

Enhancing economic development
in rural Ohio by establishing new
cooperatives and strengthening
existing cooperatives.



Incubator Farms FAQ

(Centers to Assist Local Foods Workforce and Economic Development)

What are they?

- **Local foods training and business development farms** - Farms may support grower's skills training and business development services, education and research programs of participating community colleges, apprenticeships programs, high school career programs, community food hubs, and community education and awareness activities.
- **Designed mainly for training growers and supporting grower business formations** - Farm training and business development services may also be extended to other areas of local food industry operations such as food preserving, processing, cooking, marketing, distribution, etc.
- **Serve as a classroom/lab for certificate programs, apprenticeship training programs, and/or continuing education** - Farm managers and/or staff could be employed by the certificate and/or apprenticeship program providers as related technical instructors and/or adjunct professors.

Why do we need them?

- **New grower-trainees need to fully experience a profitable, productive, working farm** - Trainees need to know what it is like to work full days and in extreme weather conditions. Training experiences could be paid, non-paid, and/or based on commission. Even part-time existing grower-trainees who are thinking about expanding to a full-time farming operation may need this type of experience.
- **To reduce the start-up and maintenance cost for certificate and/or apprenticeship program providers** - Many providers do not have the funds or do not want to commit funds from their institution to provide this program lab experience. Incubator farms can help meet this need.
- **Larger incubator farms could also provide longer training times and/or temporary employment for some trainees** - Some programs may have trainees that need more supervised training to help them get ready to start their own business, obtain employment, or achieve the needed job skills for their future career goals.

What do they look like?

- **Incubator farms could be provided on the training program's campus** - Provider needs to provide a cost-effective, fully profitable, productive, working farm including field, greenhouse, and tunnel facility experiences as well as retail and wholesale marketing.

- **Incubator farms could be provided on a non-profit farm** - Non-profit farms may provide the most cost-effective operation providing approximately 25 acres or greater and greenhouse and/or tunnel facilities supporting a fully profitable, productive, working farm experience as well as retail and wholesale marketing. Some farms may include overnight lodging such as YMCA/Church camps.
- **Incubator farms could be provided on a for-profit operation** - For-profit operations may also provide a profitable, productive, working farm experience. The provider must be careful to have a comprehensive work experience that is needed to support the total industry and multiple product production training needs as well as retail and wholesale marketing. This requirement could reduce profits for a portion of the farm.

How do we run them?

- **Operations should be directed by a board of directors** - Many times this effort should be operated by a legal cooperative that is a traditional or a worker-owner business structure.
- **Provide an on-site, full-time, farm manager** - Many incubator farms have barns, out buildings, and a house which could be used for storage and the farm manager's residence as part of their compensation for their job responsibilities.
- **Use trainees and volunteer labor to help operate the farm** - Caution is called for in using trainees to help break even or make a profit which could be in conflict with the trainees' education and business development goals. This could be controlled with required task experience checklists.

How do we finance them?

- **Incubator farms can be financed by one or more of the following:**
 - ✓ Sale of products produced on the farm
 - ✓ Support from the community college such as for trainer salary and training supplies
 - ✓ Employer and/or trainee tuition and fees
 - ✓ Farm and facilities provided by the non-profit farms
 - ✓ One-Stop Centers support for testing, training cost, travel, food stamps (SNAP), etc.
 - ✓ Grants, foundations, community organizations, private contributions, etc.

(Business plans and financial projections should be developed and maintained for this effort)

Where should they be located?

- **Farms usually need to be located near training sites** - Participating community colleges and incubator farms' location should take into consideration the need to have access to the training sites within a reasonable/acceptable commute for trainees or make arrangement for this need.
- **Farms also need to be located near trainee pools** - Trainee pools should include unemployed, underemployed, emigrant communities, etc. with numbers needed to be successful with recruitment and screening of acceptable trainees and/or apprentices. Incubator farms will need to help with student recruitment, business development, and placement.
- **Farms also need to be located near needed operational resources** - May include such resources as water, good soil, good customers, distribution options, processing facilities, etc.



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