

---

# Developing a Strategic Plan for Regional Farm Incubation

---

Hines Chapel Incubator Farm

---

Prepared by Piedmont Conservation  
Council, Inc.

---

Piedmont Conservation Council, Inc.  
721 Foster Street, STE 228  
Durham, NC 27701  
(919) 560-0560

**February 2014**

**Prepared By:**



Jacob Leech  
Project Manager  
Piedmont Conservation Council, Inc.



Jennifer Walker  
Beginning Farmer Program Associate  
Center for Environmental Farming Systems  
NC State University

Joanna Massey Lelekacs  
State Coordinator, Incubator Farm Project  
Center for Environmental Farming Systems  
NC State University

**Hines Chapel Incubator Farm Steering Committee:**

Janet MacFall, Ph.D., Chair  
Alex Ashton  
Steve Moore  
Millie Langley  
Dr. Wick Wickcliffe  
Anne Hice  
Kevin Moore  
Joanna Lelekacs  
Eric Henry  
Ariel Fugate  
Dr. John O'Sullivan  
Phil Ross  
Torry Nergart  
Paige Wyrick

Elon University  
Guilford County Open Space Program  
Elon University  
Guilford Soil & Water Conservation District  
Guilford County Cooperative Extension Service  
Guilford County Open Space Program  
Rockingham Co. Soil & Water Conservation District  
Center for Environmental Farming Systems  
TS Designs  
Lowe's Foods, Inc.  
NC Cooperative Extension Service, NCATSU  
Alamance County Soil & Water Conservation District  
Goodliet Family Farms  
Hines Chapel Community Member

**Sponsored by Piedmont Together**



## Table of Contents

Section 1: Executive Summary.....	4
1.1 Introduction to Incubator Farms.....	4
1.2 The Case for Incubator Farms .....	5
1.3 Common Traits of Incubator Farms .....	6
1.4 About this Report.....	8
Section 2: Incubator Farm Development.....	9
2.1 Identify the Need .....	9
2.2 Identify Stakeholders .....	11
2.3 Defining the Mission and Vision .....	16
2.4 Site Selection.....	24
2.5 Developing the Educational Component .....	25
2.6 Identifying & Marketing to Potential Incubator Participants .....	28
2.7 Determining Marketing Outlets.....	32
2.8 Funding Sources .....	33
2.9 Evaluation and Assessment .....	34
Section 3: Scope of Incubator Farm Project .....	42
3.1 Key Standard Practices.....	42
Section 4: Developing Networks.....	53
4.1 Models of Marketing & Distribution .....	53
4.2 Lomax and Lowe’s Foods: A Case Study .....	56
Section 5: Land Transition.....	59
Section 6: Case Study: Hines Chapel Incubator Farm .....	59
Section 9: Literature Review .....	63
Section 10: Conclusion and Recommendation(s) .....	67

## Appendices

Appendix A: Suggestions of Food System Project Stakeholders

Appendix B: Sample Book Order List for Beginning Farmer Library

Appendix C: HCIF Resources/Suggestions for Funding

Appendix D: Funding Sources for Incubator Programs

Appendix E: Cash Rent Graphics for Land Transition

Appendix F: Hines Chapel Incubator Farm Draft Business Plan

## Section 1: Executive Summary

The purpose of this document is to provide a descriptive analysis of the strategic planning process for a regional incubator farm project in the Piedmont Triad region. The strategic planning process will include such elements as analysis of existing incubator farm programs nationwide, needs assessment and stakeholder development, mission and vision development, core program considerations, standard practices, network development, land transition, business plan development, and an overview of pertinent literature on the subject. The planning process will be described with the intent to provide a blueprint for development of similar projects in the region with the purpose of creating a new generation of farmers to maintain a strong and vibrant local agriculture economy.

The North Carolina agricultural industry contributes approximately \$70 billion to the state's economy annually utilizing 8.6 million of the state's 31 million acres to produce food and fibers.<sup>1</sup> The proposed Hines Chapel Incubator Farm (HCIF) is among a network of emerging incubator programs across the state seeking to address the gap in training and access to land and capital among beginning farmers. The proposed HCIF location is in Guilford County, where the average working farmer is 59.6 years of age<sup>2</sup>. In order to maintain resilient and sustainable communities in the Piedmont, it is imperative to build a new generation of family farms to strengthen an emerging locally-based sustainable food production system that is accessible and affordable.

This plan is based on a thorough evaluation of the needs of the Piedmont region and North Carolina as a whole. The proposed incubator is a strategic solution intended to fill a niche in the process of developing new, viable farm businesses. It compliments many other impressive efforts in the region to educate and train beginning farmers but provides a unique service to new farm businesses by providing a setting for business launch that reasonably reduces risk and provides specific training and professional development services to increase the chances of long-term business success.

### 1.1 Introduction to Incubator Farms

Business incubators seek to assist entrepreneurs in establishing their own, independent business startups by helping them access resources that can otherwise be difficult to obtain in the early stages of business growth.<sup>3</sup> While the offerings of specific incubator farms differs across the country, the overall purpose remains to minimize barriers to entry for beginning farmers and provide professional development to increase the likelihood of success.<sup>4</sup> Common barriers to entry

---

<sup>1</sup> <http://www.ncagr.gov/stats/general/overview.htm>

<sup>2</sup> <http://www.ncagr.gov/stats/codata/guilford.pdf>

<sup>3</sup> [http://nbia.org/resource\\_library/fag/index.php#1](http://nbia.org/resource_library/fag/index.php#1).

<sup>4</sup> Agudelo Winther, E., & Overton, M. (2013). The Farm Incubator Toolkit. New Entry Sustainable Farming Project. Retrieved: <http://nesfp.org/node/216>.

for beginning farmers are fairly consistent nationwide, most notably access to land and capital.<sup>5</sup> Although there are many various types of farmer training programs being launched across the country, including North Carolina, incubators are unique in that they are land-based and offer close and intensive support for business launch including a combination of shared infrastructure, equipment, storage and processing facilities, and professional development.

Other types of land-based training initiatives have also grown in popularity and sparked tight networks for professional development and marketing including internships, apprenticeships, and other types of experiential learning. What separates farm incubators is that the incubator “client” is not working for an existing business, rather is launching an independent business utilizing the available resources of the incubator at a sometimes reduced cost. Their incomes are not acquired through employment, but through the products that they grow themselves within their independent business’s allocated space at the incubator site.<sup>6</sup>

## 1.2 The Case for Incubator Farms

According to the 2012 Census of Agriculture Preliminary Report released in February 2014, there are just over 2.1 million farms in the United States, a decrease of over 100,000 farms since the 2007 Census. The average age of a working farmer (all scales of production) is 58.3 years.<sup>7</sup> Farmers over the age of 55 control more than half of US Farmland.<sup>8</sup> The 2007 Census of Agriculture states that 91% of all farms in the United States are classified as “small farms” (defined as having less than \$250,000 in annual products), and that 30% of small farm operators are over the age of 65 years old.<sup>9</sup>

North Carolina is one of the nine states listed in the 2007 Census of Agriculture that contributes to 50% of the total value of agricultural products in the United States.<sup>10</sup> This state has a rich agricultural heritage but a combination of factors is making times tough for the family farm and the nature of farming is evolving rapidly. Nationwide there is a shortage of new and beginning farmers due to multiple issues including lack of access to capital, land, and training.<sup>11</sup> USDA estimates that

---

<sup>5</sup> Shute, Lindsay Lusher. *Building a Future with Farmers: Challenges Faced by Young, American Farmers and a National Strategy to Help Them Succeed*, Tivoli, NY: National Young Farmers Coalition, November 2011.

<sup>6</sup> Lelekacs, J., & Morris, M. (2013). *Incubator Farms for North Carolina: A White Paper*.

<http://www.cefs.ncsu.edu/whatwedo/foodsystems/newfarmers/incubator-farms-for-nc.pdf>

<sup>7</sup> [http://www.agcensus.usda.gov/Publications/2012/Preliminary\\_Report/Full\\_Report.pdf](http://www.agcensus.usda.gov/Publications/2012/Preliminary_Report/Full_Report.pdf)

<sup>8</sup> Mishra, Ashok, Christine Wilson, and Robert Williams. “Factors affecting financial performance of new and beginning farmers.” *Agricultural Finance Review*, 69(2): 160-179.

<sup>9</sup>

[http://www.agcensus.usda.gov/Publications/2007/Online\\_Highlights/Fact\\_Sheets/Farm\\_Numbers/small\\_farm.pdf](http://www.agcensus.usda.gov/Publications/2007/Online_Highlights/Fact_Sheets/Farm_Numbers/small_farm.pdf)

<sup>10</sup>

[http://www.agcensus.usda.gov/Publications/2007/Online\\_Highlights/Fact\\_Sheets/Economics/economics.pdf](http://www.agcensus.usda.gov/Publications/2007/Online_Highlights/Fact_Sheets/Economics/economics.pdf)

<sup>11</sup> Shute, Lindsay Lusher. *Building a Future with Farmers: Challenges Faced by Young, American Farmers and a National Strategy to Help Them Succeed*, Tivoli, NY: National Young Farmers Coalition, November 2011.

70% of farmland will change hands in the next two decades<sup>12</sup> and indicators show that fewer new farmers are in a position of inheriting land and other necessities to carry on a family farming tradition.<sup>13</sup>

The National Incubator Farm Training Initiative recognizes a multitude of factors that are contributing to the growth of farm incubation projects in the US including an aging farmer population, increased consumer demand for local food, lack of access to resources for new and beginning farmers, and more.<sup>14</sup> Incubators are a unique economic development tool that, when implemented properly, can have a dramatic impact on the success of new businesses. Historically 87% of graduates from incubation programs (across all industries) were still in business after 5 years after completion of the program compared to the typically dismal number of startup failures.<sup>15</sup> It is estimated that 55% of startup business (across all industries) fail by the 5<sup>th</sup> year.<sup>16</sup> The exact success rate of incubator farms is unknown, but business incubation as a whole is a proven tool at advancing the success rate of startups.

### 1.3 Common Traits of Incubator Farms

Incubator farms vary throughout the country and even within North Carolina depending on geography, local markets, demographics, urban proximity, and a host of other factors. As previously stated, there are common traits to most incubators including a central purpose to remove the barriers to entry for new farm businesses.

#### ***Management Structure***

It is most common for incubator farms to be structured as 501(c)(3) nonprofit organizations. In most cases, incubator farms are either operated under the umbrella of an existing nonprofit, or to pursue their own 501(c)(3) status upon initiation. In fact, of the 50 nationwide respondents in a survey distributed to 65 known operational incubator programs by the National Incubator Farm Training Initiative, 68% were organized as nonprofit organizations.<sup>17</sup> This management structure is conducive to the goals of a typical incubator as an organization operating in the interest of the public good through delivery of training and economic development. The tax exempt status offers

---

<sup>12</sup> United States Department of Agriculture (USDA). 2008. *Family Farm Forum, April*. Cooperative State Research, Education, and Extension Service (CSREES).

<sup>13</sup> Agudelo Winther, E., & Overton, M. (2013). The Farm Incubator Toolkit. New Entry Sustainable Farming Project. Retrieved: <http://nesfp.org/node/216>.

<sup>14</sup> Agudelo Winther, E., & Overton, M. (2013). The Farm Incubator Toolkit. New Entry Sustainable Farming Project. Retrieved: <http://nesfp.org/node/216>.

<sup>15</sup> University of Michigan, National Business Incubation Association, Ohio University, and Southern Technology Council. *Business Incubation Works: The Results of the Impact of Incubator Investments Study*. Athens, Ohio: NBIA Publications, 1997.

<sup>16</sup> <http://www.forbes.com/sites/ilyapozin/2012/11/28/how-to-avoid-being-a-startup-failure/>

<sup>17</sup> Agudelo Winther, E., & Overton, M. (2013). The Farm Incubator Toolkit. New Entry Sustainable Farming Project. Retrieved: <http://nesfp.org/node/216>.

obvious advantages but also carries with it strict compliance requirements which can be reviewed in detail on the IRS website: <http://www.irs.gov/Charities-&-Non-Profits/Charitable-Organizations>.

There are incubators in existence operating as for-profit businesses or under some form of partnership, but this is much less common. The particular circumstances of your needs assessment should dictate how you set up your incubator. Also consider who major project drivers and committed stakeholders are as well as what your common goals are for the program.

### ***Funding***

There are a variety of funding options available for incubator farms. The key considerations for funding your program should be aligning the mission and goals with relevant funding sources. In many cases, the first essential component is land acquisition. While there may be funding available for land purchases or easements through federal programs, state or local government, or foundations, it is wise to first survey the community your incubator will service and consider alternative options such as donated land, long-term leases, or partnerships with entities that share your values and may already own available property. It is common for many incubator programs to utilize diverse funding streams in order to diversify programmatic features and manage risks. Funding options for your incubator will be discussed in more depth in Section 2.8.

### ***Resources and Services Offered***

Although there are variations on what is offered by incubator farms, there are some common features in the resources and services offered such as:

- Land – typically available for rent in small increments at reduced or graduated cost
- Equipment – shared equipment offered at low fees for use among incubator clients
- Infrastructure – access to electricity, water supply, storage, post-harvest facilities, etc.
- Training – formal and informal group and one-on-one training and technical assistance
- Market Access – assistance in finding and accessing markets or collaborative marketing
- Capital – many incubators feature assistance developing needed tools to access capital
- Transition – incubators typically assist in finding suitable off-site land access for transition upon the conclusion of a client's tenure

### ***Production Philosophy***

The production philosophy and practices taught and applied on incubator farms vary, but to tend to focus on sustainable practices and/or organic farming techniques. There are several examples of incubator farms applying varying philosophies and even for individual clients within a given



incubator to differ in their production approach, as Lelekacs and Morris outline in their work.<sup>18</sup> This can be a complex issue as in many cases client plots are in close proximity and can potentially impact one another. A conventional plot set up adjacent to an organic plot with minimal buffer may adversely affect the organic client's ability to achieve certification or market their product as organically grown, for example. In some cases entire incubator sites have been certified organic, and the management must oversee each client's activities and ensure sufficient recordkeeping to maintain compliance. In other cases a site may not be comprehensively certified, but individual clients may seek certification for their plots. Other sites may not require any particular philosophy but will offer relevant training in order to equip clients with the knowledge to apply particular practices upon transition. This is all set up in a case-by-case basis tailored to the overall needs of the client pool and the local markets for particular classes of products.

### ***Location***

Incubator farms are currently in operation in 32 states and 2 Canadian provinces according to a survey conducted by the National Incubator Farm Training Initiative in 2013.<sup>19</sup> The survey also indicates a concentration of programs in development in the southeast US. These incubators vary between urban, suburban, and rural locations. The distinctions between characteristics of rural vs. urban or suburban incubators are fairly obvious, but what may be of more significance are the potential opportunities that these different settings can provide. This topic will be explored further in Section 2.4.

## **1.4 About this Report**

This report explains the concept of incubator farms and their significance to the Piedmont region. It will outline in detail the basic process for planning and establishing a successful incubator farm and will give specific examples of successful programs in other parts of the country. The report will go into detail about such procedures as identifying need, developing a stakeholder network, developing educational opportunities, and planning the logistics and management of your incubator.

A spotlight will be the development of the Hines Chapel Incubator Farm, a project of the Piedmont Conservation Council, currently under development in Guilford County.

---

<sup>18</sup> Lelekacs, J., & Morris, M. (2013). Incubator Farms for North Carolina: A White Paper.

<http://www.cefs.ncsu.edu/whatwedo/foodsystems/newfarmers/incubator-farms-for-nc.pdf>

<sup>19</sup> Agudelo Winther, E., & Overton, M. (2013). The Farm Incubator Toolkit. New Entry Sustainable Farming Project. Retrieved: <http://nesfp.org/node/216>.

## Section 2: Incubator Farm Development

### 2.1 Identify the Need

#### *Why is needs identification important?*

It is critical when beginning any business, project, or other venture to first determine the existence of a need within your community or target demographic for your products or services. Clearly identifying the need will serve to answer many important questions about what you are trying to accomplish, including:

- Does our anticipated program serve a justifiable purpose?
- Does this program address a real issue within the community?
- Is the purpose of our program in line with our core mission? If so, does our mission serve to make a real impact in our community?
- Will lenders and/or sponsors be willing to support this cause?

This is typically executed through development of a thorough needs assessment and/or feasibility study. Commonly, it is encouraged that nonprofit organizations undertaking new projects must identify a public service that addresses a community need that aligns with a local, state, regional, or national initiative, or that an underrepresented grassroots need has been identified and meets a qualified purpose. Educational programs typically seek to address a gap in knowledge within a particular demographic. Needs assessments for training and education initiatives may include a number of components, but should provide the answers to the following questions<sup>20</sup>:

- How can education and training **impact** you audience?
- What **approach** will be most effective?
- Do you have **awareness** of existing programs and gaps in knowledge?
- What information do you have about the current situation that will help you identify and document **outcomes**?
- What is the **demand** for future programs or products?
- How will your program gain **credibility**?

#### *How do I conduct a Needs Assessment?*

Prior to collecting data it is critical to clearly state the objectives and identify the target audience for your needs assessment. This will assist in determining the best methods for your study. A needs assessment for a project that aims to close the gap in training or knowledge for a targeted audience

---

<sup>20</sup> McCawley, Paul F. (August 2009). Methods for Conducting an Educational Needs Assessment. University of Idaho Extension. Retrieved: <file:///E:/PCC/PART%20Strategic%20Plan/Needs%20assessment/BUL0870.pdf>.

should carefully assess the current situation as well as what potential solutions the audience may be interested in. It is futile to propose solutions if your solutions do not appeal to your audience.

There are a variety of methods for collecting data for your needs assessment, and the right approach will vary on the objectives and audience. Four common methods include surveys, interviews, focus groups, and working groups. The following draws heavily from McCawley's *Methods for Conducting an Educational Needs Assessment* (2009). McCawley states that while the number of participants engaged may vary according to a particular project's scope, the key is to achieve a high rate of respondents among those sampled. Rates less than 100% may introduce bias, but rates less than 50% begin to compromise statistical integrity. Keeping the rate of responses above 75% is recommended.<sup>21</sup>

Surveys can be conducted through written questionnaires or orally. Each method presents advantages and disadvantages, but regardless of method it is critical to carefully identify your audience, establish clear goals, and try to limit open-ended questions that may be more difficult or time-consuming to analyze. It is also encouraged to pilot test your questions to determine how easily they are understood and how open to interpretation they may be.

Interviews are inexpensive and can serve to develop a rapport between the interviewer and stakeholders, which can be incredibly useful as a project unfolds. One must be careful, however, to be mindful of their own bias during interviews and to stay on task, not allowing the conversation to meander. Interviews are also time-consuming, so it is important to be organized and stay on task while also making your subject feel comfortable to share their thoughts. It may be helpful to record interviews in order to make data collection easier. The interviewer may be too consumed with taking notes, making them seem disengaged or rushed.

Focus groups are great tools to judge attitudes and beliefs, and commonly can be used as follow-ups for surveys. They tend to focus on a limited number of stakeholders in a group setting. They are very useful in gaining open-ended views, gathering shared views, and collecting fresh ideas from stakeholders. An open conversation within a focus group can allow subjects to feed off of one another's comments and come up with spontaneous suggestions or ideas.

Working groups are great long-term tools that often may result in gaining group opinions plus a product. They may be useful for strengthening an organization's credibility among stakeholders by developing relationships, building consensus over the long-term and utilizing that consensus to develop actionable project processes, and assembling qualitative data that does not need to represent a larger audience.

### ***What is the wider need for incubator farms and how do you focus locally?***

Beginning farmers across the U.S. lack access capital, land, and established marketplaces for their products. The number of beginning farmers has declined as more than half the farmland across the

---

<sup>21</sup> McCawley, Paul F. (August 2009). *Methods for Conducting an Educational Needs Assessment*. University of Idaho Extension. Retrieved: <file:///E:/PCC/PART%20Strategic%20Plan/Needs%20assessment/BUL0870.pdf>.

U.S. is controlled by farmers over the age of 55.<sup>22</sup> USDA estimates that 70% of farmland will change hands in the next two decades<sup>23</sup> and indicators show that fewer new farmers are in a position of inheriting land and other necessities to carry on a family farming tradition.<sup>24</sup>

Many sources of information are readily available to access statistics on farmland, farmer ages, and other information that makes the case for assisting beginning farmers. The Census of Agriculture statistics can be accessed through the USDA and state agriculture departments, along with other critical information to help build the case. Locally, it is important to understand how this wider case for beginning farmer facilitation is relevant to your community. Many counties in North Carolina and nationally have developed Farmland Protection Plans which contain useful local data about agriculture in your community, local trends, and plans for action. More information about farmland protection in many communities across the U.S. and links to local reports and programs can be found on sites such as the American Farmland Trust (<http://www.farmland.org/default.asp>) and Farmland Information Center (<http://www.farmlandinfo.org/>). Accessing this information is the first step in understanding your local situation and how a farm incubator may help to meet agricultural goals in your community. This will set the stage for identifying and engaging stakeholders locally to continue the process.

## 2.2 Identify Stakeholders

### ***Why are identifying and recruiting key stakeholders important?***

Incubator farms serve to increase the number of successful farmers in a region through building and strengthening community networks that serve the entire regional food system. Identifying and recruiting a broad, engaged set of key stakeholders is an important process to undertake in the beginning stage of any incubator farm project. These stakeholders—and the organizations or groups that they represent—will be part of the project as it moves from the ideation stage to implementation, and in an ongoing capacity as the incubator farm matures. These key stakeholders are invested in the success of the incubator farm, and serve to connect the project leaders with other community and broader resources (e.g. financial, material, and local knowledge), to speak on behalf of the project to the wider community, and to help facilitate the recruitment of potential farmers, mentors, and other project participants.

---

<sup>22</sup> Mishra, Ashok, Christine Wilson, and Robert Williams. "Factors affecting financial performance of new and beginning farmers." *Agricultural Finance Review*, 69(2): 160-179.

<sup>23</sup> United States Department of Agriculture (USDA). 2008. *Family Farm Forum, April*. Cooperative State Research, Education, and Extension Service (CSREES).

<sup>24</sup> Agudelo Winther, E., & Overton, M. (2013). The Farm Incubator Toolkit. New Entry Sustainable Farming Project. Retrieved: <http://nesfp.org/node/216>.

### ***What is a “key stakeholder?”***

“Key stakeholder” is a broad term used to refer to individuals and organizations within the community that have a “stake” in a positive outcome for the incubator farm. Sometimes, these stakeholders are obvious: Cooperative Extension Agents, agriculture teachers from a local college, and established farmers. Others may be less obvious, but no less helpful: local chefs, representatives from farm service agencies or banks, city or county officials, and civic clubs. Key stakeholders are sometimes referred to as “partners.” The ideal key stakeholder will have:

- A stated interest in the positive outcome of the incubator project,
- Willingness to give resources (time, their network, knowledge, or material resources),
- A shared value that is compatible with that of the incubator farm’s goals,
- The ability to remain in contact with the incubator farm staff throughout the project ideation, implementation, and ongoing management.

Some incubator farms have found success in regularly engaging their full team of leaders and key stakeholders through monthly meetings and regular updates. Others have chosen to identify an “inner circle” of stakeholders that have the ability and interest level needed to participate on an ongoing basis (often called a “leadership team”), and a broader group of key stakeholders that are informed through regular updates and infrequent meetings, yet are available to be called on for their particular services or expertise. Either way, it is of utmost importance to identify and engage all key stakeholders during the initial visioning process to ensure that everyone is on the same path.

### ***How do I identify what types of stakeholders the incubator project needs?***

Input from diverse stakeholders has been identified as a key success strategy for local food projects. Consider your vision and needs as you seek out stakeholders, and make note of potential connections that contribute the success of your project’s goals.

A list of potential community resources prepared as a resource through the *Bringing New Farmers to the Table*<sup>25</sup> project is provided in the appendix. This list ought not to be considered exhaustive. Base your list on the vision for your incubator farm project and the resources that you have within your community.

Additional strategies for identifying incubator farm project key stakeholders include:

- A brainstorming session with the leadership team. Start by identifying the types of resources that you need, but do not currently have.
- A broadly focused brainstorming session can be overwhelming, especially at the beginning of a stakeholder identification process. It may help to think about the resources that are needed in terms of categories:

---

<sup>25</sup> <http://www.cefs.ncsu.edu/whatwedo/foodsystems/beginningfarmers.html>

- Funding (locally-sourced funding, or resources that can be leveraged through local organizations)
- Farming assistance (use of tractors, land-clearing equipment, bush-hogs.)
- Farmer training (teachers, specialists, etc.)
- Land access (people who may have land, or organizations that may be able to hold land in trust, or professionals that can assist with lease agreements, real estate needs, etc.)
- Connections to the broader food system (grocers, chefs, institutional buyers)
- Researchers and Evaluators (people with the skills to help evaluate the program throughout all stages, to ensure the project is on the right track toward meeting objectives and accomplishing goals, as well as to assist with obtaining grants.)
- Other categories that your team identifies.

Thinking more broadly about the concept of community resources, the Community Capitals Framework provides a model of seven ways of describing community assets (with potential committee members in parentheses)<sup>26</sup>:

1. Natural capital: Representatives of parks and rec, watershed, nature groups, and those who use the resources; farmers, ranchers, and others who make a living off the land and their customers and suppliers.
2. Built capital: Representatives from telecommunications systems, utilities, industrial parks, main street, business locations, etc.
3. Financial capital: Representatives of infrastructure development groups, banks, endowments, community foundations, and funding agencies.
4. Social capital: Representatives of clubs and organizations, people with links to outside resources, people who know many in the community.
5. Human capital: Facilitators, educators (K-12), trainers, representatives of agricultural and other service agencies and their customers, economic developer and partners.
6. Cultural capital: Representatives of cultural and religious groups, representatives of museums and historical associations and their support base.
7. Political capital: Elected and appointed officials and those with whom they work, congressional staff, representatives of political groups.

The Community-Based Food System Assessment and Planning facilitator's guidebook<sup>27</sup> suggests a method of using these seven categories to brainstorm members of your community networks that

---

<sup>26</sup> Flora, C. B., & Flora, J. L. (2013). *Rural communities legacy and change*. Boulder, CO: Westview Press.

<sup>27</sup> Bargainer, M. C., Eley, M., Fogel, J., Jakes, S., Peery, S., Prohn, S., Sandberg, N., Smutko, S. (2011). Community-Based Food System Assessment and Planning. Southern Sustainable Agriculture Research and Education. Retrieved from [http://www.pubs.ext.vt.edu/3108/3108-9029/3108-9029\\_pdf](http://www.pubs.ext.vt.edu/3108/3108-9029/3108-9029_pdf)

may be good candidates for key stakeholders. Note: It is strongly recommended that incubator farms look at their efforts as instigating holistic, systemic impacts, and therefore requiring the involvement of a broad and diverse set of stakeholders. However, each incubator farm steering committee should ultimately determine which categories are important to their efforts, and how best to engage their communities.

### ***Methods to assess and recruit potential key stakeholders for your incubator farm***

The National Incubator Farm Training Initiative (NIFTI) has produced a helpful “Partner Landscape Worksheet” to help identify the roles, scope, and resources that potential partners can fulfill. It may be a useful starting point to help assess potential key stakeholders.

### NIFTI Partner Landscape Worksheet<sup>28</sup>

Partner (or potential partner)	Type of Partner (i.e. program development, delivery, support, policy and direction, sustainability)	Ethics/Goal Alignment (strong, moderate, challenging, disparate)	Touchpoint (how and when will you work with this partner, in what venue)	Resources that can be leveraged  (i.e. funding, volunteers, land access, research/evaluation)

Identifying the stakeholders that you would like to be involved in the incubator farm project does not necessarily mean they’ll rally to the cause right away. Have resources available that explain what an incubator farm is, and examples of successful projects, but be strategic about when you engage with potential stakeholders. Sometimes it is advisable to have at least a few details worked out before requesting support from high-level stakeholders. Information provided throughout this incubator farm resource will be helpful in describing what goes into the creation of an incubator farm project, and the following list of web resources provide a baseline of information.

<sup>28</sup> From: <http://nifti.wikispaces.com/file/view/Strategic+Partnerships+Worksheet.pdf>



## Examples of NC Incubator Farms

<http://www.cefs.ncsu.edu/whatwedo/foodsystems/incubatorfarmresources2a.html>

## Incubator Farms for North Carolina: A White Paper

<http://www.cefs.ncsu.edu/whatwedo/foodsystems/newfarmers/incubator-farms-for-nc.pdf>

## National Incubator Farm Training Initiative (NIFTI)

<http://nesfp.nutrition.tufts.edu/food-systems/national-incubator-farm-training-initiative>

## Agriculture and Land-Based Training Association (ALBA)

<http://www.albafarmers.org/>

### ***Common pitfalls of key stakeholder engagement, and how to avoid them***

Not engaging key stakeholders soon enough in the visioning process. One of the biggest benefits of engaging key stakeholders is to ensure that incubator farm efforts are not duplicating an already-existing project and that the new effort is not overlooking a prime opportunity within the region. Engaging key stakeholders early in the process serves to capture this local knowledge as early as possible in the visioning process. Furthermore, stakeholders feel that they have much more of a “stake” in the project if their input is taken into consideration during the visioning process. Remember, identifying key stakeholders is only the first part of the process; retaining their interest, attention, and involvement is an ongoing effort. Engaging the stakeholders early in the process can help ensure this long-term success.

- A. **Not building partnerships with the existing farm community early in the project process.** Incubator Farms are a new phenomenon, and as such, can occasionally be met with suspicion and even contempt by local residents who are unfamiliar with the people or concepts involved. Engaging a diverse group of key stakeholders early on in the process will provide the project with a knowledgeable set of community leaders who can speak enthusiastically about the incubator farm to cautious community members, thereby preventing community conflict that can slow down progress later in the project timeline.
- B. **Having a “supply-only” key stakeholder group.** While it is certainly important to have stakeholders with small-farming know-how, it is important to utilize broader community knowledge in order to situate the incubator farm into the regional food system and to help generate long-term sustainability. Ensure that key stakeholders represent all aspect of the food system: buyers, chefs, financiers, educators, economic developers, etc.
- C. **Losing the interest and participation of key stakeholders.** Everyone’s busy, and in all likelihood, the stakeholders that your committee has identified are some of the busiest, most networked people in your community. It’s a good idea to be as upfront as possible when you approach potential key stakeholders about the time commitment that you anticipate their involvement will entail. Additionally, regular updates and predictable meeting times and places will go a long way in ensuring their ongoing participation. Finally, work to engage their continued participation and interest by attentive listening and responsiveness to their ideas, and incorporate those ideas as much as possible where they fit within the stated goals and visions of your project.



## 2.3 Defining the Mission and Vision

### ***Why a visioning process is important***

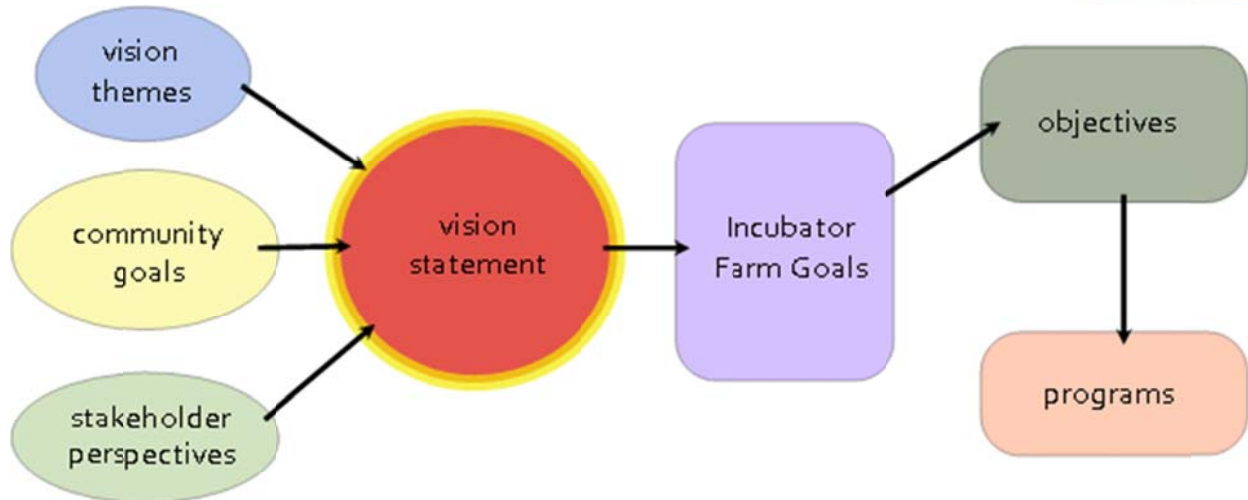
Much like the food system itself, incubator farm projects rely on a broad and diverse set of participants and stakeholders to creating a sustainable program that is integrated into the fabric of the community. While this diversity brings great strength to the project, it also brings the need to conduct a collaborative visioning process to ensure that there is unity and understanding among the leadership team and all stakeholders.

### ***Four main goals of a visioning process:***

Create a baseline of understanding. All stakeholders should be brought up to speed and have a similar understanding of the scope and possibilities of the incubator farm project.

1. Develop a working knowledge base of the unique perspectives and resources that each stakeholder brings to the project. Get to know one another!
2. Produce a written (and graphic, if possible) vision statement for the incubator farm project. This vision statement will be used to guide future decisions regarding goals, strategies, and programs.
3. Generate unity. By the end of the meeting, all stakeholders should have a unified sense of the vision and goals of the incubator farm project.

Often, incubator projects are conceived of by a small number of “activators” who have a passion and/or specialized know how. It can be tempting to move forward quickly, motivated by sheer enthusiasm or by deadline of an attractive grant, or both. A visioning process serves not only to ground the existing group with an overall vision that can be easily communicated before detailed decisions are made, but also to identify additional stakeholders early on, garnering their participation, perspectives, resources, and new ideas. It may seem overwhelming, at first, to invite 20 or more new people together with the small group of organizers that may have been having informal conversations for a period of time. Know that doing so, in an organized manner, will serve only to strengthen the project over the long course of development, implementation, management, and continued growth. Gathering a large number and diversity of stakeholders early on provides the best possible input for the vision of the project, while detailed decision-making is typically carried out by a smaller number of those stakeholders who have the time and interest to participate at a more active level.



### ***Description of possible processes***

A visioning process can take many forms. Some processes are more text-based, while others have a graphic component. Some groups choose to utilize an outside facilitator. This is especially useful if you feel like your group lacks facilitation experience or if everyone would like to participate. Sometimes it's difficult for the facilitator to step out of the organizing role and contribute a new idea or perspective, either because it takes so much focus to facilitate, or there is a fear of appearing partial.

Graphic visioning processes are the most common, and can be a useful way of organizing the thoughts of a large group. The Grove<sup>29</sup>, a consortium of facilitation consultants, almost exclusively uses visual and graphic facilitation methods. Ahha!<sup>30</sup> is another for-profit consultant that provides facilitation materials and guides that are helpful when using a graphic method. Idea Connect<sup>31</sup> is a third resource that may be helpful.

### ***Sample methodology***

As illustrated above, there are many possibilities for visioning processes. One possibility is outlined below, complete with an agenda, instructions, and everything needed for a facilitator to conduct a farm incubator visioning process.

### ***Pre-meeting considerations:***

- Select a location for the meeting that is central and familiar. The meeting room should allow for flexibility of use (i.e. have tables and chairs that can be moved around).

<sup>29</sup> The Grove Consultants International <http://www.grove.com>

<sup>30</sup> Ahha! <http://experienceahha.com/>

<sup>31</sup> Idea Connect <http://beideconnect.com/>

- Invite all key stakeholders at least three weeks in advance, or more if engaging executives or government officials. Follow up with personal invitations and contact to ensure attendance.
- Allocate four hours for the meeting. The visioning process is unlike a regular, action-oriented meeting, and can take a fair amount of time.
- A successful visioning session will include 12-20 stakeholders from diverse areas of interest and participation, although other factors to consider are how well invitees already know one another, their experience and comfort in speaking in front of large groups, and their familiarity with the incubator farm project.
- Pay attention to the needs of your stakeholders when planning a meeting date and time. Evenings are generally better for farmers, as are slower growing seasons.
- Arrange for drinks and snacks at the meeting. If the budget allows, a “working lunch” can also be a great way to build rapport among stakeholders.
- It may help to refer to the meeting as a “workshop,” “community input session,” or “charrette” to better convey the tone of the content. A four-hour workshop, or “afternoon workshop” sounds more appealing than a three-hour meeting.
- Designate at least one person to be the note-taker. Ideally, one note-taker works with the facilitator by writing responses on large format paper for everyone in the meeting to see as the process unfolds, and one note-taker types more detailed notes on a laptop.
- Place pens and pads of paper at each table so that participants can take notes as they are led. A bowl of peppermints on each table is a nice touch, too.
- Items to gather:
  - Pens and paper
  - Post-it notes
  - Large sheets of drawing paper/flipcharts on easels if possible (either post-it note type, or have tape)
  - Broad-tipped markers
  - Snacks and drinks
  - Comfortable chairs
  - Table

### ***At the meeting***

#### **1. Gathering and introductions.**

This may be the first time that many of your key stakeholders are meeting each other. Have name tags available and encourage their use. Consider starting the meeting with a short, engaging “ice breaker” activity to introduce members to one another. At the very least, this should allow stakeholders to state their name, their organizational affiliation, and why they are interested in the success of an incubator farm.

#### **2. Review the agenda.**

### **SAMPLE AGENDA**

1. Gathering and introductions (30)
2. Review the agenda (5)
3. Short presentation on Farm Incubators (15)
4. ‘This I believe’ exercise (20)
5. Articulating vision themes (60)
  - \*\*ten minute stretch break\*\*
6. Developing a shared vision (30)
  - \*\*ten minute stretch break\*\*
7. Crafting the vision statement (45)
8. Parking lot items (10)
9. Next steps (25)

Have an agenda posted in the meeting room in large print that remains in the same location throughout the workshop. Some people find it helpful to also have a time associated with each segment of the agenda, so that they are aware of the pace of the workshop. The facilitator should go over the agenda at the beginning of the meeting with a fair amount of detail, and solicit participant agreement that the stated agenda is the way that the meeting will proceed.

A visual “parking lot” can be helpful. Workshops often veer off course when participants raise a concern or idea that is not germane to the discussion at hand. A good facilitator will note the item by acknowledging the participant’s concern, referring to the agreed upon agenda, then writing that item in large print near the agenda (the “parking lot”), assuring the participant that the item will not be neglected -- it will be addressed either at the appropriate time in the agenda, or at the end of the meeting.

### 3. Short presentation on Farm Incubators.

As outlined above, the first goal of this process is to bring everyone to the same level of understanding. A short presentation on incubator farms (their history, local conditions that instigated the interest in creating one in your area, examples of successful programs, etc.) will help achieve this, and allow time for questions from participants. However, be careful to ensure that this presentation and question session doesn’t jump right into participants expressing their hopes and dreams for the incubator farm project. The focus is solely informational.

### 4. ‘This I believe’ exercise.

Often, participants will either begin the visioning process too narrowly (naming specific projects or programs that they would like to see integrated), or they will be stymied by the open-ended nature of a visioning process. The “This I Believe” exercise is a short, engaging, and insightful way for participants to begin to think more creatively about the project and overall vision.

Instructions: The goal is to elicit perspectives on farming, the food system, farm incubators, etc., and to see that there exists a range of perspectives on each topic. It also serves to jump-start the creativity of your key stakeholders and leadership team. Ask participants to sit in a circle. The facilitator says, “This I believe about \_\_\_\_.” (See suggested topics below.) As led, participants share a 5 second or less word or short statement about the topic. When they share, ask that they stand, and remain standing until everyone has shared. Once everyone is standing, the facilitator asks everyone to sit down, and repeats the exercise with another topic. Each round should take about 1 to 2 minutes, and the facilitator should be prepared with 10-15 topics. This should be a rapid-fire exercise, with each participant standing to share quickly and in rapid succession. Encouraging people to stand as soon as they have an idea, instead of in the order that they are seated, will help keep the pace brisk. Have a note-taker (or two) at the head of the room to write down what is said.

Suggested topics:

Farming  
 The name of your county/town/region  
 Incubators  
 Farm businesses  
 The food system  
 Local food  
 Land access  
 New farmers

## 5. Articulating vision themes.

Utilizing what everyone has learned in the preceding exercise, ask participants to think creatively about the goals of the incubator farm project. Start by initiating a creativity-boosting exercise: prompt participants to think 10 years out, and imagine what life will look like. Start with the participant's personal perspective, and expand outward to their organization, community, and region. Without soliciting verbal responses, utilize variations on the following questions:

- How old will you be in 10 years?
- If you know any farmers, will they be farming in 10 years?
- Knowing that economic projections predict population growth in nearly every NC county, imagine what your community will look like—
  - Will there be more restaurants?
  - More grocery stores?
  - Larger school populations?
  - More development?
  - Less farmland?
- If there is a large city or town nearby, what effects will the growth of that market have on your community?

Ask participants to keep what they've imagined in the forefront of their mind; remind them that we're setting a long-term vision for the incubator farm project—they should be thinking ambitiously about the farming and economic situations 5-10 years down the road. Then, begin to solicit short statements of their visions. Have each participant write 3-8 visions that they have for the future of the food and farming system in their community, each vision on an individual post-it note. This is a brainstorming exercise, so the facilitator should discourage too much discussion among participants at this point. In order to cultivate an atmosphere of safe and creative sharing, remind participants that the next step is to consider the visions that have been put forward and see what themes emerge, but first you'd like to get as many ideas down on paper as possible.

To help explain this exercise to the participants gathered and to ensure that they're all responding to the same question, you may want to use some variation on the question below, and even post in large print at the front of the room so that it can be referenced.

**“This project will be successful in five years if....” (characteristic of the incubator farm, or of the wider community food and farming system)**

## 6. Developing a shared vision.

As the participants are writing their visions (which should take around 5-10 minutes) have them place their post-it notes on a blank wall that has ample access for all. At this point, the facilitator (or several volunteers from the group) should begin organizing the post-it notes into common “themes”: grouping the participants suggested visions into common areas of effect.

Soliciting ideas for project vision themes this way helps to “level the playing field” between participants that are more introverted and those that are extroverted, and those that are accustomed to visioning exercise and other organizational development methods. A major goal of the stakeholder meeting is to include a broad swath of community participants, and create a process by which people can participate through writing short statements down on paper as opposed to having to speak up in a group of strangers. This method can help ensure that you’re getting input from everyone.



*Post-it notes can be used to facilitate the grouping of proposed goals into themes.*

The facilitator (or several volunteers from the group) should continue grouping the vision theme ideas into common areas until she can suggest 3-5 general “vision themes.” These should be tested with the participants, and space allowed for the participants to make suggestions—either out loud or by moving the post-it notes on the wall, depending on how many stakeholders are in attendance.

Example visioning themes (from the Hines Chapel Incubator Farm Project):

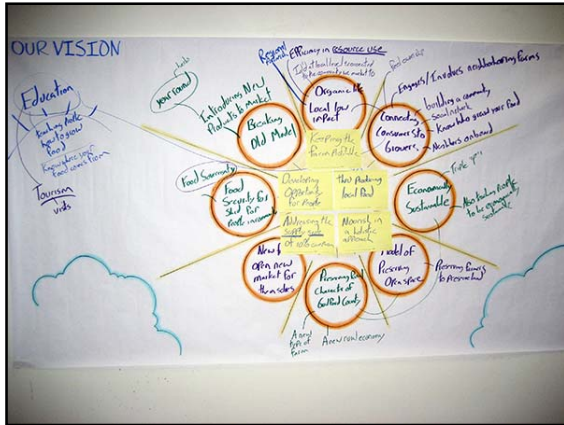
- Keeping farms profitable
- Developing opportunity for people through producing local food
- Addressing the supply side of the NC 10% Campaign
- Nourishing a holistic approach

These 3-5 well-articulated visioning themes that will serve as the centerpiece for the next segment: crafting the vision statement. Once there is consensus on the vision themes of your farm incubator project, the note taker should write them in large print prominently where they can be seen for the remainder of the meeting.

## 7. Crafting the vision statement



Definition of a vision statement: “Vision is the ultimate outcome of your work. It is not solely dependent on your organization’s efforts, but it is the change/impact you are working to achieve. It should be: Inspirational, motivational, navigational, move people toward the future and be easily understood and positive.”<sup>32</sup>



Note takers should write clearly in large format on a white board (if available) or on large sheets of drawing paper.

The vision statement is different than a mission statement in that the vision reflects what the future will look like because of what you do every day, while the mission statement reflects what you do best every day.

The vision statement that you craft will be used to provide a consistent focus over time and across many community platforms. It is written not only for the stakeholders to remember what they’re all working toward, but also for the wider community, for grant proposals, and to solicit participation and resources from potential partners by capturing the “big picture” and inspiring people and communities to action.

In a facilitated vision-crafting session, it is imperative that everyone’s voice is heard. Pay special attention to the dynamics of the room—are there a few people that are speaking frequently, and others who have not said a word? If your group is on the larger side (10+ people) it is beneficial to divide participants into smaller groups of 3 or 4. Try to discourage “cliques” by asking participants to count off instead of self-organizing, where the temptation is great to gravitate toward one’s friends and colleagues. Ask each group to reflect on the post-it notes, which are at this point organized into thematic areas, and craft a vision statement collectively that they think best captures the themes present. Allow 3-5 minutes for this exercise.

Reconvene the entire group, and ask a representative from each group to slowly read their vision statement. The facilitator (or note taker) will write each statement in large print at the front of the room. Once they are all displayed, ask for a few minutes of silent reflection from the group before taking further suggestions for statements.

One vision statement may become clear to everyone present—in which case, congratulations! More likely, a few participants are going to suggest ways that their statements presented could be combined or tweaked. The note take should do her best to record what is being said and the facilitator should do her best to moderate the conversation so that everyone who desires to speak feels empowered to do so, and so that the conversation is productive.

A note on consensus: It is of utmost importance that the final vision statement be reached by consensus. Do not allow for a decision between two or more vision statements to be decided by a

<sup>32</sup> from Resourceful Communities <http://www.conservationfund.org/our-conservation-strategy/major-programs/resourceful-communities-program/>

vote or show of hands. The purpose of this workshop and the crafting of a vision statement is to build a community of support. Combining the different perspectives, ideas, and individual goals of the stakeholders present will not be easy, but once you've reached a consensus-based decision, you will have a stronger group of stakeholders who each have a deeper understanding of each other and the long-term vision of the incubator farm. Voting invariably leaves individuals feeling unheard or like their ideas are less than valuable to the group. It is quite an accomplishment to create a vision statement with a diverse group of people, and participants will feel so much more energized knowing that they've avoided shortcuts and that everyone is an equal part of this new group effort.

It's advisable to take a short collective break here to celebrate what the stakeholders have accomplished. Do something fun and inclusive to mark the occasion. Crafting a vision statement can be an exhausting process, and acknowledging this accomplishment in a fun way that re-centers the group will go a long way in determining how likely the stakeholders are to show up at future meetings.

## 8. Parking lot items.

Another way to ensure that all stakeholders feel heard, and that everyone remains engaged with the development process moving forward, is to make good on your promise of revisiting the "parking lot" that you've (hopefully) used throughout the meeting to keep the current conversation on track. Now is the time to address any questions, small discussions, or concerns that were raised earlier. It's highly likely that the items in this list will not be able to be addressed in the moment—they'll either require information that is not at hand, or pose the need for a discussion that is more than a couple of minutes. If so, be clear about what future actions will be taken by the organizers to satisfy all the items in the parking lot.

## 9. Next steps

The most important next step is to make sure you utilize your vision statement! Your team has worked hard to craft this statement, but it will quickly fade from memory if it is not revisited regularly. Broadcast it widely—on your website, in your newsletter, in the header or footer of correspondence, and be sure to have it posted during future meetings.

Another important step is to document the work that has been done today. While crafting the vision statement was the end goal, the other comments and contributions from the meeting are also important to catalog and revisit periodically. The note taker and facilitator should work together to catalog the day's work into a document that will be sent to all attending stakeholders as well as be made available to future participants to help bring them up to speed as to the groundwork of the vision statement and of your incubator farm project.



Since you have a broad group of stakeholders present, take a moment to plant the seed of future needs and participation by conducting a quick community resource asset mapping exercise<sup>33</sup>. This can also lead into naming a few organizing committees: land acquisition, farmer liaisons, business development, and others. Ask that the stakeholders present take an active role in helping to find new participants and resources by identifying other people they know that should be participating, but weren't there at the visioning meeting.

Set a time and purpose for the next meeting—further identification of community resources, business plan development, identifying objectives and short term goals, among other possible items. Recognize that not all of the stakeholders present will feel inclined or have ability to participate in every future meeting. Instead, allow for their participation by scheduling quarterly or biannual meetings and ensuring that you can keep them apprised of progress through regular newsletters or communications.

## 2.4 Site Selection

### *Urban Incubators*

Incubators in urban areas should follow some of the same basic guidelines for establishment as rural areas, but there will be significant distinctions in terms of available land, zoning, ability to integrate livestock into the operation, and access to consumers. These will typically, but not always, be focused on smaller plot sizes and smaller-scale production. Some considerations of both threats and opportunities that may be unique to establishing incubators in urban areas include:

- A. Potential threats
  - Is the potential for nuisance conflicts between farmers and residential or commercial properties greater?
  - Are there city ordinances limiting the types of production (e.g. livestock)?
  - Will it be necessary to apply for re-zoning of the property?
  - How limited are the options for available property?
  - Are there any properties with existing infrastructure suitable for farming?
  - Are there potential soil quality or contamination issues on available properties?
- B. Potential opportunities
  - Are there nearby mass - marketing opportunities that could reduce transport costs?
  - Are there funds available for neighborhood improvement projects?
  - Is there a target population within the urban environment that could become a reliable niche clientele for the incubator?
  - Are there more opportunities for onsite or local residence for clients?

---

<sup>33</sup> For community resource mapping, refer to the worksheets provided in the appendix, and also available in: Bargainer, M. C., Eley, M., Fogel, J., Jakes, S., Peery, S., Prohn, S., Sandberg, N., Smutko, S. (2011). Community-Based Food System Assessment and Planning. Southern Sustainable Agriculture Research and Education. [http://www.pubs.ext.vt.edu/3108/3108-9029/3108-9029\\_pdf.pdf](http://www.pubs.ext.vt.edu/3108/3108-9029/3108-9029_pdf.pdf)

- Will increased public exposure enhance marketing and branding opportunities?
- Do you have a more substantial pool of local volunteers through urban community organizations?

### ***Suburban Incubators***

Incubator programs located in suburban areas may enjoy the “best of both worlds” when it comes to balancing proximity to marketplace and safety from public overexposure. However, there are still inherent risks that must be considered when choosing a suburban location. Here is a brief list of considerations when considering a suburban location:

- A. Is the cost of renting or purchasing land going to be less conducive to your plans?
- B. Review the future land development plans for your area to make sure future development will not hamper your efforts? Could future development be an asset to your clients?
- C. Will suburban neighborhoods be more open to a community-based farm or will it be considered a nuisance?
- D. Are there affordable housing options for clients in your demographic?

### ***Rural Incubators***

Rural incubators also come with distinct considerations and characteristics to an extent. An incubator startup may be more likely to find a site that was traditionally agriculture, is zoned appropriately, and has existing infrastructure that may reduce startup costs. Also, the potential threat for nuisance complaints is lower if you have onsite compost, livestock, or noisy machinery. There is also greater potential for incubator clients who transition out of the program to find a site for their own business that more closely resembles the site they have transitioned from. Those advantages aside, there are a few distinct disadvantages to some rural locations that should be weighed:

- A. How far from the site are the best markets and how will that impact transport costs for the clients?
- B. Is there enough potential site traffic to involve community members, volunteers, or host a market?
- C. What options exist for affordable client housing in the area? If few exist, how far will clients have to travel to maintain their plots and will they be reliable?

## **2.5 Developing the Educational Component**

The educational component of an incubator farm may be multi-faceted and tailored to suit the client-base and local needs of the farming community. Education on an incubator is not simply limited to classroom learning; it typically takes many forms and covers a lot of topic areas. The key component of the incubator farmer’s education and training is the experiential learning that comes

with starting a small business in a semi-controlled environment. Through hands-on mentorship and access to the many resources that typical incubators set up, the incubator farmers should be able to learn many of the skills they need to be successful and put those skills to the test in real time. Along with land access and entry to markets, education is one of the key offerings of an incubator farm.

As with the many other aspects of beginning an incubator project, it is critical to understand the audience and its needs to make the educational component relevant and helpful. This is something that should be considered during the Needs Assessment phase of your planning. For example, surveys or focus groups may help you identify what stage of growth your primary audience represents. If you plan to serve immigrant populations for whom English is a 2<sup>nd</sup> language, the need for language appropriate training may be an important consideration. Your audience may be seasonal migrant farm laborers who already have production skills but need much more focus on financial management and marketing. These issues should be clearly understood prior to developing your educational programming so the incubator is not wasting time and resources on unnecessary education nor is it missing opportunities for addressing critical training areas among your demographic.

Understanding your demographic will also be essential before selecting an incubator manager or mentor farmers. For example, if your incubator is serving an immigrant or refugee population, you will want a manager who can communicate effectively with the clients and is knowledgeable of cultural issues and language barriers facing that population. If you are serving a demographic with little or no farming background you may need to plan for a full-time incubator/farm manager so that they can be readily available to assist in the early stages of the clients' production. If your clients' are mostly planning to grow organically, you will need a farm manager with organic production experience and may need to focus training on organic standards and certification. If you have a client-base that is largely planning to grow for wholesalers there will be a need to provide intense training on food safety and GAP certification.

The NIFTI Farm Incubator Toolkit outlines a variety of potential educational formats that can be utilized<sup>34</sup>:

- Classroom based learning
- Field trainings
- Online workshops
- Mentorship
- Peer-based learning
- One-on-one technical assistance
- Training/demonstration farm

It is wise to begin engaging with potential educators and trainers early in the development process for any incubator farm. The individuals may be key for developing the project in such a way that is conducive to incorporating diverse training opportunities. For example, you may want to contact

---

<sup>34</sup> Agudelo Winther, E., & Overton, M. (2013). The Farm Incubator Toolkit. New Entry Sustainable Farming Project. Retrieved: <http://nesfp.org/node/216>.

cooperative extension, land-grant universities and other educational institutions, conservation professionals, and local farmers, and figure out who your primary education and training providers will be and what role each of them can play in training your incubator clients. It is possible that mutual goals can be met through the educational component, resulting in lower costs for the incubator. Many local extension specialists or other professionals may be looking for more opportunities to expand existing educational programs and the incubator could serve to help them meet these goals, resulting in free or reduced costs for the educational component. Involving these key individuals early in the process will help to identify if any such opportunities exist. If not, it will need to be incorporated in the funding plan for the incubator very early.

It is highly recommended that some type of education or training be utilized as a pre-requisite for entry into the incubator program. This will serve two purposes: (1) the pre-requisite can serve as a screening process to evaluate which participants are the best fit for the incubator, and (2) prospective incubator farmers will come into the incubator with sufficient knowledge and increased chances for success. Farming is much more complicated than simply learning to grow crops. A successful farmer must also be able to market wisely, manage time and personnel, have adequate financial management skills, and utilize a host of other skills such as small engine repair, carpentry, pest management, etc. The more diverse a farmer's skill set, the less need exists for that farmer to outsource skills at a cost. Many incubator programs require applicants to submit business plans. A pre-requisite course may serve to assist farmers in developing these plans, therefore providing an even playing field for applicant evaluation.

Typically, incubator farms will include some of the following components in their education and training services:

- Enterprise budgeting
- Marketing
- Crop production
- Soil management
- Integrated pest management
- Financial management
- Business planning
- Food safety
- Accessing capital (loan programs, alternative means of capital, etc.)
- Whole farm planning

It may not be practical for an incubator to offer education and training on all of the core components of running a small farm business. The types of enterprises may vary among your incubator farmers and there are many opportunities to earn income through farming, therefore it is virtually impossible to cover every conceivable need. For this reason, a critical aspect of managing your incubator will be understanding what opportunities for training and education already exist in or near your community (or online) and either creating a database of these opportunities for your clients' information, or developing relationships and creating pipelines to get your clients access to these opportunities.

In the Piedmont, there are already a variety of offerings when it comes to beginning farmer training. Local organizations such as Carolina Farm Stewardship Association may have training opportunities in any given year, as well as local educational institutions such as Central Carolina Community College, Guilford Technical Community College, North Carolina A&T State University, etc. It may also be useful to note whether or not a nearby college or library carries an adequate supply of agriculture-related books and informational resources. Many farmers may be independent learners and will want to do independent study in addition to the training offered at the incubator. If such resources are not available through partnership, it may be wise to budget for a beginning farmer library (See sample Book Order List – Appendix B).

## 2.6 Identifying & Marketing to Potential Incubator Participants

### ***Why marketing is important***

When it is time to start actively marketing to potential new farmers who will participate in your Incubator Farm project, conveying all necessary information in a clear and concise manner is of the utmost importance. Think of the marketing brochure as the only chance to communicate with farmers—it should contain all necessary information (dates, location, contact information) while also capturing the enthusiasm and energy that your leadership team and stakeholders have cultivated through the visioning process and project development.

### ***Checklist of important elements***

- ☐ Name of your incubator farm project
- ☐ Physical location of the farm (with map if possible)
- ☐ Date (even if just the current year)
- ☐ Key benefits of participation in the farm incubator
- ☐ Your vision statement
- ☐ Background or definitions (who is a beginning farmer, what is an incubator farm, etc.)
- ☐ Partners that are involved
- ☐ Contact information:
  - ☐ Name and title of a contact person
  - ☐ Phone number
  - ☐ Email address
  - ☐ Incubator farm website
  - ☐ Mailing address
  - ☐ Any associated Twitter, Facebook, or other social media addresses
- ☐ Application deadline

- ☐ Several key facts about your Incubator farm (size, number of participants, aspects of coursework, length of program, etc.).
- ☐ Statement of why their participation will be invaluable. (Ex: “Having a supportive and low-risk place to learn and test new farming techniques and marketing strategies helps new farmers become more successful and financially sustainable for the long-term.”)

### ***Key Points to Remember***

- The brochure should be in color, and attractive enough to grab attention, yet not so “busy” with text and images that it becomes difficult to read.
- If you are including an application, or any sort of detachable, mail-in section on the brochure, ensure that the reverse side does not contain any pertinent information that the farmer will need in the future, such as contact information, address, or key dates.
- It is a good idea to use the back panel of the brochure as a mailing-ready space: include your return address, and leave space for a stamp and a recipient mailing label. However, there is space to add in images, and other text, such as your vision statement.
- Pay attention to the location and amount of space that you are giving to items on the brochure: more space or prominent locations convey importance, and can be used to highlight the desired aspects of your project.
- Your brochure should look professional. Use full-color and high-quality printing, and have multiple people review it for spelling and grammatical errors.

Example Brochure:



## For More Information

Complete the following statement of interest, and send to:

Acme Incubator Farm  
3756 Penatauk Road  
Blainesville, NC 29473

Or complete online at:

[www.acmeincubatorfarm.org](http://www.acmeincubatorfarm.org)

Full Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Email: \_\_\_\_\_

Phone Number: \_\_\_\_\_

Mailing Address: \_\_\_\_\_

Are you interested in the August 2014 season?

☐ yes

☐ no, I am interested in a future year

## Contact Information

Ethel Everitt, Program Coordinator

**Phone:** (919)175-3782

**Email:** [info@acmeincubatorfarm.org](mailto:info@acmeincubatorfarm.org)

**Website:** [www.acmeincubatorfarm.org](http://www.acmeincubatorfarm.org)

**Mailing:** Acme Incubator Farm  
3756 Penatauk Road  
Blainesville, NC 29473

Vision: A Blainesville region abundant with small farms, healthy land, and locally and honestly produced foods available to all.



Acme Incubator Farm  
3756 Penatauk Road  
Blainesville, NC 29473



## Acme Incubator Farm



protecting the future of farming...  
*...one new farmer at a time*

**Current opportunities  
for new and beginning  
farmers in the Blainesford  
County area!**

Participating farmers receive:

1/4-1/2 acre of prepared farmland,  
expert instruction in current vegetable  
production and handling methods,  
education in business and marketing  
strategies for farmers,  
and many other benefits!

**3756 Penatauk Road  
Blainesville, NC**

### Outside Back Flap

This is the second panel that the viewer sees when opening the brochure. Since you are trying to recruit farmers for participation, this is a great place for contact information and how to take action, such as an application, and web address.

### Outside Middle Panel

This can be left for mailing labels. Use your project's logo, and include other pertinent information such as your vision statement, or a call to new farmers to participate. However, don't make this panel too busy.

### Outside Front Cover

This needs to be attention grabbing and should present the project name, key benefits, location, and brief goals. It should entice a new farmer to open the brochure and read more.

### what is an incubator farm?

According to the Center for Environmental Farming Systems, an incubator farm is "one or more parcels of land where one or multiple producers are farming and marketing farm products through their own new farm business enterprise, often with organizational access to training / technical assistance opportunities on farm business and production practices." For more information, see:

<http://www.cefs.ncsu.edu/whatwedo/foodsystems/incubatorfarmproject.html>

### what is a new or beginning farmer?

The USDA defines a new or beginning farmer as one who has been operating a farm or ranch for 10 years or less. The Acme Incubator Farm aims to assist anyone who is in the beginning stages of starting a new farm enterprise. This may be someone who has farmed a commodity crop for years, or been involved in animal husbandry, but is new to fruit and vegetable production.



## Acme Incubator Farm

protecting the future of farming...  
...one new farmer at a time



### AIF At a Glance

- 18 slots currently available for new or beginning farmers in the first farmer group.
- Enrollment includes the lease of 1/4 acre of prepared farmland.
- The two-year program (with option for extension) allows you to learn from multiple growing seasons.
- The program provides a required class meeting (once a month in the evening) where various topics are covered:

farm business planning  
 soil management  
 produce handling safety best practices  
 marketing strategies  
 Many, many more

- Connect and learn from other emerging farmers in the area.
- Have access to farm tools and learn their appropriate use and maintenance requirements.

Having a supportive and low-cost place to learn and test new farming techniques and marketing strategies helps new farmers become successful and financially sustainable for the long-term.

Applications due by  
August 1, 2014

Visit our website to apply and  
for current information:  
[www.acmeincubatorfarm.org](http://www.acmeincubatorfarm.org).

### Incubator Farm Partners



...and many dedicated individuals!

### Inside Front Cover

This is the first panel that a farmer will read when opening the brochure. Think about the farmers in your area, and what general, primary questions they may have. This example panel anticipates that the farmer would like to know what an incubator farm is, if they qualify as a beginning farmer, and where this specific farm is located.

### Inside Middle Panel

This panel can contain the bulk of the information specific to the project. Give basic information: how big is your farm, how many farmers will be involved, what is included in the program, what is the benefit of participating. Be sure to clearly articulate what those benefits are!

### Inside Back Flap

Because your incubator farm is a collaborative effort across a diverse set of community stakeholders, highlight the partners involved. This also helps the potential farmer understand that the incubator farm is about more than learning horticulture techniques: financial and marketing aspects are well represented.



## 2.7 Determining Marketing Outlets

In addition to marketing to potential incubator clients, it is also critical to begin considering how those clients will market their products early in the planning process. Gaining access to markets is another key barrier that many new and beginning farmers face. It is common for incubators to incorporate market access into their programming to some extent. Following are several examples of marketing outlets that can be utilized and collaborative marketing opportunities for consideration. Some of the following information is pulled from the NIFTI Farm Incubator Toolkit.<sup>35</sup>

### ***On-site Markets***

One opportunity to provide market access for your incubator clients is to enable on-farm sales. Clients can sell directly to consumers on the incubator's property either independently or collaboratively. There are several key considerations to developing on-farm sales that will need to be evaluated in the early planning stages:

1. **Regulation:** Are on-farm sales permitted in your area? This commonly will depend on how your property is zoned. Typically agriculturally zoned properties are permitted to utilize on-farm sales in the form of a market or farm stand.
2. **Site Traffic:** Do you have sufficient traffic to support on-farm sales? Consider location and nearby populations. Will consumers have to travel far to access your site and will that kind of support be consistent? Do you have the ability to create visible advertisement to generate on-site traffic?
3. **Competition:** Are there many other farm stands in your area? Will these established farm stands help drive traffic to you or will they take business away? Are local farmers supportive of your incubator or will they see your on-farm sales as unfair competition? It is important to weigh these options when planning. Utilizing on-farm sales for minimal income may not be worthwhile if it creates a negative buzz among the farming community in your area, turning potential supporters and resources into opponents.

### ***Farmers Markets***

Farmers Markets are excellent venues for incubator farmers to try out their salesmanship and get consumer feedback. They are also very time consuming and can be tough to access. The incubator may have an opportunity to get a collaborative market space in individual markets, although there needs to be sufficient planning on how to brand the product and how to allocate sales to individual farmers, as well as how to staff a collaborative market booth.

---

<sup>35</sup> Agudelo Winther, E., & Overton, M. (2013). The Farm Incubator Toolkit. New Entry Sustainable Farming Project. Retrieved: <http://nesfp.org/node/216>.

### ***Community-Supported Agriculture***

CSA's are excellent venues for selling produce for a variety of reasons. CSA's that sell on-farm pickups can reduce staff time and there are possibilities to set up a multi-farm CSA as long as there will not be redundancy in product offerings. This will take a lot of planning on crop production sequence for multiple farmers. Another distinct advantage of the CSA model is that typically the CSA customers, or "members", pay up front for the season so the income is guaranteed. There should be adequate quality assurance to retain members over multiple seasons. CSA customers are typically very loyal if they feel they are getting a good value and good quality produce.

### ***Wholesale Opportunities***

Small-scale producers often do not meet the needs of wholesale or institutional buyers on their own. The advantage of an incubator is the ability to combine produce from multiple farmers to fill orders. If successful, selling to wholesale buyers, institutions, or restaurants may be an opportunity to teach beginning farmers valuable skills such as relationship building, account management, and food safety. Contrarily, quality assurance will be a critical undertaking as wholesale relationships rely on consistency and quality of the product. Consider the potential possibility of incubator farmers having the ability to continue their relationship with wholesale buyers after transitioning on their own land.

## **2.8 Funding Sources**

There are national initiatives that have available funding for incubator programs such as programs within the United States Department of Agriculture (Beginning Farmer and Rancher Development Program, Farmers' Market Promotional Program, Community Food Projects, etc.).<sup>36</sup> While these grants are excellent resources and have been successful in supporting beginning farmer development, the application process can be time consuming and complex for a smaller, low-resource organization. There may be slightly less formidable alternatives within your state. North Carolina has a range of potential grant funding sources such as the NC Tobacco Trust Fund, NC Department of Agriculture & Consumer Services Specialty Crop Block Grant, and more. Local sources of funding such as family foundations, community foundations, corporate sponsors, and private donors should also be researched. Plenty of online resources are available to do a quick and easy search to find suitable matches for your program and locale. Charity Navigator<sup>37</sup> and Foundation Center<sup>38</sup> are two great sources with plenty of information available for free and access to enhanced features with a subscription.

---

<sup>36</sup> To learn more about available USDA grants for agricultural programs, visit the "Know Your Farmer Know Your Food" website at: [http://www.usda.gov/wps/portal/usda/usdahome?navid=KYF\\_GRANTS](http://www.usda.gov/wps/portal/usda/usdahome?navid=KYF_GRANTS).

<sup>37</sup> <http://www.charitynavigator.org>

<sup>38</sup> <http://foundationcenter.org/>

According to Winther, federal grants are the primary funding sources for many incubators.<sup>39</sup> While there are a wide variety of grant opportunities out there for incubators, there is increasing competition therefore you must make every effort count by engaging individuals to write grants who know how to effectively identify appropriate grant opportunities and develop strong proposals. Another key consideration is grant management. Managing grants is a serious undertaking. There is no such thing as “free money”. Your ability to effectively manage a grant, submit high quality reports, and ensure that you meet your goals and deliverables is essential to future grant funding opportunities. When writing a grant, make sure that ample time is included in the request to fund a project manager who will not only handle reporting, but will stay on top of making sure that deliverables are met and outcomes and outputs are appropriately documented.

While grant funding remains a primary source of incubator funding, it is critical to plan for the long term. It will be much easier to make the case for startup funding but creating a case for long-term support and operational funding may be more challenging. Develop a smart business plan that incorporated a variety of funding mechanisms for your incubator and work with your stakeholders to identify income generating opportunities. For more information on grant funding and resources see Appendix C and D.

## 2.9 Evaluation and Assessment

### *Why Evaluation and Assessment are Important*

Conducting credible and targeted evaluation and assessment protocols throughout the life cycle of your incubator farm project serves multiple purposes:

- Improving the project and programs to achieve stated goals;
- Meeting the needs and goals of current and future participants;
- Obtaining stakeholder support;
- Communicating successes to the public;
- Documenting project efficacy to garner additional funding;
- Recruiting new farmer participants.

While anecdotal success stories are helpful to bring texture and life to marketing materials and improve staff morale, effective evaluation and assessment strategies carry more credibility and can articulate specific areas for improvement, help to focus your organization’s efforts on your strengths, and identify areas where you may seek additional support, knowledge, and partnerships.

The purposes outlined above provide a glimpse into the variety of audiences and purposes to which evaluation and assessment methods can speak. However, when developing your own methods, be clear about the intended audience: the framing of the evaluation question and the methods used will vary depending on the end user of the information. For example, evaluating the success of farmer participants for the purpose of new farmer recruitment may lead you to collect information

---

<sup>39</sup> Agudelo Winther, E., & Overton, M. (2013). The Farm Incubator Toolkit. New Entry Sustainable Farming Project. Retrieved: <http://nesfp.org/node/216>.

on the self-assessed success of farmers who have gone through the program—*did the incubator farm program help them meet the goals they set out to achieve?* However, if you are evaluating the success of farmer participants for the purpose of obtaining grant funding from an economic development agency concerned with job creation, you'll want to gather information on farm income generated, and full time equivalent positions created by former farmer participants—*did the program generate new jobs in the county and did farm income increase?*

The results of any evaluation and assessment program should serve to inform and improve your incubator farm project. Just as it is necessary to utilize and refer to your vision statement regularly, the results of an evaluation or assessment program are only useful if they affect policies and generate new ways of understanding your project, and lead to new ways of running your program.

### ***Opportunities to Evaluate and Assess***

(What questions need to be answered, what stories need to be told?)

There are many opportunities to incorporate useful mechanisms for assessment and evaluation throughout your incubator farm project.

- 1) Internal Evaluation (Is the program meeting its goals?)
  - a) Is there financial sustainability?
  - b) Are the goals outlined in your vision statement being addressed?
  - c) Are staff supported, and opportunities for professional development made available?
  - d) Other, self-identified goals of your program—target population served, food security of neighborhood increased, etc.
- 2) Evaluation of farmer participants (Is the program meeting the farmer's goals?)
  - a) Before they start the program, are potential farmer participants qualified to begin the training; do they possess a baseline level of knowledge about farming?
  - b) During the program, are farmer participants progressing, learning the necessary skills? Are there skills besides farming that they should learn? (Ex. Leadership development, teaching, community organizing, etc.)
- 3) External Evaluation (Does your program graduate farmer participants that are still farming 3, 5 or 8 years after leaving the program?)
  - a) This involves tracking participants well after graduation.
  - b) How do you define success? (Participants that work in other aspects of the food system may also be considered "successful.")

Well-considered and executed evaluation and assessment activities present opportunities to *add to* the quality of your project and program through their implementation. Figure 1 below shows a traditional methodology of a "feedback loop": a program is enacted or performed, an evaluation is conducted, changes are made, and the improved program is performed.

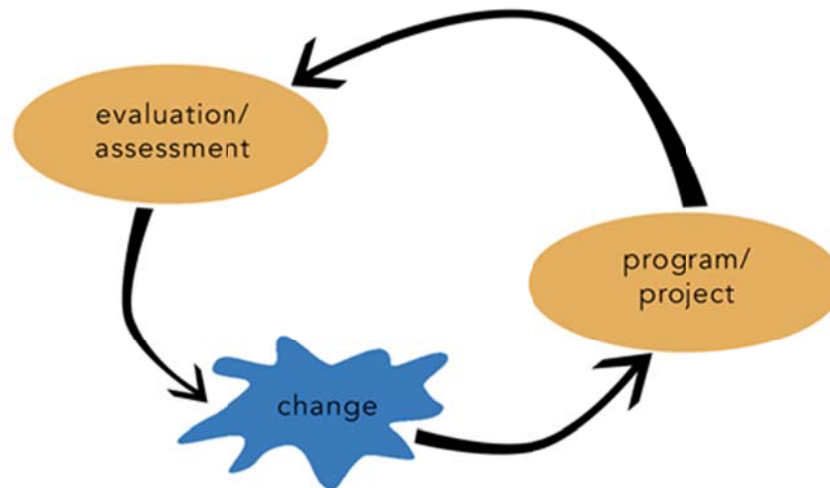
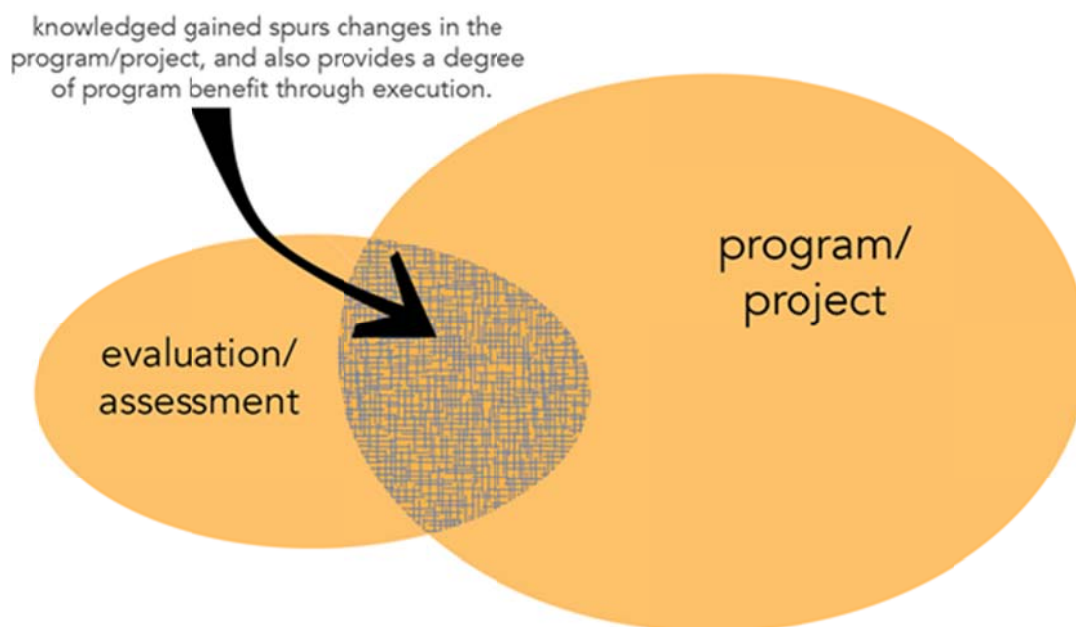


Figure 1: Traditional methods of evaluation and assessment involve efforts separate from the program and project being evaluated. In some projects this is useful; an evaluation is completed after a program, changes are made, and the program is run again.

This can be a useful way to conduct and utilize evaluations and assessments of your incubator project and programs. However, most existing farm incubator projects utilize minimal or no evaluation or assessment practices, citing the lack of time and resources as a primary obstacle<sup>40</sup>. Therefore, it is best to conceive of methods that are *integrated* into your program and provide some amount of understanding or new knowledge to participants and staff through the process of collecting the information, instead of only after the information has been gathered and synthesized. (Figure 2)



<sup>40</sup> E. Agudelo-Winther, personal communication, Nov. 13, 2013

Figure 2 Consider the implementation of an evaluation or assessment strategy that is integrated into the program or project. In addition to serving an assessment role, the evaluation tool can add value directly to the project or program.

One example of this integration of evaluation into program and practice is the use of detailed self-assessments for current farmer participants. The participants are asked to review and fill out a detailed checklist of the skills needed to be a successful farmer (see example of New England Small Scale “Sustainable” Farmer Skill Self-Assessment Tool and other examples on their website: <http://www.smallfarm.org>). As the farmer completes the checklist, denoting where she’d like more training, and what her priorities are, she learns more about what skills are necessary to have as a successful, new farmer. The staff’s responsibility at that point is simply to archive and organize participant responses for future reflection by the farmer participants as well as the program coordinator.

### ***Methods of Evaluation and Assessment (Strategies)***

Start with developing an *evaluation question*—what is the story you want to tell? Do you want to tell a story of developing new small, organic farmers? Or a story of refugees in your community that used the farm skills they know to develop sustainable businesses in their adopted community? Maybe the story is one of land preservation—how the incubator farm has an impact on regional farmland preservation by creating new working small farmers.

Once you have the evaluation question specified, consider the audience with whom you’d like to articulate the results—is it the general public, who may respond more to qualitative (narrative) data, or is it a major funder, who desires quantitative data that is standard to their foundation’s requirements. With the evaluation question and the audience defined, selecting the most appropriate evaluation and assessment method is much easier.

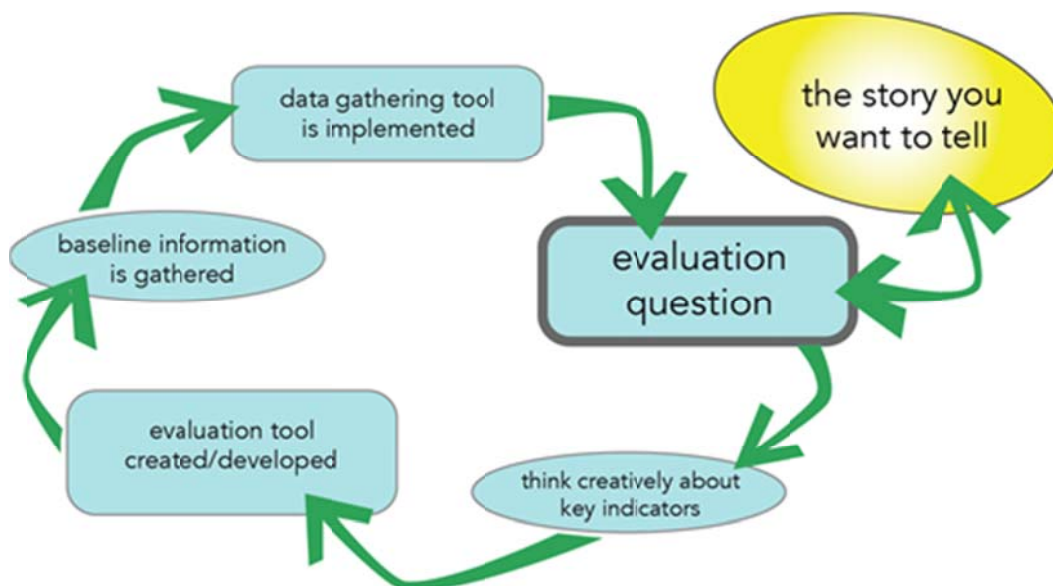




Figure 3: The basic components of an evaluation method. The story you want to tell informs the evaluation question, which is part of an iterative process of information gathering and analysis. Start by discerning the story you want to tell, and then create the evaluation question. Once the assessment process is complete, you will have a coherent “story.”

One strategy for measuring the success of your incubator farm project is to measure “outputs” of the program. These are largely easily quantifiable elements, and include things such as the number of farmers graduated from the program, tonnage of food produced, acreage under cultivation, number of participants in training or outreach programs, food donated to local food security agencies, etc. This strategy is an *accounting* of things produced by your incubator farm project.

Another strategy is to measure ultimate impacts as short-, mid-, and long-term *changes in knowledge, attitudes, skills, , aspirations (KASA), and behavior* as a result of your project, which are harder to quantify, and also more difficult to directly correlate with the efforts of your project. Nevertheless, strategies that measure changes in behavior and knowledge are often much more informative, descriptive, and useful to crafting a successful incubator farm project.

Short-term changes in behavior and knowledge are somewhat easier to measure, and are more reliably attributed to the program. For example, a farmer participant who previously did not know how to write a farm business plan now has these skills, and one who didn’t know much about integrated pest management now has enough knowledge to utilize those methods in her production.

Mid- and long-term changes are harder to attribute to the program (and therefore to measure) because there are many external factors that can influence the outcome. For example, the long-term success of a farmer running his or her own farm business depends not only on the knowledge gained during their participation in a farm incubator training program, but also on:

- Propensity for entrepreneurship,
- Family obligations and needs,
- Financial factors: access to credit and capital,
- Availability of land,
- Health,
- Motivation,
- Many other factors.

These are not always aspects that the incubator farm program can address, but nevertheless have an impact on the mid- and long-term outcomes for farmer participants. However, an accurate and objective assessment of the long-term success of farmer participants may reveal new opportunities for programs within your incubator farm project.

### ***Setting the baseline or standard for control***

There is not a great deal of information or data on the success of new farmers that begin *without* the assistance of an incubator farm project—this would be the best baseline data. However, there is not much data about small business success in general, either. Recent research shows that new businesses (across industries) have a success rate of 44% after 5 years of operation, while new

businesses that received support through an incubator training program have a success rate of 87% after the same time period<sup>41</sup>. The Small Business Development Center at the University of Tennessee reports that specific to the agricultural industry, the success rate of new businesses after 4 years is 56%<sup>42</sup>.

Depending on the specific aspects that you'd like to evaluate, many methods exist to obtain baseline data. For *internal* organizational evaluations, baseline financial data can be achieved by appropriate and detailed accounting. It is highly advisable to employ the expertise of a professional accountant from the beginning of your incubator farm project to ensure that all the necessary information is being tracked. A good professional will help set up bookkeeping methods that will not only help your organization come tax filing time, but also help to track and assess spending and income throughout the year.

Evaluating the success of programmatic goals that were outlined in your vision or mission statement may be vaguer than the quantifiable financial evaluation strategies mentioned above, but it is still possible to gather baseline data for these aspects. For example, if one of your project's goals is to create opportunities for supplemental income generation among socially disadvantaged populations, one way to generate baseline data is by assessing the current supplemental income from farming generated by soon-to-be participants. This could take the form of a short survey or a series of questions on the initial application. Three examples of different strategies are presented below:

*The New Entry farmer training program<sup>43</sup> in Massachusetts has used short (27 question) surveys given at the first class meeting to determine the baseline of farming knowledge that participants have. Eva Agudelo-Winther, a coordinator and trainer at New Entry, warned that sometimes this method produces a "negative dip" as the course progresses: students don't know how much they don't know until they start learning<sup>44</sup>. This method works best in a classroom setting.*

*Agudelo-Winther also uses a "checklist" of skills that farmers need to succeed. Farmer participants can check off skills that they possess prior to, during, and after a program. The list also serves as an overview of the broad skills that farmers need to acquire. The New England Small Farmers Institute (NESFI) has produced Occupational Profile materials that can be used by project staff or farmer participants<sup>45</sup>. Their worksheet, Farming and Business Skills Assessment, is a simplified version that shows the broad skill sets that could be evaluated. This*

---

<sup>41</sup> <http://www.businessnewsdaily.com/272-incubators-increase-small-business-success.html>

<sup>42</sup> <http://www.statisticbrain.com/startup-failure-by-industry/>

<sup>43</sup> <http://nesfp.org/node/14>

<sup>44</sup> E. Agudelo-Winther, personal communication, Nov. 13, 2013

<sup>45</sup>

[http://www.smallfarm.org/main/for\\_service\\_providers/tools\\_and\\_resources\\_for\\_working\\_with\\_new\\_farmers/nesfi\\_tools\\_and\\_resources/dacum\\_occupational\\_profile/](http://www.smallfarm.org/main/for_service_providers/tools_and_resources_for_working_with_new_farmers/nesfi_tools_and_resources/dacum_occupational_profile/)



*document, the corresponding detailed self-assessments and other tools provide greater detail and can be found on the NESFI website<sup>46</sup>.*

*The Agricultural and Land-Based Training Association (ALBA) has produced a very helpful annual farmer survey that is utilized in tracking the progress of farmers post-graduation<sup>47</sup>. This instrument is designed as an interview script, and not as a survey for the farmer to fill out herself. It provides a framework for ALBA to track how many of their participants are currently farming, and at what scale.*

### **Common Evaluation Tools**

Surveys, questionnaires, and self-assessments are viable methods for evaluating and assessing certain aspects of your farm incubator project. Staff satisfaction, professional development, and farmer knowledge gained are three of the most applicable aspects where you can utilize these evaluation instruments.

Other forms of evaluation and assessment include tracking indicators to determine change within a system without specifically asking about that change through a survey or direct questionnaire. This method of assessment works best for evaluating eco-system services or changes within the food system.

For example, monitoring the soil health at the incubator farm can be an indicator of the adoption and successful utilization (or not) of sustainable farming techniques. Similarly, the degree of weed infestations within individual plots can be an indicator of the corresponding farmer's ability to manage their weed population. However, note that there are situations where a farmer "inherits" a plot with a substantial weed bank. In that case, solid baseline information on weed populations and continued monitoring will result in a more accurate assessment of the farmer's performance.

Community impact assessments are helpful when your incubator farm project has goals that extend beyond the incubator farm and farmer participant and into the community. For example, some incubator farm projects aim to alleviate food insecurity in their community. Assessing the impact of the incubator farm project on community food insecurity can be tricky because many other external factors are at play. Consider a simple yearly survey of agencies that your project interacts with—ask them to review your performance, noting key benefits or places of improvement.

### **Key Considerations**

Success may not always take the form that you and your stakeholders initially think it will. For example, some existing incubator farm projects are finding that a fair number of farmer participants actually do not go on to operate farm businesses upon graduation, and instead find their niche in some other aspect of the food system—marketing, aggregating, purchasing on behalf of an institution, teaching farming techniques to community gardeners, etc. Farmer participants who do not graduate and start or continue a farm business do not necessarily represent a failure of your farm incubator program. There are many external factors that influence the mid- or long-

<sup>46</sup>[http://www.smallfarm.org/main/for\\_service\\_providers/tools\\_and\\_resources\\_for\\_working\\_with\\_new\\_farmers/nefi\\_tools\\_and\\_resources/dacum\\_occupational\\_profile/](http://www.smallfarm.org/main/for_service_providers/tools_and_resources_for_working_with_new_farmers/nefi_tools_and_resources/dacum_occupational_profile/)

<sup>47</sup> <http://start2farm.gov/sites/default/files/g9%20-%20Annual%20Farmer%20Survey%20Interview.pdf>

range success of farmers: access to capital and credit, the availability of land, family obligations, and propensity for entrepreneurship, among others. Tracking the farmer participants for a number of years after they graduate the program can be useful to generate feedback about how the program has helped them in their chosen path, as well as to assess the externalized factors. It may be that some of these factors spark a new programmatic opportunity for your leadership team to consider as a new part of your project.

Other important key considerations for evaluation and assessment practices include:

- Evaluation and assessment protocols should be ongoing, not one-time activities. Strongly integrated evaluation mechanisms will allow you to track progress and changes over time.
- Don't forget to conduct pre-program evaluations and assessments. Solid baseline information is needed in order to truly evaluate progress.
- While evaluating the progress and success of your participating farmers is a definite area of focus, remember to also continually evaluate other aspects of your incubator farm project, such as:
  - Staff satisfaction
  - Partner and stakeholder engagement
  - Fiscal policies
  - Community perception and engagement
  - Land and environmental health assessments
  - Many other aspects
- It is important to be able to tell the story of your project in qualitative as well as quantitative ways. Ensure that your evaluation and assessment mechanisms gather both types of data. Quotes from participants can be very effective for sharing impacts with the community.
- Creativity is called for when determining key indicators for evaluation questions. Good key indicators have the following characteristics:
  - They are easily accessible. (Gathering information for key indicators should not require extensive new protocols.)
  - They are controlled. (Key indicators should be directly tied to what you are trying to discern, and any other mitigating factors should be limited, or at least accounted for.)
  - They respond to the evaluation question you are asking. (For example, a key indicator for the production quantity of participant farmers would be the 'amount of produce per crop variety produced in a season.' Using a key indicator of the 'amount of produce sold at market' would not be a good indicator—while the data would be much easier to collect, there are numerous other factors that can influence the amount of produce sold, including the marketer's ability, consumer knowledge, and price.

## Section 3: Scope of Incubator Farm Project

### 3.1 Key Standard Practices

#### ***Variety in Incubator Farms***

Every incubator farm is unique—considerations of land availability, local economy, access to markets, and types of agricultural methods practiced are just a few of the variables that determine the particular nature of any one incubator farm project. However, even within this variety, there are some practices that are standard among many incubator farms that have developed collectively and independently. The National Incubator Farm Training Initiative (NIFTI) of the New Entry Sustainable Farming Project has compiled a toolkit where many of these considerations are explained in great detail. The following information draws heavily from the NIFTI Farm Incubator Toolkit<sup>48</sup>, and is provided as an overview of some of the main aspects of developing and managing an Incubator Farm project. The general standard practices outlined should be used as a starting point for discussion among your leadership team, and not taken as hard-and-fast rules to abide by.

According to research compiled by Agudelo-Winther & Overton (2013) for the Toolkit, most incubator farms work to provide five categories of benefits to new farmers: land, infrastructure, knowledge, markets, and capital. These benefits take many forms, depending on the needs of the community, the needs of the participating farmers, and the capacity of the incubator farm organization.

#### ***Nationally-recognized farm incubator programs:***

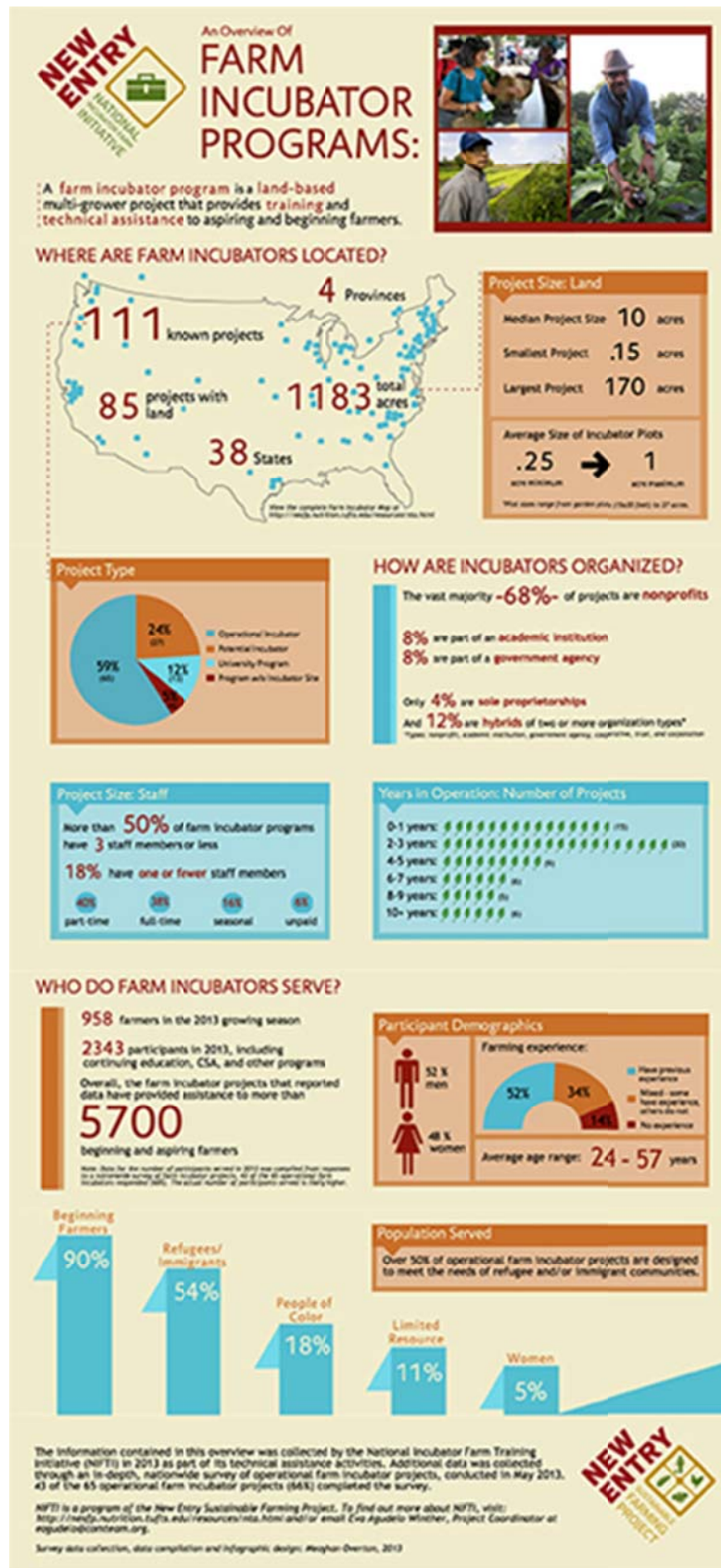
The following three programs have each been operating for over a decade, and provide well-documented insights into many aspects of starting and managing an incubator farm.

- The Intervale Center: Burlington, VT [www.intervale.org/](http://www.intervale.org/)
- The New Entry Sustainable Farming Project: Lowell, MA [www.nesfp.org/](http://www.nesfp.org/)
- The Agriculture and Land-Based Training Association: Salinas, CA [www.albafarmers.org](http://www.albafarmers.org)

New Entry produced an info-graphic in 2013 that details many aspects of incubator farms in the United States—their size, populations served, and organizational structure among other aspects. This graphic summarizes the results of a national incubator farm survey that revealed emerging trends among current and potential projects.

---

<sup>48</sup> Agudelo Winther, E., & Overton, M. (2013). The Farm Incubator Toolkit. New Entry Sustainable Farming Project. Retrieved: <http://nesfp.org/node/216>.



Incubator farms differ widely based on their geographic location. Successful projects have been started in urban areas, catering to new farmers that intend to grow high-value crops on intensively cultivated land, utilize permaculture or bio-intensive growing methods, irrigate with rainwater collected from nearby structures, and often integrate non-produce production schemes (such as aquaculture and honey production) in their practices to make up for the higher land rents. Rural farm incubators draw new farmers that typically (but not always) farm using more traditional methods: soil prep and cultivation with tractors, row cropping, and irrigation supplied by a well or nearby pond. Conversely, many rural farm incubator programs also utilize intensive production techniques, and some urban incubator farms can be less intensive than their location would suggest. However, according to Agudelo-Winther & Overton, most incubator farms teach and utilize organic and/or sustainable practices regardless of where they fall on the urban-rural spectrum.

The types of market outlets available represent another potential difference between rural and urban incubator farms: urban farmers generally have the opportunity to market their products directly to nearby restaurants, farmers' markets, and other direct-to-consumer markets. Because of their proximity to higher-value markets—and more markets in general—they can be more responsive to delivery times and more demanding in their pricing. Rural incubator farms often must rely on existing or new aggregation and distribution systems to get their products to a market, although many are still able to travel to a nearby farmers' market, grocer, restaurant, or institution. Because of the distance to higher-end markets and the likelihood that fewer outlets exist, rural farm incubators find that aggregation and distribution are often two areas of interest to participating farmers.

### ***Prerequisites for Farmer Applicants***

Incubator farms vary widely in their application requirements for beginning farmer participants, although many have found that at least a preliminary degree of individual research, consideration of the realities of becoming a small farmer, and documented access to the basic resources necessary to start a farm business are useful in selecting farmer participants that have the basic capacity for long-term success. The local economic and social conditions of your region, combined with the specific values and vision for your incubator farm project, will be factors in determining which prerequisites you require.

You may also decide to include certain eligibility requirements for participating in the incubator farm. Eligibility is most often a function of projects that have specific goals and objectives beyond training new farmers. For example, a project with the goal of training international refugees in sustainable income generating projects will either require that participants be refugees, or state clearly the refugees will be given preference during the application process. Low-resource individuals, women, and recently incarcerated persons are other examples of defined eligibility requirements.

Some incubator farm projects may decide that participant farmers must own, or have sustained access, to farmland where they can move their business after completion of the program. Lack of access to farmland is often cited as one of the most common reasons that beginning farmers



discontinue farming, and ensuring that your participant farmers have reasonably secure access to land before they begin the program can help in focusing your organization's efforts on farmers who are most likely to experience long-term success. However, many incubator farm projects are also working toward solving the land-access issue, and therefore would not use farmland access as prerequisite, instead focusing course attention on selecting and obtaining farmland.

Experience with gardening at a large scale is occasionally used by some existing projects as a prerequisite. The Elma C. Lomax Incubator Farm in Cabarrus County maintains an on-site community garden, where prospective incubator farm participants with limited horticultural experience are encouraged to grow for a year prior to applying to the program. This allows the potential applicant to "test" their desire to farm, and also gives them a chance to learn informally from others farming on-site and gain a better understanding of the workings of the incubator farm.

Requiring the completion of a preliminary business plan is another common prerequisite for participant farmers. A business plan would include a statement of the farmer's experience, an accurate accounting of their expected expenses and receipts, and a realistic plan for acquiring start-up capital, land access, and market outlets. Providing interested beginning farmers with a business plan template specific to farming would help to standardize the expectations for applying, as well as contribute to a general understanding of the planning that is required for starting a farm business.

The Elma C. Lomax Incubator Farm mentioned above requires the completion of an online initial training program for a minimal fee to build foundational knowledge<sup>49</sup>. The course ensures that all applicants have a base level of understanding of the requirements of commercial vegetable farming and realistic expectations of what is possible to accomplish through participation in the incubator farm program.

### ***Relationship with aggregators and existing markets***

Some farm incubator projects have integrated programs to help facilitate the sale of farm products grown at the farm, or grown by associated farmers or graduates of the program. Maverick Farms' Farm Incubator and Grower program (FIG) in Valle Crucis, NC is a good example of an integrated program: The organizers realized early on in the development of their farm incubator project that the lack of local markets for sustainable produce was one of the largest obstacles to success for new and beginning farmers. They established the High Country CSA to provide a consistent and reliable year-round outlet for the farm products of local farms. As they developed farmers through the FIG program, the established and successful CSA was there to provide a market for the new farmers<sup>50</sup>.

The Agriculture and Land-Based Training Association (ALBA) in Salinas, CA started a produce distributor (ALBA Organics) in 2002 to "support the sales and training needs of beginning farmers as an essential component to their development and success as entrepreneurs."<sup>51</sup> They have developed the project into a successful and competitive distributor that not only provides an outlet

<sup>49</sup> <http://lomaxfarm.org/lomax/about-the-farm/online-initial-training-program/>

<sup>50</sup> <http://maverickfarms.com/>

<sup>51</sup> [http://www.albafarmers.org/alba\\_organics.html](http://www.albafarmers.org/alba_organics.html)

for incubator farm produce and marketing experience for beginning farmers, but also brings in needed revenue to continue to support projects.

Not all incubator farm projects have established independent aggregation and distribution outlets like the two described above. Some partner with existing local aggregators, or simply sell at a local farmers market or on-site with a small farm stand. The needs and opportunities present in your regional food system as well as your project goals and vision statement will help in discerning the right direction for your incubator farm.

### ***Business Structure and Staffing***

Successful incubator farms have clear structures and consistent staff that can tend to the regular needs of the project. High administrative capacity from the inception of the farm project will ensure that the incubator farm project can focus on programming and on the needs of the participants. A solid visioning process that includes a diversified set of stakeholders early in the life of your project will lay a solid foundation for the organizational structure. However, your leadership team also needs to consider the pros and cons of different organizational structures. According to NIFTI's incubator farm survey, 68% of farm incubator projects are organized as a non-profit, while only 4% were sole-proprietorships. 8% are academic institutions or government agencies and the remaining 12% were a hybrid of the above<sup>52</sup>.

Consider the current and future needs of your project: Do the populations you wish to serve require specialized communication skills? (i.e. a foreign language or understanding of low-literacy communication.) Do your financing needs or leadership structure lend itself to partnering with a local university or government agency? Would you like for some administrative roles to be filled by farmer participants as part of their education and training?

Roles and responsibilities at incubator farm projects are quite variable, and respond to the particular needs and values of your project. According to research by Lelekacs & Morris, incubator farm staffs have widely varying responsibilities, including "recruiting, training, and leading workshops, writing and reviewing funding proposals, managing the farm budget, and managing relationships with existing farmers and other community stakeholders."<sup>53</sup> Additionally, they add that these same staff members are also relied upon to provide traditional farming duties such as equipment and infrastructure maintenance.

Staffing an incubator farm project is often an unexpected challenge for new projects that had previously relied solely upon sporadic volunteer labor. The enthusiasm of the original leadership team may wane over time, or an individual that your team had anticipated including as a vital part of the staff may move or take other employment. Initial funding for starting an incubator project dissipates over time, and staffing is often one of the largest items on the budget. Interns and

---

<sup>52</sup> Agudelo Winther, E., & Overton, M. (2013). The Farm Incubator Toolkit. New Entry Sustainable Farming Project. Retrieved: <http://nesfp.org/node/216>.

<sup>53</sup> Lelekacs, J., & Morris, M. (2013). Incubator Farms for North Carolina: A White Paper. <http://www.cefs.ncsu.edu/whatwedo/foodsystems/newfarmers/incubator-farms-for-nc.pdf>



volunteers can be an asset to an organization, but should not totally replace staff—these temporary workers, although unpaid, are not “free” to your organization. They take time to manage and direct, and require someone to ensure continuity of services and the preservation of institutional knowledge as interns and volunteers come and go.

Most incubator farms surveyed by NIFTI rely at least in part on volunteer or participant labor: 52.7% operated with limited staff (two or three staff members), and 18.2% had one or fewer. Of these, roughly half were full time, and half were part-time positions. Yet only 6% of the positions were unpaid<sup>54</sup>.

Unanticipated costs can place a huge stress on a beginning incubator farm. It is best to thoroughly consider all possible sources of expense during initial developmental stages and to plan accordingly. In the *Farm Incubator Toolkit*, NIFTI provides an excellent list of typical administrative costs associated with an incubator farm project. Note that these are exclusive of the costs of infrastructure and running the program—which can be unexpectedly costly in their own right—and instead simply reflect the administration of an organization.

- Salaries
- Professional development (conferences)
- Office supplies
- Mileage
- Phone/fax
- Rent
- Utilities/internet
- Computers
- Software
- database software
- website publishing
- file storage
- email management
- graphic design and editing software
- financial management/accounting
- postage
- consultants and paid interns
- annual audits/accounting services

---

<sup>54</sup> Agudelo Winther, E., & Overton, M. (2013). The Farm Incubator Toolkit. New Entry Sustainable Farming Project. Retrieved: <http://nesfp.org/node/216>.

As discussed above, incubator farm projects utilize a diversity of structures and staff resources to implement their programs. Lelekacs & Morris<sup>55</sup> provide current management structures and staffing for six currently operating incubator farm projects:

Incubator Farm	Management Structure	Farm/Management Staff
ALBA (Agriculture and Land-Based Training Program), Salinas and Las Lomas, CA	501(c)3 Non-profit	8 program and leadership staff
Elma C. Lomax Incubator Farm, Cabarrus County, NC	501(c)3 Non-profit	Part-time Farm Superintendent (county staff); two Cooperative Extension Agents provide training/technical assistance.
Intervale Center, Burlington, VT	501(c)3 Non-profit	15 employees (FT/PT)
New Entry Sustainable Farming Project, Lowell, MA	A partnership project between Tufts University and Community Teamwork, Inc. (501(c)3)	9 employees (FT/PT/Seasonal)
Onslow County Incubator Farm, Onslow County, NC	A partnership Program of Onslow County Farmers' Market – a 501(c)3 and Onslow County Cooperative Extension	1 program staff person, PT
PLANT@Breeze Farm Enterprise Incubator, Orange County, NC	Program of Orange County Cooperative Extension and Orange County Economic Development - Planning Committee - Friends of Breeze is a 501(c)3 that receives tax deductible contributions.	Part-time Orange County Ag. Economic Development Coordinator; two Cooperative Extension staff support the farm as a portion of their duties. PT farmer liaison/farm manager.

### ***Evaluation and Assessment***

Continual assessment and evaluation of the incubator farm project is necessary to create a flexible and responsive program that responds to the needs of your community. While crafting and adhering to a strong and meaningful vision statement is necessary to provide long-term direction and consistency for the organization, evaluation and assessment of your programs, of the project, and of the farmers themselves will help the effort to continually build and improve upon the work you are doing.

Making time and resources available for evaluation and assessment has been a struggle for many incubator farm projects. Typically, it is an administrative task that is done only in hindsight, and only when needed for funding purposes. However, approaching evaluation and assessment with this perspective misses many opportunities for organizational development and growth through the knowledge gained from well-executed evaluation mechanisms. Thoughtfully considering evaluation and assessment mechanisms from the beginning of your project development will ensure that they are well integrated, and it will be easier to ensure the timely and consistent completion of assessments.

<sup>55</sup> Lelekacs, J., & Morris, M. (2013). Incubator Farms for North Carolina: A White Paper. <http://www.cefs.ncsu.edu/whatwedo/foodsystems/newfarmers/incubator-farms-for-nc.pdf>

Refer to the NIFTI *Farm Incubator Toolkit*<sup>56</sup> and the section on Evaluation and Assessment Mechanisms within this document for more information on evaluating all aspects of your incubator farm project.

### ***Financing***

Gathering the funds to develop and initiate an incubator farm project can be difficult, and ensuring that there is a sustainable source of financing over time to ensure the long-term functioning of the project is equally important. Thinking of the funds required in two stages has been helpful to many projects—initial start-up (capital) costs, and ongoing organizational and facility support costs. There is no standard financial strategy among incubator farms, although many have found success in utilizing a combination of grant sources, fee-for-service programs, farmer participant fees, and farm-product sales.

Some trends were documented by NIFTI through their research for the *Farm Incubator Toolkit* regarding the source of incubator farm funding: Out of a 78.4% response rate from incubator farms across the United States, NIFTI found that “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 [the farm incubator] projects.”

Many incubator farms rely on participant farmer fees to cover at least a portion of their ongoing expenses, although the percentage contribution to the overall budget varies widely. Aside from generating revenue, many farm projects find that collecting fees for participation is important to ensure that new farmers understand and get accustomed to the costs and expenses they will incur when they graduate from the incubator farm program and are establishing independent farms. Expenses such as contract tractor service, or tractor expense depreciation on a purchased tractor; electricity for irrigation and cold storage, greenhouses, or other infrastructure; land rents; fence and path maintenance; among many other expenses are important to become aware of as a beginning farmer.

For more detailed information about incubator farm project financing, refer to Section 3 of the NIFTI *Farm Incubator Toolkit*<sup>57</sup>.

### ***Participant Focus***

NIFTI’s recent survey of US Incubator projects found that 53.8% aim to serve refugee and immigrant communities, while others mainly focus their efforts on serving socially disadvantaged

---

<sup>56</sup> Agudelo Winther, E., & Overton, M. (2013). The Farm Incubator Toolkit. New Entry Sustainable Farming Project. Retrieved: <http://nesfp.org/node/216>.

<sup>57</sup> Agudelo Winther, E., & Overton, M. (2013). The Farm Incubator Toolkit. New Entry Sustainable Farming Project. Retrieved: <http://nesfp.org/node/216>.

and limited resource farmers<sup>58</sup>. Nearly all were focused on serving beginning farmers as defined by the USDA<sup>59</sup>. Most incubator farm projects reported that their participants had some level of farming experience. Some projects require that participants have a baseline level of understanding and knowledge about the profession, while others are open to individuals interested in farming for the first time. Much like a new company would define a “target market,” ensure that your leadership team has come to clarity about the new farmers you hope to attract to the program. While there can be significant grant funding available to help certain populations (new immigrants and social disadvantaged farmers), take care to discern the needs of your community and the strengths and abilities of your organization when defining your participant focus. ‘Because there was money for it’ is not a great way to choose a participant focus.

### ***Support and Programming Offered***

Most incubator farms provide horticultural education, farm business training, farm planning, and current food safety handling training as a basic offering. Other programming foci to consider: land transition, farm financing, specialty crops training, specialized marketing education, and value-added processing and packing. This focus on “whole farm planning”—where the focus is not solely on production but includes the incubation of holistic businesses—is a theme among most incubator farm projects.

Transition strategies are another aspect of farmer training that many incubator farm projects are finding it necessary to address. Many mainstream agricultural lenders require a three-year history of farmer operation experience, production history, and Schedule F documentation (IRS form: Profit or Loss from Farming) in order to qualify for a line of credit that would allow for the purchase of land<sup>60</sup>. Considerations of your local and regional food system, partner agencies that may be able to assist farmers in transitioning (i.e. land trusts), and the cost of arable land are all factors that will help your leadership team develop a strategy and program around new farmer transitioning.

### ***Physical Infrastructure***

Some incubator projects are enacted on small plots of urban land, while many provide ¼ acre each for at least 10 farmers. In addition to the land, other infrastructure includes: access to irrigation, secure storage areas for equipment, produce cleaning and packing areas, cold storage, and hoop houses. Depending on the goals of the project and of the participating farmers, others provide additional infrastructure for other endeavors such as beekeeping, hothouses, aquaculture, vermicomposting, etc. All farms will require at a minimum fencing, irrigation, and appropriately

---

<sup>58</sup> Agudelo Winther, E., & Overton, M. (2013). The Farm Incubator Toolkit. New Entry Sustainable Farming Project. Retrieved: <http://nesfp.org/node/216>.

<sup>59</sup> The USDA defines beginning farmers and ranchers as “those who have operated a farm or ranch for 10 years or less either as a sole operator or with others who have operated a farm or ranch for 10 years or less.” From: <http://www.ers.usda.gov/publications/eib-economic-information-bulletin/eib53.aspx#.UoKLbpRg7U>.

<sup>60</sup> Lelekacs, J., & Morris, M. (2013). Incubator Farms for North Carolina: A White Paper. <http://www.cefs.ncsu.edu/whatwedo/foodsystems/newfarmers/incubator-farms-for-nc.pdf>

maintained paths. The following table, from Lelekacs & Morris<sup>61</sup> shows the land and infrastructure of several existing incubator projects.

<b>Incubator Farm</b>	<b>Facilities/Infrastructure</b>	<b>Land Tenure</b>
ALBA (Agriculture and Land Based Training Program), Salinas and Las Lomas, CA	Tractors and various implements, resource center, classrooms, maintenance workshop, produce cooler, distribution facility.	Rural Development Center (RDC) 110-acre organic farm. Farm Training and Research Center – 195-acre farm (60 acres in cultivation). Ownership: ALBA.
Elma C. Lomax Incubator Farm, Cabarrus County, NC	Greenhouse, high tunnel, post-harvest shed, walk-in cooler, tractor, irrigation hookups, security and deer fencing, tools in secure shed, office, classroom, and restroom.	Using 8 acres of 30.6 total acres. Ownership: Cabarrus County.
Intervale Center, Burlington, VT	Vegetable washing stations, coolers, tractors, hand tools, two greenhouses, multiple well water access points.	~350 acres managed by Intervale Center. Ownership: City of Burlington, Intervale Center, and private landowners.
New Entry Sustainable Farming Project, Lowell, MA	Hoop houses, storage sheds, irrigation, small equipment and tools, produce wash stations, electric fencing, walk-behind tractors, walk-in cooler.	Using ~25-30 acres (as of 2011). Ownership: Privately held leased land.
Onslow County Incubator Farm, Onslow County, NC	Hoop house, storage shed, irrigation, walk-in cooler, tractor service.	Using 10 acres Ownership: Privately held – 10-year lease.
PLANT@Breeze Farm Enterprise Incubator, Orange County, NC	BCS with rototiller and plow, mowers, small bush hog tractor (on loan), hand tools, irrigation system, two hoop houses, walk-in cooler, post-harvest wash area.	Using 5 acres of 269 total acres (99 acres open). Ownership: NC State University.
Raft Swamp Farms, Hoke County, NC	Greenhouse, hand tools, farm library, tractors, electricity, irrigation system.	~200 total acres (70 acres open). Ownership: Privately held.

***Resources for further information:***

- National Incubator Farm Training Initiative (New Entry Sustainable Farming Project)  
<http://nesfp.nutrition.tufts.edu/food-systems/national-incubator-farm-training-initiative>
  - Online resource library and in-depth webinars
  - Technical Assistance
  - National data gathering
- Bringing New Farmers to the Table (project of the Center for Environmental Farming Systems)  
<http://www.ncnewfarmers.org>
  - NC-specific information and resources
  - New Farmer Toolbox

<sup>61</sup> Lelekacs, J., & Morris, M. (2013). Incubator Farms for North Carolina: A White Paper.  
<http://www.cefs.ncsu.edu/whatwedo/foodsystems/newfarmers/incubator-farms-for-nc.pdf>

- Intervale Center (Vermont)  
<http://www.intervale.org/>
  - Farm incubator as well as other programs
  - Farm business development expertise
- Agriculture and Land-Based Training Association (ALBA)  
<http://www.albafarmers.org/>
  - Working Incubator Farm in Monterey, CA
  - Marketing and economic development focus



## Section 4: Developing Networks

### 4.1 Models of Marketing & Distribution

Whole farm planning, where farmer participants are trained in all aspects of farm business has long been the driving force behind farm incubator programming. Successful farmers must wear many hats; extensive knowledge of production, safe handling practices, marketing, accounting and bookkeeping, and the requisite coordination of these factors are all necessary factors for success. Since the goal is to create new farm businesses that are able to remain profitable long after their active participation in the incubator program, this attention to all aspects of farm business training is indeed a good goal for your farm incubator project. Along this line, some existing incubator farm projects have found it useful to incorporate distribution and marketing programs into their programmatic structure to achieve both farmer training and, in some cases, to generate sustained revenues for the incubator project. The farmers gain experience (and build their professional reputations) in selling to a variety of market outlets, through an established channel that serves to build community rapport and involvement. Furthermore, while the existence of an “in-house” marketing and distribution operation serves an educational purpose, allowing farmers to easily plug into an existing outlet also frees up time for them to focus on other aspects of whole farm planning, rather than developing a market outlet from scratch.

Four examples of existing distribution and marketing programs created by farm incubator projects are detailed below. Key areas of difference between the four examples, and questions for consideration are presented in concluding remarks.

#### ***ALBA (ALBA Organics)***

Salinas, CA

[http://www.albafarmers.org/alba\\_organics.html](http://www.albafarmers.org/alba_organics.html)

Although ALBA’s efforts in farmer organizing, education, and training began more than 40 years ago, ALBA Organics, a licensed produce distributor, was founded in 2002 to “support the sales and training needs of beginning farmers as an essential component to their development and success as entrepreneurs<sup>62</sup>.” The ALBA Organics program is an essential part of their farmer training program, specifically providing the new farmers with “vital technical assistance on crop planning, field production, post-harvest handling/packing, as well as the marketing for distribution to a variety of customers<sup>63</sup>.” They have an on-farm cooler, an off-site warehouse and distribution facility, and other delivery infrastructure to assist in these efforts. The specific training that they provide

---

<sup>62</sup> [http://www.albafarmers.org/alba\\_organics.html](http://www.albafarmers.org/alba_organics.html)

<sup>63</sup> [http://www.albafarmers.org/alba\\_organics.html](http://www.albafarmers.org/alba_organics.html)

includes “marketing education for farmers on packing and sales for wholesale and retail distribution, including food safety and quality control.”<sup>64</sup> Additionally, ALBA Organics includes in its mission statement the values of organic production techniques, supporting small-scale and limited-resource farmers, and economic success and sustainable livelihoods for farmers.

ALBA Organics is a separate business entity from the ALBA incubator program, and sells mainly wholesale fresh produce to schools, universities, institutions, and retail and restaurant establishments. ALBA utilizes produce grown by small-scale farmers associated with their program; some are currently farming on incubator farmland, while others have “graduated” yet continue to utilize this market outlet.

***Intervale Center (Intervale Food Hub)***  
Burlington, VT

<http://intervalefoodhub.com/>

The Intervale Food Hub is an online market that aggregates and sells produce and farm products from local (defined as Vermont-grown) produce from a variety of producers. It is owned by the Intervale Center, a 20+ year old non-profit dedicated to “strengthening community food systems through training, education, market development and social enterprise<sup>65</sup>.” After significant market research and assessment, the Intervale Food Hub was formed in 2007 with the goal of allowing farms to “share supply management and distribution functions while preserving the identity of their farm to consumers” among other goals<sup>66</sup>.

From their vision statement, other goals include:

- Supporting the use of sustainable and ecological production methods,
- Cultivating the local economy,
- Providing convenient, year-round delivery,
- Strengthening the relationship between the farmer and the public,
- Creating stable markets with fair prices,
- Educating, training, and supporting Vermont’s farmers

---

<sup>64</sup> [http://www.albafarmers.org/alba\\_organics.html](http://www.albafarmers.org/alba_organics.html)

<sup>65</sup> <http://intervalefoodhub.com/>

<sup>66</sup> <http://foodshedguide.org/cases/intervale-food-hub>

Through the multi-farm ‘CSA’ approach that they employ, The Intervale Food Hub offers local food “subscriptions”—weekly deliveries of seasonal produce and farm products— as well as an online retail marketplace where customers can order items “a la carte.”

The *National Good Food Network* has created an informative case study of the development of the Intervale Food Hub, available at this location: <http://foodshedguide.org/cases/intervale-food-hub>.

### ***New Entry Sustainable Farming Project (World PEAS Food Hub)***

<http://nesfp.nutrition.tufts.edu/world-peas-food-hub>

World PEAS Food Hub began as a cooperative in 2005 through the New Entry Sustainable Farming Project, with the goal of assisting beginning, immigrant, and refugee farmers establish farm business and to increase access of healthy, locally grown, and culturally appropriate foods. Because of their intention of working with a farmer population that does not generally have the language skills, time, volume, or transportation to seek out and create their own marketing opportunities, New Entry sought to assist in the creation of a cooperative that would combine the farm products grown in a manner that effectively and efficiently connects with local consumers. In 2013, World PEAS acquired a warehouse space, and now aggregates produce from over 30 farmers for sale to 450 CSA shareholders, in addition to community food assistance outlets, schools, institutions, and SNAP-eligible residents of their Lowell community<sup>67</sup>.

The World PEAS Food Hub serves as a market outlet for their producers, as well as a way to provide “producer-oriented” technical assistance to farmers, fulfilling a primary goal of the New Entry Incubator Farm.

### ***Maverick Farms FIG (High Country CSA)***

<http://highcountrycsa.org/>

Maverick Farms is a 501(c)3 non-profit founded in 2004 with a mission of “educating the community on the environmental and social benefits of small-scale farming.” The organizers were exploring the possibility of a Farm Incubator and Grower (FIG) program shortly after they organized, but soon realized there were no reasonably consistent and reliable market outlets for new farmers in the area. With that concern, Maverick Farms started its first CSA in 2005 with 10 subscribers. This effort expanded to become the High Country CSA in 2009 with 50 shares sold throughout the community, and drew on the produce and farm products from multiple local farmers. In 2011 the High Country CSA began an online, year-round “a la carte” multi-farm retail

---

<sup>67</sup> <http://nesfp.nutrition.tufts.edu/world-peas-food-hub>

market outlet, and has since expanded further<sup>68</sup>. With this market outlet for local produce well established, Maverick Farms returned their attention to the creation of the FIG program, and began accepting applications for participating farmers in 2012<sup>69</sup>.

While the High Country CSA began as an effort to aggregate and market farm products grown by new and beginning farmers, their strategy is unique in that they maintain an explicit goal of bridging the experience and perspectives of both new farmers, and multi-generation established farmers.

### ***Conclusion and Key Considerations***

The preceding four examples of incubator-farm-associated distribution and marketing activities demonstrate the diversity of approaches that exist to achieve training, market opportunity and revenue-generating goals. Key considerations to take into account when discerning options for your incubator farm are:

- Business structures differ based on the structure of the “parent” organization as well as the goals of the market outlet. ALBA Organics is a stand-alone company organized by the ALBA farmer training program, while Intervale Food Hub, World PEAS, and High Country CSA are programs of their corresponding incubator farm projects.
- Some projects have found success with online CSA or direct market sales, while others focus more on wholesale sales to institutions. What is best for your project will depend on the interests and capacities of the farmers you work with, as well as local market conditions.
- Most distribution and marketing projects associated with incubator farms began well after the establishment of the incubator farm. However, the model that Maverick Farms used—establishing a reliable market before training new farmers is a great strategy, especially if your project is in an area without existing, consistent outlets for the sale of locally produced food.

## **4.2 Lomax and Lowe’s Foods: A Case Study**

One common theme among incubator farm projects is the inclusion of education and support for the *business* side of farming. The role of incubator farms is to create and support new farm businesses that will experience long-term success. Therefore, ensuring that farmers understand and gain experience in selling to a variety of market outlets is an important facet of the programmatic offerings of an incubator farm project. The example outlined in this section highlights the process that one such incubator farm utilized in fulfilling that mission.

---

<sup>68</sup> J. Walker (2012) unpublished research

<sup>69</sup> emailed press release, January 8, 2012

A beginning farmer participant at an incubator farm in rural North Carolina had been having success selling at local farmers' markets and was interested in expanding to larger sales outlets. After attending a Retail Ready workshop presented by NC State University Cooperative Extension, the farmer was inspired to begin the process of selling to a large, regional grocery store. At the Retail Ready workshop, he learned that a particular grocer had a store just ten minutes from the incubator farm and was interested in purchasing local produce from small farmers in the area. The grocer was also engaged in discussions with NC State through the NC Growing Together program about facilitating purchases from local producers. The farmer contacted the Locally Grown Accounts Representative at the grocer's headquarters, and she connected him with the produce manager at his local store.

The farmer learned that the process was fairly straightforward: he would need to purchase additional insurance and register as a vendor with the grocery store. (The grocer requires a \$1 million general aggregate policy and a \$1 million product liability policy at a minimum.) The farmer felt that being part of the incubator farm helped to quickly connect him with the resources and knowledge that he required to accomplish those tasks, even though sales and marketing systems were not already in place as a function of the incubator farm itself.

Another benefit of participating in the incubator farm was that the farmer was able to easily and informally aggregate the produce of other farmers. This allowed him to fill out orders where his harvest was thin, while also creating opportunities for his fellow farmer participants to generate sales revenue and learn first-hand how the process works. Having a greater quantity of produce also allowed the farmer to be more competitive with other, larger vendors that service the local store. And because they farmed at the same physical location, aggregation and packing were much simpler. Infrastructure at the incubator farm was also a great benefit; their farm includes a walk-in cooler and post-harvest cleaning and packing facilities, making sorting and packing much easier and professional than it may have been for new farmers working independently without these resources.

The biggest learning curve that the farmer reported was learning how to estimate how much produce he would have ready for harvest when orders were due. It takes a fair amount of experience with each crop to build confidence in estimating, and farming at an incubator farm was a huge asset in this regard; the new farmers learn from one another and can easily share this highly localized information. Training in succession planning and harvest estimation are two aspects of new farmer education that all incubators should consider formalizing in training programs for aggregation and marketing.

Because this particular incubator farm is owned and partially funded by the County government, the farmer and the incubator farm project team both felt like it would be best for the farmer, rather than incubator staff, to take the leadership role in organizing the sales. This allowed the farmer to utilize the knowledge and resources provided by the incubator farm while building his farm business and farm brand within institutional outlets.

From the produce manager's perspective in this example, he has been extremely happy with the quality and shelf-life of the produce the incubator farmer delivered. He felt like the price point was

similar to the larger distributor he normally purchases product from, but found that the local farmer's products were far superior in quality.

Like any small beginning farmer, this new farmer has concerns about staying on the radar of the produce manager. It takes a very proactive farmer to make and complete regular institutional sales; it will always be easier for produce managers to rely on one or two national food distributors who have a much wider product menu and nearly unlimited quantities that can be delivered within an incredibly short time frame. However, there is much interest and enthusiasm on the part of grocery stores and other institutions for purchasing locally grown produce from small farmers, so it is well worth the effort to develop and utilize a consistent marketing strategy. Maintaining high quality, meeting production promises, and staying in communication with the produce manager are three important aspects of successful marketing of small farm products to grocery stores and institutions, and incubator farm programming and training can serve a much needed role in building the capacities of new farmers in achieving in these areas.

Other incubator farms, such as New Entry and ALBA, have taken a differing approach, formalizing sales and distribution channels through established brands and distribution systems. These programs allow the participant farmers to begin selling immediately through established channels, and in many cases remain suppliers even after they "graduate" from the farmer training program. There are many benefits to both methods, and your project team should think through your vision to see what provides the best programmatic strategy to your incubator farm.



## Section 5: Land Transition

Access to land has been discussed as a barrier to entry for new and beginning farmers around the country and in North Carolina. Once incubator farmers complete their tenure at the incubator they must move on. This requires them to acquire property, typically either by purchasing or leasing existing farmland. The land transition component is approached in many different ways and to different degrees by incubators nationwide. One of the most accessible models for land transition is New Entry's Farmland Matching Program.<sup>70</sup> It involved developing relationships with area farmers and providing them with a central organization to contact when they have farmland available. New Entry offers this program outside of their incubator, but preference is given to incubator farmers.

The New Entry Farmland Matching Program not only provides technical assistance to landowners and land-seekers, but also provides assistance to evaluate potential farmland, help land seekers access funding and USDA resources, and includes a substantial amount of outreach. The devil is in the details, and specifics will vary for any incubator farm, but the critical takeaway is for an incubator to devote a substantial amount of effort toward developing relationships around the area to identify farmland and to prioritize assisting new farmers in accessing resources they need to acquire land in some form. It is important to market your program heavily and make sure your visibility is consistent and your reputation is intact.

Cash rent data for counties within the Piedmont Together area showing prices for rental of irrigated, non-irrigated, and pasture land can be found in Appendix E. It is important for incubator clients to know and understand the costs of land prior to reaching this phase of incubation. This includes understanding associated costs such as developing infrastructure, tax obligations, etc. This should all be emphasized early during the business planning phase of the educational component.

## Section 6: Case Study: Hines Chapel Incubator Farm

### *Project Summary*

The Piedmont Conservation Council is developing an incubator farm on the Hines Chapel Preserve in McLeansville, NC. This incubator will address a widely recognized need across the Piedmont and across the United States to reduce the barriers of entry for farm ownership among beginning farmers. Business incubation is a common practice across many sectors of the economy, and in recent years has been rapidly evolving within the small-scale farming industry. Successful programs across the country are beginning to tap into local, state, and national initiatives to grow their incubation programs and to develop networks to share standard practices and success stories.

North Carolina has a long and rich heritage of family farms, but in recent decades the pressure and risks have increased and the market for small farmers has changed rapidly. From development

---

<sup>70</sup> <http://nesfp.nutrition.tufts.edu/farmland>

pressure due to urbanization to the rising costs of inputs and decreased profitability, many farms are no longer staying in the family. The average age of the North Carolina farmer is 57 according to the 2007 Census of Agriculture, up from 56 in 2002.<sup>71</sup>

There are numerous indicators that the local food movement has led to a dramatic rise in opportunity for small-scale producers, but there is a noticeable training gap as many newcomers to farming are not second and third – generation farmers like their predecessors. Incubator farms seek to fill that gap and help remove some of the primary obstacles for new farmers such as access to land and capital. The Hines Chapel Incubator Farm is one example of this emerging network of incubators. It will service the Piedmont region through a centralized location in Guilford County. Many valuable partners and collaborators are stepping up to the table to help plan and implement this incubator farm, and to find a way to compliment other statewide efforts to develop both the supply and the demand for local food.

In January 2014 the Guilford County Board of Commissioners voted to give permission to the Piedmont Conservation Council to enter into a lease with Guilford County for the purpose of developing and operating a farm incubator on a small portion of the 450 acre Hines Chapel Preserve.

This vote by the Board of Commissioners was the result of several years of project planning and development by a group of stakeholders from Guilford, Alamance, and Rockingham counties. The initial recommendation to develop this incubator farm made in the *2020 Guilford County Farmland Protection Plan: Preserving the Agricultural Economy* and similar needs were also recognized in Farmland Protection Plans developed for neighboring counties such as Rockingham and Alamance. These recommendations were the result of a number of trends including decreases in the number of family farms, rising demand for local produce including fruits & vegetables, rise in the average age of farmers, the threat of agricultural land being converted and developed, and a number of other trends highlighting the need to facilitate a new generation of farmers.<sup>72</sup>

The mission for Hines Chapel Incubator Farm (HCIF) is to establish a regional incubator farm for training in the arts, sciences, and business of growing and selling food and other agricultural products. This mission was established in the early planning stages of the incubator's development and focuses on the establishment of a farm incubator as a resource to new and beginning farmers (clients) in the region. It is intentionally inclusive to any viable agricultural products in order to encourage product diversification and income diversification for clients.

A kick-off meeting was held on September 13, 2012 (APPENDIX A – Business Plan) at Hines Chapel, located adjacent to the Hines Chapel Preserve. It was facilitated by the Center for Environmental Farming Systems (CEFS) and Fountainworks through the CEFS *Bringing New Farmers to the Table*<sup>73</sup> project. A group of 21 attendees was present including representatives from the community, Piedmont Conservation Council, the Center for Environmental Farming Systems, Elon University,

---

<sup>71</sup> <http://www.ncagr.gov/stats/census/highlights.htm>.

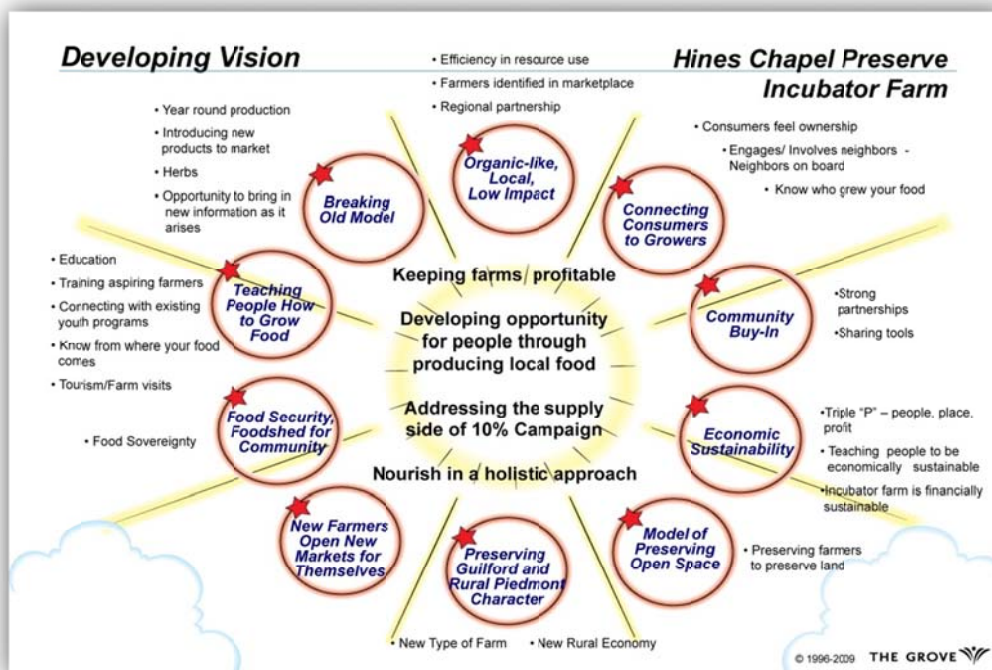
<sup>72</sup> <http://www.piedmontconservation.org/caswellfpp>.

<sup>73</sup> <http://www.cefs.ncsu.edu/whatwedo/foodsystems/incubatorfarmproject.html>

local Soil & Water Conservation Districts, NC Agricultural & Technical State University, the Guilford County Open Space Committee, and more. The primary purpose of this meeting was to bring together stakeholders to establish the vision and objectives for the project as well as identify local resources that could be utilized. The secondary purpose of the kickoff meeting was to identify individuals with diverse skill sets and backgrounds who would be willing to commit to serving on a steering committee to conduct more detailed planning, maintain project momentum, and guide the development process, as well as to provide continued oversight once the incubator is established.

The following mandala (Figure 1) represents the vision themes identified that day, which have since been revised slightly by the project steering committee that was established in the kickoff meeting.

Figure 4



As shown in Figure 1, the primary vision themes of the incubator development project are:

- Keeping farms profitable
- Developing opportunity for people through producing local food
- Addressing the supply side of the 10% Campaign
- Nourish in a holistic approach

Additional sub-themes were adopted such as breaking the “old model” of agriculture, providing a model of preserving open space, preserving the rural character of the region, developing community buy-in, fostering economic sustainability, etc. Another visioning characteristic of note which was not included as part of the adopted vision but remains critical to the incubator’s

development and implementation is to focus the intensified *training* on beginning farmers who do not have the resources for an initial land purchase, while incorporating components of *education* that could be available to the broader farming community or to the general public. This strategy is intended to develop and maintain a stronger community connection for the incubator and emphasize the need for education and outreach on both the supply side and demand side of local food. One core component of the intended consumer education is to define “local” as regional rather than allowing it to be defined impractically by county boundaries.

The kickoff meeting in 2012 also served to establish goals & objectives for the incubator upon development. The following goals were established as necessary to achieve in a 3-5 year timeframe:

1. New farmers are growing on the land at Hines Chapel Preserve
2. Provide a professional training program for new farmers
3. Enable new farmers to sell food/agricultural products in the region
4. The planning group expanded on the incubator’s goals by establishing the following 5-7 year goals recognized as highly important in order to maintain programmatic credibility, client recruitment, stakeholder commitment, and financial viability:
5. Transition new farm businesses to independent farmland
6. Establish a multi-use purpose to the farmland (e.g. potential research opportunities and/or sub-lease of additional fields)

A full version of the draft Hines Chapel Incubator Farm Business Plan can be found in Appendix F. In addition to the above information on the project, a detailed marketing plan and management plan as well as projected budgets for the first two years of operation can be found in the draft HCIF Business Plan.

### ***Next Steps for Hines Chapel Incubator Farm***

The Hines Chapel Incubator Farm is currently still in the planning stages and is scheduled (pending funding) to begin operation in 2015. There are a number of steps that must be taken over the next year in order to prepare the incubator for launch, including some of the following:

1. Continue survey work with potential incubator farmers (ongoing through summer 2014)
2. Identify target demographic for programming (summer 2014)
3. Finalize lease with Guilford County (May 2014)
4. Develop and finalize land lease packets for incubator clients (summer 2014)
5. Develop media/publicity plan (May 2014)
6. Begin official client recruitment (June 2014)
7. Finalize pre-requisite training plan for prospective clients (July 2014)
8. Secure funding for site development and staffing for first 2 years of operation (ongoing through September 2014)
9. Identify farm manager (October 2014)
10. Finalize education/training curriculum (October 2014)
11. Complete necessary infrastructure development (January 2015)

## Section 9: Literature Review

Regional food systems in Piedmont communities are a dynamic and evolving area for generating economic growth and creating livable, resilient communities; and incubator farms are at the nexus of effecting actionable change through generating and supporting new farmers.

While many food system development projects look to small-scale farming and direct-retail sales at farmers' markets for incremental growth, the potential for sustained, integrated, and positive growth is much, much larger. The 2010 State Action Guide produced by the Center for Environmental Farming Systems identified major areas of focus for the continued development of a robust local food system North Carolina. Among those issues identified, the development of new aggregation and processing capacities for small-scale producers, the preservation of arable farmland, and the recruitment and training of new farmers were highlighted as significant areas of focus. Attention should also be given to the continued development of institutional buying programs and consumer marketing efforts to ensure that demand for locally produced food remains high.

The following literature provides useful background information for understanding the larger context of food system development so that the opportunities of incubator farms can be better understood.

### ***General Food System Literature***

Conner, D. S., Knudson, W. A., Hamm, M. W., & Peterson, H. C. (2008). The Food System as an Economic Driver: Strategies and Applications for Michigan. *Journal of Hunger & Environmental Nutrition*, 3(4), 371–383.

*An exploration of quantifying the economic and jobs impact of strengthening a local food system.*

Curtis, J., Creamer, N., & Thraves, T. E. (April, 2010). From farm to fork: A guide to building North Carolina's sustainable local food economy, Center for Environmental Farming Systems, Raleigh, NC. Retrieved from: <http://www.cefs.ncsu.edu/resources/stateactionguide2010.pdf>

*Statewide action guide created through a two-year "Farm to Fork" initiative, gathering knowledge and perspective of more than 1,000 food system participants across the state. The action guide details the knowledge gained and articulates action items and strategies for creating a more robust local food system in the state.*

Dunning, R. (2013, August). Research-Based Support and Extension Outreach for Local Food Systems. Center for Environmental Farming Systems.

*Collection of key findings and research related to support and extension outreach for local food systems—the economic, health, and environmental benefits of local food systems.*

McCullum, C., Desjardins, E., Kraak, V. I., Ladipo, P., & Costello, H. (2005). Evidence-based strategies to build community food security. *Journal of the American Dietetic Association*, 105(2), 278–283.

*General, evidence-based research on food systems change, and the stages of change in building local, sustainable food systems. Focus on community food security.*

Mount, P. (2012). Growing local food: scale and local food systems governance. *Agriculture and Human Values*, 29(1), 107–121.

*Discusses the issues and opportunities present in scaling up local food systems, and their governance and management. Describes how scale affects the perception and legitimacy of the local food system, and contributes to optimism around the development of regional food hubs.*

Skertich, R. L., Johnson, D. E. A., & Comfort, L. K. (2013). A Bad Time for Disaster Economic Stress and Disaster Resilience. *Administration & Society*, 45(2), 145–166.

*Not specific to food, but a useful discussion of the potential of interagency cooperation in the creation of distributed systems that work toward building “whole communities” and economic resiliency.*

Williams, J. (2012). Authenticity and Success in Marketing “Local” in Retail Grocery Settings. Center for Environmental Farming Systems. [http://www.ncgrowingtogether.org/?page\\_id=412](http://www.ncgrowingtogether.org/?page_id=412)

*Thorough examination of local foods retailing operations—lessons learned, key findings, and annotated literature review specific to retail operations.*

### ***Aggregation and Processing***

Block, D., Thompson, M., Euken, J., Liquori, T., Fear, F., & Baldwin, S. (2008). Engagement for transformation: Value webs for local food system development. *Agriculture & Human Values*, 25(3), 379–388.

*Community partnerships in the “value web”— examples of University/community partnerships that contribute to local food system development.*

Bloom, J. D., & Hinrichs, C. C. (2011). Moving local food through conventional food system infrastructure: Value chain framework comparisons and insights. *Renewable Agriculture and Food Systems*, 26(01), 13–23.

*Two case studies are presented that detail the food distribution networks of local food systems—rural and urban—with a focus on “scaling up”, ownership models, and the technical aspects of distribution and processing.*

Day-Farnsworth, L., McCown, B., Miller, M., & Pfeiffer, A. (2009, December). Scaling Up: Meeting the Demand for Local Food. UW-Extension Ag Innovation Center UW-Madison Center for Integrated Agricultural Systems.



*Report detailing the research results from interviewing 11 local food entrepreneurs about the bottlenecks and other obstacles they face in moving large amounts of local food into mainstream markets.*

Feagan, R. (2007). The place of food: mapping out the “local” in local food systems. *Progress in Human Geography*, 31(1), 23–42.

*Research pertaining to current consumer definitions of “local food” to better understand regional aggregation and processing opportunities and possibilities.*

Hinrichs, C. C. (2003). The practice and politics of food system localization. *Journal of Rural Studies*, 19(1), 33–45.

*Provides closer scrutiny of the idea of “local food” for the purposes of understanding the tension between defensiveness and diversity in efforts to localize a food system.*

Lev, L., Brewer, L., & Stephenson, G. (2003, December). How Do Farmers’ Markets Affect Neighboring Businesses? Oregon State University Extension Service.

*Slightly dated report that documents the “spill-over” effects of farmers’ market shoppers on nearby business. They found that for every dollar spent at a farmers market, \$0.60 was spent at a local business.*

Marsden, T., Banks, J., & Bristow, G. (2000). Food Supply Chain Approaches: Exploring their Role in Rural Development. *Sociologia Ruralis*, 40(4), 424–438.

*Research provides framework for understanding “short” or “alternative” food supply chains in the broader discussion of rural economic development.*

### **Farmland Preservation**

Clancy, K., & Ruhf, K. (2010). Is local enough? Some arguments for regional food systems. *Choices*, 25(1), 123–135.

*Discusses the need for regional planning approach to food system development, and presents the case that local and regional are not synonymous. Provides an articulated vision of regionalism for food system development that situates farmland preservation in a larger context.*

Gatrell, J. D., Reid, N., & Ross, P. (2011). Local food systems, deserts, and maps: The spatial dynamics and policy implications of food geography. *Applied Geography*, 31(4), 1195–1196.

*This introduction to the *Applied Geography* journal focuses on understanding the spatial/geographic issues within the food system and provides an overview of the associated disciplines, current research, and issues being addressed by contemporary researchers.*

Brodt, S., Feenstra, G., Kozloff, R., Klonsky, K., & Tourte, L. (2006). Farmer-Community Connections and the Future of Ecological Agriculture in California. *Agriculture and Human Values*, 23(1), 75–88.

*Draws links between the promotion and acceptance of sustainable and ecological farming practices and farmland preservation efforts, among other food system aspects.*

Duram, L., & Oberholtzer, L. (2010). A geographic approach to place and natural resource use in local food systems. *Renewable Agriculture and Food Systems*, 25(Special Issue 02), 99–108.  
doi:10.1017/S1742170510000104

*Research pertaining to the limited-resource aspects of farming and food systems: place and geography of local food.*

Mariola, M. J. (2005). Losing ground: Farmland preservation, economic utilitarianism, and the erosion of the agrarian ideal. *Agriculture and Human Values*, 22(2), 209–223.

*The author presents a critique of farmland preservation tactics based on historical research into the origins of the movement and argues that instead of relying on utilitarian justifications, preservationists should incorporate agrarian ethics in order to maintain both integrity and effectiveness.*

### ***Recruitment and Training of New Farmers***

Agudelo Winther, E., & Overton, M. (2013). The Farm Incubator Toolkit. New Entry Sustainable Farming Project. Retrieved from <http://nesfp.org/node/216>

*A current and thorough document detailing many aspects of starting and managing an incubator farm program.*

Bendfeldt, E. S., Walker, M., Bunn, T., Martin, L., & Barrow, M. (2011, May). A Community-Based Food System: Building Health, Wealth, Connection, and Capacity as the Foundation of Our Economic Future. Virginia Cooperative Extension.

*Understanding incubator farms in the context of larger food system efforts. This document provides a thorough overview of the community-development process of building a local or regional food system.*

Ewert, B. M. (2012). Understanding Incubator Farms. Harvard University, Cambridge, Mass. Retrieved from [http://etd.lib.umt.edu/theses/available/etd-06192012-135554/unrestricted/Ewert\\_Brianna\\_thesis.pdf](http://etd.lib.umt.edu/theses/available/etd-06192012-135554/unrestricted/Ewert_Brianna_thesis.pdf)

*Graduate thesis that presents a comprehensive set of case studies for understanding different characteristics of incubator farms, farmer training, and project development.*

Goddeeris, L. (2012). Cultivating Thriving Communities Through Food Systems. *Public Management* (00333611), 94(5), 24.

*The role of local governments in supporting local and regional food systems—the need for significant community partnerships and a culture of community involvement.*

Kilpatrick, S., & Johns, S. (2003). How farmers learn: Different approaches to change. *The Journal of Agricultural Education and Extension*, 9(4), 151–164.

*The author presents the benefits associated with several different methods of farmer learning, education, and information exchange. The professionalization of farming is examined, specifically in the context of change and information sharing.*

Lelekacs, Joanna Massey, O'Sullivan, John, Morris, Mike, and Creamer, Nancy. Incubator Farms as Beginning Farmer Support. *Journal of Extension*. In Press as of September 2013.

*Examination of the opportunities present in the continued development of incubator farms as a response to barriers experienced by new and beginning farmers, and Extension's possible role in supporting their design and development.*

Lelekacs, J., & Morris, M. (2013). Incubator Farms for North Carolina: A White Paper. <http://www.cefs.ncsu.edu/whatwedo/foodsystems/newfarmers/incubator-farms-for-nc.pdf>

*Thorough overview of existing incubator farms, with a focus on opportunities and possibilities for North Carolina. Contains detailed information regarding the organizational structure and physical infrastructure of incubator farms.*

Mailfert, K. (2007). New Farmers and Networks: How Beginning Farmers Build Social Connections in France. *Tijdschrift voor economische en sociale geografie*, 98(1), 21–31.

*An examination of how new farmers build social connections. (Note: examples used for research are in France.) Although not specific to incubator programs, the article documents the need for building sustained social connections between new farmers and the existing agricultural community.*

## **Section 10: Conclusion and Recommendation(s)**

There are a number of steps that could be taken across the Piedmont Triad to facilitate further development of beginning farmer training initiatives and develop more incubator programs. Hines Chapel Incubator Farm will be a launching point for assessing the current need and demographics of the population to be served by such programming. This incubator could serve as a catalyst for recruiting more beginning farmers to participate in farm incubators across the region. Other steps could be taken to make the current environment more conducive to beginning farmer success as well:

1. Goal 1: Facilitate identification of beginning farmers and connect them to appropriate programming for assistance:
  - a. Action Item 1: Develop regional database of beginning farmer business development services offered in the Piedmont.
  - b. Action Item 2: Create an online hub for beginning farmer communication with service providers that can match participants with appropriate and accessible programming.
2. Goal 2: Connect beginning farmers with capital:
  - a. Action Item 1: Support regional informational roundtables between beginning farmers and loan providers or local food investors to educate beginning farmers on steps needed to acquire sufficient funding for startup.
  - b. Action Item 2: Highlight ongoing financial training opportunities on database created through Goal 1.
3. Goal 3: Facilitate connection for beginning farmers and available land:
  - a. Action Item 1: Hold roundtable with key organizations providing beginning farmer training and identify organization to lead effort of connecting beginning farmers to land.
  - b. Action Item 2: Provide support for point-organization to develop regional connections with landowners and beginning farmers to begin process of land matching.
  - c. Action 3: Provide support for host online database to display profiles of available land and potential buyers/renters for agricultural use.
  - d. Action 4: Facilitate semi-annual networking events for landowners and beginning farmers.