own circumstances, as well as questions you should be asking about how your program is organized and run and what frameworks for success you want to put in place from the beginning.

The Farm Incubator Toolkit brings together the real world experiences of practitioners in the highly specialized field of land-based training and support programs for small-scale sustainable farmers. We hope this guide offers both a helpful jumping off point, as well as resources that you can come back to again and again as your program develops and matures over time. If you are already running an

established incubator project, perhaps this guide will contain new perspectives and creative solutions to common but seemingly intractable problems.

Ultimately, this guide is a manifestation of incubator projects coming together in a national community of practice where our knowledge and best practices can be shared with one another to the ultimate benefit of farmers and the food system as a whole. Therefore, NIFTI welcomes and appreciates your feedback, questions, additions, and critiques of what we consider to be the first edition of *The Farm Incubator Toolkit*. Email the NIFTI Program Coordinator, eagudelo@comteam.org, to submit suggestions and changes.

We hope this toolkit makes it possible for more young and beginning farmers to get started running successful, sustainable small farm enterprises, which is the ultimate goal of all of our work and what you as practitioners make possible. Thanks so much for everything you do, and happy farming!



1.2 How to Use The Toolkit

The Farm Incubator Toolkit offers a framework for farm incubator program development and a wealth of resources for project planning, daily incubator management, and long-term project growth. The primary audience for this toolkit is practitioners - people who are involved in the planning, development, and daily operation of farm incubator projects. Project funders, agricultural extension agents, universities, and food systems advocates will also find relevant and useful information in this toolkit.

The overall objective of this toolkit is simple and straightforward: to assist other land-based farm incubators in their efforts to deliver successful programs and services for underserved beginning farmers.

Purpose

The overall objective of this toolkit is simple and straightforward: to assist other land-based farm incubators in their efforts to deliver successful programs and services for underserved beginning farmers. The toolkit not only reflects NIFTI's expertise (and that of project partners), but also focuses on projects that are the most comprehensive in design and offer the broadest scale of services to socially-disadvantaged beginning farmers. This toolkit is just one piece of a broader effort to build a national network of incubators that are enabling socially-disadvantaged new producers to become part of the next generation of America's farmers, and in so doing, to build economic opportunity for themselves and to sustain the vitality of small-scale agriculture across the nation.

Intended Use

This toolkit contains a great deal of useful information, and is intended to be a comprehensive guide to planning, developing, and sustaining a farm incubator project. However, each farm incubator project will have different needs and unique experiences that may not be reflected in the information provided in this toolkit. The information contained in this toolkit should be used as an overall guide to the process of starting and developing your incubator. You will likely need to do a significant amount of additional research, outreach, and planning to meet the needs of your particular project.

Structure

This toolkit is designed to be used in many different ways. As a complete document, the structure of the toolkit is based on a program development model[1,2,3]. The toolkit can also be used in a modular way, so you can read and use the sections that are most relevant to your work without downloading or printing the entire toolkit. Throughout the toolkit you will find examples and quotes

from farm incubator projects in many different stages of program development. You will also find case studies, worksheets, and tools in the appendices that you can use in the development and operation of your own farm incubator project.

The two introductory sections of the toolkit contain background information and key definitions:

Section 1 contains background information about the development of this toolkit. In addition, Section 1 includes this users' guide to assist you in using the toolkit in your work.

Section 2 includes the definition of a farm incubator project, as well as a description of the importance of the farm incubator model. This section also includes aggregate data collected from farm incubator projects in 2013. For a quick overview of the demographics of farm incubator projects, the infographic included in Section 2 may be particularly useful.

The next three sections comprise the bulk of the toolkit. Each section follows a similar structure:

At the beginning of each section, you will find a brief introduction and a list of the specific topics covered. Each of the topics in the section will begin with key considerations you will need to address as you plan and develop your incubator program. For many topics, you will also find links to worksheets or other planning tools. These tools can be reprinted and used in your work as long as you credit the original author. Finally, each section includes references to case studies of existing farm incubator programs. The case studies include helpful advice, reflections on lessons learned, and in many cases additional tools that the case study programs have offered to share with others. As with the planning tools and worksheets, any resources included in the case studies can be used in your work as long as you credit the author/program.

Section 3 - Planning For Your Incubator Project breaks down the process of starting a new farm incubator project. This section will be most helpful to people who are considering the farm incubator model or who are in the initial stages of planning and developing a farm incubator project. Section 3 contains information about planning, organizing, and funding an incubator program.

Section 4 - Developing Your Incubator Project covers major topics in getting an incubator project off the ground. Section 4 covers finding land, developing a curriculum, accessing farm support services, and complying with regulations. This section could be useful for people who are considering significant changes to or expansion of their farm incubator project in addition to people

who are in the beginning stages of program development.

Section 5 - Managing Your Farm Incubator Project covers the major aspects of the day-to-day management of a farm incubator project. This section is geared toward people whose farm incubator projects are already in operation, and it can also be used as a guide for people who are planning a farm incubator project. Section 4 contains information about developing an incubator site, assigning plots to farmers, establishing expectations, managing infrastructure, providing market access, integrating livestock, and transitioning farmers off the incubator site.

The last sections of the toolkit contain comprehensive references, case studies, and additional resources.

Section 6 is a full reference list for all of the sources cited in the toolkit.

Section 7 contains case studies from 13 farm incubator projects. The case studies were developed from in-depth interviews with incubator staff at each farm incubator project. Many incubator projects profiled in the case studies also provided worksheets, example documents, or other tools.

Section References:

1. Delbecq, Andre L. and Andrew H. Van De Ven. 1971. "A Group Process Model for Problem Identification and Program Planning." *The Journal of Applied Behavioral Science, 7(4)*, pp 466:492. Accessed 14 July 2013 from www.csom.umn.edu/assets/12465.pdf.
2. Speakman Management Consulting. ND. *Nonprofit Life Cycles Matrix*. [Adapted from Judith Sharken Simon. 2002. *The 5 Life Stages of Non-profits.*] 5pp. Accessed 1 July 2013 from www.speakmanconsulting.com/pdf_files/NonProfitLifeCyclesMatrix.pdf.
3. Allison, Michael and Jude Kaye. 1997. *Strategic Planning for Nonprofit Organizations: A Practical Guide and Workbook*. Support Center for Nonprofit Management. John Wiley & Sons, inc: New York, NY. 277pp.

Section 2:

What is a Farm Incubator?

A farm incubator project is a land-based multi-grower project that provides training and technical assistance to aspiring and beginning farmers.

2.1 Defining Farm Incubators

Like traditional business incubators, farm incubator projects aim to help new and beginning farm entrepreneurs establish their own successful businesses by providing specific resources and services that are difficult for start-up entrepreneurs to access on their own.[1] The types of resources and services offered by farm incubator projects vary depending on geographic area, demographics, funding, and other factors. However, the overall goal of farm incubator projects is consistent: to minimize the barriers to entry for aspiring and beginning farmers.

Barriers to entry for aspiring and beginning farmers in the US include access to land, infrastructure, knowledge, markets, and capital.[2,3] Farm incubator projects address these obstacles in many ways, some of which are listed below. Note that each farm incubator project is different, and the listed resources and services may not be offered by all projects.

Land:

- Provide low-cost or free rent for land
- Help participants identify suitable land for lease or purchase
- Match landowners and incubator participants

Infrastructure:

- Provide low-cost or free access to equipment and tools
- Provide low-cost or free access to infrastructure (e.g. walk-in coolers, barns, wash stations, hoophouses)
- Provide access to utilities like irrigation, water, and electricity

Knowledge:

- Create opportunities for ongoing training through workshops, classes, field trips, etc.
- Connect participants to outside experts and/or mentor farmers
- Provide ongoing one-on-one technical assistance with all aspects of farm operation

Markets:

- Help participants find and enter farmers' markets, restaurants, and other sales outlets
- Establish or support the establishment of Community Supported Agriculture (CSA) programs
- Facilitate wholesale accounts and/or institutional sales

Capital:

- Work with participants to develop the recordkeeping tools and skills they will need to apply for loans, grants, and other sources of capital.
- Connect participants with suitable financial advisors, banks, cooperatives, etc.
- Assist participants with business and market planning

It is important to distinguish farm incubator projects from other types of beginning farmer training and education like farm apprenticeships, university degree programs, or online learning tools.

Farm incubator projects are unique in that they are land-based projects that offer aspiring and beginning farmers an opportunity to establish their own independent farm enterprises with on-site support from farm incubator staff. See Figure 1 below:

Figure 1: Farm Incubator Projects Do/Do Not

*Farm incubator projects **DO:***	*Farm incubator projects **DO NOT**:*
• Operate primarily on a specific site or sites (land-based)	• Operate primarily in a classroom or university setting
• Generally provide low-cost or subsidized land rent for individual plots	• Typically charge market-rate rent, at least in the initial year(s) of participation
• Limit the amount of time participants can farm on the incubator site	• Provide land access for an unlimited amount of time (as in community gardens)
• Provide access to resources (education, infrastructure, etc.) that supports the development of independent farm operators	• Train people to become farm workers, apprentices, or interns

2.2 Why Are Farm Incubator Projects Important?

Farmers are aging, and some researchers estimate that as many as 50% of US farmers will retire over the next decade.[4] In addition, farmers over the age of 55 control more than half of all US farmland.[5] As the age of US farmers has continued to increase, the number of farms and number of new/beginning farmers has declined. Researchers point to many reasons for the limited number of aspiring and beginning farmers – new farmers often lack access to land, capital, and established marketplaces for goods, and face more severe financial struggles than established farmers.

The USDA estimates that about 70% of farmland will change hands over the next two decades.

New farmers are also less likely than established farmers to come from a farm background, meaning that new farmers often lack basic farm knowledge.[6] Driving a tractor, planning crop rotations, and servicing equipment are all processes that many new farmers must learn "on the fly" as new entrants into the agriculture sector. This combination of retiring farmers and lost cultural knowledge poses problems for the effective support, training, and education of the next generation of US farmers.

In addition, US agriculture is entering into a period of enormous land transition. The USDA estimates that about 70% of farmland will change hands over the next two decades.[7] As fewer Americans grow up on farms, the pathway to farming as an occupation has shifted dramatically. Aspiring and beginning farmers are much less likely to inherit or purchase land from family members.[2,3]

There is a very real possibility that much of the agricultural land in the US will be consolidated into large farm enterprises as land changes hands, which will raise the barriers to entry for beginning farmers even higher. Connecting aspiring and beginning farmers to available land will be a critical part of this land transition, and is a central piece of the mission of many farm incubator projects.

Farm incubator projects represent a unique and relatively new approach to addressing the many challenges and obstacles faced by aspiring and beginning farmers. The significance of the farm incubator model is twofold: not only can farm incubators support the development of new farm enterprises, they can also encourage the growth of strong local food systems.[8] Several interrelated factors have contributed to the increasing growth of

farm incubator projects in the US:[9]

- An aging farmer population and other demographic shifts;
- Increasing consumer demand for small-scale (human-powered) agriculture;
- Family and/or Extension training vacuum;
- Lack of access to resources (land, education, markets, capital);
- High risk and start-up cost of farming;
- Importance of sustainability goals to individual producers; and
- Increasing funding opportunities (BFRDP, OASDFR, RAP-P).

Though a few farm incubator projects have been in operation for more than ten years,* the vast majority of farm incubators have been in operation for five or fewer years.

As more incubators have begun operation over the last few years, it has become clear that farm incubator projects are filling a critical gap in beginning farmer training and development. The farm incubator model is a comprehensive model that offers support, guidance, and a great deal of promise for farmers and food systems advocates.

**** Farm incubator projects in operation for more than 10 years include:***

- The Intervale Center: Burlington, VT – 25 years;
- The New American Sustainable Agriculture Project (NASAP): Portland, ME – 11 years;
- The New Entry Sustainable Farming Project (New Entry): Lowell, MA – 15 years; and
- The Agriculture and Land-Based Training Association (ALBA): Salinas, CA – 12 years.

2.3 Overview of Farm Incubator Projects

According to information collected by NIFTI[10] and a recent nationwide survey of farm incubator projects,[11] there are 111 known farm incubator projects in the U.S. and Canada. These 111 projects break down into several different categories:

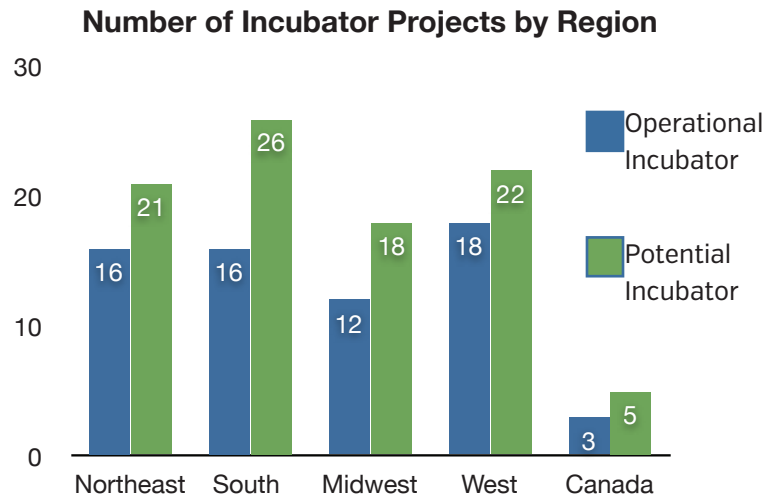
- 65 projects (59%) are operational farm incubators
- 27 projects (24%) are potential farm incubators in the planning/development stage
- 13 projects (12%) are university programs
- 6 projects (5%) are farmer training programs that do not provide access to individual plots of land

Though a small number (6) of farm incubator projects have been operating for over 10 years, farm incubators are still a relatively new model for beginning farmer training that has been growing steadily. Over 50 of the 65 farm incubators currently in operation were established within the last decade, and dozens of new programs are in the initial planning and development stages.

Location

Farm incubators are currently operating or being developed in 38 states and 4 Canadian provinces. Programs currently in operation cover 32 states and 2 provinces. There is a slight concentration of farm incubator projects in the South of the U.S. When considering only programs that are in operation, however, the concentration shifts to the West of the U.S. (see Figure 2).

Figure 2: Project Location



Organization

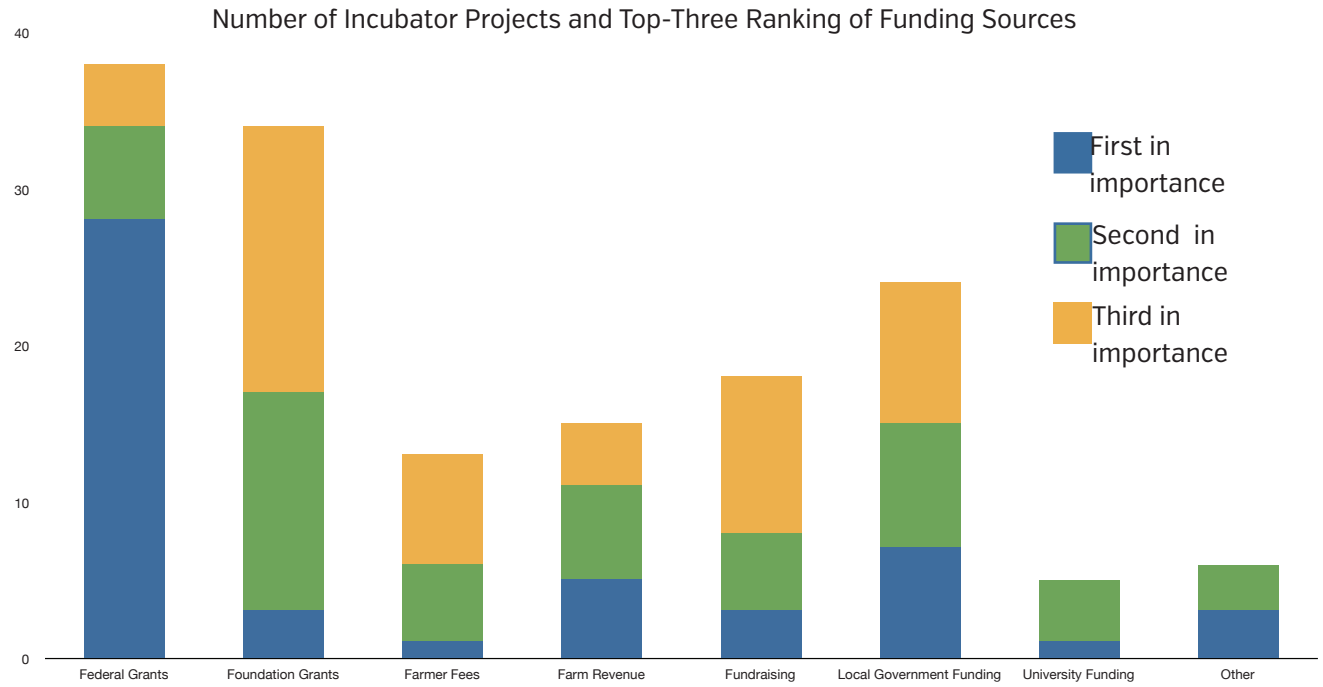
Fifty of the 65 known operational incubators (76.9%) responded to survey questions about the organizational structure of farm incubator projects. The vast majority of responding farm incubator projects (68%) are organized as nonprofit organizations. 12% of responding programs indicated that their projects are a hybrid of two diffferent organization types; for example acadmic/nonprofit or nonprofit/cooperative. Academic institutions and government agencies each accounted for 8% of the total responses. The least common organizational structure was a sole proprietorship; only 4% of respondents organize their programs in this way. Though some programs included a cooperative structure as part of a hybrid model, no farm incubator projects are organized entirely as cooperatives, trusts, or for-profit corporations.

According to survey responses from 55 operational incubators (84.6%), most projects operate with limited staff. 52.7% of responding programs have 3 staff members or less, and 18.2% have one or fewer staff members. Job types are roughly evenly split between part-time employment (40.2%) and full-time employment (38.4%). Some positions (16%) are seasonal, and a small percentage (6%) of incubator staff are unpaid. Also important to note is the prevalence of volunteer and participant labor that may not be reflected in these numbers. It is a common practice for many incubator projects to use volunteer or participant labor during peak harvest periods or for additional help with infrastructure improvements on the incubator site.

Funding

Farm incubator projects seek funding from many different sources. Fifty-one operational farm incubator projects (78.4%) responded to a question that asked them to rank sources of funding from most important to least important. The majority of incubator projects (54.9%) indicated that federal grant programs (e.g. the Beginning Farmer and Rancher Development Program (BFRDP) or the Refugee Agricultural Partners Program (RAPP)) were the most important source of funding for their projects. See Figure 3 for more information about the importance of various funding sources for farm incubator projects.

Figure 3: Funding Importance



Population Served

Farm incubator projects have provided support, access, and education to thousands of farmers, gardeners, and other farm businesses. Of the 65 operational farm incubator projects surveyed, 56 responded (86.1%) with information about the number of participants they have served overall, and the number of participants they are working with in 2013. The number of participants served by farm incubator projects is likely higher, because not all incubator projects responded to the survey.

Overall, responding projects have served 5,747 participants. In 2013, 2,343 participants benefited from farm incubator project services, including continuing education, marketing, and other programming. 958 growers farmed on incubator plots at responding projects during the 2013 growing season.

Over 50% of farm incubator projects aim to serve refugee and immigrant communities.

Population: Many farm incubator projects aim to serve specific populations of farmers. Responses from 49 farm incubators (75.4%) indicated that projects are overwhelmingly geared toward beginning farmers (89.8%) as defined by the USDA. In addition to their focus on beginning farmers, a majority of farm incubator projects also aim to serve refugee and immigrant communities (53.8%). It is important to note that some of the responding farm incubator projects (10.2%) are open only to recently resettled refugees and do not serve beginning farmers who were born in the U.S. Other common populations served by farm incubator projects include participants who meet the USDA definitions of socially disadvantaged (23.1%) and limited resource (10.8%) farmers.

Experience: While the beginning farmers served by farm incubator projects may not have extensive experience as sole farm operators, the majority of farm incubator participants do have previous farming experience. Fifty-six farm incubator projects (86.1%) provided infomation about the farming experience of their participants. More than half (52%) of responding projects indicated that their participants usually come to the incubator with previous farming experience. More than one-third (34%) reported that their participants have mixed levels of farming knowledge - some have previous farming experience, while others have none. Only 14% of responding incubator projects reported that their participants typically have no previous farming experience.

Age: The aging of the farmer population in the U.S. has been well-documented,[12] and the 2007 Census of Agriculture found that the average age of principal farm operators is now 57.1 years of age. Farmers over age 65 are one of the fastest growing age groups in U.S. agriculture. The number of farmers under the age of 45, on the other hand, has dramatically decreased in recent years. Principal operators under age 45 decreased by 21% in the 2007 Census of Agriculture, and the number of all operators in the under-45 age group decreased by 14%.[13] Farm incubator projects can help address the aging of the U.S. agriculture sector because they tend to serve beginning farmers who are much younger than the average age for farmers in the U.S. Fifty farm incubator projects (76.9%) reported information about the age of their participants, and the average age of participants at 49 of those projects (98%) is below the U.S. average of 57.1 years. Perhaps more importantly, the average age of participants at 35 of the responding projects (70%) is under 45 years old.

Gender: Men and women appear to participate roughly equally in farm incubator projects. Forty-nine farm incubator projects (75.4%) provided information about the gender of their participants. Women represent 48.5% of incubator participants at responding projects, and men represent 51.5% of participants. The number of female participants in farm incubator projects is encouraging, especially given that women were principal operators of only 14% of U.S. farms in 2007.[14]

Most of the information included in this section is also represented in an infographic format. This infographic can be reproduced for use in your work as long as you acknowledge the authors. See Figure 4 on page 2.3.10 for a print version. A .pdf version of the infographic is available for download at: http://nesfp.org/nifti/incubatorinfographic.

USDA Definitions

A ***beginning farmer*** must meet two criteria:

1. They must have 10 or fewer years of consecutive experience operating a farm or ranch as a principal operator, and

2. They must "materially and substantially participate in the operation of the farm or ranch."

These criteria apply to all members of an entity.

Full USDA definition.

A ***socially disadvantaged farmer*** must be a member of a socially disadvantaged group, defined by the USDA as "a group whose members have been subjected to racial or ethnic prejudice because of their identity as members of a group without regard to their individual qualities."

Full USDA definition.

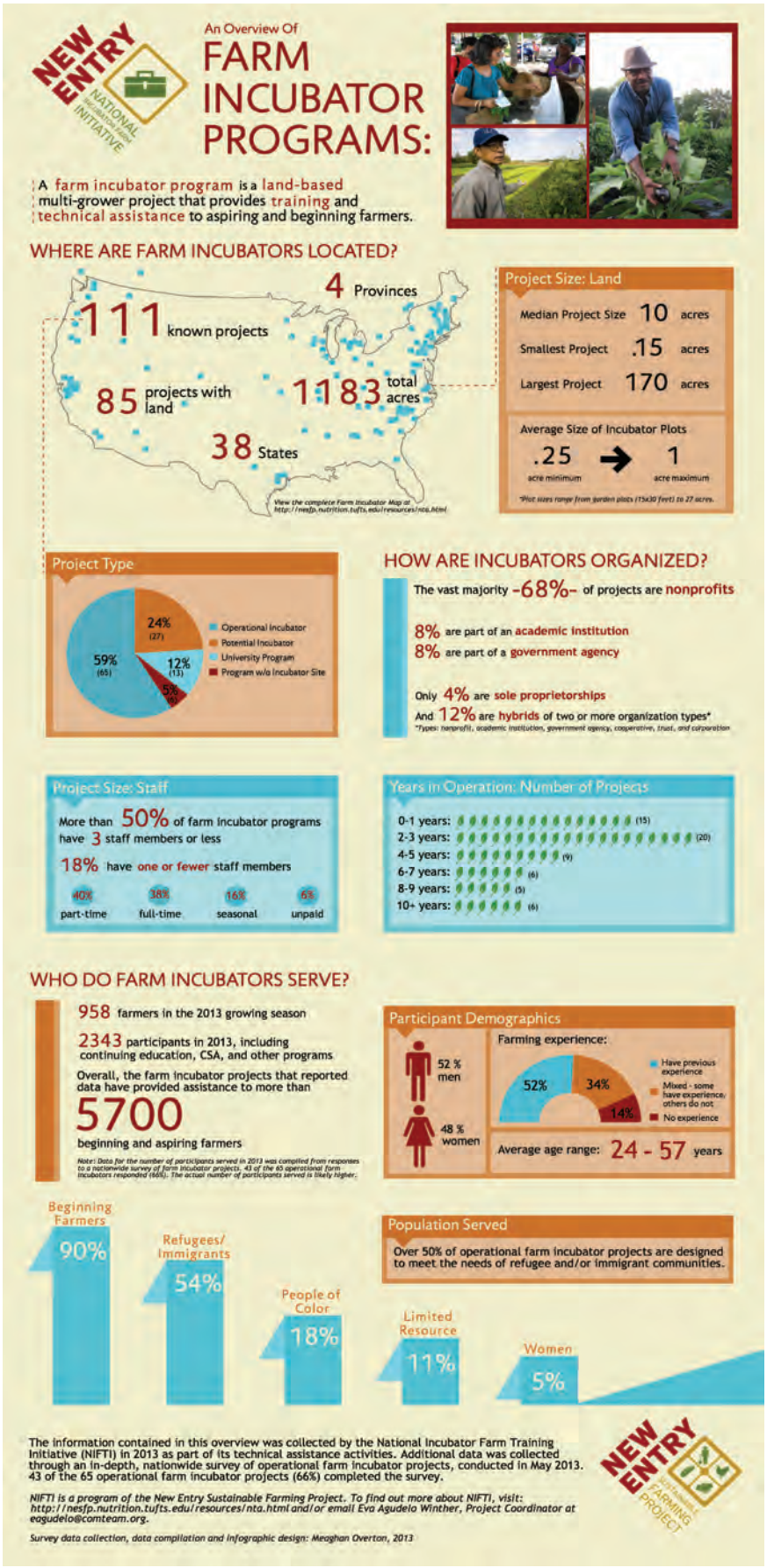
A farmer must meet two criteria to be considered a ***limited resource farmer***:

1. Farm sales must be $172,800 or less in each of the previous two years, and

2. Total household income must be "at or below the national poverty level for a family of four or less than 50 percent of county median household income in each of the previous two years."

Full USDA definition.

Figure 4: An Overview of Farm Incubator Programs infographic.



Section References:

1. National Business Incubation Association. 2009. *Business Incubation FAQ.* Available at www.nbia.org/resource_library/faq/index.php#1.
2. Ahearn, Mary and Doris Newton. May 2009. "Beginning Farmers and Ranchers." USDA Economic Research Service. Economic Information Bulletin Number 53.
3. Barham, Brad, Douglas Jackson-Smith, Steve Stevenson, and Jennifer Taylor. 2001. *Nurturing the Next Generation of Wisconsin's Dairy Farmers.* Center for Integrated Agricultural Systems (CIAS) and Program on Agricultural Technology Studies (PATS), College of Agricultural and Life Sciences, University of Wisconsin-Madison.
4. Katchova, Ani L. 2010. *Structural Changes in US Agriculture: Financial Performance of Farms in Transition.* Paper presented at 114th EAAE Seminar, April 15-16, 2010. Available at http://ageconsearch.umn.edu/bitstream/60965/2/katchova.pdf.
5. Mishra, Ashok, Christine Wilson, and Robert Williams. "Factors affecting financial performance of new and beginning farmers." *Agricultural Finance Review, 69(2)*: 160-179.
6. Ewert, Brianna M. 2012. *Understanding Incubator Farms: Innovative Programs for New Farmer Development*. MS Thesis, Environmental Studies. University of Montana: Missoula, MT. 157pp.
7. United States Department of Agriculture (USDA). 2008. *Family Farm Forum, April.* Cooperative State Research,Education, and Extension Service (CSREES).
8. Lyson, T.A. 2004. *Civic agriculture: Reconnecting farm, food, and community.* Tufts University Press: Medford, MA.
9. Winther, Eva Agudelo. 2013. *Training New Farmers, Training the Trainers.* Presentation at the Start2Farm Beginning Farmer and Rancher Conference, March 18 2013. New Entry Sustainable Farming Project.
10. NIFTI (National Incubator Farm Training Initiative). 2013.
11. Overton, Meaghan. 2013. *An Exploratory Survey of Farm Incubator Programs*. Unpublished Master's Thesis. Tufts University, Department of Urban and Environmental Policy and Planning.
12. Allen, Rich and Ginger Harris, 2005. *What We Know About the Demographics of U.S. Farm Operators.* NASS/USDA. Presented at Agricultural Outlook Forum, February 25, 2005.
13. USDA. 2012. *2007 Census of Agriculture: Farmers by Age.* USDA NASS (National Agricultural Statistics Service). Accessed 17 July 2013 from http://www.agcensus.usda.gov/Publications/2007/Online_Highlights/Fact_Sheets/Demographics/farmer_age.pdf.
14. Hoppe, Robert A., and Penni Korb. 2013. *Characteristics of Women Farm Operators and Their Farms*. EIB-111, U.S. Department of Agriculture, Economic Research Service, April 2013. Accessed 17 July 2013 from http://www.ers.usda.gov/media/1093194/eib111.pdf

Section 3:

Planning for Your Incubator Project

3.1 Introduction

Now that you have a basic sense of what defines farm incubator projects and the status of these programs throughout North America, it is time to dive into the details of what makes farm incubators work. Good administration and management serves as the foundation of any organization's work and the following section discusses the logistical aspects of this that are specific to running a farm incubator project. Some of the information here is applicable to all organizations, and therefore may seem intuitive to those who are familiar with standard operating procedures within their own settings.

3.1.1 - Key Considerations

Project Goals: Your ability to provide high quality services and support to your farmers is directly related to the administrative capacity of your organization. It is important to make sure that your program:

- has the financial resources and support to operate programs effectively;
- retains employees that are satisfied, and have access to professional development; and
- has strong internal and external program monitoring and evaluation protocols.

Once you have gone through a strategic planning process for either your organization or your project (see section 3.2) you may realize that you have values-based goals for your program that may influence how you design your administrative roles – perhaps in terms of leadership development for participants, or being committed to remaining flexible and adaptable to farmers changing needs.

Relationships: Your incubator project administrators will interact with participants through every aspect of your program, from intake, through program design and implementation, and into the evaluative process. Depending on the populations you serve, this may require specific skills or training around language and literacy, or cultural competency. Consider investing in trainings on relevant aspects of your work, as well as basic facilitation and conflict resolution.

Resources: You will need many resources to effectively operate an incubator project. When you are creating your startup budget, remember to include detailed cost estimates for both administrative and software expenses. See Figure 5 for a list of typical farm incubator project administrative and software expenses.

Communication: You will want to make sure that all staff, participants, partners and supporters have a clear understanding of the mission, values, and goals of your project and are able to clearly articulate what you do and why. It may help to find a consultant to help with your "brand strategy" or messaging and develop some basic language for press releases, social media, websites, and printed promotional materials.

A learning organization is one that: seeks to create its own future; assumes learning is an ongoing and creative process for its members; develops, adapts and transforms itself in response to the needs and aspirations of people, both inside and outside itself; and allows people at all levels, individually and collectively, to continually increase their capacity to produce results they really care about.

Figure 5: Typical Administrative and Software Expenses

Administrative Costs: **Each program's budget will be different based on your unique circumstances. Below is a list of typical administrative costs you should allow for.**

- Salaries
- Professional development (conferences)
- Office supplies
- Mileage
- Phone/fax
- Rent
- Utilities/internet
- Computers
- Software
- Postage
- Consultants and Interns
- Annual audits/accounting services

Software: **There are a number of software tools that can make your program run much more smoothly and allow you to reach out, follow up, and work more efficiently.**

- ***Database software:*** Something that allows you to track "clients" and their activity, run outcomes reports, etc. Salesforce is a commonly used tool in non-profits, and both ALBA and New Entry have experience customizing it for use with farmers. Non-profit package rates are available.
- ***Website with content management capacity for staff:*** Almost everyone uses the internet these days, even farmers. You want the ability to put current information on your site, publicize events, and tell the general public about what you do
- ***Financial Management:*** Quickbooks is the standard for keeping track of income and expenses, and will allow you to invoice suppliers and manage payments from farmers.
- ***Constant Contact:*** A highly useful suite of cloud-based functions that allow you to send newsletters and outreach to your various audiences, set up event registrations, conduct basic surveys and evaluations. Non-profit package rates are available.
- ***Survey Monkey:*** Another (relatively inexpensive) tool for surveying participants and gathering information about program participation and future learning needs, or anything else you'd like to know!
- ***Online Meetings and Webinars:*** GoToMeeting, Adobe Connect, Google Meetup offer various packages for conducting online meetings with participants and stakeholders. You may be able to provide distance learning options and workshops through these tools as well.
- ***Cloud-based file storage:*** Dropbox or Google Drive/Google Docs can be used to share files and collaborate on documents with staff and may be especially useful for working with interns or work study students.
- ***Graphic design:*** Adobe InDesign or Photoshop for print layouts. Non-profit licensing is often available for reduced rates.

3.1.2 - Typical Administrative Activities

Incubator project staff often wear multiple hats to keep the project running. The list below is not comprehensive, but it will give you an excellent place to start when you are thinking about roles, job descriptions, and staffing levels. Here are some of the typical administrative activities conducted by farm incubator project staff:

Strategic and program planning: Facilitating a strategic planning process for the organization, gathering stakeholder input, and shaping annual work plans and budgets; maintaining the organization's focus on mission-driven outcomes; developing key programmatic objectives, goals, and work plans including staff tasks/activities and evaluation metrics.

Budget development: Developing staffing plan for program activities, supplies and materials and programmatic costs for all program areas; incorporate budget needs into all funding requests and allocate proportionally all overhead/administrative costs.

Fundraising and grant writing: Searching for appropriate funding opportunities to meet funder and program mission; review RFPs for suitability to support program goals; responding to RFPs via proposal / budget development; secure partner support for proposals; fundraising and individual donor cultivation and engagement; conduct annual appeals, fundraising dinners, and special events (Spring Launch, Farm Tour, Open Houses, Festivals, etc.).

Grants management and reporting: Tracking and maintaining monthly report of program activities by all staff and developing financial and program reports to funders; conduct funder meetings, site visits, attend project director meetings/ conferences, teleconferences, etc.

Building and maintaining community partnerships: Represent project at events, workshops, panel presentations, meetings, etc.; participate in working groups for collaborative projects; engage in local, regional, and national policy and advocacy work.

Staff Management: Hiring, managing and evaluating staff performance; ongoing coaching and supervisory "check ins" to assess progress toward goals; facilitate staff cohesion and team building.

Program Evaluation: Evaluating project performance and impacts either via data collection, discussions with clients, through participant surveys, focus groups, partner feedback, etc.

Maintaining the organization's focus on mission-driven outcomes.

Direct Program Work: Engage in some direct programmatic work through participation in public events, program planning and site management.

Additional Administrative Activities:

- *Communications:* Serve as the program liaison to prospective participants via email and telephone and answer inquiries or direct them to the appropriate staff person
- *Office administration:* Management of physical resources, including office supplies and equipment, communication tools, etc.
- *Procurement:* Handle purchasing and tracking expenditures.
- *Special events planning:* Direct logistics including volunteer management, scheduling, locations, etc.

3.1.3 - Staffing

Your staffing will largely depend on the needs of your participants, and your organizational structure and budget. Many incubator projects are developed by the existing staff of organizations and then transitioned into having their own staff at some point during the development and implementation phase.

Although in the beginning various roles may be filled by one or two people, or their part-time equivalent, the typical positions that need to be filled on an incubator project are:

- *Administrative oversight:* project director or executive director – see typical activities in section 3.1.2
- *Administrative support:* bookkeeping, financial management, office support
- *Farm site manager:* build and/or manage infrastructure, maintain site and equipment, conduct field trainings
- *Farmer training coordinator:* coordinate and develop curriculum, conduct classroom and field-based trainings, provide one-on-one technical assistance to farmers
- *Outreach coordinator:* promote and enroll participants into programs, promote work of the incubator to general public
- *Market development specialist:* provide assistance to farmers in accessing markets

Most organizations will need their staff, regardless of their specific role, to be able to do some administrative tasks including financial management, program evaluation, outreach and communication, software literacy, fundraising and grant-writing, etc. for their own program areas.

A note about interns:

Interns and work study students, if you have access to them through local colleges and universities, can be a great asset to your organization. Some tips on incorporating them into your project:

- Make sure you have the administrative capacity to manage and support students before you take them on
- Provide distinct projects, with clear and accomplishable parameters, that have a learning benefit to the student
- Think about what institutional knowledge may have to be transferred and what level of experience students should have to accomplish their goals

3.2 Project Planning

3.2.1 - Introduction

While it may be tempting to jump right in and start training beginning farmers as soon as you get your first grant or land donation, an organization that hopes to operate a program with the capacity for long-term effectiveness should first engage in strategic planning, visioning, and goal setting. The planning process allows you to clarify important aspects of your endeavor, such as your mission, your target audiences, how you will grow over time, and other key topics.

Good planning is the foundation of everything your program will accomplish. Although a bias towards actions and outcomes is common and understandable, good results go hand in hand with the process of how you get there and the relationships you build along the way. Setting clear intentions from the start of your program, or, if your program is already in operation, taking the time to think about where you have been and where you are going, is a key step in creating a robust farm incubator program that will continue to provide value to farmers for the long term. Just as we often advise farmers to plan and think ahead when they're planting crops in the springtime, we must also be aware that setting your intentions at the outset makes for a better program that can clearly articulate its mission, goals, and results to constituents, funders, and the communities we work in.

3.2.2 - Key Considerations

Project Goals: Now is the time to get crystal clear on your goals for this project. You may have a wide variety of stakeholders with their own needs and agendas, so it is vital to clarify from the start what your organization will and will not attempt to accomplish. A good place to start here is looking at who will benefit from your work – obviously beginning farmers, but are you also hoping to provide an educational benefit to your community? Will farmers be selling food to low-income residents? Is your project stewarding land and the local ecosystem through sustainable agriculture? Your incubator project does not, and should not, attempt to provide all things to all people, so a well defined set of goals is important to guide your activities in the years to come.

Relationships: As you are determining your project's mission and goals, who have you decided to include in the process and in what capacity? Do you have a steering committee for your project made up of key constituents that will either participate or help to deliver on your program goals? In the early stages and when

re-evaluating your project's strategic goals, it can be helpful to conduct interviews with key program constituents to both gain insight into your program's impact as well as increase a sense of ownership and involvement with the people you would like to keep engaged in your work. Your relationships with farmers are the most important, so make sure you prioritize listening to their perspectives, needs and suggestions.

Resources: Take inventory of what you have to work with as you develop your goals and strategies. Resources include the financial (funding, individual donor base, etc.) and physical (land, barn, equipment), but don't forget your social capital, which includes relationships with farmers, the community at large, and other organizations who have complimentary missions. Be realistic about the time you have to dedicate to planning, but be aware that you're saving valuable staff time in the long run by laying down important groundwork first. Try to strike a balance between pushing forward without any planning whatsoever, and spending too much time talking about what you're going to do and not enough time doing it.

Communication: Develop a clear timeline for the planning process, as well as projected dates for project launch and other key milestones and share this timeline with your constituents, community, and steering committee so it is clear what the outcome of your planning process will be. It can be helpful to wait until your mission, goals and audiences have been clarified before you announce to the general public what you plan to do so you can present a strong and well-developed program right out of the gate. Your early planning stages are also a good time to think about project "branding" and how you want the public to see your organization and what you're trying to accomplish.

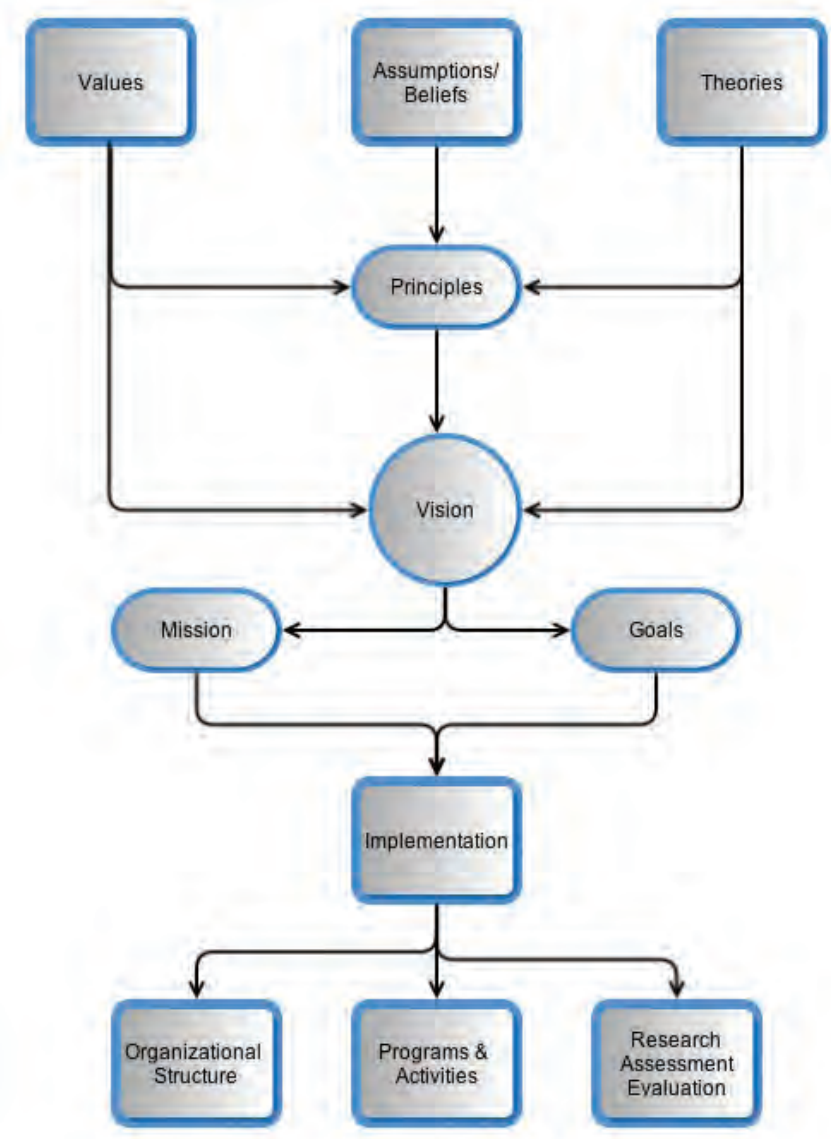
3.2.3 - Planning/Program Development Process

Figure 6 (below) offers a simple and typical map for a strategic planning and/or program development process. You may already have some of these components very well developed, while others may have received less attention and now need to be fleshed out. Regardless, every organization should have some sense of its values, assumptions and beliefs, and theories of change (i.e. how you think a problem should be addressed). For example, many incubator projects value sustainable agricultural practices and strengthening local food systems, believe that more small-scale sustainable farmers will lead to healthier communities and land, and theorize that a program dedicated to supporting beginning farmers can make a significant impact towards achieving positive ends. Examining your organization's values, assumptions and theories is a good place to bring in

stakeholder input. Once you have delved into all of this, you can try to codify it into the organizing principles of your program.

You can now articulate your vision, which states what sort of world your program is trying to bring about. The vision should be inspiring and ambitious and state what the future looks like when all your work has been successful. From the vision, you can state how your organization plans to bring about this vision in a mission statement, and create clear goals that set out the specific achievements that indicate you have achieved your mission and are on the path towards your vision. Implementation requires an organizational structure that can enact your programs and activities, and an ongoing evaluation component to ensure you are moving in the right direction.

Figure 6: Creating a Vision for your Farm Incubator Project



3.2.4 - Beginning to Plan

There are many way to approach the planning process, but you may want to start by answering the following key questions:

What do we do? What is the issue you're trying to address and how will you address it? Most incubator programs address the lack of resources for beginning farmers by providing for farmers' clearly stated needs. Depending on what services and resources are already available in your area (extension, Buy Local campaigns, etc.), you may not have to provide everything a farmer requires to be successful, but the following is a list of common activities that incubators engage in:

- Lease land to beginning farmers at reduced rates. This land often includes infrastructure including water, greenhouses, and other equipment. See Section 4 for a more complete list.
- Provide education around business planning, crop production, sustainable farming practices, accessing land and credit, etc.
- Market farmers' produce and assist farmers in finding their own markets. Sometimes this also involves negotiating contracts and/or relationships with buyers on behalf of farmers.
- Raise awareness of food systems issues for the broader community.
- Provide low-income food access.
- Help farmers access land and services once they have left the incubator.
- Explain complex regulations.

For whom do we do it? The first and most basic audience for a farm incubator project is farmers, but you can certainly parse this group in a variety of ways and there are other people in your community who will benefit from your work. Make sure you clearly define your target audiences, and know who is a primary and who is secondary. Who you decide to work with will also impact many other aspects of your program operations, including cost, how you set expectations, what kind of funding you can access, etc.

- *Farmers:* What is the average age of the farmers you're trying to reach? What racial or ethnic background are they from? What income bracket or level of education do the farmers in your program have? Are you hoping to work

with mostly women or men? Recent college graduates or second career farmers? Will a background in gardening be enough to enter your program, or will you expect 1-3 years of previous farming experience on a market farm? Whether your program is geared towards a highly specific audience or not, it is important to clarify who you plan to work with and why you have made that decision.

- *The General Public:* This can include those who purchase food from farmers, or from your project if you operate a food hub of some kind. It can also include neighbors adjacent to your farm sites or in the same town, as well as municipal representatives who work with your project (town zoning boards, etc) and land trusts or agricultural commissions in your town.

How will we know if we're successful?* Here is where you get into the vision, mission, goals, and outcomes of your program. What does a successful farmer look like? How will you measure that success? Remember, if you have multiple audiences and different goals for each of them, you should also have measurable outcomes for each of those goals. To evaluate if your program worked you will need to have a baseline measurement of whatever you decide to use as an indicator from before your participants started your program so you can see how they have improved as a result of your work. It's important to note that there are many factors that contribute to the success of farmers and that your program is simply one of those factors.

Common Indicators of Success:

- Gross and net income from farming pre-and post participation
- Number of farmers still farming post-participation
- Various types of achievement on farmer skills assessments
- Number of farmers served overall
- Number of farmers connected to farmland
- Diversity of farm enterprises and markets accessed by farmers
- Percentage of household income derived from farming
- Number and type of organic/sustainable/ conservation practices used
- Estimated value of crops sold per year
- Improvement in financial literacy and access to credit for farmers

3.2.5 - Tips for Successful Strategic Planning

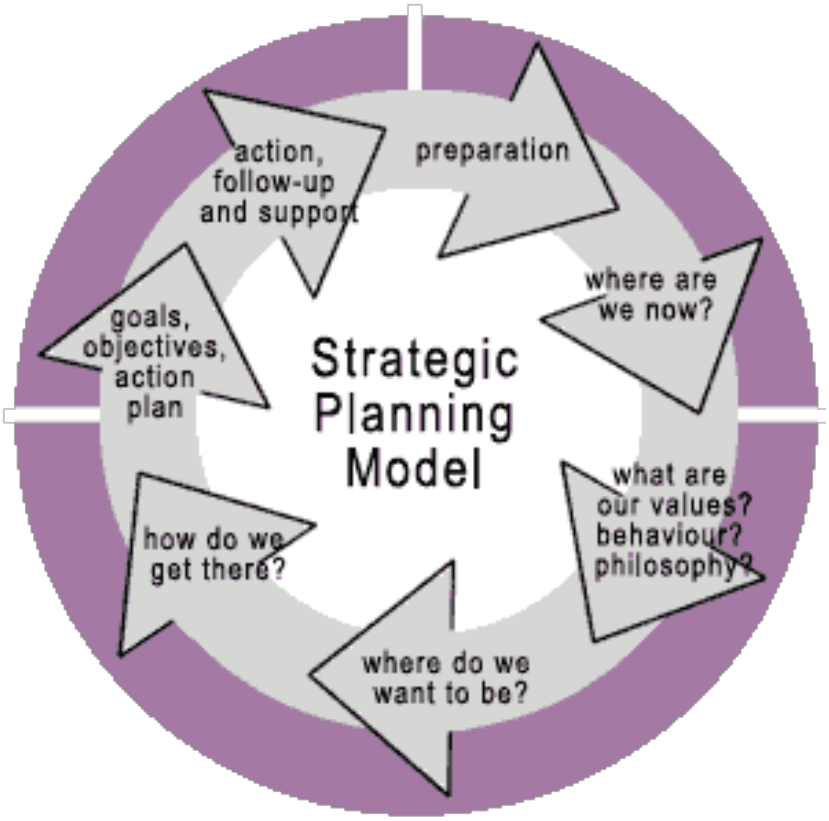
A thoroughly thought out and well-designed program will not only allow you to serve the needs of your participants, it will also help you articulate your goals and outcomes to prospective supporters over the life of your project. When you put in place clear and usable ways to measure your program outcomes not only can you look back on your work and see what approaches were most or least effective and improve upon what you have done in future endeavors, you can also make a strong case to local, state, and federal agencies, funders, farmers, and your community that farm incubator projects are an excellent tool for addressing myriad

**The issue of how incubator projects measure their outcomes is a complex and many-faceted one, which NIFTI is currently dedicating significant time and resources towards addressing. To receive up-to-date information about our progress in the development of shared metrics, please visit our website at* http://nesfp.org/nifti.

food systems challenges.

The strategic planning process follows a progression from preparation to action, and following this sort of model can help you develop a strong, flexible farm incubator project. See figure 7 below for a graphical representation of the strategic planning process.

Figure 7: The Strategic Planning Model



Here are some strategies that you may find useful in your strategic planning process:

- *Engage core partners & constituents*. Make sure you're asking the people who will be most involved in your program what they need and can realistically engage in.
- *Do a SWOT Analysis.* SWOT stands for Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, and Threats, and is a common tool for understanding your resources, challenges, and potential paths.
- *Get a facilitator.* Effective facilitation is KEY! You may want to invest in bringing in an outside facilitator to work with your organization on the planning process, or perhaps recruiting a member of your board to provide trained

facilitation. Having someone in the room who can listen to everyone's perspective and synthesize many complex ideas into a usable plan can be invaluable because without good facilitation it is far too easy to get sidetracked or "lost in the weeds."

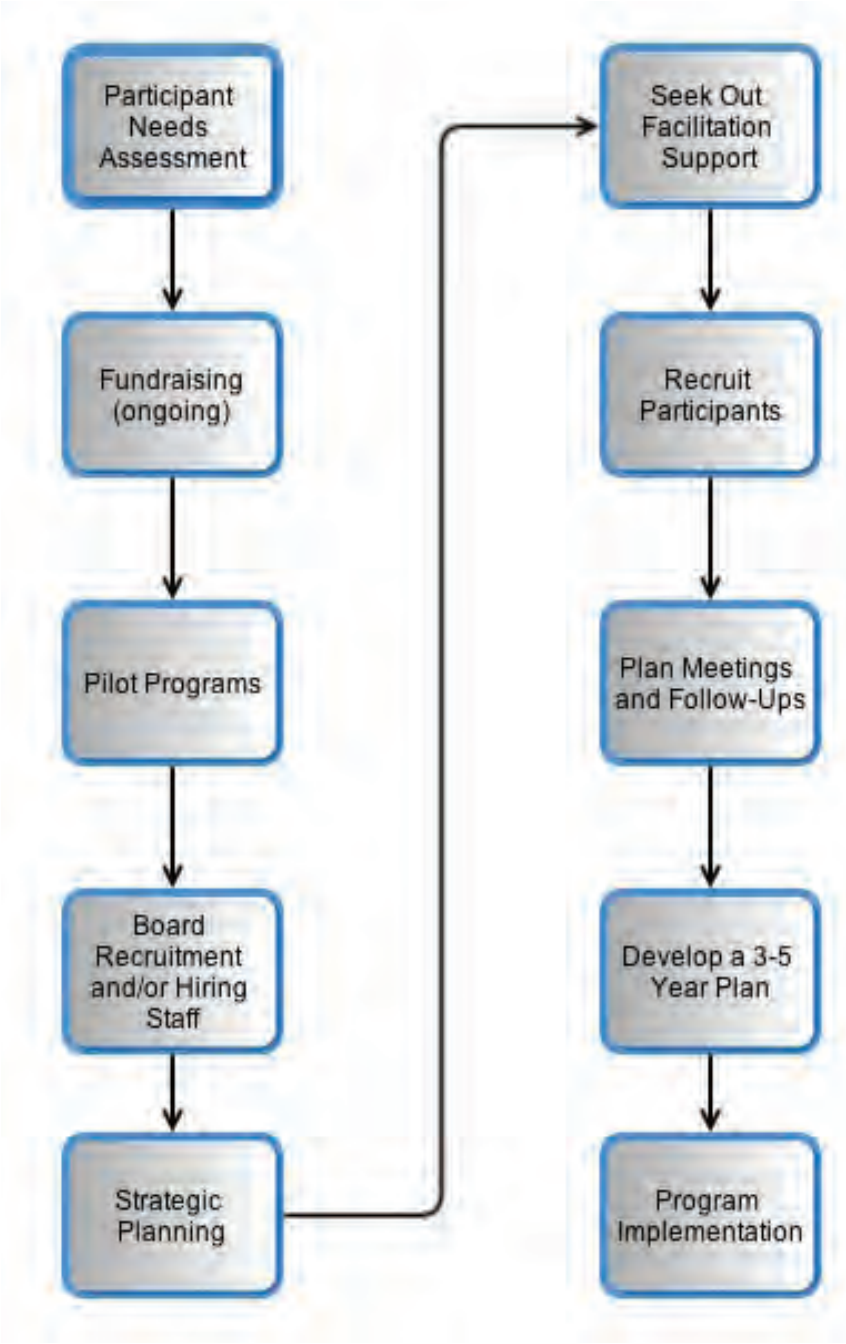
- *Set aside time for planning and reflection.* Allowing adequate time to plan and think through your proposed action plan can save you time in the long run. It can also reveal issues you may not have thought of, perspectives that should be incorporated into your work, or other factors that often get pushed aside in the interest of expediency. Again, doing it right the first time saves energy and effort over time.
- *Set SMART goals.* Decide on goals that are Specific, Measurable, Attainable, Realistic, and Time-bound to make sure you're setting yourself up for success. SMART goals make it easier to develop an action plan and get where you want to be.
- *Incorporate good program design and evaluation.* It is impossible to overestimate the importance of being able to tell the story of the impact your program has in both qualitative and quantitative ways and this requires prioritizing program evaluation at every opportunity.

3.2.6 - Program Development Timeline

Every incubator program arises from different circumstances and has unique challenges. Figure 8, however, is our attempt to lay out the typical activities that will take place as you develop your program. Average time frames for each of these parts of the process are far too dependent on circumstances for us to attempt a typical timeframe. We present this list with the caveat that some pieces of the process may be more or less relevant to your situation.

You may have already completed some of these steps without completing others and want to go back to further develop other aspects of your program. Even when you have been through a full cycle of strategic planning and have developed your program, you will still need to return to your plan periodically, re-evaluate, and continue to adapt to changing circumstances. Program development and strategic planning are iterative and continuous processes.

Figure 8: Farm Incubator Project Model Timeline



3.2.7 - Conclusion

Planning for your incubator program is absolutely essential. Although parts of the process may seem overly abstract or time consuming, providing a needed service in a way that works for your audience for years to come is the best reward for laying down a solid foundation for your work.

3.3 Raising Money

There is no magic bullet for raising funds for your farm incubator program and the funding climate, along with the economy at large, is not the most encouraging for anyone at the moment. With that said, incubator projects are funded in a myriad of creative ways through public/non-profit partnerships, land donations, sponsorships, and crowd funding, along with your more traditional government and foundation funding streams. All organizations strive for some sort of financial stability and many see income generation as a way to accomplish this goal. Although there is potential for this on farm incubator projects through the sales of farmers' products and small amounts of income from farmer rental fees and payment for services, the mission of incubator projects is inherently long-term and educational in nature. This puts them squarely in the "public good" category of investments in the future of our food system, the health and well-being of our communities, and sustainable economic development. The following section lays out various options for generating income for your project.

3.3.1 - Key Considerations

Project Goals: Future funding is driven by results. Make sure you have identified your target goals and how you will measure these so you can show progress and significant impact as a direct result of the work you are doing. Demonstrate a wide variety of benefits (economic, social, environmental),and articulate them clearly and often, along with your mission and ultimate vision for the world you hope to create with your project. While quantitative metrics are always useful, qualitative stories also move hearts and minds. Your project should strive to constantly identify sources of additional funding, build transparency into the planning and implementation process, and document all of your work so you can report in detail what you have accomplished and how you did it.

Relationships: Cultivate relationships with foundations, but also with individual donors and the communities you serve. Ultimately, the customers who purchase food from your farmers, the farmers' and their families who have sustainable livelihoods and all other beneficiaries of your work should be able to tell inspiring stories about what you do, which can translate into applications and appeals for support. Don't forget to think local and cultivate your municipal, county, and state government so they understand the economic development opportunities your program provides and the environmental benefit of having land in sustainable agriculture. The more advocates you have, the more options there will be for collaborations and innovative program development

with other local partners that can increase your likelihood of receiving funding.

Resources: Take advantage of local libraries or universities that have subscriptions to online grant databases like the Foundation Center (http://foundationcenter.org/) to conduct comprehensive searches. Consider soliciting in-kind donations of goods and services from local businesses and professionals to help with various program activities and ask for donations whenever possible.

Communication: If you have a strong presence in your community or a broad base of partner organizations, make sure you reach out (sparingly) for support to your networks. E-newsletters and social media are a great way to build community support for your work, and websites create a strong presence for your program on the web where a majority of funders will conduct research on your program. Make sure your mission, vision, and goals are clearly stated and articulated, and don't forget to provide moving stories, to make the case for why your organization is a good candidate for ongoing funding.

3.3.2 - Fundraising

Fundraising commonly happens through the following means, and often requires:

Grassroots (appeals and campaigns): Reach out to your previous participants, and any general audiences that you may have cultivated through holding public events, tabling at agricultural fairs, etc. The benefit of grassroots appeals is that the funding is unrestricted. The downside is that you can spend a lot of time and resources on these campaigns for very little financial payoff. However, if you consider raising awareness about your program a long-term investment in your organizational health and relevance, then grassroots campaigns are well worth the effort.

Individual donor cultivation: You may have contacts and interested parties who are capable of providing larger individual donations. Smaller fundraising events may be more appropriate for these donor groups. Consider events along the line of farm dinners with donated produce and a well-known chef or restaurant sponsor.

Events: Larger community events have similar plusses and minuses as other grassroots appeals and campaigns in that they often get the word out to a broad audience about your work, but may not yield as much return on investment as other approaches. Some examples of events include seasonal plant sales, farm dinners, road races, and community harvest festivals.

Sponsorships: If you have some way of reaching a large group of people through your outreach and promotional efforts, for example, if you hold grassroots events like the ones mentioned above, you may be able to leverage this exposure to cultivate sponsorships from local businesses who want to be associated with sustainability and local business promotion and cultivation. Consider your local food-coop, garden supply stores, popular restaurants that serve local food, or other community allies.

Crowd funding: Recent online crowd funding platforms like Kickstarter and IndieGogo and GoFundMe have sprung up in recent years and offer a good alternative to traditional funding sources if a few conditions exist: you have the administrative time to manage the site; you have attractive giveaways to offer potential funders; you have a broad base of socially networked contacts; and you have a distinct project (for example, a greenhouse or tractor) that provides an appealing focus for potential donors.

3.3.3 - Grants Development

Government grants can be federal, state, or local. They often require more time to apply for and more time to report on due to higher levels of bureaucracy inherent within the system. Below is a list of federal funding programs that may appropriate for incubator farm projects. Note that some of these programs are contingent on congressional appropriation and may not survive the next round of Farm Bill negotiations. You can also search http://www.grants.gov for additional opportunities.

- CFP – Community Food Projects
- BFRDP – Beginning Farmer and Rancher Development Program
- RMA / RME – Risk Management Agency (and Regional Risk Management Centers)
- OASDFR – Outreach and Assistance to Socially Disadvantaged Farmers and Ranchers (2501 Progarm)
- FMPP – Farmers' Market Promotion Program
- Specialty Crop Block Grants (via state dept of agriculture)
- SARE – Sustainable Agriculture Research and Education (farmer, R&E, prof. devt, community, partnership)

- Regional IPM Grants
- NRCS CIG (Conservation Innovation Grants), EQIP (Environmental Quality Incentives Program), AMA (Agricultural Management) and Farm Service Agency (FSA) Loan Programs
- RBEG (Rural Business Enterprise Grants)
- USDA Value-Added Producer Grants
- ORR/HHS RAPP – Refugee Agricultural Partnership Program
- Local Community Development Block Grants (CDBG)

Foundation grants have specific geographic and mission foci. When searching and applying for foundation grants, take the time to make sure you are not trying to fit into a box that wasn't made for your program. If the grant does not seem to be a good fit for your organization in some meaningful way, don't spend time applying for it. If there is a question about whether or not it's a good fit, try to contact the foundation to clarify before spending a lot of time on an involved application.

As mentioned in the "Key Considerations" section, you can find various search engines for searching various foundation grant opportunities at your local libraries, colleges, and universities.

Some key search terms for incubator projects include: food security, agriculture, environment, economic development, farm, land conservation, farmers.

3.3.4 - Fee For Service

Incubator projects charge some fees for services that they provide on the incubator, although these are mostly to cover basic costs of farm operations, incentivize farmers to take their time on the incubator seriously, and provide farmers with a realistic perspective on the costs associated with running a farm business. Fees for basic incubator services are not especially good at covering the added costs of running an educational program, which requires teaching staff and administration to oversee. The following is a list of fees that an incubator commonly charges.

Land Rent: typically either market rate or just below, and scaled up over three years to reach market rate by graduation. Rent is calculated per acre, and either by the month or for the entire season. For sample rates for equipment and land fees at several different incubator projects, see Toolkit Resources and References

(section 6) and Case Studies (section 7) .

Services: Custom tractor work, cover cropping, site management fees, etc.

Technical assistance: Some projects charge additional fees for time with the farm manager or technical assistance coordinator, again, not necessarily to cover the costs of that technical assistance but to incentivize full farmer utilization of the resource.

Consulting: If your project has a specialized knowledge or skill base that would be of value to other organizations in your region, you can consider charging for time spent sharing information about your operations. Consider partnering with organizations who would like to offer your type of service to their participants on grant applications to receive a stipend for your work.

3.3.5 - Economic Sustainability

The clearest path towards economic sustainability for incubator projects is the same as the one we recommend to farmers; diversity. Having multiple funding streams and not too much dependence on any individual one of them allows for more unrestricted funds, and less risk overall if a major grant falls through or your program encounters unexpected expenses. In addition to the funding sources mentioned above, the following are other creative ways to ensure the long-term financial health of your project:

- Cultivate in-kind contributions from partners;
- Generate program income through social enterprises;
- Start a Community Supported Agriculture (CSA) program;
- Sell farm products and services to the general public; and
- Collect registration or attendance fees to generate revenue from training/educational workshops and conferences.

3.4 Organizational Structure

The organization of your incubator project will be largely determined by the circumstances that led to the creation of your project in the first place. Incubator projects are started by a wide variety of groups, including universities, extension, conservation districts, local business advocates, economic development agencies, food banks, refugee resettlement agencies, faith-based initiatives, and other types of non-profit entities. All of these various types of programs have their own constraints and logistical challenges, as well as their own advantages.

3.4.1 - Key Considerations

Project Goals: Given the fact that you are starting or have already started an incubator project, it is probable that the incubator's goals align with the goals of the larger organization within which it exists. You may want to fully articulate this relationship and explicitly state the mission of your project and how you hope to achieve that mission within the parameters and goals of the university, county or city agency, etc. that sponsors the farm incubator. If your organization exists solely for the purpose of starting an incubator project, then the majority of your work around how to structure your organization will be determined by the strategic planning process described in section 3.1 and should reflect the wishes and needs of the community you hope to serve.

Relationships: Where does the farm incubator "live" in your organization? Do you fit best into one particular department or program area? Who is ultimately responsible for the incubator project and what is their role in overseeing the project, its staff, and the farmer participants? The chain of command, as well as who has a stake in your project and who will provide your program with guidance, direction, and high level support to should be clear and explicit from the start. Also try to be aware of the relationships and reputation that your organization already has within the community and how you can best utilize those partnerships or avoid potential conflicts. If you are an independent organization, you will need to start forming a steering committee and/or board of directors to guide your program and provide ongoing feedback and support.

Resources: Take stock of the resources and benefits you may be able to utilize through your larger organizational sponsor, including community partnerships, internal administrative services and any knowledge or experience of the issues you are trying to address. If you are an independent organization, be sure to do thorough research into complimentary programs in your area that you can utilize rather than trying to develop duplicate

services, such as business planning or vegetable production classes through your local extension office.

Communication: Whatever your organizations' structure, try to make sure that your program participants and the general public get a clear picture of those structures and relationships. If your program gains attention and popularity, it makes sense to have a concise yet accurate way of describing where your incubator program fits into the larger picture of food systems development , economic development, and social services in your community.

3.4.2 - Nonprofit

As stated in section 2.3, "The Current State of Incubators", the vast majority of incubator projects are organized as non-profits, which includes academic institutions and other registered 501c3 organizations. If your program does not already exist within an established non-profit organization you may want to pursue your own non-profit status to accurately reflect the nature of the work you do in the interest of the "public good". You will need proof of non-profit status to apply for most foundation and government funding opportunities and be exempt from paying taxes on donations and other types of program income. Note that if you are renting land, or engaging in aggregation, distribution and sales of produce, you will have to show that these activities are specifically in the public interest. You will also need to recruit and supervise a board of directors that reflects the community your program serves.

There are very specific rules about what constitutes a non-profit organization, and restrictions on the kinds of activities you can engage in. For details and information on how to apply to become a 501c3, visit: http://www.irs.gov/Charities-&-Non-Profits/Charitable-Organizations/Exemption-Requirements-Section-501%28c%29%283%29-Organizations .

Sometimes when an incubator project is in its planning stages, concerns in the agricultural community arise that these projects will send a flurry of "subsidized" farmers into the marketplace to compete with independent entrepreneurs and that incubators' non-profit sponsorship allows farmers to get an easier start than they did, thus creating an unfair advantage. Listen carefully to these concerns and make space for them to be expressed in your planning processes. Think about how your project can be of service to all farmers in your area and alleviate some concerns in that way. For example, the New Entry Sustainable Farming Project (New Entry) makes its field trainings, land matching, and livestock programs available to the general public so all farmers can attend classes. Other points that incubator projects can use to address

these concerns include:

- The incubator farm itself rarely sells its own product, but rather serves to incubate independent, small business owners who incur their own costs and make their own decisions about marketing.
- Incubator farmers are encouraged to create realistic business plans that identify untapped markets, while charging the standard market rate for their goods to avoid tapping into existing market share and/or undercutting other farmers' prices.
- There is a huge amount of untapped market potential in the vast majority of people who do not take advantage of direct purchasing opportunities. All farmers can access those markets through various means. In all new markets (such as the expanding market for local food), supply and demand must grow and evolve together as an iterative process. Bringing more farmers into the market is part of that process.
- The conventional industrial food system is subsidized to the tune of many billions of dollars per year, both on the producer and consumer side. The comparatively miniscule amount of assistance that incubator projects provide their participants – who by and large still pay for access to equipment and to lease land, as well as for all their seeds and inputs – is designed to address that inequality.

The non-profit structure is by far the most common for farm incubator projects because they provide a clear and apparent public service: not only do they educate and encourage the next generation of farmers, incubator projects foster economic development by providing sustainable livelihoods while laying the groundwork for long-term viability of our countries' food system. In essence, farm incubator projects are developing public infrastructure in terms of intellectual capital and the physical capacity that will ultimately serve every single person in America that eats food.

3.4.3 - For-Profit

There only a very few for-profit incubator projects in development (and fewer still in operation) in part because the added expense of providing education and technical assistance to new farmers is hard to fund through the sale of produce, which has extremely tight profit margins. Some programs charge higher tuition fees for their programs to cover the cost of staffing their educational

component. Their curricula are often far more formalized than the typical incubator project and fall closer towards the university training and on-farm apprenticeship model rather than aiming to train independent entrepreneurs who are starting and operating their own small businesses on the incubator farm site. This approach can raise issues of accessibility for those who cannot afford to pay a high yearly tuition to gain experience farming.

3.4.4 - Partnerships

Because many incubator projects get started in response to a demonstrated and observed community need for healthy and accessible food as well as more economic opportunities and support for people with the desire and inclination to become farmers, they often also emerge as the result of partnerships between multiple stakeholders. Partnerships between various agencies, universities, and non-profits are also more likely to receive funding from certain types of foundations and government grant programs. Organizations should be aware of community assets, capable of utilizing the resources that already exist in a community, and have the backing of well-established practitioners in the field of beginning farmer training while developing their farm incubator. Partnerships can take various forms and be more or less integrated and formal depending on your program needs and goals. Some ways to partner on an incubator project include:

- Forming a steering committee or board of directors made up of representatives from other organizations in your area with similar missions, goals, and activities;
- Working with local land trusts to acquire land for your project;
- Partnering with extension to provide classroom and field-based based training opportunities for farmers;
- Recruiting experienced farmers to serve as mentors for your program participants;
- Working with your local food-based businesses to acquire sponsorships and promotional opportunities for your program farmers;
- Developing and/or sittin on local food policy councils, agricultural commissions, and planning boards and encouraging people to think about the needs of beginning farmers in the context of municipal policy decisions.; and

- Partnering with local hunger relief agencies to provide access to fresh, nutritious food to low-income residents in your area.

The opportunities for intersectional relationships while working in the field of food and agriculture are truly endless and at the same time highly dependent on the circumstances in your local community and region. The more organizations partner with one another, the easier it becomes to identify areas where more work is needed as well as areas where sufficient resources have been allocated, thus avoiding the duplication of efforts and strengthening collective efforts towards greater health and economic prosperity in your town, city, state, or region.

If you want to explore possible strategic partnerships for your farm incubator project, see the Strategic Partnerships Worksheet at: http://nesfp.org/nifti/strategicpartnerships.

3.4.5 - Hybrids

A hybrid is simply another type of partnership, albeit one in which the relationship between organizations is much closer than the situations described above. In a hybrid model, the incubator project is jointly owned and operated by some mixture of academic institution, non-profit, corporation, government agency, or trust. If it becomes apparent that your incubator would be best served by having multiple partners take a significant role in operations because of available resources and expertise, then be sure to clearly delineate the roles and responsibilities of each entity. Just as any service provider would recommend to a farmer starting a new business with a partner, we recommend that you have completely transparent and agreed upon written contract with protocols in place to minimize risks and facilitate the delivery of efficient and effective programs to your farmers.

3.4.6 - Conclusion

The form of organization you choose for your incubator project should be rooted in both the needs of the community and the assets available through various local non-profits, agencies, academic institutions and other potential partners. No matter what type of organization your incubator project becomes, make sure you have clearly stated and clarified roles, responsibilities, and relationships in writing and in a format that you can readily show to farmers and the general public. Ultimately, farm incubator projects deliver a valuable service to your immediate community and the food system as a whole and the way you organize your program will be reflective of that.

3.5 Finding Farmers

In deciding to develop a farm incubator project and throughout the strategic planning process, the consideration of who your project will serve was probably central to your discussions. The best projects arise from a demonstrated community need, and the best way to establish that need is by talking to farmers and prospective farmers at public events, community meetings, farmer socials, and in focus groups and listening sessions with your target participants. However, these groups of farmers may only be a small portion of the people who are interested in enrolling in your farm incubator project. The following section discusses conducting outreach for your program, screening potential participants, preliminary skills assessments and enrollment criteria and procedures.

3.5.1 - Key Considerations

Project Goals: Your strategic planning will lead you to a specific population, or perhaps a broad definition, of who your program is designed to serve. This will guide all your outreach, screening, and enrollment activities because it will determine what criteria you used to accept people into your program. Who did you decide you want to work with and what specific needs will you try to address? If you will work with immigrant and refugee populations, you will need to conduct outreach in different places and through different means than if you are reaching out to U.S. born second career and retiree farmers or college aged urban residents.

Relationships: To conduct effective outreach, you should have strong relationships with community groups, farmer organizations, all agriculture-related agencies, and other sources of adult education and business training. If you already have a history of providing services and support to beginning farmers, or the populations that your program hopes to work with, then you are likely to have built a good network of contacts for outreach.

Resources: We cannot stress enough the importance of cultivating community partnerships. You will also need physical resources and staff time dedicated to conducting outreach via social media and the web, as well as at in-person events and community meetings. Depending on the community you are trying to reach out to, it may take additional investments of time and energy to form relationships and cultivate partnerships.

Communication: When reaching out to new participants and enrolling them in your courses and programs be sure to have good protocols in place for follow up and follow through with interested applicants. Make sure you have the skills and training

to reach out to diverse audiences in terms of language and cultural awareness and make sure you clearly delineate various program expectations and what your program does, and does not, provide as early as possible.

3.5.2 - Outreach

The goal of conducting program outreach is to make people aware of your programs so they can talk about it to other people and spread the word to potential participants. You want to cast as wide a net as you need to in order to reach your target audience. Find and give special attention to building relationships with advocates within the groups you are reaching out to. If you already have staff or choose to hire staff with a history of engagement within your target community, all the better.

Tools for outreach include:

- E-newsletters
- Website
- Social media
- Farmer networks or professional organizations
- Tabling at regional farming conferences
- Print media
- Small group presentations organized by community groups and/or partner organizations

You can also send work study students or interns to table at events or conduct various other kinds of outreach, just be aware that whoever does outreach for your program should be able to speak comprehensively about what you offer. If you are trying to build relationships within a particular community you may want to send a more permanent face of your organization to create consistency and trust over time. Don't forget to bring a sign-up sheet to events so you can gather contact information from interested prospects and follow-up with them later!

3.5.3 - Screening

Not everyone who is interested in becoming a farmer has all the information they need at first to jump right in. Incubator projects generally have limited capacity and want to set up new farmers to be successful. This means finding candidates who will be a good fit for the program in terms of motivation, experience, dedication, and capacity.

Internet Outreach and Accessibility:

Web-based communications are increasingly at the center of organizational outreach for all manner of non-profits, and are certainly very important in many ways. However, it is also a form of communication that can have the effect of filtering the same underserved populations that some programs may most want to reach. Connecting with these target participants requires legwork and personal attention. In the intake phases alone, some programs can spend up to four times as much time corresponding with target limited-resource participants.

You can screen participants in a number of different ways:

- Meet with the prospective farmer one-on-one and conduct an intake survey
- Have prospective farmers fill out an intake survey on their own
- Hold an "Intro to Farming" group class to explain the basics of becoming a farmer

When you are screening prospective participants, you will probably want to ask a number of different questions to determine whether the potential participant is a good match for your farm incubator project. Here are some questions you may want to ask [or observe] during your screening:

- How much previous experience do you have?
- How much time do you have to spend on your farm business?
- How much money do you have to invest in your business?
- What do you need help with?
- Are you receiving other types of assistance and support?
- What learning and business goals do you have and are these realistic?
- What expectations do you have of our program and what we can offer?
- Will you be farming full or part-time?
- What other work do you have to balance their time with?
- Do you have the language skills needed for full participation?

You will have to define what answers to these questions make for a good candidate based on your own program goals. Keep in mind that you are trying to set farmers up to be successful and only you know if what you have to offer will be sufficient to set them on the right path given their unique circumstances. You don't want to make your criteria so lax that many participants drop out when they realize what it entails to be a good farmer, nor do you want to scare people away or screen out good candidates because they don't have the "perfect" profile. Again, each program is different and will make these decisions based on their own values and parameters.

"Intro to Farming" Classes

These introductory classes can be a great way to find participants for your incubator project, and can also help you screen potential applicants before they apply.

The resources below provide more information about "intro to Farming" type classes and farmer assessments.

- New Entry's "Explore Farming!" Syllabus http://nesfp.org/nifti/explorefarmingsyllabus
- The "Beginning Farmer Quiz" https://nesfp.org/nifti/beginningfarmerquiz

3.5.4 - Skills Assessment

You should be tracking a variety of baseline data before applicants enter your program, not only to know how best to tailor your programming to their needs, but also so you can find out what kind of impact your program had on their level of knowledge. The best way to do this is with some form of skills assessment. The sheer volume of skills that farmers need to be successful is truly impressive and incredibly broad, so it might at first seem intimidating to select the most important indicators.

As mentioned above, there is a wide variety of what different incubator projects expect their participants to have under their tool belts before joining the program. Some don't require any farming background, just a cohesive and realistic business plan. Some programs require 1-2 years of experience farming on a commercial operation before they accept applicants. It really depends on where the demand lies for your program and who you have decided you want to serve.

Note that it is preferable to do skills assessments in person, especially if you're working with farmers that have limited literacy skills.

Baseline assessments should cover:

- Previous experience farming or gardening
- Where was the farm or garden?
- What crops did you grow?
- How much land did you farm or garden on?
- How long did you farm there?
- Where did you sell your produce?
- Have you ever received formal education in farming? Where? What type?
- Do you have any experience running a business?
- Other, potentially related skills?
- How much time do you have to dedicate to the business?

A Note on Self-Reported Skill Levels:

Applicants to your program may not know what they know. Be careful of this when you're tracking baseline data as it could lead to odd results in your first couple of years. For example, a new farmer may think they know a lot about integrated pest management from their home gardening experience. After a year on the farm, they may realize they knew a lot less than they thought they did.

If you are measuring success based on self-reported skills, their numbers will go down on future assessments instead of up. Try to find more objective ways of establishing skill levels in addition to (not to the exclusion of) asking participants what they know.

For information about how other incubator project's measure their farmer's success, check out the following resources:

- ALBA's farmer survey http://nesfp.org/nifti/ALBAfarmersurvey
- Intervale's Farm Report http://nesfp.org/nifti/intervalefarmreport

NIFTI is currently in the process of developing uniform metrics for incubator projects. Look for that in upcoming editions of the Farm Incubator toolkit, and at http://nesfp.org/nifti/library.

3.4.5 - Enrollment

The application and enrollment process requires a standardized process and acceptance criteria. Depending on what you're actually enrolling farmers into, you may have different acceptance criteria. For example, for enrollment into pre-requisite business planning or production classes prospective participants may not need a lot of farming background. For enrollment on the incubator, however, you might want to see either a business plan or more of a farming background, and ideally both.

Possible Application Questions include:

- Basic information

  -Name, Address, Phone, Email, Country of Origin, English skills, Emergency contact

- What kind of agricultural business do you want to start?
- What do you want to produce or sell?
- Where do you live in relation to the incubator site?

  -Do you have reliable transportation?

  -Have you accounted for the time and costs associated with travelling to the site?

- Who will your customers be and how will you advertise to them?
- Do you have a business plan?
- How much are you expecting to earn from farming?
- Supplemental or all income?
- What are you expecting to learn from our program?
- Please provide references (personal and/or employment)
- Current income (range)
- Previous work experience (job title, employer, length of time employed, activities)
- Do you have friends or family who will help on your farm?

On your application, you may also want to provide some basic information about what next steps happen after turning in application – timeline, who will contact them, when, and how. For more on the enrollment process, see section 5.4, "Establishing Expectations."

Enrollment Tips:

- Every program needs pictures of the work they do. Get a media release form from your participants while you're gathering the rest of their information.
- Find out how they learned about your course for future reference and to direct your outreach efforts
- Try to have one person who works with farmers throughout the whole intake process, including outreach, assessment, and enrollment
- You can find samples of application forms in sections 6 (Toolkit Resources and References) and 7 (Case Studies) as well as in the NIFTI resource library: http://nesfp.org/nifti/library.

Section 4:

Developing Your Incubator Project

4.1 Finding Land For Your Incubator

Farm incubator projects are distinct from other forms of beginning farmer training in that they provide access to land on an incubator site. In many cases, land access in the form of a donation or unused municipal property is what spurred the idea of an incubator in the first place, although not all projects are so lucky. If you are searching for land for your project, the following section will help you seek out suitable land, evaluate different types of tenure options, and develop criteria for your preferred site.

4.1.1 - Key Considerations

Project Goals: Much of what you can do on your incubator project will be determined by the land you operate on, or vice versa depending on what comes first. You have to be clear on what your project priorities are and what you can be flexible on when looking at land for your incubator. You may not get everything you want, but try to remember the saying, "The perfect is the enemy of the good" when conducting your search. There is no such thing as the perfect farm, there is just the farm that allows you to get on the ground and start training farmers. With that said, some things may be non-negotiable for you and your project and you should know what those things are.

Relationships: Develop relationships with existing farmers and landowners, real estate agents, and people who are familiar with the agricultural land in your area from your local conservation district, departments of ecology, extension, universities, and NRCS. When evaluating parcels, think about what sort of community your project will be located in and who will be your neighbors. Are they familiar with agriculture, or will you need to do public outreach and education to acclimate them to the idea of living next to a farm?

Resources: Just like with farmers looking for land, or anyone trying to buy property, you need to know what you have available to spend before you start your search. If you want to buy land for your project, how will you raise the funds? Don't forget about property taxes which are an ongoing yearly expense. If you are planning to lease, what will the rates be and will you be able to afford it with the income you will make from farmer land fees, or will you need to supplement with grants. What infrastructure will you need to put into the land and is it worth it if you have limited tenure? Can you afford to build structures (greenhouses, etc.) or dig a well? If not, then you'll need to find a property that already has these available.

Communication: Word of mouth and public promotion of your proposed project can be a great way to locate available properties for your incubator. You can also do larger scale outreach to landowners in partnership with municipalities and conduct community meetings about the project in areas that seem like good prospects for land.

4.1.2 - Locating Farmland

Physically locating land for your project will require some leg work and outreach on your part, as well as research into individual parcels once they have been identified. The following strategies

and tools should help you on your search.

Community outreach and networking: Find out who currently has land in your area that meets your criteria and reach out to them directly. Some places to start are:

- Existing farmers
- Municipalities
- Real estate agents that specialize in agricultural land
- Community land trusts

Once you have identified land for sale or lease, you can learn more about it by using the resources below.

Mapping: You will need one or more pieces of information to find out more about your prospective parcel. Try to collect the following:

- Address: soil survey (see Web Soil Survey below), ownership, zoning, real estate searches, etc.
- Parcel number: ownership, zoning, liens, tax assessments
- Latitude and longitude: soil survey, Google Maps, GIS

Other Tools:

- Google Maps
- County assessors' offices (search by parcel numbers)
- Web soil survey (http://websoilsurvey.sc.egov.usda.gov)
- Map libraries at local universities
- Water rights maps (see sidebar on Water Rights)

4.1.3 - Physical Criteria

The physical criteria your incubator site will need to have can be separated into primary and secondary criteria. Primary criteria are the most important. If a potential incubator site does not meet all or most of these criteria, consider looking for a different site. Secondary physical criteria are characteristics that would be nice to have on an incubator site, but they aren't absolutely necessary. Below is a list of primary and secondary criteria you may want to consider:

A note on water rights:

In the eastern U.S. water use is based on a riparian system where water is considered part of the land and rights to its use are automatically transferred along with the land title.

In the West, the right to draw and utilize water is based on use and you may need a legal and documented water right to irrigate crops. A water right is a legal document which grants the right to use water for a specific purpose, drawn from specific location, and in a specific amount. A water right can be either surface (streams, rivers, lakes and springs) or groundwater (wells, etc). A water right is not automatically transferred when one purchases a parcel of land, nor is it guaranteed unless the water has been used consistently and in compliance with the parameters of the water right at least every five years since the right was granted.

Check with your local department of ecology or other body that oversees water rights in your area to find out more and make sure you're gaining legal access to irrigation when you purchase or receive donated land for your incubator project.

For more on water rights: http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Water_right.

Primary Site Criteria

Good agricultural soils: Use the web soil survey (WSS) (http://websoilsurvey.sc.egov.usda.gov) to find out what type of soil is on your potential property. To find out which soil types are best in your area, read the full descriptions of the soil types in the WSS for common uses and consult with local farmers and agricultural service providers.

Access to sufficient water for irrigation: (sufficient amount, acre ft.) Using efficient drip irrigation systems, and depending on the amount of precipitation in your area, you will need approximately 1 – 1.5 acre ft. of water per year per acre of mixed vegetable production. (One acre ft = enough water to cover 1 acre in 1 foot of water = 325,851 gallons). Also look into the amount of pressure you will have from your water source and any additional infrastructure like pumps and pressure regulators you may need to add to make it suitable for irrigation.

Close to markets: Farmers need to sell their products somewhere, and the closer they are to a market the less time and fuel they spend getting there efficiently. On the other hand, the closer you are to larger markets, the higher your land values (and possibly rent) will be.

Few or favorable zoning restrictions (see section 4.1.4)

Limited flood risk: You can search any address on the FEMA website to see its level of flooding risk at https://msc.fema.gov. This is another good time to consult with local farmers and agricultural service providers who are likely to have seen the effects of flooding on particular properties over the years and can give a sense of the risks and challenges you might face trying to farm them.

Secondary SIte Criteria

Available infrastructure: (greenhouses, barns, sheds, etc). You may or may not be able to add infrastructure to a property depending on your type of land tenure, zoning restrictions, and conservation easements. If you are willing and able to add buildings and infrastructure, allow for the increase in budget and time.

Office space availability for incubator staff, administrators and farmers.

On-site housing possibilities.

Land Tenure Options

Incubator projects can own their land, or lease it from a farmer, municipality, land trust, or private business.

To see sample leases from NASAP and New Entry: http://nesfp.org/nifti/leaseagreement

http://nesfp.org/nifti/library/DTLI

To find out more about leasing agricultural land, including the standard components of any good land lease:

- New Entry Guide to Finding Farmland: http://nesfp.org/nifti/library/MAFarmland
- http://www.landforgood.org/leasing/online2.html

Once you have established a site's basic suitability for your project, you may want to bring your project partners, advisory committee, and a few experienced and beginning farmers out to see the location so you can gather their feedback and expert opinions. Try to get a sense of the physical condition of the land and buildings, conduct soil samples, take pictures, and see if your target audience would want to farm there since that is the ultimate criteria for whether or not a site is a good fit for your project goals.

4.1.4 - Zoning and Legal Considerations

Your incubator needs to be located on land that is zoned appropriately for how you plan to use it. Check with your local assessor's office to find zoning and parcel maps as well as definitions of different zoning types. Read these carefully and make sure you know what you can and cannot do on a given parcel of land. In addition to whatever current uses you may have for an incubator farm parcel, think about possible future uses that may not be possible with all types of zoning, such as

- having a farm stand
- bringing the public to your farm for tours
- having housing for farmers

If you're purchasing land, you'll need a lawyer and a real estate agent to advise you. Consider working with a community land trust (http://www.cltnetwork.org/), as their values may be aligned with your work and they are experts in creative methods for acquiring land tenure.

4.2 Developing Your Curriculum

Education is one of the three core elements that a farm incubator commonly offers and – along with access to farmland and marketing support – and is essential to growing successful new farmers. Once you understand who your target audience is and what the goals are for your project, along with your resources and organizational capacity, you can start to determine what sort of educational opportunities you would like to offer farmers on your incubator farm.

You curriculum can take a multitude of forms, including:

- classroom based learning
- field trainings
- online workshops
- mentorships
- peer-based learning
- one-on-one technical assistance
- training/demonstration farm

Who can teach?

- Staff
- Invited instructors
- Other more experienced farmers
- Interns

The types of learning opportunities you offer will vary based on your farmers learning needs (determined by their previous level of farming experience) and on the resources you have available in terms of staffing, knowledge base, and physical space.

Many incubator projects require farmers to either participate in some kind of formalized training before becoming eligible to apply for a spot on the incubator site or show that they have a degree of professional farming experience. Some people will assume because they have had a backyard garden, they are prepared to farm for market. If you want to set your incubator farmers up to succeed, there should be some mechanism in place to give them a reasonable context for starting a small farm business including the time, money, and effort it will require – often for minimal rewards in the first few years – before they step foot on a plot of land.

While it's hard to learn how to farm without actually getting your hands dirty, there are many other topics that farmers can, and should, study before the season begins. These include:

- Marketing
- Business planning

- Production planning
- Enterprise budgeting
- Financial record keeping
- Risk management
- Food safety

Whether you offer a formalized business planning class for your incubator farmers or not, most projects require that prospective farmers submit documentation of their plans as a part of the incubator application process. Ideally this will take the form of a completed business plan that includes at minimum:

- a marketing plan (where will they sell their product);
- production plan (what they will grow and how);
- farm financial projections (including income and expense forecasts); and
- a risk management plan (what challenges will arise and how they will manage them).

Beyond the skills required to be a small business owner, you also need to consider how your program will provide information about the wide variety of agriculturally specific knowledge that farmers need to be successful in an efficient but comprehensive way. The following sections will discuss various methods for covering a spectrum of skills and information, but you can also investigate the possibility of forming partnerships with other organizations who provide learning opportunities to farmers to supplement your own programming.

For samples of curriculum, visit the NIFTI Resource Library at http://nesfp.org/nifti/library and click "How to Teach".

4.2.1 - Key Considerations

Project Goals: Depending on the populations you serve (see callout), you may find that there are learning needs for your farmers around literacy, leadership development, and cross-cultural fluency, in addition to the more obvious topics of how to run a small farm business. Deciding what your program wants, and perhaps needs, to address to set farmers up to succeed will be a crucial part of your strategic planning process. Part of any listening sessions or focus groups with your target audiences should include asking what skills and competencies they already

have, and what they think they need. Be aware that new and prospective farmers do not always know what they don't know, and you may want to have a set list of questions or a list of skills ready to present, as well as allowing farmers to place themselves on a spectrum rather than having to state that they either do or do not know something. Also consider what learning approaches fit best with the groups you are serving and how they will respond to in-class learning vs. field trainings vs. peer-based learning and what proportions of each of these make the most sense for building community and encouraging leadership development amongst participants. Remember to keep your curriculum planning focused and in line with your mission and vision for your project and remember that it can and should evolve over time to meet the needs of the farmers you serve.

Relationships: There are a number of relationships to consider when developing your curriculum, such as those between farmers, service providers, mentors, program staff, and any other organizations that you bring in to provide additional educational opportunities. Opening your trainings up to the general public along with your incubator farmers can help to create good will in your local agricultural community, and get the word out about your programs to potential supporters of your work. Developing relationships with your local extension will add to your educational capacity and there may be other non-profit organizations you can partner with to provide small business development support, promotional assistance, or market development. Keep in mind that these relationships should be cultivated and acknowledged regularly and are a good to include in funding proposals as they diversify and expand the impact of your program. When developing your curriculum, the most important relationships you establish are the ones with farmer participants. All your classes and workshops should be geared towards the groups you serve and designed with their unique backgrounds and goals in mind.

Resources: The resources you need to offer high quality curriculum to farmers can be broken down into a few different categories:

- physical (technology, infrastructure, tools, etc.)
- financial (funding for infrastructure and staffing)
- staffing (year round, part-time, interns)
- community connections (classes and resources from other organizations)

More well-established incubator projects generally have a staff person, and sometimes an assistant, to provide educational programming to participants as well as on-site technical assistance for on-the-ground teaching. This staff person may also be in charge of site management and maintenance, or you can split the positions into an administrative role and a farm management role. Either way, the people you hire should be knowledgeable about the topics they are going to teach, and you should have the physical infrastructure to convey the realities of the material you are covering. A working farm, including demonstration plots (the programs' or the farmers') is extremely helpful, as is access to a greenhouse and basic farm tools and equipment. Make sure you also have a comprehensive list of other resources in the area that farmers can take advantage of such as online tools from your local extension or national databases (see Appendix for links), local farmer groups, farm supply distributors, farm service professionals (loan officers, CPAs, insurance agents). You can also start developing a resource lending library of books, DVDs, manuals, and other items that farmers may find useful. You can find a list of good resources to have on hand for farmers at the end of section 4.

Your resources, and the resources of your participants (in terms of time and money) will determine when and where you offer your program and for how long. Classes on incubators range from 2-4 hour sessions for individual trainings, to 15 week classes that meet for an entire day each week. There is often some combination of these, and incubators make different decisions about what to charge.

Communication: You'll want to get the word out about your classes and conduct outreach as soon as possible. Incubator projects often promote their educational opportunities via local email list serves, through related organizations, by word of mouth in the agricultural community, and by attending festivals, fairs, and other related educational events. Once farmers are interested, make sure they fully understand what is expected of them in terms of fees, attendance, and completing assignments. If you have language or literacy barriers with the group you're serving, be sure to enlist the help of a translator and spend time learning about how to teach to English as a Second Language (ESL) students. Having a solid intake process for your classes that involves collecting some basic demographic and background information in advance will help you tailor your educational opportunities towards the level of experience and types of interest in the room.

Who is your demographic?

Second career farmers

- Savings and professional knowledge

Young, educated farmers

- Few resources
- Excited about hands-on learning

Farm workers with farming experience in the U.S.

- Strong production skills
- Focus learning on management, leadership, and business planning

Immigrants and refugees

- May have significant farming experience
- Can lack resources and transferrable skills

4.2.2 - Production

Because the majority of organizations and individuals who start and operate farm incubator projects come from a farming orientation, production curriculum is often the easiest to develop or already exists. Whether participants are brand new to farming or have some previous experience, incubator farms will always have some element of teaching new farmers how to grow crops. This includes:

- soil health and cover cropping
- nutrient management
- water and irrigation
- bed/field preparation
- plant biology/crop families
- greenhouse management
- weed management
- disease management
- pest management
- maturity assessment
- harvesting, and post-harvest handling
- equipment use and maintenance
- whole farm design and management

"Appropriate technology" is a term that refers to people-centered, small-scale, energy-efficient, and environmentally sound. In essence, the technologies you teach and use on the farm should be accessible to the farmers and something they would be likely to use on their own farms in terms of both practicality and affordability.

Production practices lend themselves most easily to being taught in the field, but there are some elements which are complimented by classroom-based instruction. For example, you can teach students in advance about the components of healthy soil, explain the nutrient cycle, and then when farmers are out in the field applying fertilizer take the time to link your earlier classes to what is happening on the ground. If you can follow up the lesson over time by showing the effects of good plant nutrition versus bad, or show multiple pest cycles by following their arrival in the fields, then you are offering both theoretical and practical knowledge and contextualizing the experiences that new farmers will have on the incubator site. When planning field trainings, be sure to schedule them at the seasonally appropriate time for the subject matter. Always keep the focus on delivering practical skills and using "appropriate technology".

As with all types of training, it is helpful to think of the background that your students have before designing your curriculum. If they already have a farming background from another country, think about how farming in this country might differ from the situations they were in before. If most of your students are coming from a backyard or community garden, you may want to show how production agriculture is distinct from hobby farming. If your project has a focus on sustainable practices (as most do), consider developing written guidelines for farmers on what is and is not allowable on your sites in terms of practices and inputs, and discussing these in depth as a teaching tool for how to grow organically.

Because most farmers do not live on site and will not be on the incubator farm for longer than 3-5 years, livestock and perennial production are not commonly taught on incubator farms. This guide has a special section on how to educate incubator farmers about livestock production (4.7) and does not discuss perennials.

Related to the above point, topical interests may arise amongst your incubator farmers that your program does not have the staff expertise, infrastructure, or time to develop. In these cases, you can find outside experts to teach special "one-shot" workshops. For example, New Entry has provided special "advanced" workshops on topics such as equipment mechanics, high intensity SPIN farming and hoophouse season extension.

A lot of production education comes from one-on-one technical assistance on the sites. Farm managers can do walk throughs of the participants' farms once per week during the growing season and/or schedule individual sessions with farmers to ask questions etc. Farm managers can also be on site or have regular "office hours" for impromptu questions from farmers. Some programs charge a fee for this service, and some don't. The fees rarely cover the cost of the managers' time, but they do incentivize participation in one-on-one TA on the part of the farmer. You can determine how much or how little time each farmer will get, but you should clarify this in advance as part of your program expectations (see section 4.3).

You should also encourage participants to take advantage of local and regional sustainable farming conferences and peer networks. The Collaborative Regional Alliance for Farmer Training (CRAFT) is a series of decentralized and farmer organized groups that get together on a semi-regular basis in various parts of the U.S. for socializing and farm visits. If your area does not have a CRAFT group, consider forming one or finding a particularly enterprising farmer to develop a new group. Visit http://www.craftfarmers.org/ for a list of CRAFT groups in North America. If you don't have the capacity to offer formal training, these types of informal networks

and professional development opportunities can go a long way towards supplementing your program.

4.2.3 - Post-Harvest Handling and Food Safety

It is never too soon to stress the importance of product quality with your program participants. The majority of farmers on an incubator site will sell to consumers either directly or through a single middleman like a grocer or restaurant. In order to remain competitive and have the ability to charge the higher prices that make small-scale farming feasible, they will have to differentiate their products in terms of quality and value. We will talk about value more in the section below on marketing, but ensuring product quality can be taught through discussing best practices around post-harvest handling and food safety.

Post-Harvest Handling

Farmers should be taught when to harvest and how to treat their product once it comes out of the ground as soon as possible. Good post-harvest handling will determine product quality in a variety of ways, and farmers will need to know about*:

- Harvest timing – identifying ripeness
- Harvest methods – avoiding damage in the fields
- Washing – being gentle, using potable water, avoiding cross-contamination
- Cooling – getting rid of field heat
- Packing – preventing damage
- Storage – staying cool

**For a detailed treatment of these topics, see New Entry's Plain Language Guide to Harvesting Crops for Market at* http://nesfp.org/nifti/harvestformarket.

It is best to teach post-harvest handling both in the classroom – explaining the basic concepts and showing pictures of crops in various conditions – and in the field so farmers can see the practical application and procedures associated with harvesting crops properly. You will want access to a well designed and functional, clean, and ideally GAP compliant wash station on your incubator farm site (see sidebar).

Field trainings on the topic of post-harvest handling have the limitation of being restricted to the time when crops are available to be harvested and not all crops will come in at the same time. To address this issue, you can create a printed guide with pictures

A good wash station should have:

- Large bins for washing produce
- Tables for laying out product
- Screen tables for spraying root crops
- A hand washing station
- Good drainage
- Enough surfaces that you do not have to place product on the ground

For more on building a wash station, see New Entry's "Og Wash Station Notes" for one way to go about it: http://nesfp.org/nifti/library/GAPwashstation

explaining the most common crops grown on the incubator and how to harvest and care for them after harvest. Ideally you will also have a farm manager or mentor on site to show farmers the best techniques for, say, getting the field heat off of salad greens or packing broccoli for transport. If enough farmers ask about how to treat a specific crop, you can schedule a formal or informal training on their area of interest.

The topic of post-harvest handling also encompasses product grading and packaging, which will be extremely dependent on your farmers' markets. Don't forget to include guides to common bunch sizes, information on suppliers for packaging materials, and a simple explanation of how to determine the appropriate market for your crop based on size and quality coming out of the field in any curriculum or printed materials you provide for farmers.

Remember, not all farmers are coming from the same background and things that seem intuitive to your project staff may not be for your program participants. Always think of developing curriculum from the perspective of the learner and don't forget to ask questions of your students both about what they're learning, and about your own teaching style and if it is working for their learning needs.

Food Safety

The other major aspect of product quality is food safety. All farms, regardless of size, need to pay attention to food safety to ensure that they are doing everything possible to minimize the risk of a consumer getting sick from their product. This makes sense from the perspective of operating in good conscience, but also in terms of operating a successful small business that builds a strong reputation in the community and limits its exposure to liability. Your farmers need to understand that when they grow food for consumption, particularly food that will be eaten raw as many fruits and vegetables are, they are taking the health and safety of their customers into their hands.

The topic of food safety can be intimidating for many farmers, in part because of the extremely complex process of applying for Good Agricultural Practice (GAP) certification through the USDA. Farms choose to become GAP certified so they have the ability to sell product into larger institutional markets (such as school and hospitals) or to some grocery chains that now require GAP certification for suppliers. The vast majority of the farmers entering into your program will not be considering selling into these markets, thus it is best to stick to the basic principles of food safety on the farm within the context of your core curriculum, emphasizing the importance of a food safety

The Basic Elements of Produce Quality:

Flavor (sugar/salt)

Texture (firm/tender/mealy)

Color (uniform/varied)

Size (maturity/marketing)

Shape (visual appeal)

Free from defects and disease

Shelf life

Free from contaminants

Nutritious

plan, and leave additional discussions of GAPs to more advanced topical workshops based on interest and necessity.

You should also incorporate discussions of food safety into your risk management curriculum (see below) and any relevant field trainings on the farm. Your incubator project site should be designed with food safety in mind, not only to provide a good example to your participants, but also for all the same reasons that farmers should be engaging in GAPs on their farms.

What basic principles of food safety should every incubator farm teach their participants?

- Farmers must wash their hands with soap and water regularly, including before starting work, after using the restroom, after eating, after handling chemical, after coughing or blowing their nose, after smoking, and after handling garbage
- Water used for washing crops must be potable*
  ** Your incubator farm should have its water tested regularly and put protocols in place for chlorination of wash water if the water is not found potable.*
- All manure used on fields must be composted
- Tools and harvesting bins, in addition to wash stations, must be cleaned and sanitized with bleach regularly to avoid cross-contamination
- Harvested crops should be stored in covered containers, at the appropriate temperature
- Pets should not be allowed into the fields and crops that have been contaminated with animal waste must be discarded
- If you are ill or injured (actively bleeding) you should not be in contact with food crops
- Have a food safety plan!

A food safety plan should be a requirement for each farmer on your site. Deciding how involved you want that food safety plan to be is a decision every incubator project will make for itself based on the capabilities of their farmer participants. For more information on how to develop a food safety plan and access to an online food safety plan generator, visit: http://onfarmfoodsafety.org/. You can also find one-page GAPs guides at http://nesfp.org/nifti/library/GAP, and https://nesfp.org/nifti/library/GAPs.

For up-to-date information about GAP certification requirements and how they affect your farmers, visit the National Sustainable Agriculture Coalition's page on the Food Safety Modernization Act (FSMA) here:

http://sustainableagriculture.net/fsma/.

4.2.4 - Business Planning

Most farmers do not decide to become farmers because they love marketing, spreadsheets and enterprise budgets. Yet for any small farmer to operate a successful business, they need to become well acquainted with these and many other aspects of small business management. Farm incubator projects are often the only place where new and prospective farmers can get information and learning opportunities specifically related to the business side of small-scale, sustainable production agriculture. Apprenticeships and other types of beginning farmer training may only focus on the production side, whereas the goal of farm incubators is to train independent entrepreneurs who are business owners from the start. For any farm business to be truly sustainable it must be both ecologically sound and financially viable so the farmer can continue doing what they love for the long-term.

The majority of farm incubator projects have some type of formalized farm business planning course or consulting services available to their participants. Pay attention to the capacity of your target audience to engage in different formats when designing what your business planning course will look like. For example, if you're working with mostly second career farmers or anyone who plans to keep their day job while starting their farm, then holding your business planning classes in the morning on weekdays won't work. Depending on the language skills of your participants, you may want to have a translator on hand, or design your curriculum to be more accessible to diverse groups. How much time is realistic for your participants to dedicate to their attendance in the class and any additional coursework that takes place outside of the class? To some degree, their participation in a class (or lack thereof) will be an important indicator of their ability to commit to farming on the incubator sites in terms of time and resources.

One major challenge when teaching farm business planning to new and prospective farmers is that they often have so little experience upon entering the class that creating their first business plan can seem like a guessing game where they're plugging in a lot of made up numbers because they don't actually know what their operation will look like yet. They should still create a business plan, and your program should still require a business plan that appears well thought out and reasonable before allowing farmers to use your sites, regardless of how likely it is that their plans will change significantly based on better data and more experience during their time on the incubator. Your program can and should offer projections related to potential

Why do farmers need a business plan?

- Get specific about what they want to do
- Make sure choices are market-driven and economically viable
- Think through all operational aspects of the business
- Make good financial decisions
- Set practical goals
- Make a plan for dealing with challenges
- Communicate about their business to customers, supporters, and lenders
- Evaluate business performance over time

income, standard crop pricing, cost of inputs, etc. But the first business plan is simply a projection and an outline of a plan rather than something fixed and unchangeable. The business plan is a living document designed to help new farmers see where they have been and where they plan to go and it will be subject to multiple revisions over the life of their business. Our job on the incubator farm is not to make sure that farmers follow their business plans to the letter, but to make sure that they have all the tools they need to learn and grow as farmers and as entrepreneurs.

A good business plan, with the components outlined below, is a key one of those tools. All of these different aspects of business planning work together in concert to create a complete picture of how to run a farm business. Although they are presented here, and in most classroom settings, in a linear fashion, farmers will likely go back and revise different parts of their plan as they make their way through its development.

The components of a typical business plan include:

- Executive summary
- Marketing Plan
- Operations Plan
- Financial Analysis
- Risk Management Plan

You can find several examples of business plan templates in section 7 (Case Studies).

4.2.5 - Marketing

Farmers need markets to be successful and one of the first steps of planning for a small farm business is to identify what markets are available for your products. New and prospective farmers may – because they hear people talking about local food and going to the farmers markets – have an idealized expectation that they will have no trouble selling their produce to their neighbors or friends. Or perhaps they have identified a niche market such as mushrooms or chickpeas that they would like to develop a farm plan around. Regardless of how much thought has gone into their small farm dream, incubator farm staff should make sure that farmers' marketing plans are firmly grounded in research and the realities of your specific market context.

Marketing includes the following topic areas:

- Market research
- Competitive advantage
- Pricing
- Promotion
- Grading and product quality
- Communication with customers
- Invoicing
- Record-keeping
- Product display and presentation
- Customer service

There is a truly impressive volume of materials available on marketing for small-scale farmers. If you are designing a curriculum for your farmers from scratch, the resources listed below are a good place to start for inspiration. As with all curriculum development, we recommend adapting your marketing training materials to your specific audience and integrating classroom-based presentations and discussion with real-world practice of the concepts at the market or on the farm.

- National Center for Appropriate Technology – ATTRA: "Marketing, Business & Risk Management." https://attra.ncat.org/marketing.html
- New Farmer Development Project – Marketing Handouts: Approximately 40 pages of curriculum, handouts, worksheets and presentations designed to teach marketing to new farmers. http://nesfp.org/nifti/NFDPMarketing
- New Entry Sustainable Farming Project – Marketing and Sales Lesson Plan: http://nesfp.org/nifti/NewEntryMarketing

For additional discussion of how to provide marketing support to incubator farmers, see section 5.6, Providing Market Access.

4.2.6 - Enterprise selection

When deciding what enterprises to take on, a farmer should consider their personal, financial, and quality of life goals as well as take an inventory of their physical and financial resources. The landscape of the incubator farm will determine what they can grow, especially the amount of investment they are willing to put into a piece of land that will not be theirs over time. For this reason, most incubator farmers start out on the incubator growing annual vegetable crops or flowers and herbs. It is the job of incubator farm program staff to help farmers determine, in the context of their business plans and the practical realities of your site, what is a good enterprise to embark upon as they get started.

Factors to consider when choosing an enterprise include available landscape and infrastructure, climate, irrigation and water access, machinery, available capital, and management capacity and knowledge.

Many new farmers coming onto incubator sites are interested in the model of the diversified vegetable farm that does direct sales at farmer's markets and through a CSA. While this is absolutely possible for new farmers, encourage them to be realistic about their skills and capacity in their first year and perhaps start small, or with fewer crops, to get a sense of what farming entails before

Evaluations

No matter how and what you decide to teach your farmers on the incubator, you'll want to create pre-class or field training assessments to determine what your participants knew beforehand so you can properly measure the benefit of their attendance.

These pre-evaluations and subsequent post-class quizzes or evaluations should be based on the learning goals you developed for each individual class or field training.

they jump into growing 75 different crops and signing up 50 CSA members. Ambition, idealism, and drive are great qualities in a small business owner. It is our job to provide a healthy dose of reality and a moderating influence on those initial plans and make sure that farmers have done their market research and self-assessment to find out if they truly will be able to accomplish their goals. You may also have more knowledge of the local marketing environment than your participants do and thus be able to advise them on whether or not a particular market is saturated, or what niches are still available to fill.

Different crops require different amounts of time and resources. See the resource below for over 1,000 sample enterprise budgets organized by crop to use in classes on enterprise selection and to share with your farmers:

- http://nesfp.org/nifti/enterprisebudgets

4.2.7 - Crop Planning

Once farmers have gone through the process of developing a marketing plan and selecting their enterprises, they can start creating a crop plan. Depending on your farmers level of experience and background you may need to explain not only how to plan for growing crops, but also some of the basic elements of growing healthy produce. The following topics should be part of a crop planning curriculum:

- Crop families and cultures, stressing the needs of different types of plants in terms of sunlight, water, harvest and post-harvest handling, nutrient needs, pest and disease pressures, equipment, and labor and other inputs required
- Where to find information on specific crops (local extensions, web resources, seed catalogs, your program's resource library, etc.)
- Production planning based on your marketing projections (from the marketing plan)

  -The amount of product you need
  -When you need to have it available
- When you can offer a particular crop based on biological or infrastructural limits
- How much space you need to grow what you want to grow

Crop Planning Software

If your farmers are relatively computer literate and have access to the necessary technology, there are a number of online tools for crop planning that can help your farmers get a handle on their successions. Try these two resources if you are looking for online crop planning software:

- http://farmhack.net/tools/crop-planning-software
- http://www.agsquared.com

- What you need to purchase for each crop and how much of it you will need:
  -Seed
  -Water/irrigation (drip tape)
  -Pest and disease control (row cover, companion plants, pesticides/herbicides)
  -Nutrients (lyme, compost, fertilizers, etc.)
  *-Harvesting bin*s and packaging materials (twist ties, bags, etc.)
- Growing more to allow for "shrinkage" (at least 25%)

Stress to your participants that the best laid crop plans are often subject to change based on weather or other circumstances outside of their control. Regardless, farmers should have a well thought out crop plan going into their first year, and they should do their best to take copious notes throughout the season on how the plan changed, what caused the changes, and what they will do differently in subsequent years. To reinforce this behavior, your farm manager can schedule regular and/or season-end meetings with farmers to review their crop plans and talk about what worked and what didn't.

Always explain to farmers how the crop plan fits into the rest of their business plan, including the farm financials, the marketing plan, and the operations plan so they can start to see the many pieces of the business plan as a whole document designed to guide their path and provide regular feedback on how well they are accomplishing their goals.

New Entry has a host of spreadsheets to take farmers through the mathematical process of crop planning. These are available online at http://nesfp.org/nifti/library using the search term "spreadhseets".

One of the best and most straightforward resources available for small-scale production crop planning is: "Crop Planning for Organic Vegetable Growers": http://www.growingformarket.com/store/products/115 .

4.2.8 - Farm Financials

New farmers need to have an accurate picture of how much it will cost to run their business and how little they will get paid during the times they need to be spending the most on purchasing seeds and getting their fields ready for planting. The seasonality of income and expenses inherent within farming means it's helpful to have tailored tools that farmers can use to track their financial situation on a month to month basis.

Record Keeping

Teaching good record keeping can fit into every part of your curriculum. The most common uses and benefits of good record keeping are:

- Evaluating the performance of production and business practices over time
- Obtaining organic certification
- Complying with your food safety plan
- Applying for credit
- Negotiating a lease with a landowner

Although record keeping can fall by the wayside and is the least exciting part of farming for many farmers, your program can make it easier on them by providing templates and regular reminders of its importance for the health of their business.

Farm financials will encompass all of your students' previous data from their marketing plans, enterprise selections, and crop planning. They should know how all the pieces fit together, and be able to see when during the year they will arrive at a break even point and start making money from their business. Make sure they're fully accounting for all the costs associated with farming in the incubator (lease fees, equipment rental, etc.) and also what those expenses would be if they were farming on their own so they can start getting a realistic picture well before they need to think about transitioning off the site.

When discussing farm financials with your participants, you will want to cover:

- The importance of financial planning
- Sales projections
- Expense forecasts
- Break even analysis
- Taxes (including how and when to file)

Why is financial planning important for new farmers?

- Set realistic goals
- Make informed decisions
- Set solid foundation to apply for financing
- Avoid unnecessary risk

In addition to basic farm financials in the context of their individual business plans, you may want to provide additional resources to your participants around sound money management and financial resources for small businesses. The majority of people operating farm incubator projects are not licensed CPAs or attorneys, and therefore should direct their program participants towards financial professionals who have the skills and expertise to advise them properly about larger financial decisions like purchasing land, or taking out large equipment loans. If you don't have someone on your staff who feels confident running the numbers with your participants, by all means refer them to the appropriate resource to get their questions answered thoroughly and accurately. In some cases it may make sense to cultivate a relationship with a CPA or lawyer in your local area who either has some experience already working with small-scale agricultural producers or is willing to develop that expertise to become a resource for your participants. These professionals can also be guest lecturers in your classroom sessions, perhaps conducting an "Intro to Financial Planning", or running special advanced workshops for incubator farmers.

Depending on your farmers goals, accessing capital through loans, grants, and bank financing may be very important to their future plans. Helping farmers keep good financial records and understand the ins and outs of their businesses finances will set them up to access these types of opportunities and lead to

the possibility of growth for their operations over time. Although all of these concepts are vitally important for farmers, it's also necessary when teaching farm financials to find or develop tools and resources that are simple enough to not be overwhelming, while also being complex enough to capture all the important information farmers will want to track over time. You'll also want to try and tailor documents to farmers' specific needs, including line items for fertilizer and land lease rate, so that they are more likely to be aware of the typical expenses they will incur.

4.2.9 - Risk Management

Farm incubator projects are one mechanism for minimizing risk for farmers just starting out. By limiting the financial risks and improving farmers' access to physical and educational resources, incubators try to deal with some of the major challenges that can prevent farmers from succeeding, or even getting started in the first place. When educating farmers about the challenges inherent in running a small farm business, it is important to discuss:

- Crop damage from pests/weather/disease
- Price fluctuations
- Government regulations and changing policies
- Accidents on the farm
- Illness
- Financial risks
- Food safety

There are various strategies to deal with the multitude of risks involved in farming. When discussing risk management with farmers, either in the context of business planning or when offering any other type of technical assistance, the following strategies can be presented:

- Product and market diversification
- Ongoing market research
- Lists of experts or sources of information on crop production and business planning

Who helps farmers manage risk?

- Other farmers
- USDA agencies
- Loan officers
- Teachers
- Crop insurance agents
- Lawyers
- Family members
- Business counselors
- Accountants
- Extension agents

- Evaluating physical risks on the farm (weather, fertility, pest pressure, etc.)
- Record keeping
- Crop insurance
- Equipment maintenance
- Crop storage
- Written agreements and contracts with partners and customers
- Financial planning and literacy
- Understand legal and regulatory environment
- Insurance for crops and labor
- Developing a food safety plan

Many aspects of risk management are specific to states, micro-climates, populations served, or other circumstances. While it is impossible to prevent any unforeseen circumstances arising, we can do our best to prepare farmers for possible eventualities and provide them with proven strategies for increasing their resilience in the face of the inevitable challenges they will face.

4.2.10 - Conclusion

Remember, the farmers on your program are just starting out and becoming a truly proficient organic grower, marketer, manager, and all the other myriad skills required of a farmer can take decades, if not a lifetime. The role of educators on an incubator farm is to help the farmers keep this in perspective as they try their hand at this new endeavor, and inevitably make mistakes and fail once or twice, while taking the opportunity to turn setbacks into teaching moments. The majority of incubator projects keep their farmers on site for 3-5 years with the expectation that there will be a steep learning curve, but farmers should have the time to make mistakes and learn as they go. If incubator project staff keeps a sense of humor and remains encouraging and supportive, farmers will have a chance to develop into truly successful entrepreneurs.

4.2.11 - Additional Resources

BOOKS:

- Crop Planning for Organic Vegetable Growers
- The Organic Gardener's Handbook of Insect and Disease Control
- Sustainable Vegetable Production from Start-Up to Market
- Sell What You Sow!
- Rodale's Vegetable Garden Solver
- Building a Sustainable Business
- Resource Guide for Organic Insect and Disease Management
- Exploring the Small Farm Dream
- Eliot Coleman's Four Season Harvest
- The Organic Farmer's Business Handbook
- Northeast Cover Crop Handbook
- Building Soils for Better Crops

WEB RESOURCES:

- Crop Production Budgets for Vegetable and Berry Growers; http://www.uvm.edu/vtvegandberry/budgetlinks.html
- Vermont Vegetable and Berry Grower Page; http://www.uvm.edu/vtvegandberry/index.html
- National Sustainable Agriculture Information Service (ATTRA) publications; https://attra.ncat.org/
- North Carolina Cooperative Extension Growing Small Farms; http://chatham.ces.ncsu.edu/growingsmallfarms/resourcelist.html
- CSA Coalition Resources for Growers; http://www.csacoalition.org/resources/growers/
- Greenhorns Publication Library; http://www.thegreenhorns.net/?cat=36
- World Crops; www.worldcrops.org

4.3 Providing Access to Farm Support Services

Incubator projects provide farmers with the resources they need to be successful. To do this effectively they often need to develop partnerships and direct farmers towards other organizations, service-providers, government agencies, and suppliers that can supplement the work that takes place on the incubator farm. Because many incubator projects operate with limited resources and staff, and because it is more efficient to utilize existing services than to try and create these from scratch, it is important to develop a comprehensive picture of what is available to farmers in your community already and how the incubator project and those resources can complement and enhance each other.

4.3.1 - Key Considerations

Project Goals: The primary goal of an incubator project is to help new farmers start successful businesses, so you should put every resource you know of at their disposal. Being aware of what other services are available to beginning farmers can also help you refine your goals and make sure your program is providing a needed service and not duplicating something that already exists.

Relationships: Develop relationships with external service providers so they get to know your program and the types of farmers you work with. These professionals are often excited to have access to your program participants as a potential audience for what they provide and may be willing to tailor outreach events and programs specifically to the groups that you work with.

Communication: The external services and resources available to your farmers won't do them any good if they don't know about them. Communicate the value of taking advantage of these opportunities to your participants since, as we all know, farmers are very busy and sometimes it can take a lot to get them out of the fields. Pay attention to timing when trying to run informational sessions on various programs, and don't schedule any events promoting external services like the availability of FSA loans or food safety trainings the day before market or during high harvest times.

4.3.2 - External Service Providers

Government

- USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) – County offices across US. Relevant programs include: Environmental Improvement Programs (examples: EQIP, AMA); Stewardship Programs; Community Assistance Programs; Technical Resources (Conservation Planning Services), connections to local Conservation Districts, and more. See: http://www.nrcs.usda.gov/wps/portal/nrcs/main/national/programs
- USDA Farm Service Agency (FSA) – County offices across US. Relevant programs include: Farm Loan Programs – ownership and operating; Emergency Disaster Programs (ie, NAP – Non Insured Crop Disaster Assistance Program); and more. See: http://www.fsa.usda.gov
- USDA Rural Development (RD) – County offices across US. Relevant programs include: cooperative development resources, loans, grants, and technical assistance. See: http://www.rurdev.usda.gov/Home.html
- USDA Sustainable Agriculture Research and Education (SARE) – Maintains a rich, diverse "learning center" and resource library of funded projects with information on production and agricultural research. There is a SARE Coordinator in every state – connect with them. SARE Farmer or Partnership Grants can be used to implement or demonstrate new/innovative techniques on incubator farms. See: http://www.sare.org/
- National Center for Appropriate Technology (NCAT) and ATTRA – They maintain an English-language ATTRA toll-free hotline at 800-346-9140 or the Spanish-language ATTRA hotline at 800-411-3222 for expert technical advice. Service providers (and farmers) can also use the Ask An Ag Expert tool to send them an electronic note. See: https://attra.ncat.org/

State agency programs

- Extension / Land Grant University – traditional service providers to offer technical assistance to farmers/community gardeners. Look for available resources on e-eXtension, see: http://www.extension.org/

Agricultural Supply Companies

Don't overlook the technical assistance that can be offered by for-profit agricultural suppliers. Invite a company representative to serve as a guest speaker or develop a good working relationship with a staff/owner who is willing to assist new farmers (spread the wealth so as not to appear partial to a particular brand/ company with a vested interest in a sale).

These include:

- Seed companies
- Hardware stores
- Farm supply stores
- Irrigation equipment
- Fencing
- Insurance companies

- Departments of Agriculture (and Markets) – many state agencies or departments of agriculture also offer producer outreach, training, grant programs, energy services, marketing support, and other programs/services.

Grassroots Farmer Groups/ Trade Associations

- CRAFT (Collaborative Regional Alliance for Farmer Training) networks: Grassroots farmer groups usually in support of intern/apprentice training. Groups usually schedule seasonal farm visits, workshops, or social events to network with other young farmers. See examples at: http://www.emasscraft.org/ (Eastern Mass CRAFT), or http://www.craftfarmapprentice.com/ (Hudson Valley CRAFT), or http://www.learngrowconnect.org/what/training/craft (Angelic Organics CRAFT in Illinios).
- Farm Bureau: Each state has a chapter and there are county committees in each state. Often they have young farmer programming. See: http://www.fb.org/
- National Farmers Union: There are regional chapters of the National Farmers Union and they also are a legislative/ advocacy group with programming and networks across the US. See: http://www.nfu.org/
- Statewide Beginning Farmer Networks: More statewide organizations in support of new farmers are emerging, see: http://bfnmass.org for an example of New Entry's statewide network in Massachusetts.

Consultants

There are an abundance of consultants who specialize in agricultural (or cross-industry) technical consulting in areas such as:

- business planning, marketing, branding, financial management, insurance, legal (attorneys), CPA (accountants), commodity specific consultants, media and public relations, agritourism and more.
- SCORE – is a nonprofit association that helps small businesses (including agricultural businesses) get off the ground through education and mentorship. They offer mentors, tools, counseling and workshops. See: http://www.score.org/about-score to find a local chapter.

Others

- Buy Local business membership organizations
- Other sustainable farming organizations (NOFA, MOFGA, Etc.)
- Organic Certifiers
- Other beginning farmer training programs
- Conferences, workshops and field days
- Advocates, allies, resources and partners

4.3.3 - Loan/Grant Programs

Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS – USDA) will fund different types of farm infrastructure projects including:

- High tunnels
- Agricultural Management Assistance
- Road Improvements
- Irrigation projects

Crop insurance through USDA:

- Most crop insurance is for commodity crops
- Only option for diversified growers is Adjusted Gross Revenue Lite (AGR-Lite)
  -AGR-Lite requires 5 years of revenue history as well as tax returns. Cost for 1 year of insurance if grossing $10,000/ year is $900. Maximum benefit in case of total loss is $2,400.

The Farm Service Agency (FSA)'s primary role is as a lender. The flexibility of the FSA to think outside the box depends greatly on local officers. However, FSA is mandated to improve its services to minorities, and does have special programs for beginning farmers and minority producers. FSA provides the following services:

- Operating loans
- Farm ownership loans
- Rural youth enterprise loans
- Emergency loans
- Non-insured disaster assistance program

Section 5:

Managing Your Incubator Project

5.1 Introduction

This section outlines some of the common issues, needs and concerns when managing an incubator farm. As always, many of the decisions you make about how to run your incubator farm will be contingent on your physical circumstances, organizational resources, and the needs of the populations you serve. In this first section, we also discuss the importance of setting a culture on the incubator farm that develops leadership skills in farmers and builds a sense of community and peer-based mentorship amongst new farmers; another key benefit that incubator projects offer their participants.

The Costs of Running Your Incubator Farm

Each incubator farm will come with a different set of parameters to work within, and all of these various factors will influence your costs of operation – both when you're first getting started and then on a year-to-year basis. Below is a list of the common costs associated with running the incubator farm:

- Farm manager salary
- Seasonal intern salaries
- Equipment: Include initial purchases, subsequent equipment needs, and a repair budget. Consider having someone on staff who is good at fixing tractors and a decently outfitted shop.
- Site preparation: Both the staff time spent on getting the fields ready for planting, and the cost of field scale inputs such as lime and compost.
- Irrigation: Both the costs associated with digging wells or running underground lines, as well as the yearly upkeep and maintenance costs of pipes, flushing lines, etc.
- Additional infrastructure outlays: Greenhouses, sheds, wash stations, cold storage, etc.
- Miscellaneous farm supplies: for day-to-day operations, including tools, gas for the farm vehicle

Now that you have laid the planning and administrative groundwork for your incubator project, it's time to develop a plan for how you will manage the incubator site itself. Incubator farms have some similar characteristics to other types of farms and some key differences. Your staff may be familiar with operations on a for-profit farm with family ownership, but each farmer on an incubator is their own independent business owner with different management styles and philosophies. Although some incubator farms are cooperatively managed by all the farmers on site, many have separate plots for each farmer and thus multiple separate farms on each incubator. At the same time, the infrastructure and common spaces are used by everyone and usually do not technically belong to anyone. As one might imagine, this leads to challenges and occasional conflicts that need to be managed and resolved by incubator project staff.

5.1.1 - Key Considerations

Project Goals: The incubator farm site is core to the mission of our projects because it provides farmers with affordable access to land, farm infrastructure, and basic tools, which are crucial resources for becoming a successful farmer. 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.

Relationships: The incubator farm is a web of relationships that must be carefully nurtured. First, there is the relationship between your organization and whoever owns the land on which your program sits. For more on this topic, see section 3.4. Farmers will develop relationships with one another as peers, and with the incubator program staff as mentors and/or service providers. Your incubator will also sit within a community of neighbors and other farmers, as well as volunteers and visitors to the farm. Keep these various types of stakeholders in mind as you create the specific parameters of your program.

Resources: The best way to avoid conflict on an incubator site is to make sure that there is enough of everything – time, space, equipment, etc. – to go around. If you don't have the capacity to offer enough of everything to everyone, have clear systems in place for allocating resources and try to ensure that everyone is in agreement about these policies. Care for all equipment and infrastructure carefully and well and make sure that farmers are

also trained at the beginning of the season to do so.

Communication: We cannot stress enough the importance of making 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. You should also develop a way for farmers to communicate feedback about the program to the staff and administrators, as well as work with each other to handle challenges and conflicts. Many incubator projects take the approach of complete transparency with farmers about program operations and costs as part of the learning experience and to help them get a clear picture of what it takes to run a small farm.

5.1.2 - Group Dynamics and Community Building

The farmers on your incubator site will be working in close proximity with one another, sharing tools and farm infrastructure, and trying to develop a host of new skills while working long hours for very little immediate payoff. Under these circumstances, it can be helpful to think through the tone you want to set on your incubator farm both amongst the farmers and between the farmers and the project staff to foster good group problem solving skills and productive interactions. Consider hiring staff with some experience in group facilitation, or finding professional development opportunities for your staff that can strengthen those skills, since more interpersonal work happens on incubator farms than you might initially expect.

There are a variety of different options for making decisions on the farm (see sidebar) and you can choose different tools for different situations based on your values and goals for your project. Some projects stress farmer led decision-making, while others are more guided by the farm manager and program director's decisions. Most are a hybrid of these approaches, with staff making decisions around things that don't especially affect farmers or that farmers would have little to say about, and then holding regular meetings or topical feedback sessions for issues that concern everyone on the farm. Your staff will have to make judgment calls about which is which or, ideally, develop a clear set of protocols about which types of decisions get made with the farmers and which get made amongst staff alone. No matter what you decide, communicating the incubator project's policies and procedures to farmers before a challenge arises will help to ensure that the process itself doesn't become part of the problem.

Characteristics of successful groups:

- Understanding of purpose
- Belief in objectives and each others' ability
- Personal satisfaction from the work
- Small enough to know each other, large enough for diversity
- Clearly defined relationships between members and to other parts of the organization
- Abide by established norms

Source: NFDP presentation for NIFTI webinar #2

Remember that the more say an individual has in the decision making process, the more they will have a sense of ownership and stake in that decision and its outcomes. Also, having input from the people directly affected by an issue will lead to a more successful resolution because you are able to see the relevant perspectives of those involved and gather enough information to make reasonable decisions. It may seem easier to make decisions about certain things on your own in the moment without consulting the effected parties but you may risk losing trust and damaging relationships with your participants and making your job much harder in the long run.

Types of decision making

- Democratic - majority voting
- Consensus - all agree after discussion
- Spontaneous agreement - all agree without the need for discussion
- One person decides - often with feedback and input from the group

Different types of decision making are appropriate for different situations. You can research different styles of decision making and choose what you will use for different purposes amongst your participants.

At minimum, your project will want to have a pre-season meeting with all the farmers to go over the site rules and expectations and set working agreements with each other. Although you may have a set of rules that you have already developed, it is worthwhile to open up the discussion for additional suggestions and input, again, to encourage a sense of ownership over the eventual resulting set of community norms. You can also have regular meetings; say bi-weekly or monthly depending on farmers' availability, to discuss issues that are cropping up on the sites or to problem solve challenges together. Any of these meetings can be combined with a social gathering like a potluck or barn dance (or both!) to encourage camaraderie and social cohesion amongst your cohort. Farmers who socialize together and already have a rapport are more likely to approach one another on the farm to ask questions or seek assistance with a project than not.

Try to encourage an open door policy and make sure that there are open avenues for farmers to give feedback about what is and isn't working for them about the program. This feedback can take place at group pre- and post-season meetings, or at individual meetings with farmers where you discuss their goals and challenges one-on-one. The more you know, the better job you can do accomplishing your larger goals of training successful farmers. Keeping open the lines of communication and accepting feedback appreciatively and constructively will also set a strong tone for the culture you want to see on the sites as a whole.

5.1.3 - Leadership Development

Prioritizing leadership development with farmers essentially means encouraging your participants to take responsibility for addressing issues as they arise, both with each other and with the project staff. It also moves participants into the mindset of being their own independent entrepreneurs with the resources and capacity to be leaders in their communities.

The benefits of cultivating leaders in your program are:

- Shared work and responsibility with participants, which leads to greater feelings of ownership and buy-in to the program and its outcomes
- Building trusting relationships with participants to create the culture you want on your incubator
- Get more and better information about what's happening on the incubator farm and amongst the farmers so you can make informed decisions
- Help farmers understand the complexity of running a farm and how to address challenges as they arise as training for their future careers as independent farmers
- Farmers sometimes learn better from each other than from service providers and farmer leaders can take on mentorship roles as they move through the program, or teach workshops that are uniquely suited to their audience

You can cultivate farmer leadership by having farmers who are interested or well suited:

- Run meetings
- Help teach trainings
- Take responsibility for some types of record keeping on the farm
- Adopt a particular space (the shed, the greenhouse) to keep organized
- Be part of the overall incubator project planning processes
- Help to make decisions about policies and procedures

Be mindful of who steps up as a leader and who may need additional encouragement to take on leadership roles. Try to make sure that diverse voices are represented in leadership amongst the farmers and on the farm in general, and try to address obstacles that arise for particular people to become leaders in the community by, for example, providing childcare at farmer meetings so families with children are more likely to participate.

The more say an individual has in the decision making process, the more they will have a sense of ownership and stake in that decision and its outcomes

5.1.4 - Conclusion

Unforeseen circumstances will always arise on a farm, and when you are working with multiple farmers all sharing resources on a single plot of land, complications increase exponentially. You will also have to manage physical infrastructure with all the myriad potential breakdowns that entails, as well as maintaining a healthy ecosystem and encouraging soil fertility on your incubator site while it's being used by farmers who have little to no investment in its long-term health. With all of these (and many other) challenges inherent in running a farm incubator, the payoff of creating a shared learning environment and a community of farmers who can work together to learn and grow as entrepreneurs and as producers is well worth the trouble. The following chapters will outline some of the best strategies for dealing with specific issues as they arise. Remember, you can always stay flexible and re-evaluate your program policies and decisions as needed if it turns out that one solution or strategy was less effective than you hoped. If you set a good foundation of solid relationships with participants and good communication skills, your program will be able to respond better and remain flexible in the face of changes both big and small.

5.2 Developing the Incubator Site

After you have organized your incubator project and secured land for your participants to farm, you can begin the work of developing the incubator site. This section will provide information and resources about farm incubator site development, including equipment needs and wants, building and expanding site infrastructure, and establishing a fee schedule for your project.

5.2.1 - Key Considerations

Thoughtfully developing the farm incubator site is critically important to the future success of your program. Throughout the site development process, there are several important issues you will need to think about:

Project Goals: How can the layout of plots, infrastructure, and administrative space best support the long-term goals of your project? If you have a land use plan in place, future decisions about expansion, participant transition, and adding new infrastructure will be easier.

Relationships: Who should be included in decision-making about how you will develop the incubator site? Neighbors, the landowner, established producers in your area, and potential incubator participants are just a few possible stakeholders you might want to consult.

Resources: Are you planning to develop the incubator site and recruit your first group of participants at the same time? Developing the infrastructure for your site and the policies/procedures for your project simultaneously can be very challenging.

Communication: Who will be responsible for shared infrastructure, and what are the expectations for overall site management? Involving participants in decision-making and site maintenance can help offset the "tragedy of the commons" and encourage shared responsibility.

5.2.2 - Equipment Needs and Wants

Each farm incubator project has unique characteristics, and decisions about the types of equipment and infrastructure your particular project will need are dependent on many factors: your overall goals, the acreage of your site, the amount of funding you have available, and the experience level of your staff and participants, among many other considerations. At the most basic

level, however, all farm incubator projects need a few things to get started.

Needs:

- Acreage, both for administrative project support and to expand the project;
- Parking or other site access (i.e. public transportation) for participants and visitors;
- Water access for irrigation (dependent on method and region);
- Potable water for washing produce, drinking, or washing up;
- Storage for equipment and supplies; and
- Bathrooms for staff, participants, and visitors.

Beyond this basic list of essentials, many farm incubator projects provide additional infrastructure and equipment to participants. This list is not exhaustive, and the types of equipment and infrastructure your project can offer are limited only by the space, time, and money you have available. It is a good idea to prioritize your "wants" based on the things your participants need to establish successful farm enterprises, while acknowledging that your project can't possibly provide everything your participants might want to have.

Wants:

- Electricity (could be required depending on irrigation);
- Greenhouse space;
- High tunnel/hoophouse space;
- Cooling/cold storage;
- Meeting space;
- Office and/or computer access;
- Fencing (required depending on site);
- Barns;
- Vehicles;
- Hand tools; and
- Equipment (tractors, rototillers, etc.).

5.2.3 - Building and Expanding Infrastructure

Imagine a Saturday morning during the harvest season on your farm incubator site: Because many of your participants work other jobs, most people are there on nights and weekends. The weekend demand for hand tools, wash stations, and other equipment is high and there is little time for repair or maintenance. You've scheduled a couple of tours with community groups who want to learn about your project. There are also volunteers in the fields helping out some of your participants. Most of your farmers are harvesting for farmers' markets, CSA distribution, or farm stand sales, and many have brought family members (including children) along. That's a lot of people on your site in one day!

Because farm incubator projects are shared-use sites, they have unique infrastructure needs that individual farm sites or private landowners may not experience. Quirky equipment or improvised infrastructure, which might work perfectly well on an individual farm, could quickly cause expensive equipment failure or other problems on an incubator site. In addition, the novelty of the farm incubator model means that people in your local community, potential funders, and other folks who are interested in your activities will probably want to visit your incubator site. Many farm incubators offer tours and host volunteers, and some allow public access to all or a portion of their site. Finally, farm incubators have multiple participants at one time, and many farmers rely on family or friends for harvesting and other farming help.

In short, a farm incubator project is a very public farming model. You will need to ensure that you have adequate field access and facilities for all of your potential users. How can you build the infrastructure you need to support all of the different uses and users of your site? It is extremely helpful to have a short-term and long-term plan for the development of your site's infrastructure that includes not only its use as a farming site, but also its use as a community resource and gathering place. Here are a few questions to help you begin thinking about building and expanding the infrastructure on your farm incubator site. If you have also prioritized your equipment and infrastructure "wants" from the previous section, use those priorities to help guide your planning as well.

Questions for Infrastructure Planning:

- What does our "built-out" incubator site look like?
- Do we have enough space for all of the structures/facilities we want to have?
- How much might it cost to build our ideal site?
- How often do we want to replace infrastructure, and what is its useful life in a heavily-used farming environment?
- What other priorities do we have that might require our time, money, and energy?
- What is the best use of our limited resources?
- Are all of our stakeholders on board with our future vision for the site? (participants, staff, community members, landowner, etc.)
- How do we decide what to build and when?
- What resources do we expect to have available for infrastructure, and when?
- Are any funds dependent on a timeline and can they be used for infrastructure?
- Can we get solicit donations for some of the things we'd like to have?
- What kinds of infrastructure are best suited to our climate and farming practices?
- When are we most likely to have the amount of help we'll need to build/install infrastructure projects?
- What types of infrastructure would be most helpful to our participants and other users, and at what point in the season?
- Who will build/install new infrastructure?
- What kinds of skills do we have on our team? Volunteers, staff, board/steering committee members, participants, etc. may all have very important skills and experience.
- What are the pros and cons of building/installing infrastructure ourselves?
- Should we hire local contractors, and for what types of projects?
- What role do we want our participants to play in developing

infrastructure on the site? Do they help make decisions, provide labor, etc?

- How will we maintain new infrastructure?
- Who is responsible for regular maintenance and repair?
- Is there a procedure for participants to follow if they break something or notice that it's broken?
- How often will we inspect facilities and infrastructure?
- Have we budgeted enough money for maintenance and repairs?

5.2.4 - Establishing a Fee Schedule

It can be difficult to decide how much your project should charge participants, and there are many different ways to structure your fee schedule. A few projects do not charge any fees at present (2013). Some projects (for example, Dirt Works Incubator Farm, SC; Growing Farms Incubator, MN; Horn Farm Center Incubator, PA) charge a flat fee for all participants each year they are at the incubator. Other projects (for example, Headwaters Incubator Farm, OR; Growing Farmers, NE) employ a graduated fee structure, where first-year participants pay a percentage of the total fee and the fees gradually increase over time. Still other projects (for example, Groundswell Farm Enterprise Incubator, NY) use a sliding scale fee structure, where participants who make less money pay lower fees.

In all cases, farm incubator projects describe what is included in the fee as part of the lease with each participant. The fee covers rent for the plot at the incubator site and, sometimes, additional services. These "extras" can anything from pre-season tillage to access to shared greenhouse space, wash stations, utilities, office space, etc. Services that are not included in the participant fee are generally offered on an as-needed basis.

Because there is so much variability in project fees across the country, it is impossible to create an "ideal" fee schedule for all projects. The best fee schedule for your project is one that helps you achieve the goals of your project and supports your long-term vision. Here are some questions to ask when developing your fee structure:

Who do we serve? If you are working with farmers who have very low income, you may not be able to charge much for land or the services you provide. On the other hand, if your population includes farmers with more resources you can likely cover more of your program costs with participant fees.

What is the market rate? Depending on your location and the infrastructure present on your site (i.e. irrigation), market-rate rent may vary widely. Research costs of agricultural producers in your area to help you establish reasonable rates for land, equipment rental, tillage, cover cropping, seed, utilities, and other services you plan to provide.

How will we make up the difference? Think about the other sources of funding that might be available for your project. Many farm incubators do not cover all of their costs with participant fees. In fact, federal grants, foundation grants, and private fundraising are all critical financial resources for many projects.

What is our definition of success? If you want participants to establish their own independent farm businesses after transitioning off your incubator site, you will need help them prepare for the actual costs associated with agricultural production in your area.

Regardless of the fee structure you choose, it is important to share with your participants the actual costs of the services you are providing. As participants prepare to transition to their own land, they will need to be able to cover all of the costs of running their own independent farming enterprises. Consider itemizing an invoice or bill for your participants, and show the discount provided by your project. It is a good idea to include market rates for rent, infrastructure, marketing, and utilities so your participants can prepare themselves for the true cost of running a farm business.

Although no two projects are alike, referencing other projects' fee structures can be helpful as you think about the fees and services you will include in your farm incubator project. Several projects that participated in case studies with NIFTI have generously shared their fee structures (see Section 7: Case Studies).

5.2.5 - Additional Resources

Biernbaum, John A. 2006. Greenhouses for Local Food and Farming. Michigan State University. 21 pp. Available at www.nofanj.org/LiteratureRetrieve.aspx?ID=104103.

Blomgren, Ted and Tracy Frisch. 2007. High Tunnels: Using Low-Cost Technology to Increase Yields, Improve Quality and Extend the Season. Regional Farm and Food Project and Cornell University. Distributed by the University of Vermont Center for Sustainable Agriculture. 77pp. Available at http://www.uvm.edu/~susagctr/Documents/HighTunnels.pdf.

Haschley, Jennifer. 2012. Capitalizing the Incubator Farm: Tractors, Tools, and Toys. New Entry Sustainable Farming Project. Powerpoint Presentation. Available at https://nesfp.org/nifti/library/capitalizing

NESFP (New Entry Sustainable Farming Project). 2011. New Entry Farmsite Budget. Available at https://nesfp.org/nifti/library/farmsitebudget

5.3 Establishing Expectations

The process of establishing clear expectations with participants on your incubator site begins long before participants begin farming on their individual plots. Your eligibility guidelines, application materials, and other project documents (e.g. land use protocols, participant manuals) all help create standards for performance, communication, and farming practices. In this section, you will find information about developing eligibility criteria and application materials, as well as a discussion about the different ways responsibilities can be split between participants and incubator staff through participant agreements. In addition, this section briefly covers record-keeping and conflict resolution as ways to monitor and maintain your expectations.

5.3.1 - Key Considerations

All of the documents you use to select participants and guide their performance need to reinforce your expectations and send a consistent message. But what exactly are your expectations? And what can your participants expect from you? Working with key stakeholders to develop clear ideas about how you want participants to operate and interact on your incubator site is the first step toward developing a clear set of expectations. Here are some questions to get you started:

Project Goals: How can you reflect your project goals in your incubator project documents? If you require that all of your participants complete a business planning workshop, for example, you will want to clearly communicate that expectation in all relevant materials and ensure that participants understand the commitment involved.

Relationships: Can you meet your participants' expectations? If you promise to provide training opportunities, access to infrastructure (e.g. walk-in cooler, irrigation), help with marketing, or other services to participants, you need to be able to follow through. Although it is tempting to offer a wide menu of services, keep your limitations in mind to ensure that your participants are not disappointed.

Resources: How much time can you devote to monitoring your participants' operations and enforcing the expectations you have set? If you have minimal staff time, you may choose to have a limited number of expectations. Alternatively, you might encourage your participants to develop and enforce their own standards with input from incubator staff.

Communication: Have you minimized the possibility of miscommunication whenever possible? Policies and expectations are likely to change over time. It is a good idea to involve participants in policy/expectation changes and to communicate those changes to all participants as soon as possible in writing. In addition, you should revisit your other documents to make sure that they are up-to-date and consistent with one another.

5.3.2 - Eligibility and Applications

People who want to farm on your incubator site might hear about your incubator project in a number of different ways. It is important that you clearly communicate your eligibility criteria and application process whenever you publicize your incubator project (e.g. press releases, social media, interviews). Whether someone reads about your project in a newspaper or hears about the incubator through word of mouth, potential participants should know if they are eligible to participate, how to begin the application process, and where to go for more information. Clear and consistent messaging about your eligibility and application process can save you time, and will help ensure that your participants are willing and able to meet your expectations. You will find examples of the eligibility guidelines and application materials from several incubator projects in section 7 (Case Studies).

Eligibility

Deciding who your incubator project will serve is the first step in developing eligibility criteria (see Section 3.5, Finding Farmers, for more information about how to decide who your incubator will serve). Your project might aim to serve a very specific population. For example, some farm incubator projects are only open to people who are refugees living in the U.S. Some incubator projects try to serve farmers with limited income, farmers who are immigrants, or farmers who are members of a socially disadvantaged group. Still other incubator projects are open to all beginning farmers. The target population of your incubator project is your first criteria for eligibility in your project. However, you will need to be specific about how you will incorporate your target population criteria into your application and selection process:

- If you want to serve a specific group of farmers (e.g. refugees, low-income farmers, etc.), will you require that all of your participants meet that criteria? If not, will you give preference in the selection process to applicants who do meet the criteria?

- Are there enough potential participants in your area who are members of your target population?
- What will you do if the people who do apply to participate in your incubator project aren't part of your target population?

Also, keep in mind that your target population may change over time.

Another important aspect of your eligibility criteria is the level of experience you expect participants to have when they begin working on your incubator site. The amount of technical assistance and farmer training you plan to provide as part of your incubator project will likely play a large role in defining this part of your eligibility criteria. If you plan to provide extensive training, require participation in an intensive series of classes or workshops, or have the staff capacity to give lots of one-on-one attention, you may decide that potential participants do not need to have much (if any) previous farming experience. On the other hand, if you plan to offer training and workshops on an as-needed basis, or you have limited staff time to provide technical assistance and one-on-one support, you may wish to restrict eligibility to participants who have one full year or more of farming experience, or who meet other benchmarks that indicate they are ready to farm semi-independently. See the "Additional Resources" in this section (5.3.5) for an example from the New American Sustainable Agriculture Project (NASAP) that describes how NASAP places participants in different parts of their program.

The final piece of eligibility criteria at many farm incubator projects is a requirement that participants complete a particular training class or series of workshops before they apply to farm on the incubator site. Often, local extension agents, land grant universities, or nonprofit organizations offer a one-day workshops or a series of classes aimed at aspiring farmers. These workshops educate aspiring farmers about the realities of operating a small farm enterprise and often lay the groundwork for more intensive farm business planning classes. Many incubator projects have partnered with organizations that offer introductory farm business workshops and classes and have found that these partnerships both increase the knowledge of the incubator participants and provide excellent outreach for the incubator project. See the "Additional Resources" section (5.3.5) for examples of organizations that offer introductory farm business workshops and classes. Please note that there are many excellent organizations offering introductory farm programming, and that this resource section only lists a few examples.

Insurance Requirements

Many incubator projects also require that potential participants have proof of insurance before they can farm on the incubator site. Your participants will probably need to be covered under your organizations insurance policy, although to what degree and in what way is highly individualized based on your organizational structure.

Farmers on your sites should also be required to have liability insurance for themselves and their business as an independent entity operating on the incubator farm.You should consult with an insurance agent to determine the best coverage amounts for your participants. It is often a good idea to develop a relationship with a particular insurance agent or carrier so that farmers can work with someone who understands their circumstances.

Applications

If a farmer is eligible to participate in your incubator project, they can apply for a plot on your incubator site. The application process varies widely among incubator projects. Some incubator projects only require that potential participants complete an application form. Others require additional meetings and/or documents; for example: interviews with incubator staff, interviews with current participants, business plans, and projected budgets. When you decide what you will require in an application for your incubator project, remember that your application process needs to collect enough information from potential participants about their ability to succeed at your incubator site. At the same time, you want to avoid overwhelming your potential participants (and yourself!) with too much information. To help you think about what you might want to include in your application process, look at some examples of application materials from other incubator projects in the "Additional Resources" section (5.3.5) and in Sections 6 and 7 of this toolkit.

As you begin developing your application documents, it might be helpful to think about the types of information you will need from participants. Here is a brief overview of five major types of information that many incubator projects include in their application materials:

- *Basic information:* This includes contact information (name, address, phone, etc.) and sometimes emergency contact information.
- *Time:* This includes questions about how much time the applicant intends to spend on the incubator site. You can ask applicants to describe or list the days and times they expect to be on the site during a typical week. You can also collect information about the applicant's other employment. Note: Some incubator projects ask detailed questions about who will help the applicant and how often to ensure that the applicant will actually be able to handle the workload on the incubator plot.
- *Skills:* This includes questions about the applicant's farming experience and background. You may choose to list a number of farm skills (e.g. driving a tractor, planning crop rotations) and ask the applicant to rank their comfort level with each, or you can ask applicants to describe their previous farming experience more broadly. You might also ask applicants to list their previous farm employment and/or provide farming-specific references

- *Expectations:* This includes questions about the applicant's training needs, language requirements, and overall expectations of your project. Here are some sample questions:

  -What part of running a farm enterprise do you know the least about?

  -What would you most like to learn at this farm incubator?

  -What languages do you speak? Which of these languages do you prefer to use for verbal and/or written communication?

  -How do you think this farm incubator can help you achieve your farming goals?

- *Commitment:* This includes questions about the applicant's farming goals, business plans, market access, etc. It is often difficult for incubator project staff to truly know whether an applicant is "serious" about farming as a commercial business. Requiring proof of business or market plans can help the applicant show their level of commitment, and can also help you select applicants whose needs and goals match those of your incubator project.

In addition to collecting information from potential participants, it is also important to provide information about your incubator project in the application materials. Remember that your applicants may not have much information about your incubator project, and use the application documents as an opportunity to communicate with them about fees and basic expectations. Your application materials should include a copy of your fee schedule and a description of what services are included in participants' incubator fees. The application should also describe your expectations. Will you require attendance at workshops or trainings? Do participants need to follow organic farming practices or pursue organic certification? Think about your most fundamental expectations of your participants, and include those expectations in your application materials. It is a good idea to end the application form with an agreement statement, which asks the potential participant to sign and date the application form to indicate that they have provided complete, truthful information and that they agree to abide by the expectations set out in the application documents.

5.3.3 - Participant Agreements

To keep any farm running smoothly, everyone who is responsible for farm operations needs to have a clear understanding of their responsibilities and how those responsibilities fit into the whole-farm picture. Farm incubator projects are no different. You will need to decide how the different aspects of farm operation will be divided between incubator staff and participants. Many incubator projects outline this division of responsibility in writing, and require participants to read and sign short (1-3 page) documents indicating that they clearly understand their responsibilities and the responsibilities of the incubator project staff. Participant agreements can enhance communication and provide a starting point for future conversations about participant performance. See the "Additional Resources" section (5.3.5) for an example of a participant agreement from the New American Sustainable Agriculture Project (NASAP). Here are some topics you might want to cover in your participant agreement:

Participant Responsibilities

- Attend meetings
- Attend required trainings and workshops
- Use the incubator plot as outlined in relevant documents
- Write or regularly update a farm business plan
- Use equipment and infrastructure as outlined in relevant documents
- Request assistance when needed
- Work cooperatively with other incubator participants and incubator staff

Incubator Staff Responsibilities

- Attend meetings
- Provide trainings and workshops
- Perform pre-season field preparation and other field work as outlined in relevant documents
- Assist participants in writing or updating farm business plans

- Provide operable equipment and infrastructure as outlined in relevant documents
- Provide other technical assistance as requested
- Work cooperatively with incubator participants and staff

Participant agreements are meant to be short outlines of the various responsibilities of project participants and staff, and they work in concert with longer, more specific documents like site guidelines, land use protocols, and participant manuals. These different types of documents are not mutually exclusive; you might develop both a participant manual and a land use protocol, for example. However, each type of document serves a different purpose.

Site Guidelines

Site guidelines are generally short (3-10 page) documents that cover community standards, required farming practices, land use requirements, and administrative expectations. Farm incubator projects with little or no shared equipment and infrastructure can often cover all of their critical expectations in a site guidelines document instead of creating a longer participant manual. Site guidelines are also sufficient for your project if you are providing limited training or do not plan to require participant attendance at workshops or classes. You might also consider using site guidelines if participants in your farm incubator project have low literacy or reading/oral comprehension skills, or if you anticipate the need to translate your documents into several languages. Finally, site guidelines are an excellent place to start for a new farm incubator project. Without putting too much time and energy into a participant manual, you can use site guidelines to develop your expectations and refine them over your first season or two.

Land Use Protocols

Land use protocols outline specific farming practices that all participants on a farm incubator site must implement on their individual plots. Farm incubator projects that are certified organic or wish to follow organic farming practices often use land use protocols to set expectations for cover cropping, crop rotation, compost application and soil amendments, and weed, disease, and pest management. Land use protocols can also be very helpful if your farm incubator project has a particular focus on environmental sustainability and/or resource conservation.
In addition to the land use topics just described, you can also include expectations about water use and irrigation methods, erosion control, and chemical (pesticide/fertilizer/fungicide)

application in your land use protocols. Your land use protocols can be stand-alone documents or they can be included as a section in a participant manual.

Participant Manuals

Participant manuals are usually longer (10-30+ pages) documents that provide a comprehensive overview of all of a farm incubator project's expectations, policies, and procedures. The topics covered are often very similar to those included in participant agreements and site guidelines, and a short participant agreement or set of site guidelines can form the outline of a participant manual. Farm incubator projects with extensive training or complex land use expectations often choose to develop participant manuals to provide more detailed information to their participants. Creating a participant manual could also be a good choice for your incubator project if you want to compile all of your expectations in one place. Participant manuals not only allow you to state your expectations; they also provide you with an opportunity to explain how you will monitor and maintain your expectations (see Section 5.3.4). For example, you might include information in your participant manual about when and how you will meet with participants, the types of records you require participants to keep, and the consequences of missing payments or otherwise not meeting your expectations.

5.3.4 - Monitoring and Maintaining Expectations

Even if you have carefully developed your expectations and have clearly communicated them to your participants, it is inevitable that your participants will sometimes fall short of your expectations. It is also very likely that you or another member of the incubator staff will sometimes fail to meet the expectations your participants have of the incubator project. How will you hold participants (and yourself) accountable to the expectations you've developed?

Recordkeeping and Reporting

Monitoring the performance of both your participants and your incubator staff and sharing information about the performance of everyone on the incubator site can help maintain expectations. Regular recordkeeping and reporting can also help identify potential problems in their early stages. For example, you might notice that one participant's market sales have been declining while others have not. You could meet with that participant to talk about market strategies, address post-harvest quality issues, or discuss other problems so that the participant has a chance to recover lost revenue for the remainder of the season.

When you are thinking about what kinds of records you want participants to keep about their farm enterprises, it is important to try to avoid overwhelming them with too many recordkeeping requirements. If your participants lack access to office facilities, have limited farming experience, or are unfamiliar with the concept of business recordkeeping, you might want to start with a few basic requirements and suggest other optional records that participants might want to keep. You can require additional recordkeeping in future years as participants increase their skills and comfort level. Also remember that participants who might want to apply for a Farm Service Agency (FSA) loan need to have proof of 3 years of farm operating experience, which will require records of both farm production and farm administration/finance.

Below are some common recordkeeping requirements that might be applicable to your farm incubator project:

- *Markets:* plans and schedules for all accounts (farmer's markets, wholesale, restaurant, CSA, etc.)
- *Production:* water use, planting and seeding schedules, crop plans, pesticide/chemical use, soil amendments, soil test results, yields
- *Finance:* expenses (fixed and variable costs), sales, farm-related debts, projected budgets
- *Training:* attendance, outside trainings or workshops, time spent with mentor farmers, time spent on incubator site

The records you keep about your farm incubator project are equally important. Good records can help you apply for grant funding, modify your policies and procedures as needed, and monitor the success of your incubator project over time. Every farm incubator project keeps slightly different records, but here are some common metrics that you might want to incorporate into your recordkeeping:

- Technical assistance: hours of assistance provided, topics covered, results from training
- Participant outcomes: revenue generated/sales, future farm employment, yield from each plot, success stories, land acquisition of participants
- Participant demographics: age, race/ethnicity, income level, educational attainment, previous farming experience, languages spoken

- Land management: crop rotation plans, soil test results, soil amendments, infrastructure development plans

See section 3.2.4 for an additional list and discussion of measuring the outcomes of farm incubators.

Conflict Resolution/Rule Enforcement

There will be times when participants or incubator staff do not abide by the rules and expectations you've developed for your farm incubator project. There are many reasons someone might not follow the expectations you've set. Perhaps they don't understand the rules or the reasons that the rules are important. They might not have the tools or resources they need to work in accordance with your expectations. Or, they may not be a good fit for your farm incubator project because they do not intend to follow the rules to which they agreed. It's also possible that your rules didn't account for particular issues that might arise and may, if possible, need to change to reflect the needs or practices of the farmers in subsequent seasons. To ensure that you are prepared to address problems as they arise, you should decide how you will handle conflict and enforce the rules on your farm incubator site before any disagreements occur.

Your conflict resolution and rule enforcement procedures should be applied consistently, and should be put in writing and communicated to all participants in languages they understand. You can structure these procedures in any way that works for your project, staff, and participants. For example, you might decide that a violation of the rules results in a meeting with incubator staff, and that three violations results in a fine. However you decide to set up your conflict resolution and rule enforcement procedures, be sure you have addressed the following questions:

- Which rules, expectations, and/or guidelines are included in the conflict resolution procedures?
- What happens if a participant or staff member breaks the rules?
- How many times can people violate the rules before being asked to leave the incubator?
- Who can report a violation of the expectations [staff, participants, volunteers, etc.]?
- Who will make decisions about consequences, mediate disputes, and deal with complaints?

- What sorts of actions are grounds for immediate removal from the incubator project?
- What can someone do if they don't think they did anything wrong?
- What should someone do if they notice a problem that is not covered in any of the rules or guidelines?

Although conflict resolution and rule enforcement is not a particularly pleasant task, having clear procedures can minimize disagreements and can help you make more consistent decisions. Everyone on the incubator site has a responsibility to uphold the expectations of your farm incubator project and, more importantly, each person on the incubator site is affected by the actions or inactions of others. Clear expectations, thorough communication, and consistent maintenance of the rules and guidelines you create will help you develop an incubator project that supports participants in their efforts to build successful independent farm enterprises.

5.3.5 - Additional Resources

Eligibility and Applications:

- Land Stewardship Project. Farm Dreams Workshop. http://landstewardshipproject.org/morefarmers/farmdreams.
- Land Stewardship Project. Farm Beginnings Course. http://landstewardshipproject.org/morefarmers/farmbeginningscourse
- New American Sustainable Agriculture Project. 2010. Program Placement Summary. Available at https://nesfp.org/nifti/library/programplacement
- New Entry Sustainable Farming Project. Explore Farming! Course. http://nesfp.org/explore-farming
- New Entry Sustainable Farming Project. Farm Business Planning. http://nesfp.org/farmbusinessplanning
- New Entry Sustainable Farming Project. 2012. Farmsite Application. Available at http://nesfp.org/sites/default/files/uploads/farmsite_application_2013.pdf

Participant Agreements:

- New American Sustainable Agriculture Project (NASAP). NASAP Mutual Agreement. Available at https://nesfp.org/nifti/library/NASAPagreement

Site Guidelines:

- New American Sustainable Agriculture Project (NASAP). 2012. NASAP Training Farm Site Guidelines 2012. Available at https://nesfp.org/nifti/library/NASAPguidelines

Land Use Protocols:

- The Intervale Center. 2013. Land Use Protocols 2013. Available at http://nesfp.org/nifti/intervalelanduse2013.

Participant Manuals:

- New Entry Sustainable Farming Project. 2012. 2012 Farmer Manual. Available at https://nesfp.org/nifti/library/farmermanual

5.4 Assigning Plots to Farmers

Establishing plots for the first group of participants at your incubator site might seem like a relatively straightforward task, especially if you plan to start with a small number of participants in your inaugural year. Over time, however, assigning plots to farmers can become a complex process. This section will help you develop a system for assigning plots to farmers that will minimize confusion and reduce conflict, while also providing flexibility and support for your project's long term goals. Topics covered in this section include plot size, lease agreements, land allocation, and fees.

5.4.1 - Key Considerations

Farm incubator projects need to strike a balance between the individual needs of participants and the overall goals of the project. As you think about how you will assign plots to farmers on your incubator site, consider the following questions:

Project Goals: How do your lease agreements support the overall program/farm? A lease agreement can include legally binding references to other documents like land use protocols and participant manuals, which can help you hold participants accountable to their agreements.

Relationships: How will you define shared space and individual space? Participants in your program may have varying definitions of ownership. Working with your farmers to establish a collective understanding about which spaces and equipment are shared and which are not can help reduce conflict among participants.

Resources: How does your layout help or hurt your overall farm management plan? The layout of your individual incubator plots should support your land use plan for the whole farm. Consider your farm-level plans for cover cropping, crop rotation, tillage, irrigation, and other farm management issues and ensure that your plot layout allows you to maximize labor efficiency and minimize waste.

Communication: How will you review participant performance for lease renewal? You may decide to meet with participants formally on a set schedule or informally as issues arise. Many projects use a combination of formal and informal communication to figure out how participants are doing. Regardless, participants need to know how they are being evaluated so there are no surprises when you discuss lease terms for the following year.

5.4.2 - Plot Size

If you could design your ideal incubator site, what would it look like? All of the individual plots would probably be the same size and shape. Each plot would have an identical slope, the same weed/pest issues, and the same amount of sun exposure. All of the plots would also be the same distance from key pieces of infrastructure and equipment like coolers, irrigation mainline, and storage sheds. Are there other things you can think of?

Though it is unrealistic, imagining the "perfect" incubator site can be a helpful exercise as you begin designing the layout of your individual incubator plots. It is unlikely that all of your plots will be identical, and small disparities in access to infrastructure, plot slope, soil profile, or other factors can create conflict between participants. You might want to involve other stakeholders in this process – potential participants, established producers, and others on your team. Together, you can create a list of criteria that all of your plots need to have for participants to be successful on your incubator site. Here are some possible criteria to get you started:

Physical criteria

- Size:
- Slope: no more than %
- Sun exposure: at least hours per day
- Weed/pest pressure: low-medium (regional/site specific)
- Flood potential: low-medium (regional/site specific)
- Soil quality: medium-high (regional/site specific)

Access to infrastructure

- Water: mainline hookup within _____ (distance)
- Wash station: adjacent to site, within _____ (distance)
- Cooler: clear path from site, within _____ (distance)
- Storage: clear path from site, within _____ (distance)
- Parking or Public Transportation: within _____ (distance)
- Bathrooms: within _____ (distance)

A note about incubator plot sizes: the size of your individual incubator plots is an important decision, and there is no "one-size-fits-all" solution. You should keep your project goals in mind when you decide on incubator plot sizes. If you want participants to "scale up" throughout their time on your incubator site, how will they expand their operations? How much land do you think your participants will really be able to manage in their first year? What will happen if your participants overestimate their abilities and can't farm their entire plot? In general, it is easier to expand plot sizes later or allow participants to farm more than one plot after a period of time (if you plan for that possibility) than it is to reduce plot sizes.

Plot sizes at existing incubator projects vary widely. A recent survey of operational incubator projects gathered information about plot sizes from 54 projects (83.1% of all known operational programs) in the US and Canada.[1] Some plots are as small as 15x30 feet, and some are as large as 27 acres. On average, incubator plot sizes range from .25 acres – 1 acre. The most common plot size is .25 acres.

5.4.3 - Lease Agreements

The lease agreements you sign with your participants are incredibly important documents. At minimum, a lease agreement protects the incubator project from excessive legal liability and allows the project to collect fees from participants or evict participants for nonpayment. But your lease agreements can do much more for your incubator project. A comprehensive lease agreement can provide stability and predictability to your participants, can help set expectations for both parties, and can facilitate better communication between incubator administrators and participants. The annual renewal of a lease agreement is also a wonderful opportunity to have a dialogue with your participants about their experiences, challenges, and successes.

Questions to think about:

- What pattern are you setting for future years? If you have made it very difficult for either party to change the lease agreement, you may not have the flexibility you need to adapt to changing circumstances.
- What barriers to communication exist between you and your participants? You may need to translate leases into different languages, define terms, provide interpreters, or have an oral conversation about the lease for participants with limited literacy.

Take the time to ensure that your participants fully understand the agreements they are making.

- Does your lease agreement encourage farmers to take on increasing levels of responsibility? It is never too early to begin preparing your participants for the realities of running their own independent farm enterprises.
- How do your lease agreements support the overall program/farm? A lease agreement can include legally binding references to other documents like land use protocols and participant manuals, which can help you hold participants accountable to their other agreements.

Below is a list of items you might want to include in your lease agreements with participants. If you would like to see examples of lease agreements from other incubator projects, you will find examples in the Additional Resources section (5.4.6) and in section 7 (Case Studies). Please note that this list is not exhaustive, nor are the lease agreements included in this toolkit a substitute for professional legal advice. It is a very good idea to consult a lawyer to help you develop or refine your lease agreement.

What should be included?

Terms and Conditions

- Location of leased land (including a map in an appendix)
- Length of lease
- Renewal procedures
- Rent: amount to be paid, when, how, and to whom
- Procedure for rent increases
- Penalties for late/unpaid rent

Agreements

- Insurance coverage
- Liability/Indemnification
- Hold harmless clause
- Policy for subleases
- Permitted uses
- Access to the site, for both parties

Termination

- Conditions under which the incubator can terminate the lease
- Conditions under which the participant can terminate the lease
- Policies and expectations for vacating the property

Exclusions

- Descriptions of the conditions under which the lease agreement can be modified
- Description of the agreement of both parties to the terms of the lease

5.4.4 - Land Allocation

Creating good leases with your participants is one piece of a larger land allocation puzzle. As your project develops and (potentially) expands, you might be signing more leases with more participants. Or perhaps some of your participants will be interested in scaling up their operations. Even if you do not want to expand your project, some of your participants may want to farm different plots in the future. How will you equitably assign plots to participants, and who will decide how the land on your incubator site should be allocated? There are several approaches to land allocation, each with possible pros and cons.

Farmer Preference

One option for land allocation on your incubator site is to let participants decide among themselves who should farm which parcels. To ensure that everyone is involved in the decision-making process, you could choose to require a unanimous agreement/consensus to the land allocation plan. This land allocation model could be a good choice for your incubator project if your participants have extensive agricultural experience and have a close working relationship.

Pros:

- Requires limited incubator staff time;
- Encourages farmer independence; and
- Allows participants to tailor their land to their particular farm enterprise

Cons:

- Participants may take on parcels that are too large;
- Increased potential for conflict among participants; and
- Decisions may not align with overall management plan or farm goals

Farmer Performance

You could also decide to assign plots based on participant performance. In this sort of land allocation model, each new participant is assigned a parcel for their first year. Throughout the season, the participant's performance is evaluated by incubator staff or mentor farmers (for more information about evaluating performance, see Establishing Metrics below). If the participant is doing well on the plot, they may be eligible to return to the plot the following season, move to a new plot, or expand their operations. Most farm incubator projects that employ this type of land allocation system discuss the participant's performance during field walks or other regularly scheduled meeting times throughout the season.

Pros:

- Each participant is held to the same standard, and "good" performance is clearly defined;
- Incubator staff can more easily support farm management goals (i.e. crop rotation, soil fertility); and
- Creates a structure for regular communication between incubator staff and participants.

Cons:

- Requires more staff time to evaluate performance, meet with farmers, and allocate plots;
- Does not usually include opportunity for participants to make group decisions about land allocation; and
- Does not always allow participants to choose the parcel they will be farming.

Hybrid Model

Many farm incubator projects approach land allocation with some form of a hybrid approach, where participants and staff work together to decide who farms which parcels on the incubator site. Incubator staff set the parameters for participant performance as

in the “farmer performance” model, and participants are involved in site-level decisions. This form of land allocation often includes more feedback from participants about the performance of their neighbor incubator farmers. The specific details of hybrid land allocation models vary from project to project, depending on the experience level of the participants, the goals of the project, and the level of communication among participants, among other factors.

Pros:

- Standards for “good” performance are clearly defined, and participants help evaluate one another;
- Encourages participant involvement in farm-level decision making; and
- Helps create a community decision-making process for land allocation.

Cons:

- Involving the whole incubator community in land allocation decisions can be time-consuming;
- Interpersonal conflict can become difficult to manage among participants; and
- Can be difficult to find enough time for everyone to meet together.

Establishing Metrics

When you are assigning plots on your incubator site, it is important to have a consistent way to measure participant performance. Many incubator projects ask participants to meet specific expectations as described in application materials or participant manuals. In addition, many projects require participants to agree to follow land use protocols and community policies for shared resources. A rubric that assigns values to each of the important aspects of farmer performance in your incubator project can be an invaluable way to quickly assess whether your participants are succeeding on their incubator plots and are following the guidelines you have established.

Here is a list of some topics you might want to include in a land allocation rubric for your incubator project. This list is not exhaustive, and is not be representative of all farm incubator projects. However, considering these and other topics will help you get started on developing a land allocation rubric that reflects the policies and goals of your incubator. For more

information about establishing expectations for participant performance, see Section 5.3: Establishing Expectations.

- Fees - does the participant pay rent and other fees on time? Do they have outstanding debts?
- Shared infrastructure - are shared spaces left clean and used appropriately?
- Plot appearance - is the participant's plot clean and well-maintained? Is it weeded regularly? Are they using the entire alloted space?
- Farming practices - how are they handling weeds, pests, and nutrients on their plot? If organic practices are required, does the participant follow organic standards?
- Attendance - does the participant attend required trainings and/or meetings?
- Organization - does the participant keep adequate farm records? Do they quickly respond to requests for information?
- Relationships - has the participant had conflicts with others and, if so, why?
- Resource use - does the participant follow policies for water, seed, fertilizer, and other resource use? Are they choosing conservation farming practices whenever feasible?
- Shared equipment - is shared equipment returned in good working order?

5.4.5 - Fees and Penalties

Your fee schedule (see section 5.2.4) outlines the cost of the various equipment, infrastructure, and services provided by your incubator project, and your lease agreement (see section 5.4.3) describes the agreements and responsibilities of incubator participants. However, you also need to decide how your fees will be communicated to participants and how you will collect money.

Communicating Fees

It is a good idea to have a conversation at several different points in the application process to ensure that your participants fully understand the services you are offering and how much they are expected to pay. Discuss fees and penalties during the application process, at the lease signing, and again once they have begun working on the property. You can also meet with participants

after their first month to make sure they understand their bills. Be extremely clear about what services or access to infrastructure are included in the rent, and what the consequences are if your participants are unable to meet their financial obligations. Also communicate the process for paying fees. If rent and fees for services or access to infrastructure will all be due at the same time each month, your participants will need to be aware of that and plan accordingly. One important issue to note is that unplanned circumstances - family emergencies, terrible weather, or unfinished infrastructure on your incubator site - can dramatically impact your participants' abilities to pay rent and other fees. Develop a clear policy, but use discretion when warranted.

Rent: Your lease agreement should clearly outline the policies around paying rent, as well as the penalties for late or unpaid rent. Most programs collect rent on a monthly basis. Some programs collect rent only during the growing season (as defined by the region/climate) and others collect rent each month of the year. Another option is to collect a rental fee for the entire season up-front or in several installments, which may or may not be monthly. As with most incubator policies, consider the economic resources of your participants and the financial needs of your project. It is important to accurately account for rent paid by your participants - using software like QuickBooks or another budgeting system is critical to keep your project organized.

Services: If your incubator project will charge participants for services (for example, business planning, technical assistance, tractor work) or access to infrastructure (like greenhouse or cooler space), you will need to develop a procedure that participants follow to pay for these services. You might choose to bill participants monthly in conjunction with their rent. You could also bill monthly on a different day of the month to spread the financial burden on your participants more evenly. Finally, you might choose to bill participants after each service they use. However, this option requires more time creating invoices/bills than a "bundled" option that includes all services used for the month. One other option is to create a hybrid payment process where participants who are renting space in coolers and greenhouses pay monthly for that space, and individually for other services they use less consistently.

Penalties: Also consider what you will do if participants break/misuse equipment or do not uphold their responsibilities as outlined in the lease agreement. How will you hold them accountable and recover the lost revenue for your incubator project?

Should You Assess Penalties and Fines?

Some incubator projects have implemented fines and penalties to address problems with participants paying rent on time, maintaining equipment, or paying for services. Depending on your particular project and the issues you are facing, fines and penalties might be an appropriate method to use. Other incubator projects do not assess fines or penalties, and instead use an alternative method. You could decide to allow participants to contribute work or sweat equity in exchange for services. This approach could be appropriate for your incubator project if your participants have limited financial resources.

When deciding whether to assess fines and penalties, consider the financial resources of your participants and think about whether the particular issue you are dealing with might be caused by a misunderstanding or communication breakdown. Typically, problems like misuse of equipment and failing to pay for services affect everyone on the incubator site. Each participant benefits when the incubator is running smoothly and has enough income to provide services. Asking participants how they would like to solve the problem can open lines of communication and help generate creative solutions, and also encourages participants to hold each other accountable. In the long term, this approach can cultivate shared responsibility and will likely reduce the need for extensive fines and penalties.

5.4.6 - Additional Resources

- ALBA (Agriculture and Land-Based Training Association). ND. Agriculture and Land-Based Training Association (ALBA) Farm Lease. Available at http://start2farm.gov/sites/default/files/7%20-%20Farm%20Incubator%20Land%20Lease.pdf.
- The American Agricultural Law Association (AALA) is a professional organization for agricultural lawyers. You can search by state or zip code for members of the AALA on their website: http://aglaw-assn.org/find-a-member/. While this resource is not a comprehensive list of all agricultural lawyers, it could be a good place to start.
- Intervale Center. 2009. Intervale Center Farm Lease Agreement. Available at http://nesfp.org/nifti/library/intervale_lease
- NESFP (New Entry Sustainable Farming Project). ND. Land Allocation Rubric. Available at https://nesfp.org/nifti/library/allocationrubric

5.5 Managing Shared Infrastructure

One of the main goals of most farm incubator projects is to provide participants with access to the equipment and infrastructure they will need to establish successful farm enterprises. However, many farm incubator projects have found that effectively sharing tools, wash stations, coolers, and other infrastructure can be a challenge. This section will help you decide how you might want to manage shared equipment and infrastructure on your farm incubator site. Topics covered in this section include different types of use and ownership arrangements, equipment training, and establishing guidelines for the use of shared equipment and infrastructure.

5.5.1 Key Considerations

As you develop guidelines for the effective use and maintenance of shared equipment and infrastructure on your incubator site, there are several key questions you should consider:

Project Goals: What kinds of equipment and infrastructure will you provide, and what will participants need to procure for themselves? If you expect participants to transition off the incubator site and establish their own farm enterprises, they will need to know how to purchase their own equipment and infrastructure. Consider involving participants in major equipment purchasing and infrastructure investment decisions.

Relationships: How will shared use be coordinated among participants? During peak use times (harvest, market days, etc.) most participants might want to use the same equipment and infrastructure at the same time. Working with participants to develop a good scheduling system can help reduce conflict and misuse of equipment.

Resources: Who will maintain the equipment and infrastructure? If the farm incubator project is solely responsible for the replacement and maintenance of all tools and infrastructure, you will need to budget both financial resources and staff time accordingly. If maintenance is the participants' responsibility, you may need to provide training or technical assistance.

Communication: How will you communicate guidelines for the appropriate use of equipment and infrastructure? Most incubator projects post simple guidelines in shared equipment and infrastructure areas, and many require that participants complete a training session before they can use heavy equipment (rototillers, tractors, backpack sprayers, etc.).

5.5.2 Use and Ownership Arrangements

There are a few different ways you might choose to organize the use and ownership of equipment and infrastructure on your incubator site. Most incubator projects tend to utilize a mixture of use arrangements and ownership types. The best choices for your incubator project will depend on your own resources, the resources of your participants, and your participants' desire and ability to procure equipment and install infrastructure for themselves.

Shared Use

A shared use arrangement is by far the most common method farm incubator projects use to manage shared equipment and infrastructure. In this kind of use arrangement, the farm incubator project owns all of the equipment and infrastructure. Participants agree to share the use of that equipment and infrastructure with everyone else on the incubator site, and also agree to follow guidelines for the appropriate use and maintenance of farm incubator tools. Remember to budget enough of your financial resources and staff time to buy, maintain, and replace equipment and infrastructure as needed.

Note: You may choose to keep some pieces of equipment reserved for incubator staff use only. It is common for farm incubator projects to keep the use of tractors and other heavy equipment fairly limited.

Individual or Joint Ownership

Some farm incubator projects do not provide equipment or access to infrastructure. If your incubator project has very limited resources, or if your participants generally come to your incubator site with some of their own equipment, an individual or joint ownership arrangement might be appropriate. An individual ownership arrangement means that participants are responsible for procuring their own tools and infrastructure. Participants might choose to share their tools with others, or might keep them for use only on their incubator plot. Joint ownership arrangements, on the other hand, require participants to combine their resources to purchase and maintain equipment and infrastructure as a group. Larger purchases (e.g. mowers, tractors, walk-in coolers) are excellent opportunities to utilize joint ownership agreements, as it is unlikely that one individual participant will have the resources to purchase or maintain the equipment or infrastructure. See the "Additional Resources" section (5.5.5) for an example of a joint ownership agreement from NASAP.

Cooperatives

Although they are less common, cooperatives can be a very effective way to manage shared equipment and infrastructure on your farm incubator site. Cooperatives allow participants to exercise more control over the purchase and maintenance of equipment and infrastructure, and this sort of ownership arrangement can also encourage participant independence. Both the Intervale Center and the Farley Center for Peace, Justice, and Sustainability are home to cooperatives that manage much of the equipment on the incubator site. You can read more about both of these projects in Section 7 (Case Studies). Members of the cooperative include participants and former participants, and the incubator project works with the cooperative in an advisory capacity.

5.5.3 Equipment Training

Some simple hand tools (e.g. rakes, hoes, shovels) require little or no training. Most incubator projects that provide access to equipment and infrastructure do not require participants to complete any specialized training before using basic hand tools. However, farm incubator projects usually require participants to complete a class or workshop on equipment use and maintenance before they are permitted to use more complex small farm equipment like rototillers, backpack sprayers, flame weeders, etc.

Equipment training can be completed in a several-hour workshop format or in a one-day session. You can also teach participants to use one piece of equipment at a time over several separate sessions of equipment training. Whatever format you choose, remember to include enough time in your training to demonstrate the proper use of equipment in the field and allow plenty of time for participant questions.

Every incubator project will have a different set of equipment. However, there is a general list of topics you will need to cover in your participant training for each piece of equipment you plan to share with incubator participants:

- Equipment Introduction
- Proper Use
- Safety
- Equipment Demonstration

- Regular Maintenance
- Guidelines for Shared Use
- Fees

After participants have completed your equipment training, they can begin using the equipment on their incubator plots. Keep records of which participants have completed equipment training. It is also a good idea to develop a "refresher" equipment training workshop for participants who have already completed the full equipment training. This "refresher" training should be offered at the beginning of every growing season.

5.5.4 - Guidelines for Shared Equipment and Infrastructure

To help ensure that your equipment and infrastructure is not misused, you should establish guidelines that remind participants about how to properly use the equipment and infrastructure on your farm incubator site. These guidelines do not have to be long or complex, but each piece of shared equipment should have its own set of guidelines. See the "Additional Resources" section (5.5.5) for some examples of guidelines for common pieces of farm incubator equipment and infrastructure.

Here are some brief outlines of guidelines for shared equipment and infrastructure that might be helpful as you begin developing guidelines that are specific to your farm incubator project:

Equipment/Tools (will need to be modified for each type of equipment)

- Tips for proper usage
- Time limit for using the equipment
- Safety check
- Before you begin
- Starting the equipment
- While equipment is in use
- Turning off the equipment
- After you have finished
- Participant responsibilities for maintaining equipment

Field Edges/the "Commons"

- Tips for maintaining clean and clear field edges
- Safety check
- Clean up procedures and expectations
- Participant responsibilities for maintaining field edges

Compost Areas

- Tips for good compost management
- Safety check
- Participant responsibilities for maintaining compost areas

Wash Stations

- Tips for proper wash station use
- Wash station etiquette and safety
- Before washing
- After washing
- Participant responsibilities for maintaining wash station area

Hoophouses

- Tips for efficient hoophouse use
- Hoophouse etiquette and safety
- Participant responsibilities for maintaining hoophouses

Coolers

- Tips for proper cooler usage
- Cooler etiquette and safety
- Participant responsibilities for maintaining and cleaning coolers

Sheds

- Tips for proper shed usage
- Shed etiquette and safety
- Participant responsibilities for maintaining a clean and orderly shed

Once you have developed guidelines for each piece of shared equipment and infrastructure on your farm incubator site, you should compile the guidelines in a central location (for example, a shared office space). You should also post the guidelines in appropriate locations (in a tool shed, on the wall of the cooler, etc.) so they are easily accessible to participants in the field.

A note about scheduling: Most farm incubator projects use a sign-out sheet, shared calendar (online or paper) or other similar system to help participants schedule equipment use. Consider setting a time limit for equipment use if there are others waiting to use a particular tool. If no one is waiting, you can permit participants to use the equipment for as long as they need to. It is also an excellent idea to communicate in advance when equipment or infrastructure will be unavailable due to scheduled maintenance or repair.

5.5.5 - Additional Resources

Use and Ownership:

Cultivating Community, New American Sustainable Agriculture Project (NASAP). Agreement of Joint Ownership. Available at http://nesfp.org/nifti/library/jointownership

Equipment Training:

Dager, Ed, John Grande, Rodger Jany, Steve Komar, Peter Nitzche, and Jack Rabin. 2009. Participant Outcome Assessment: Beginning Farmer Equipment Demonstration Training: Proper Equipment for Small Farms. Rutgers, The State University of New Jersey, Cooperative Extension. Available at http://snyderfarm.rutgers.edu/pdfs/New_Farmer_SnyderFarm.pdf.

Guidelines for Shared Use:

BCS Rules. NASAP. Available at http://nesfp.org/nifti/library/bcsrules

Wash Station Rules. NASAP. Available at http://nesfp.org/nifti/library/wasstation_rules

5.6 Providing Market Access

The barriers to entry for new and beginning farmers include not only access to land, education, and infrastructure, but also access to markets in which they can sell their farm products. Many farm incubator projects incorporate some type of market access into their farm incubator operations. This section will provide an overview of several different methods your farm incubator project can use to help your participants build markets for their agricultural products. Topics covered in this section include on-farm sales, farmers' markets, community supported agriculture (CSA) programs, marketing cooperatives, and wholesale and institutional sales.

5.6.1 - Key Considerations

Providing market access as part of your farm incubator project can be both incredibly beneficial for your participants and extremely time-consuming for incubator staff. Here are a few questions that will help you determine the best market access approach for your incubator project:

Project Goals: What type of market access will best support your long-term vision? If your farm incubator project aims to help participants earn supplemental income (rather than rely solely on farming for their livelihoods) you might choose to focus on lower-volume sales outlets like farmers' markets and on-farm sales.

Relationships: How will you find potential customers? You may already have good relationships with farmers' markets, restaurants, and other potential customers. If not, you will need to advertise your farm incubator and get the word out about your project. Cultivating relationships on your participants' behalf can open up new markets for them, both while they are on the incubator site and after they transition to their own operations.

Resources: Who will be responsible for building and maintaining market access? There is a delicate balance between encouraging participant independence and maintaining market outlets over the long term. Think about the amount of staff time and expertise you can devote to market access and the skill level of your participants when you are deciding what type of market access is best for your incubator project.

Communication: How will you facilitate communication among participants, customers, and incubator staff? If your sales outlets are more formalized and complex (e.g. wholesale and institutional accounts), you and your participants will need to maintain very precise and consistent information about product availability,

prices, sales, etc. Also think about who will be responsible for maintaining customer satisfaction and resolving disputes.

5.6.2 - On-Farm Sales

Some farm incubator projects provide market access to participants by allowing participants to sell their products on the incubator site. Participants can sell their products individually or collectively. Common forms of on-farm sales include roadside farm stands and farm stores. Generally, on-farm sales are administered by participants with some incubator staff oversight. On-farm sales can encourage collaboration among participants and can teach valuable sales and marketing skills. However, it can be difficult to draw enough customers to your site to make on-farm sales a truly viable option for your participants. If you choose to pursue on-farm sales, be sure to check your farm liability insurance to make sure you are covered in the event of a customer injury or illness.

Pros:

- Requires minimal staff time; can be administered primarily by participants
- Can more easily adjust to variable harvest yields
- Does not require access to vehicles or much specialized equipment

Cons:

- Can be difficult to generate enough sales to cover participant costs
- Provides limited exposure to competitive market outlets

5.6.3 - Farmers' Markets

Most farm incubator projects encourage participants to sell at one or more farmers' markets. Farmers' markets offer participants an excellent opportunity to experiment with different post-harvest handling methods, interact with potential customers, learn how to display and price their products in a competitive marketplace, and track and monitor their sales over time. Some farm incubator projects help participants identify appropriate farmers markets and provide assistance with paperwork and market fees, while others expect participants to find and enter farmers' markets independently.

While farmers' markets offer many potential benefits to farm incubator participants, there are several drawbacks as well. Farmers' markets are very weather-dependent – a series of rainy market days could dramatically reduce participants' income for the season if they do not have another sales outlet. In addition, farmers' markets require a significant time commitment from participants. It is not at all uncommon for participants to spend an entire 12-hour day preparing for, selling at, and cleaning up after one farmers' market. Finally, farmers' markets are extremely competitive in some areas. It can be difficult for an inexperienced vendor to get into an established farmers' market. Even if they do secure a spot, it can still be very hard for them to make enough money to cover expenses like gas, supplies, and market fees.

Farmers' markets could be an integral part of providing market access for participants in your farm incubator project. To offset some of the potential drawbacks, encourage your participants to combine farmers' markets with a separate sales outlet (e.g. CSA, wholesale) or work with participants to establish a marketing cooperative (see Section 5.6.5) to distribute the workload more efficiently among all incubator participants.

5.6.4 - Community Supported Agriculture (CSA)

Community supported agriculture (CSA) programs are another very common type of market access utilized by farm incubator projects. Participants who are interested in selling their products through a CSA typically work with incubator staff to set up the structure of the CSA and refine their harvest schedules and crop plans. Some incubator projects help participants find CSA members and provide ongoing support, while other incubator projects only provide assistance as needed. The sizes of incubator participant CSAs vary widely – some participant CSAs have fewer than 5 members, and others have 50 or more members.

Because CSA shares are sold before the season begins, participants who sell their products through CSA have a consistent, guaranteed flow of income. This consistent cash flow can help participants plan their farm enterprises more effectively. CSAs also allow participants to experiment with new crop varieties – because the shares have been sold in advance, participants have a guaranteed outlet for less common products that may not sell as well at farmers' markets. Finally, participants will likely develop close relationships with their CSA members. When participants transition off the incubator site, they may very

well maintain relationships with their CSA members.

The drawbacks of the CSA model for farm incubator participants are usually administrative or scale related. Administratively, CSAs are more complex than farmers' market sales. Incubator participants need to purchase more supplies, do more outreach to find and keep CSA members, and spend more time planning crop diversity and harvest schedules. The scale of most incubator plots (around .25 acres) can also pose a problem for participants who want to sell their products through CSA. Participants may not have enough product to meet their customers' expectations each week, especially if they experience significant pest or disease problems. CSA's can also be challenging for new farmers because of the consistency and diversity of product required, especially if your incubator farmers are new to farming. Sometimes it's easier for a farmer who is just starting out to focus on 2-3 products in their first season.

Multi-Farm CSAs

Several farm incubator projects have established multi-farm CSAs to reduce the administrative burden on individual participants and aggregate products from several incubator farms. This approach requires more administrative support from incubator staff, but it also allows the incubator project to market and promote one larger CSA program. Generally, the incubator project staff performs most of the administrative duties and coordination associated with multi-farm CSA programs. See the "Additional Resources" section (5.6.7) for resources from several incubator projects with multi-farm CSA programs.

5.6.5 - Wholesale and Institutional Sales

Some farm incubator projects work with participants to help them develop relationships with wholesale accounts (e.g. restaurants, grocery stores) and/or local institutional buyers (e.g. hospitals, universities, schools). Although relatively few farm incubator projects provide market access through wholesale and/or institutional sales, these avenues for market access are slowly growing in importance and becoming more feasible. As interest in local food continues to grow, larger buyers like restaurants and schools are increasingly interested in working with small-scale agricultural producers.

Farm incubator participants can benefit enormously from gaining experience with wholesale accounts and institutional sales. Participants can learn how to maintain product consistency and quality, how to create invoices and bill customers, and how to build long-term relationships with other businesses. These skills

can be critically important when farm incubator participants transition onto their own land and establish independent farm enterprises. In addition, encouraging participants to manage their own wholesale and institutional accounts allows them the opportunity to continue working with the same customers when they leave the incubator.

Of course, working with wholesale accounts and institutional sales can be very challenging. Small-scale producers may not always meet the quality demands of institutional buyers, and may not have enough product to fill large orders over the course of a season. The reputation of the farm incubator project and of the individual participant is on the line, and there can be a great deal of pressure to deliver a consistent, high-quality product. Beginning producers may not have the production or organizational skills to handle wholesale accounts or institutional sales without a great deal of support and expertise from incubator staff.

Aggregating Products for Wholesale and Institutional Sales

Some incubator projects have begun aggregating products from multiple incubator participants to help participants access the benefits of wholesale and institutional sales while simultaneously shielding participants from some of the challenges inherent in larger-scale market access. This is often a "second phase" part of farm incubator project development. See the "Additional Resources" section (5.6.7) for resources from incubator projects and more information about aggregation of farm products.

5.6.6 - Marketing Cooperatives

One of the biggest problems farm incubator projects encounter with farmers' market sales, CSA programs, and wholesale and institutional accounts is that participants do not always have enough supply to meet customer demand – especially at the very beginning and very end of the growing season. In addition, it can be difficult for participants to find the time to go to enough markets or find enough CSA members to generate the revenue they need to cover their costs. A few incubator projects have addressed these problems by supporting the development of marketing cooperatives.

An agricultural marketing cooperative is a legal business entity that is organized for the purpose of collectively selling farm products. Members of a marketing cooperative determine together how they will process, package, distribute, market, and sell their aggregated farm products. Members of the marketing cooperative can decide to sell their products through many

different sales outlets: CSAs, institutional sales, wholesale accounts, restaurants, and farmers' markets are just a few possibilities. Because each member has a legal stake in the activities of the cooperative, the members need to agree on all aspects of the marketing and selling of their aggregated products.

It's important to note that some "cooperatives" aren't cooperatives in the legal or organizational sense. Be sure to work with a legal expert or an organization in your area that specializes in helping groups form cooperatives. If the farmers you work with don't want the added work and responsibility of a cooperative structure, you can aggregate product for your farmers and follow the Multi-Farm CSA model.

5.6.7 - Additional Resources

Multi-Farm CSAs:

- New American Sustainable Agriculture Project (NASAP). 2012. Community Supported Agriculture: Fresh Start Farms (brochure). Available at http://nesfp.org/nifti/library/freshstartfarms
- New Entry Sustainable Farming Project. 2010. Guide to Starting A Multi-Farm CSA. Available at http://nesfp.org/nifti/library/csaguide
- New Lands Farm. 2012. 2012 CSA Commitment Form. Available at http://nesfp.org/nifti/library/commitmentform

Aggregation:

- Wallace Center resources on Food Hubs: http://ngfn.org/resources/food-hubs/food-hubs.
- Fresh Start Farms. 2012. Wholesale Price List 2012. Available at http://nesfp.org/nifti/library/pricelist
- Lindsey, Timothy and Jim Slama. 2012. Building Successful Food Hubs: A Business Planning Guide for Aggregating and Processing Local Food in Illinois. A collaboration of the Illinois Department of Commerce and Economic Opportunity, University of Illinois Business Innovation Services, Illinois Department of Agriculture, and FamilyFarmed.org. Available at www.ams.usda.gov/AMSv1.0/getfile?dDocName=STELPRDC5097191.

5.7 Integrating Livestock

Though most farm incubator projects focus their energies on crop production, a growing number of farm incubators are beginning to incorporate small-scale livestock and poultry production into their curricula and operations. This section will provide information and resources about incorporating livestock into your farm incubator project. Topics covered include the pros and cons of integrating livestock production, common methods used to integrate livestock and poultry into daily farm incubator operations, and the resources required to add livestock production into your farm incubator project.

5.7.1 - Key Considerations

Integrating livestock and poultry production into your farm incubator project can add incredible value to your participants' experience at your farm incubator site, especially if small-scale livestock production is an important element in many participants' farm business plans. However, livestock production also requires more resources, expertise, and maintenance from incubator staff. Here are some questions to consider if you are thinking about pursuing livestock production as part of your farm incubator project:

Project Goals: How will your livestock production program support the overall goals of your farm incubator project? Identify your goals (e.g. sustainable farming practices, economically viable production, etc.) and consistently apply them to every element of your livestock production program. This is particularly important when working with outside partners who may not know about or share all of your goals or perspectives.

Relationships: Who will provide technical assistance and training about livestock production to incubator participants? Livestock production requires specialized knowledge in many different areas - pasture management, food safety regulations, animal health and nutrition, etc. Working with outside experts (e.g. veterinary schools, local regulators) can not only provide valuable support to incubator staff, but can also encourage participants to develop relationships with outside experts that they will take with them into their own independent operations.

Resources: Will your livestock production program use land on the incubator site, and will it be managed by incubator staff? If you plan to run a livestock operation on your incubator site, be sure that you have the resources you will need to raise, feed, slaughter, and market your livestock. If you have limited land, staff time, or other resources, you might want to consider working

with partner organizations to coordinate off-site livestock production trainings.

Communication: How will you coordinate communication among outside partners, incubator participants, and incubator staff? Particularly if your livestock production program consists of mostly off-site trainings, you will need to have a way to monitor your participants' progress and address any issues as they arise. Regular meetings with outside partners can help identify gaps in training or unmet participant needs.

5.7.2 - Pros and Cons

In many areas, livestock production workshops and other training opportunities primarily cater to hobbyists or backyard producers. Few of these workshops are geared toward people who are interested in starting a small-scale livestock or poultry enterprise. The training opportunities that do cater to enterprise-oriented participants are often expensive or meant to address the needs of larger-scale operations. As a result of this gap in currently available training opportunities, some farm incubator projects have begun offering livestock production programs. If you are considering adding a livestock component to your farm incubator project, you will want to weigh the pros and cons against your long-term vision for your incubator project.

Pros:

- Can provide training that is specifically geared toward starting a small-scale livestock enterprise rather than hobby or backyard production
- Helps participants establish relationships with other livestock producers and outside experts
- Gives participants an opportunity to learn about pasture management, animal welfare, and other topics that are typically not part of a crop-only production system
- Provides support for participants who may be unfamiliar with livestock and/or food safety regulations

Cons:

- Requires specialized knowledge from incubator staff
- Can be difficult to coordinate with outside partners or technical assistance providers

- Regulations for food safety, organic certification, etc. can be hard to communicate and monitor
- Experience levels of participants may vary widely, can be difficult to meet everyone's needs

5.7.3 - Methods for Integrating Livestock

Farm incubator projects that incorporate livestock production typically use a combination of methods to integrate livestock into their operations. Some incubator projects encourage participants to keep livestock independently. Incubators may require some previous experience with livestock production or a particular type of training before they allow participants to begin keeping livestock on their incubator plots. In addition, the incubator project may not have the infrastructure (fencing, barns, etc.) required for livestock and may require participants to provide any needed infrastructure for themselves. If your participants are interested in livestock production on their individual incubator plots, be sure that you are very clear about your expectations regarding previous experience, size of livestock operation, responsibility for providing infrastructure, and procedures for dealing with potential issues or conflicts.

Another option for integrating livestock into your farm incubator projects is to produce livestock collectively; where incubator staff manage the livestock program and participants assist with various aspects of livestock production. One benefit of this method is that a farm incubator project can implement a whole-farm pasture management system that dovetails nicely with crop rotation schedules. This system also minimizes risk for individual participants while providing hands-on experience. On the other hand, few farm incubator projects have the resources - time, money, infrastructure and, most importantly, acreage - to dedicate to livestock production. If you are thinking about producing livestock collectively on your farm incubator site, you will need to ensure that you have the resources available to raise, feed, slaughter, and market your livestock in addition to training your participants.

Note that you must have the appropriate amount of acreage to produce livestock on your incubator sites, which is often outside the realm of feasibility for most projects operating on either leased land or small parcels of donated land. In addition, livestock is best raised by resident farmers who are available to their animals at all times of the day or night for milking, watering, to check their health, etc. Incubator farmers and/or manager often do not live on site, and so cannot necessarily provide adequate care to animals. This is the major consideration for whether or not to include livestock on your incubator farm, and it is a serious

limitation. As the rest of this section discusses, there are various other options for ensuring that program participants are able to access learning opportunities around livestock.

A third common approach to incorporating livestock production is for the incubator project to offer workshops and/or trainings about livestock production as part of its curriculum. For many incubator projects, this method is ideal because it requires fewer resources than producing livestock on the incubator site and it helps provide the experience participants need to begin producing livestock independently. Aside from staff time, there are two big hurdles to offering workshops and/or trainings in livestock production: building and maintaining relationships with outside experts, and meeting the individual needs of participants. If you would like to offer workshops or trainings in livestock production as part of your incubator project curriculum, start building relationships before you plan to offer livestock production training to ensure that you identify partners who support your goals and are able to offer the type of training your participants need. Also try to assess the skill level of your participants to provide information that is relevant and useful.

5.7.4 - Resources Required

As with any aspect of a farm incubator's operations, staff time is by far the biggest resource you will need to integrate livestock production into your farm incubator project. Regardless of the method you choose, incubator staff will need to spend time monitoring your livestock program, creating and modifying training materials, and providing technical assistance to participants.

Infrastructure is another resource you might need, depending on your particular farm incubator project. If many of your participants are interested in producing livestock, it might be worthwhile to consider investing in a barn, chicken coops, or other types of infrastructure. This infrastructure could be provided by the incubator project, or participants could pool their resources to purchase items collectively.

Here is a list of some other resources that farm incubator projects might need to integrate livestock production into their operations. This list is not comprehensive, and the resources you need will be unique to your farm incubator.

Potential Resources Needed:

- Staff time
- Appropriate land/pasture
- Outside partners for technical assistance, training, etc.
- Access to veterinary care
- Livestock-specific infrastructure
- Funding for outside speakers
- Access to transportation for outside workshops or trainings
- Supplies for workshops or trainings

5.7.5 - Additional Resources

- Cornell University Cooperative Extension. 2005. Raising Pastured Poultry. Livestock Fact Sheets. Cornell Small Farms Program and Department of Animal Science. 5pp. Available at www.nofanj.org/LiteratureRetrieve.aspx?ID=104128.
- New Entry Sustainable Farming Project (NESFP). 2012. Livestock Training for New Farmers: A Brief Overview. 4pp. Available at http://nesfp.org/nifti/library/livestock
- S. Donaldson, et al. ND. Pasture Management: Grass Based Systems. In Sustainable Animal Production: Sustainable Small Acreage Farming and Ranching (Powerpoint Presentation). Part of the Living on the Land curriculum. University of Nevada. Reno, NV. Available at ucanr.edu/sites/BFRSOCO/files/147257.pdf.

5.8 Transitioning Off the Incubator

Because the majority of operational farm incubator projects have been in operation for five or fewer years, there are very few common practices for transitioning participants off the incubator site. However, there are several long established farm incubator projects that have successfully transitioned multiple participants onto their own land. This section will draw from the experiences of established incubator projects to discuss barriers to transitioning off the incubator and the ways in which farm incubator projects can help prepare farmers for an eventual transition to their own land and independent farm enterprises. The information in this section is drawn primarily from case study interviews and a National Incubator Farm Training Initiative (NIFTI) webinar, Transitioning Farmers Off the Incubator.

5.8.1 - Key Considerations

To establish a sustainable and successful farm incubator project, it is important to think about how you will transition participants off the incubator site from the earliest stages of your project. Although the transition of your first group of participants may feel as though it is a less immediate concern than other day-to-day issues, thoughtfully incorporating a transition plan into your daily operations will ensure that your participants are prepared to pursue their own independent farm enterprises when they reach the end of your program. Here are some questions that will help you begin planning for your participants' eventual transition off the incubator site:

Project Goals: Do your policies and procedures support successful participant transition? Your participants will need to have enough information to secure financing, buy equipment, lease land, and plan for the future of their farm enterprises. Whenever possible, participants should be encouraged to develop skills and independence in all areas of farm operation and administration.

Relationships: Are you creating opportunities for participants to connect with others? When participants leave your incubator site, they will have a much better chance of success as independent farm operators if they already have good connections with fellow beginning farmers, mentor farmers, financial advisors, and external service providers.

Resources: Who will assist participants who are preparing to transition off the incubator? Transition planning can take time, and each participant's needs will be different. Someone on your incubator staff will need to have enough time to work one-on-one

with individual participants as they begin planning to leave the incubator site.

Communication: How and when will you communicate with participants about their transition plans? Many established incubator projects emphasize the importance of beginning the conversation about transition early in a participant's time on the incubator site. While you will always need to be somewhat flexible, communicating consistent and clear expectations will help your participants transition off the incubator more smoothly.

5.8.2 - Barriers to Transitioning Off the Incubator

The barriers to entry for aspiring and beginning farmers are well known: new farmers often lack access to land, capital, markets, and knowledge.[1, 2] Although incubator participants have the benefit of several years of support from farm incubator projects, they still face similar barriers when they prepare to transition off the incubator site.

Finding Land

Because of their participation in your incubator project, your transitioning farmers probably have a pretty good list of criteria they are looking for in their own land. However, they may face substantial challenges trying to find land that suits their farm business plans. Perhaps the most obvious challenge is the high cost of land in many parts of the US. Though incubator participants might have been able to save some money for future land rent or purchase during their time on the incubator site, the cost of land and infrastructure can be prohibitive. Land availability is also a concern in some parts of the country, especially in peri-urban or rural areas that are adjacent to lucrative urban markets. Millions of acres of prime farmland have been taken out of cultivation since 1982, and owners of farmland continue to face high levels of development pressure.

Incubator participants seeking land may also face challenges that are not related to land cost, availability, or competition. Many incubator participants struggle to overcome language and/or literacy barriers when they try to find their own land. Legal documents are often complex and translation services are rarely available unless provided by the incubator project. Participants may also come face-to-face with racism, classism, xenophobia, and other negative judgments from others. Incubator staff might find that they need to educate landowners and community members about the benefits incubator participants can bring to a potential farm site. On a related note, town politics also play a role in determining the "best" use for a plot of land, which can

require a high level of political capital and commitment to attend town meetings on the part of the incubator participant and incubator staff.

Accessing Capital

Incubator participants may not be ready or able to make the sort of long-term investment required to rent or purchase land, install infrastructure, and purchase equipment. Some incubator participants (especially participants who are immigrants, refugees, or young farmers) have little or no credit history, and financial institutions perceive credit or loan applications from people with limited credit histories to be high-risk investments. Financial institutions may require someone with a stronger credit history to co-sign credit or loan applications. Another problem faced by incubator participants trying to access capital is a lack of high-value collateral. Because incubator participants often share equipment and rent space in coolers and other infrastructure, they have limited farm property to use as collateral. Depending on their personal circumstances, they may or may not have other items (house, car, etc.) to use as collateral for a line of credit or a loan for their farm enterprise.

Language and literacy barriers also come into play when incubator participants try to access capital. As with legal documents for land purchase or rent, financial documents can be very complex. Translation services are rarely available, unless provided by the incubator project. Finally, some incubator participants find that they lack a "strong track record" when they attempt to secure a line of credit or a loan. Financial institutions want to see evidence of a strong business concept, good recordkeeping, and historical data (sales, expenses, etc.) when they are considering a request for a business loan. Participants with weak business plans, inconsistent sales records, or spotty tax data will have a difficult time finding capital to support their farm enterprises.

Accessing Markets

When incubator participants try to access markets as independent producers, they can struggle to balance all of the different facets of selling their farm products. Market competition can be very stiff, whether transitioning participants are trying to enter a long-running farmers' market or sell to local restaurants. Dealing with market competition can be even more difficult because transitioning incubator participants are often small-scale producers competing with larger-scale operations. Participants need to be able to meet their customers' demand for a consistent, high-quality product, so a good business plan is critical to ensure

that participants can support their farm enterprises and build good customer relationships within their resource constraints (e.g. time, labor, money).

Limited business skills can also make it more difficult for transitioning participants to access markets. Participants sometimes lack familiarity or understanding of the regulations that are relevant to their farm enterprise and the specific markets they want to access. In addition, transitioning participants can struggle to develop efficient and affordable systems for invoicing and billing customers. Finally, transitioning participants may lack the skills and resources they need to brand and market their individual farm enterprise and their products. Social media savvy, graphic design skills, and writing ability are all important pieces of building a successful farm enterprise that transitioning participants will need to either possess themselves or find in an employee or family member.

Participant Readiness/Willingness

One final challenge faced by many transitioning incubator participants is preparing adequately for the loss of the support systems provided by the incubator project. It can be very easy for participants to focus most of their time and energy on the production side of their farm enterprises. While production skills are critical to the success of a farm enterprise, participants also need to spend time developing the high level of administrative and business skills they will need to establish a successful independent business. Some incubator projects have found that participants are not always ready or willing to transition off the incubator site when their tenure on the incubator plot has ended. A lack of readiness or willingness to leave the incubator site can be a particular problem if the incubator project has not established clear and consistent expectations about tenure on the incubator site and the process for participant transition.

5.8.3 - Preparing Participants to Transition

Though participants face many challenges when they prepare to transition off the incubator site, farm incubator projects can use several interrelated strategies to better equip participants with the knowledge and resources they will need to operate successful independent farm enterprises. Central to all of the strategies described below is an emphasis on cultivating solid relationships and connections. If your incubator project builds a good reputation with established producers in the area, external service providers, and lenders, your participants will likely benefit from increased opportunities when they leave the incubator site.

Facilitate Land Matching

Some incubator projects help transitioning participants access land through land matching or land link programs. Land matching and land link programs connect incubator participants to private or public landowners who want their land to be farmed. The person or people running the land matching or land link program also serve as facilitators between the incubator participant and the landowner(s). See sections 6 (Toolkit Resources and References) and 7 (Case Studies) for land matching and land link documents from several different incubator projects. The Additional Resources section (5.8.4) also references several helpful land access documents.

A land matching or land link program might be an excellent way for your farm incubator project to facilitate land access for your incubator participants. However, you will need to invest significant staff time to establish an effective land matching or land link program. You will need to regularly identify available land, inform landowners and the general public about what they can expect from farm operations, publicize the land matching program, and work to maintain good relationships with town officials, landowners, and the public. Land matching is an ongoing process and requires consistent attention and maintenance.

Pros:

- Helps keep farmland in production
- Can reduce cost of land for participants as compared to market-rate rent or purchase
- Builds relationships among towns, landowners, and the incubator project

Cons:

- Is a long process and can be very time intensive
- Requires extensive technical assistance on multiple levels: legal, financial, ecological, etc.
- Managing relationships among multiple parties can be challenging

As you're starting your project, or as you realize the need to match farmers to land, seek out other organizations in your area who provide these services and partner with them to conserve your resources and avoid duplication. In New England, one such organization is Land For Good (link, additional resource) and nationally you can check out American Farmland Trust. Local

community land trusts are other good places to start looking for available farmland and experts on how to help farmers find it.

Provide Business and Market Planning

Many farm incubator projects require potential participants to prepare and submit a business and/or market plan, either as part of their application to the incubator project or during their first year on the incubator site. Regular updating of business and market plans is also a common expectation for incubator participants. Often, however, incubator participants need help preparing realistic and comprehensive business and market plans for their transition off the incubator site. To help transitioning participants access markets, some incubator projects provide extensive pre-transition business and/or market planning services. The Intervale Center is one great example of an incubator project with extensive business planning services. See the case study of the Intervale Farms Program in section 7 for more information.

Set (flexible) Goals

A clear progression for transition off the incubator site is also critical – participants need to know what to do at each stage of their time on the incubator site to get ready for their eventual transition to their own land. Below is an example of a transition timeline from the Agriculture and Land-Based Training Association (ALBA). Of course, each incubator project is different, and your transition timeline may differ.

- *Year 1:* Crop plan, organic certification, learn Good Agricultural Practices (GAP)
- *Year 2:* Draft business plan, record-keeping, food safety certification
- *Year 3:* Obtain loan, meet land owners, hire/manage labor
- *Year 4:* Revise business plan, expansion planning, land identification and negotiation

All participants will not progress through your transition timeline at the same pace, however. You will need to allow for some flexibility to accommodate the different paces and goals of your incubator participants. It can be challenging to balance your participants' needs for flexibility with the overall goals of your incubator project and your need to open up incubator plots for new participants. You should try to set clear, consistent expectations about the transition timeline on your

incubator project, and plan to work on a case-by-case basis with participants who require a longer or shorter transition plan.

Farm incubator projects play a crucial role in helping participants deal with the challenges of establishing farm enterprises, but participants still face barriers to entry when they prepare to transition off the incubator site and onto their own land. Incubator projects can help participants throughout their transition process by facilitating land matching, providing business and market planning services, encouraging continuing involvement, and setting flexible goals for transition timelines.

Section References

1. Ahearn, Mary and Doris Newton. May 2009. "Beginning Farmers and Ranchers." USDA Economic Research Service. Economic Information Bulletin Number 53.

2. National Young Farmers Coalition. 2011. "Building a Future With Farmers." Avaialable at http://www.youngfarmers.org/reports/Building_A_Future_With_Farmers.pdf.

5.8.4 - Additional Resources

- International Rescue Committee (IRC), New Roots. ND. New Roots: Land Access Evaluation. Available at http://nesfp.org/nifti/library/landaccess/eval
- Kohanowich, Robin, Kathryn Ruhf, Charles Steiner, and Jennifer Taylor. 2010. Agricultural Land Tenure: A Curriculum for Beginning Farmers and Farm Seekers. 87pp. Available at http://www.uvm.edu/farmlasts/FarmLASTSAgLandTenure.pdf.
- National Incubator Farm Training Initiative (NIFTI). 2012. Transitioning Farmers Off the Incubator. Powerpoint presentation published by the New Entry Sustainable Farming Project (NESFP). March 26, 2012. Available at http://nesfp.org/nifti/library/webinar6
- New Entry Sustainable Farming Project (NESFP). 2012. Finding, Assessing, and Securing Farmland: A Plain Language Guide from the New Entry Sustainable Farming Project. 35pp. Available at http://nesfp.org/nifti/library/MAfarmland

Section 6:

Toolkit Resources and References

6.1 Introduction

In this section, you will find a compilation of all of the resources we mentioned throughout the toolkit. You'll also find a comprehensive list of all of the documents referenced. These lists of resources and references are "living documents" that will be edited and changed in later versions of *The Farm Incubator Toolkit.*

6.2 Resources

Section 1: Introduction

- National Incubator Farm Training Initiative: http://nesfp.org/nifti

Section 2: What Is a Farm Incubator

- USDA definition of beginning farmer: Full USDA definition.
- USDA definition of socially disadvantaged farmer: Full USDA definition.
- USDA definition of limited resource farmer: Full USDA definition.

Section 3: Planning for Your Incubator Project

Raising Money:

- The Foundation Center (online grant database):http://foundationcenter.org/
- Grants.gov (government grant database): http://www.grants.gov
- Applying to become a 501c3: http://www.irs.gov/Charities-&-Non-Profits/Charitable-Organizations/Exemption-Requirements-Section-501%28c%29%283%29-Organizations
- Strategic Partnerships Worksheet: http://nesfp.org/nifti/strategicpartnerships

Finding Farmers:

- New Entry's "Explore Farming!" Syllabus: http://nesfp.org/nifti/explorefarmingsyllabus
- The "Beginning Farmer Quiz": htts://nesfp.org/nifti/beginningfarmerquiz
- ALBA's farmer survey: http://nesfp.org/nifti/ALBAfarmersurvey
- Intervale's Farm Report: http://nesfp.org/nifti/intervalefarmreport
- NIFTI resource library: http://nesfp.org/nifti/library

Section 4: Developing Your Incubator Project

Finding Land for Your Incubator:

- Web soil survey: http://websoilsurvey.sc.egov.usda.gov
- Water rights: http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Water_right.
- Sample leases from NASAP and New Entry: http://nesfp.org/nifti/leaseagreement; and http://nesfp.org/nifti/library/DTLI
- New Entry Guide to Finding Farmland: http://nesfp.org/nifti/library/MAFarmland
- Land for Good website: http://www.landforgood.org/leasing/online2.html
- FEMA website (flooding risk): https://msc.fema.gov.
- Online directory of community land trusts: http://www.cltnetwork.org/

Developing Your Curriculum:

- CRAFT groups in North America: http://www.craftfarmers.org/
- New Entry's "Og Wash Station Notes": http://www.leopold.iastate.edu/cool_tools/wash_stations; http://nesfp.org/nifti/library/GAPwashstation
- New Entry's Plain Language Guide to Harvesting Crops for Market: http://nesfp.org/nifti/library/harvestformarket
- National Sustainable Agriculture Coalition's page on the Food Safety Modernization Act (GAP certification requirements and how they affect your farmers): http://sustainableagriculture.net/fsma/.
- Developing a food safety plan and access to an online food safety plan generator, visit: http://onfarmfoodsafety.org/.
- One-page GAPs guides in the NIFTI library: http://nesfp.org/nifti/library/GAP, and https://nesfp.org/nifti/library/GAPs
- National Center for Appropriate Technology – ATTRA: "Marketing, Business & Risk Management." https://attra.ncat.org/marketing.html
- New Farmer Development Project – Marketing Handouts: Approximately 40 pages of curriculum, handouts, worksheets and presentations designed to teach marketing

to new farmers: http://Nesfp.org/nifti/NFDPMarketing

- New Entry Sustainable Farming Project – Marketing and Sales Lesson Plan: http://nesfp.org/nifti/NewEntryMarketing
- Online crop planning software: http://farmhack.net/tools/crop-planning-software and http://www.agsquared.com
- Sample enterprise budgets to use in classes on enterprise selection and to share with your farmers: http://nevegetable.org/cultural-practices/crop-budgets and http://extension.psu.edu/business/ag-alternatives/horticulture
- Small-scale production crop planning resource: http://www.growingformarket.com/store/products/115

Curriculum Development Additional Resources:

BOOKS:

- Crop Planning for Organic Vegetable Growers
- The Organic Gardener's Handbook of Insect and Disease Control
- Sustainable Vegetable Production from Start-Up to Market
- Sell What You Sow!
- Rodale's Vegetable Garden Solver
- Building a Sustainable Business
- Resource Guide for Organic Insect and Disease Management
- Exploring the Small Farm Dream
- Eliot Coleman's Four Season Harvest
- The Organic Farmer's Business Handbook
- Northeast Cover Crop Handbook
- Building Soils for Better Crops

WEB RESOURCES:

- Crop Production Budgets for Vegetable and Berry Growers; http://www.uvm.edu/vtvegandberry/budgetlinks.html
- Vermont Vegetable and Berry Grower Page; http://www.uvm.edu/vtvegandberry/index.html

- National Sustainable Agriculture Information Service (ATTRA) publications; https://attra.ncat.org/
- North Carolina Cooperative Extension Growing Small Farms; http://chatham.ces.ncsu.edu/growingsmallfarms/resourcelist.html
- CSA Coalition Resources for Growers; http://www.csacoalition.org/resources/growers/
- Greenhorns Publication Library; http://www.thegreenhorns.net/?cat=36
- World Crops; www.worldcrops.org

External Service Providers

Government

- USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) – County offices across US. Relevant programs include: Environmental Improvement Programs (examples: EQIP, AMA); Stewardship Programs; Community Assistance Programs; Technical Resources (Conservation Planning Services), connections to local Conservation Districts, and more. See: http://www.nrcs.usda.gov/wps/portal/nrcs/main/national/programs
- USDA Farm Service Agency (FSA) – County offices across US. Relevant programs include: Farm Loan Programs – ownership and operating; Emergency Disaster Programs (ie, NAP – Non Insured Crop Disaster Assistance Program); and more. See: http://www.fsa.usda.gov
- USDA Rural Development (RD) – County offices across US. Relevant programs include: cooperative development resources, loans, grants, and technical assistance. See: http://www.rurdev.usda.gov/Home.html
- USDA Sustainable Agriculture Research and Education (SARE) – Maintains a rich, diverse "learning center" and resource library of funded projects with information on production and agricultural research. There is a SARE Coordinator in every state – connect with them. SARE Farmer or Partnership Grants can be used to implement or demonstrate new/innovative techniques on incubator farms. See: http://www.sare.org/
- National Center for Appropriate Technology (NCAT) and ATTRA – They maintain an English-language ATTRA toll-free hotline at 800-346-9140 or the Spanish-language ATTRA hotline at 800-411-3222 for expert technical advice. Service providers (and farmers) can also use the Ask An Ag Expert

tool to send them an electronic note. See: https://attra.ncat.org/

State agency programs

- Extension / Land Grant University – traditional service providers to offer technical assistance to farmers/ community gardeners. Look for available resources on e-eXtension, see: http://www.extension.org/

Grassroots Farmer Groups/ Trade Associations

- CRAFT (Collaborative Regional Alliance for Farmer Training) networks: Grassroots farmer groups usually in support of intern/apprentice training. Groups usually schedule seasonal farm visits, workshops, or social events to network with other young farmers. See examples at: http://www.emasscraft.org/ (Eastern Mass CRAFT), or http://www.craftfarmapprentice.com/ (Hudson Valley CRAFT), or http://www.learngrowconnect.org/what/training/craft (Angelic Organics CRAFT in Illinios).
- Farm Bureau: Each state has a chapter and there are county committees in each state. Often they have young farmer programming. See: http://www.fb.org/
- National Farmers Union: There are regional chapters of the National Farmers Union and they also are a legislative/ advocacy group with programming and networks across the US. See: http://www.nfu.org/
- Statewide Beginning Farmer Networks: More statewide organizations in support of new farmers are emerging, see: http://nesfp.nutrition.tufts.edu/resources/bfaa.html for an example of New Entry's network in Massachusetts.

Consultants

- SCORE – is a nonprofit association that helps small businesses (including agricultural businesses) get off the ground through education and mentorship. They offer mentors, tools, counseling and workshops. See: http://www.score.org/about-score to find a local chapter.

Section 5: Managing Your Incubator Project

Developing the Incubator Site:

- Biernbaum, John A. 2006. Greenhouses for Local Food and Farming. Michigan State University. 21 pp. Available at www.nofanj.org/LiteratureRetrieve.aspx?ID=104103.
- Blomgren, Ted and Tracy Frisch. 2007. High Tunnels: Using Low-Cost Technology to Increase Yields, Improve Quality and Extend the Season. Regional Farm and Food Project and Cornell University. Distributed by the University of Vermont Center for Sustainable Agriculture. 77pp. Available at http://www.uvm.edu/~susagctr/Documents/HighTunnels.pdf.
- Haschley, Jennifer. 2012. Capitalizing the Incubator Farm: Tractors, Tools, and Toys. New Entry Sustainable Farming Project. Powerpoint Presentation. Available at http://nesfp.org/nifti/library/capitalizing
- NESFP (New Entry Sustainable Farming Project). 2011. New Entry Farmsite Budget. Available at http://nesfp.org/nifti/library/farmsitebudget

Eligibility and Applications:

- Land Stewardship Project. Farm Dreams Workshop. http://landstewardshipproject.org/morefarmers/farmdreams.
- Land Stewardship Project. Farm Beginnings Course. http://landstewardshipproject.org/morefarmers/farmbeginningscourse.
- New American Sustainable Agriculture Project. 2010. Program Placement Summary. Available at http://nesfp.org/nifti/library/programplacement
- New Entry Sustainable Farming Project. Explore Farming! Course. http://nesfp.org/explore-farming
- New Entry Sustainable Farming Project. Farm Business Planning. http://nesfp.org/farmbusinessplanning
- New Entry Sustainable Farming Project. 2012. Farmsite Application. Available at http://nesfp.org/sites/default/files/uploads/farmsite_application_2013.pdf

Participant Agreements:

- New American Sustainable Agriculture Project (NASAP). NASAP Mutual Agreement. Available at http://nesfp.org/nifti/library/NASAPagreement

Site Guidelines:

- New American Sustainable Agriculture Project (NASAP). 2012. NASAP Training Farm Site Guidelines 2012. Available at http://nesfp.org/nifti/library/NASAPguidelines

Land Use Protocols:

- The Intervale Center. 2013. Land Use Protocols 2013. Available at http://nesfp.org/nifti/intervalelanduse2013.

Participant Manuals:

- New Entry Sustainable Farming Project. 2012. 2012 Farmer Manual. Available at http://nesfp.org/nifti/library/farmermanual

Leases and Land Allocation:

- ALBA (Agriculture and Land-Based Training Association). ND. Agriculture and Land-Based Training Association (ALBA) Farm Lease. Available at http://start2farm.gov/sites/default/files/7%20-%20Farm%20Incubator%20Land%20Lease.pdf.
- The American Agricultural Law Association (AALA) is a professional organization for agricultural lawyers. You can search by state or zip code for members of the AALA on their website: http://aglaw-assn.org/find-a-member/. While this resource is not a comprehensive list of all agricultural lawyers, it could be a good place to start.
- Intervale Center. 2009. Intervale Center Farm Lease Agreement. Available at http://nesfp.org/nifti/library/intervale_lease
- NESFP (New Entry Sustainable Farming Project). ND. Land Allocation Rubric. Available at http://nesfp.org/nifti/library/allocationrubric

Use and Ownership:

- Cultivating Community, New American Sustainable Agriculture Project (NASAP). Agreement of Joint Ownership. Available at http://nesfp.org/nifti/library/jointownership

Equipment Training:

- Dager, Ed, John Grande, Rodger Jany, Steve Komar, Peter Nitzche, and Jack Rabin. 2009. Participant Outcome Assessment: Beginning Farmer Equipment Demonstration Training: Proper Equipment for Small Farms. Rutgers, The State University of New Jersey, Cooperative Extension. Available at http://snyderfarm.rutgers.edu/pdfs/New_Farmer_SnyderFarm.pdf.

Guidelines for Shared Use:

- BCS Rules. NASAP. Available at http://nesfp.org/nifti/library/bcsrules
- Wash Station Rules. NASAP. Available at http://nesfp.org/nifti/library/washstation_rules

Multi-Farm CSAs:

- New American Sustainable Agriculture Project (NASAP). 2012. Community Supported Agriculture: Fresh Start Farms (brochure). Available at http://nesfp.org/nifti/library/freshstartfarms
- New Entry Sustainable Farming Project. 2010. Guide to Starting A Multi-Farm CSA. Available at http://nesfp.org/nifti/library/csaguide
- New Lands Farm. 2012. 2012 CSA Commitment Form. Available athttp://nesfp.org/nifti/library/commitmentform

Aggregation:

- Wallace Center resources on Food Hubs: http://ngfn.org/resources/food-hubs/food-hubs.
- Fresh Start Farms. 2012. Wholesale Price List 2012. Available at http://nesfp.org/nifti/library/pricelist

- Lindsey, Timothy and Jim Slama. 2012. Building Successful Food Hubs: A Business Planning Guide for Aggregating and Processing Local Food in Illinois. A collaboration of the Illinois Department of Commerce and Economic Opportunity, University of Illinois Business Innovation Services, Illinois Department of Agriculture, and FamilyFarmed.org. Available at www.ams.usda.gov/AMSv1.0/getfile?dDocName=STELPRDC5097191.

Livestock:

- Cornell University Cooperative Extension. 2005. Raising Pastured Poultry. Livestock Fact Sheets. Cornell Small Farms Program and Department of Animal Science. 5pp. Available at www.nofanj.org/LiteratureRetrieve.aspx?ID=104128.
- New Entry Sustainable Farming Project (NESFP). 2012. Livestock Training for New Farmers: A Brief Overview. 4pp. Available at http://nesfp.org/nifti/library/livestock
- S. Donaldson, et al. ND. Pasture Management: Grass Based Systems. In Sustainable Animal Production: Sustainable Small Acreage Farming and Ranching (Powerpoint Presentation). Part of the Living on the Land curriculum. University of Nevada. Reno, NV. Available at ucanr.edu/sites/BFRSOCO/files/147257.pdf.

Transitioning Off the Incubator:

- International Rescue Committee (IRC), New Roots. ND. New Roots: Land Access Evaluation. Available at http://nesfp.org/nifti/library/landaccesseval
- Kohanowich, Robin, Kathryn Ruhf, Charles Steiner, and Jennifer Taylor. 2010. Agricultural Land Tenure: A Curriculum for Beginning Farmers and Farm Seekers. 87pp. Available at http://www.uvm.edu/farmlasts/FarmLASTSAgLandTenure.pdf.
- National Incubator Farm Training Initiative (NIFTI). 2012. Transitioning Farmers Off the Incubator. Powerpoint presentation published by the New Entry Sustainable Farming Project (NESFP). March 26, 2012. Available at http://nesfp.org/nifti/library/webinar6
- New Entry Sustainable Farming Project (NESFP). 2012. Finding, Assessing, and Securing Farmland: A Plain Language Guide from the New Entry Sustainable Farming Project. 35pp. Available at http://nesfp.org/nifti/library/MAfarmland

Section 7: Case Studies

Farley Center for Peace, Justice, and Sustainability:

- 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

EMSWCD, Headwaters Farm Incubator Program:

- 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.

Horn Farm Center for Agricultural Education Incubator Farms Project:

- 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

Intervale Center Farms Program:

- 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/library/intervalereport
- Farmer Equipment Cooperative, LLC Policies and Procedures, 2013
  http://nesfp.org/nifti/library/IFEC

Minnesota Food Association Big River Farms Program

- Food Safety Plan For You
  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

6.3 References

Section 1: Introduction

1. Delbecq, Andre L. and Andrew H. Van De Ven. 1971. "A Group Process Model for Problem Identification and Program Planning." The Journal of Applied Behavioral Science, 7(4), pp 466:492. Accessed 14 July 2013 from www.csom.umn.edu/assets/12465.pdf.

2. Speakman Management Consulting. ND. Nonprofit Life Cycles Matrix. [Adapted from Judith Sharken Simon. 2002. The 5 Life Stages of Nonprofits.] 5pp. Accessed 1 July 2013 from www.speakmanconsulting.com/pdf_files/NonProfitLifeCyclesMatrix.pdf.

3. Allison, Michael and Jude Kaye. 1997. Strategic Planning for Nonprofit Organizations: A Practical Guide and Workbook. Support Center for Nonprofit Management. John Wiley & Sons, inc: New York, NY. 277pp.

Section 2: What Is a Farm Incubator?

1. National Business Incubation Association. 2009. Business Incubation FAQ. Available at www.nbia.org/resource_library/faq/index.php#1.

2. Ahearn, Mary and Doris Newton. May 2009. "Beginning Farmers and Ranchers." USDA Economic Research Service. Economic Information Bulletin Number 53.

3. Barham, Brad, Douglas Jackson-Smith, Steve Stevenson, and Jennifer Taylor. 2001. Nurturing the Next Generation of Wisconsin's Dairy Farmers. Center for Integrated Agricultural Systems [CIAS] and Program on Agricultural Technology Studies [PATS], College of Agricultural and Life Sciences, University of Wisconsin-Madison.

4. Katchova, Ani L. 2010. Structural Changes in US Agriculture: Financial Performance of Farms in Transition. Paper presented at 114th EAAE Seminar, April 15-16, 2010. Available at http://ageconsearch.umn.edu/bitstream/60965/2/katchova.pdf.

5. Mishra, Ashok, Christine Wilson, and Robert Williams. "Factors affecting financial performance of new and beginning farmers." Agricultural Finance Review, 69(2): 160-179.

6. Ewert, Brianna M. 2012. Understanding Incubator Farms: Innovative Programs for New Farmer Development. MS Thesis, Environmental Studies. University of Montana: Missoula, MT. 157pp.

7. United States Department of Agriculture (USDA). 2008. Family Farm Forum, April. Cooperative State Research,Education, and Extension Service (CSREES).

8. Lyson, T.A. 2004. Civic agriculture: Reconnecting farm, food, and community. Tufts University Press: Medford, MA.

9. Winther, Eva Agudelo. 2013. Training New Farmers, Training the Trainers. Presentation at the Start2Farm Beginning Farmer and Rancher Conference, March 18 2013. New Entry Sustainable Farming Project.

10. NIFTI (National Incubator Farm Training Initiative). 2013.

11. Overton, Meaghan. 2013. An Exploratory Survey of Farm Incubator Programs. Unpublished Master's Thesis. Tufts University, Department of Urban and Environmental Policy and Planning.

12. Allen, Rich and Ginger Harris, 2005. What We Know About the Demographics of U.S. Farm Operators. NASS/USDA. Presented at Agricultural Outlook Forum, February 25, 2005.

13. USDA. 2012. 2007 Census of Agriculture: Farmers by Age. USDA NASS (National Agricultural Statistics Service). Accessed 17 July 2013 from http://www.agcensus.usda.gov/Publications/2007/Online_Highlights/Fact_Sheets/Demographics/farmer_age.pdf.

14. Hoppe, Robert A., and Penni Korb. 2013. Characteristics of Women Farm Operators and Their Farms. EIB-111, U.S. Department of Agriculture, Economic Research Service, April 2013. Accessed 17 July 2013 from http://www.ers.usda.gov/media/1093194/eib111.pdf

Section 7:
Case Studies

7.1 Introduction

The case studies in this section were developed from in-depth interviews with incubator staff at 13 farm incubator projects in the US. In this first edition of the toolkit, only 4 case studies have been included. Future versions of *The Farm Incubator Toolkit* will include additional case studies. 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 resources shared with NIFTI from the case studies are also compiled in Section 6: Toolkit Resources and References.

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