The Intervale Center

Strengthening Community Food Systems in Burlington, Vermont

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Overview

The Intervale
- Food Systems Work
- Context for Incubation

Farm Incubation
- The Basics
- Intervale Farms Program
- Program Structure
- Infrastructure
- Management

Discussion
What We Do

The Intervale Center’s mission is to strengthen community food systems.

Food Hub- Aggregate, Market and Distribute local food.

Success on Farms- Business planning for established farmers across Vermont.

Intervale Conservation Nursery- Growing plants for streambank restoration along farm fields.

Farms Program- Growing new farmers through farm incubation.

Consulting- Sharing our model with others.

Care and maintenance of 350 acres of land.
Community Food Systems

A sustainable community food system integrates **production**, **processing**, **distribution**, and **consumption** in ways that enhance the environmental, economic, social, and nutritional health of a particular place.

Based on Washington State University definition.

- Profitable Farms
- Access to Land
- Good Land Stewardship
- Diversified Production and Markets
- Local Processing/Storage/Distribution
- Eaters Who Value Local Food
- Local Waste Management Systems
- Public/Private/Social Partnerships
- Good Food Policy
The Case for Growing New Farmers

- According to the 2007 Agricultural Census, the average age of farmers in the US is over 57 years old.

- In the northeast, there are twice as many farmers over the age of 65 as under 35.

- In 2008, the USDA predicted that 70% of all farmland in the United States will change hands in the next 30 years.

- At the same time, we are experiencing a surge in interest in local and organic food.

- Who will take over this land and fulfill the needs of this growing market?
History of Incubation

- Developed by Joe Mancuso in 1959 in Batavia, NY.
- He rented out a large industrial complex to multiple tenants and provided shared office space, assistance with capital acquisition, and business advice.
- Term incubation was jokingly coined as one of his original tenants was a chicken hatchery.
- Since then, this concept has been applied widely to the development of industrial and science research parks that commercialize projects.
- Most work with high tech innovators, focusing on new product development and companies with large growth potential.
Farm Incubation across North America

- Agriculture and Land-Based Training Association (ALBA); Salinas, CA
- Farm Start; Guelph, Ontario, CA
- New Roots for Refugees; Kansas City, KA
- New Entry Sustainable Agriculture Project; Boston, MA
- New Farms for New Americans; Burlington, VT
- Prairie Crossing; Grayslake, IL
- Raft Swamp Farms; Antioch, NC
The Farms Program

Incubating New Farmers & Growing Food for Our Community
The Farms Program: Objectives

- Access to training
- Access to land
- Access to capital
- Access to markets
- Farm experience
- Reduce farmer isolation
- Produce food
The Farms Program: Structure

**Incubator Farms:** 1-3 years
Intervale provides 20% cost share on Intervale fees

**Enterprise Farms:** 4-5 years
Farmers pay 100% of Intervale fees, at end of year 5, farmers graduate.

**Mentor Farms:** 6 plus years
Farmers pay 100% of Intervale fees, offer volunteer time to the program and sponsor an Incubator Farm

**Next:** Combining Incubator and Enterprise stages and streamlining services.

Policy development on becoming a mentor.
The Farms Program: Infrastructure

- Intervale Farmers Equipment Company, LLC was established in 2007 with grant support
- Owns 2 greenhouses, 4 tractors and various implements
- Rents to members at cost effective rates
- Purchases decided collaboratively
- Maintenance and repairs shared
- Farms build equity in LLC
- Oversight by Board of Directors (2 IC and 4 farms)

Next: Reassessing Intervale Center’s role in this LLC and transitioning further assets to IFEC
The Farms Program: Recruitment

• Recruit from local colleges, word of mouth, occasional presentations & open houses
• Often 30 or more inquiries each year initially, 10 of them seriously considering applying
• They work with program staff to prepare a business plan
• Staff makes initial assessment regarding whether a farm can proceed with application
• By the time it comes to approval, there are usually ~2-3 farms making it through whole process each year
• Total staff time in this process about 10 hours per applicant
• Then proceed to farmers and land committee for final approval
The Farms Program: Management

• Recruitment and enrollment
• Business planning
• Lease negotiation and oversight
• Land, infrastructure and equipment
• Billing and budget management
• Fundraising
• Regulatory compliance
• Strategic planning
The Farms Program: Farm Numbers (2009)

- 11 farms, ~120 acres cultivated
- 53 full- and part-time jobs
- Farm size from 0.5 to 56 acres. Average size is 10.9 acres. Age from 1 to over 15 yrs.
- 618 total CSA shares & 5 farms contributed to Food Hub CSA.
- 8 of 11 attended at least 1 farmers’ market per week
- 5 identified as primarily wholesale
- Individual farm sales from less than $8k to nearly $325k.
- Over $1 million in gross sales combined.
The Farms Program: Participation history

- 43 farms have participated in the Farms Program
- 4 are current incubators
- 8 farms are current mentors in the Intervale
- 13 farms continue to farm outside the Intervale
- 4 known farm failures (3 by year 3, 1 at enterprise stage)
- 3 farm businesses sold to new owners
- 11 unknown

Next: Working with Vermont Land Trust on surveying five Farms Program grads placed on VLT lands to assess transition

Farmland Access Network will assess appropriate locations for farm transition post incubation
Upcoming Program Development

**Infrastructure**
- Mentor farms need increased infrastructure
- Hoop houses and FEMA

**Land**
- Better water quality
- More land needed
- Improved access roads

**Long Term Viability**
- Transferability of leases
- Length of leases
- Livestock policies
- Long term planning
“Being at the Intervale with...shared infrastructure and start-up guidance is a huge help. And being around other farmers who have a bunch of experience is the best.” – Bobby Young, Hens and Hands CSA
Thank You
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