Abstract:

Incubator farms and land tenure promote unique opportunities and challenges for beginning farmers and organizations. This precedent report assesses various business models for incubator farms or farmer collaborative organizations. In addition, a literature review was conducted to understand specific constraints and suggestions for this type of management structure. Based on the research, considerations for Global Greens in regard to land tenure and business potential include:

- Supportive policy advocacy for supported public farmland; including partnerships with landtrusts or farmland preservation organizations
- Collaboration with city or county planners to incorporate development strategies that incorporate farmland access
- Potential program collaborators: SARE | Land Link | Beginning Farmer Center | Center for Rural Affairs | Growing New Farmers Project
- Consider collaborations for research, project development with local Universities or colleges
- Consider offering additional programming or training opportunities outside of refugee clients that may be able to pull in additional revenue streams
Overview:

Incubator farms are known to provide farmer training in specific types of agricultural production and business practices. Typically, this also includes potential for farmland lease arrangements or landlink programs following the training program. (Calo & Teigen De Master, Winter 2015-2016). Many incubator programs are managed by non-profits with specific clientele and value systems which may include a range of minority or underserved populations. A recent survey by the National Farm Incubator Initiative was conducted with 65 incubator programs and found “over 50% aim[ed] to serve refugee and immigrant communities” (Agudelo Winther & Overton, 2013, p. 14).

Unfortunately, a primary issue of these types of programs is land access for farmers to continue their business after completing the training portion. This can be due to several different situations including racial justice, access to financial capital, and new land tenant relations. Many beginning farmers lack access to capital, technology, etc. to pursue the purchase of property right out of training. There is also a gap in access to land due to the current industrialized system influences including knowledge, resources and educational programming. We are still faced with challenges to acquire institutional and local support for building capacity and gaining access to local and sustainable markets, capital, land tenure, training, and education (Niewolny & Lillard, August 2010).

Additional needs in regard to access to markets are frequently filled through the development of organizational support through aggregation (Nelson & Landman, 2015) (Local Economies Project, 2013). A recent study, A Practical Guide to Evaluating Community Food Hubs, articulates different types, scales, and models for food hubs. This is a helpful tool to address various needs and feasibility for programming. It also highlights the need for evaluation and assessment of the capacity of both production and market (Nelson & Landman, 2015). Food hubs range in capacity for purchasing from suppliers, within the third and 5th year of a food hub, around 31 producers or suppliers is average (Colasanti, et al., 2018).

Because of these challenges, there are several thoughts on ways policymakers and advocates can support the issue regarding advocating for change in distribution of land (Niewolny & Lillard, August 2010). In addition, not all paths to farm ownership are the same, or need to be. Individually, farmers may pursue different land tenant agreements, loans, and strategic financing options. Alternatively, exploring collaboration between land-trusts may be a viable option. Apart from individual based farming options, additional recommendations are at the community level. As an organization that supports farmer-training and incubators, it is worth exploring collaborative opportunities for community-based learning, implement participatory and experiential learning, and new marketing techniques to further develop a diverse marketing approach for the training program. Relationships are critical to both incubator farm development as well as aggregation facilities. This common denominator holds true for internal organizations and training with producers, as well as market development with buyers. Additional best practices related to food hub and aggregation specifically are shared from (Local Economies Project, 2013), launch hub with an anchor, assist farms with packaging and food safety certifications, provide inventory management and quality control, market high value products that include source identification, be sure to address and share seasonality. Challenges that continue to be seen, even among best practices include financial viability and staffing (Local Economies Project, 2013).
Case Study Report:

Based on the needs of Global Greens, a case study report was developed to assess best practices nationally around business model, marketing strategy, land acquisition, incubator program, educational training practices, and cooperative aggregation and distribution strategies. The following highlights a matrix each section based on the business and relevance to Global Greens. Subsequent sections detail each organization.

An abstract of each section to share practices are below, and then a matrix regarding specific organizations.

**Business Model:** Includes legal structures and enterprise types. A majority of food hubs are formed as non-profits, while others include for profit and LLCs as well as other corporations. Additionally, others for as cooperative models that are producer, consumer or hybrid collaboratives. (Colasanti, et al., 2018)

Within the business model section, includes discussion on the reason for the business, whether social or profit based. There is yet another model emerging- the triple bottom-line. This section discusses best practices on an array of business components. Another component of the business model includes finance. By business model, direct to consumer and hybrid models tend to fare more profitably than wholesale businesses (Colasanti, et al., 2018)

**Marketing Strategy:** As this creative endeavor emerges, marketing is a critical piece of sharing the word. It is still understood that many food hubs and incubator farms are unknown in many communities (Colasanti, et al., 2018) (Ewert, 2012). The Marketing strategy section looks at best practices of sharing the message of the organization and business to customers and the overall public.

**Land Acquisition:** Land is continually a constraint for farmers regarding access to and affordability of land (Beckett & Galt, 2014). As it relates to land access for farming, this section highlights best practices and partnerships regarding access to land whether through purchases or common agreements.

**Incubator Program:** Farm incubators typically support beginning farmers in their access to land as well as business and market development. This type of program provides initial support and then gradual promotes the sustainability of the individual farmer to learn to be self-sufficient within their business model.

**Educational Program:** Many different programs exist for commodity farming strategies, however, there are not many well suited for small-scale agriculture (Ostrom, Cha, & Flores, 2010). Determining different types of education and training programs are important and relevant for new and beginning farmers in diversified agriculture. This may also include farmer to farmer and peer education programs (Ostrom, Cha, & Flores, 2010).

**Cooperative Aggregation and Distribution:** Many different models exist for aggregation and distribution of product, typically considered a food hub or distributor. On average, food hubs source from 78 different producers (Colasanti, et al., 2018)
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Marketing Strategy: Strawberry aggregation and distribution (amongst other products). Dedicated to serving the central coast region. Have included a Market March program, which is similar to Double Up Food Bucks, which helps with a 1:1 match of CalFresh shoppers.

Land Acquisition: Owns 110 acres and rents land to farmers at subsidized rate. Farmers are also able to rent equipment. Following the incubator program, transition becomes challenging for the farmer, especially because they are individual proprietorship vs. cooperative.

Incubator Program: Recruits beginning farmers from immigrant and farm labor. Only graduates of the PEPA educational training program can apply to be in the Organic Farm Incubator. There are around 35 farmers who receive access to subsidized land.

Farmers start at ½ acre and can expand up to 5 acres.

Educational Training: Farmer Education- PEPA (10 month); allow for college credit. Most costs are waived except a $25 module material fee.

Cooperative Model: The incubator farm model at its core is collaborative and includes 35 farmers that grow organic strawberries and vegetables. In addition, there is an aggregator and distributor that partner with ALBA. The organization is Alba Organics; ALBA leases cooler facility to Aggrigator Inc. (ALBA organics). This serves as an online purchasing aggregator and distributor.

ALBA:
http://www.albafarmers.org/

Description: One of the first incubator and training programs founded in 1972. In California organic farm- Agriculture and Land-Based Training Association.
**Business Model:** The organization owns 21 gardens and manages another 37. In addition, they manage an incubator farm, Urban Edge Farm, that focuses on beginning farmer development. Based on these gardens and management structure, they also support different market channels that farmers can sell through.

**Marketing Strategy:** SCLT works on various different campaigns for funding allocation. One such campaign includes the GROW! Campaign for a processing facility - financing through a three-year capital campaign. [https://www.southsideclt.org/grow/](https://www.southsideclt.org/grow/)

**Land Acquisition:** Promote access to land through farms and community garden spaces - offer low-cost lease agreements as well as resources for local/organic production

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**Southside Community Land Trust:**
[https://www.southsideclt.org/farms/](https://www.southsideclt.org/farms/)

**Description:** SCLT manages many different farms, community gardens and projects - including Urban Edge Farm (shown below). The organization was founded in 1981 and advocates for Hmong Refugees. They also have a strong collaboration with Brown University.

**Educational Training:** Offer hands-on learning and technical assistance for vegetable and livestock farmers. Farmers participating in the training are then eligible to lease land at farm locations or to sell through market channels provided by SCLT. Additional on-farm apprenticeships opportunities can be found through their various sites.
Urban Edge Farm:
https://www.southsideclt.org/category/urban-edge-farm/

Description: Located in Cranston, RI and established with the South Side Community Land Trust (SCLT)

Business Model: A unique component of Urban Edge is a collaboration with AmeriCorps for support and management of the site

Land Acquisition: 50 acre farm with land purchased by the state of Rhode Island. It is then leased by the SCLT.

Incubator Program: Utilize an application for access to land and incubator. Farmers then have access to land, equipment and technical assistance. Farmers are not expected to leave the property. Many farmers have stayed on site for at least 4 years, farming from 1/2 to 2 acres of land.

Carolina Farm Stewardship Association:
https://www.carolinafarmstewards.org/what-we-do/

Description: CFSA was founded in 1979 and continues to offer education, advocacy, food systems, farm services, and Lomax farm programs (see below)

Business Model: Farmer driven non-profit

Land Acquisition: Operates a farmland access program for new and beginning farmers – The Lomax Farm is a certified organic incubator in Concord

Educational Training: Offer a variety of Farm Services education and technical assistance including GAP certification, conservation activity plan consulting; farmland access program, high tunnel consulting, organic certification and developing wholesale capacity.

Through this education, there are also internship and farm job referral opportunities
**Business Model:** Managed by NC Cooperative Extension


**Land Acquisition:** Cabarrus County owned and funded through a grant from NC Department of Ag- Agriculture Development Farmland Preservation Trust Fund

**Incubator Program:** Offer a 3-5 year training, internship and farm job referral program. The specific Lomax Farm incubator and training program includes an online application with membership fees and strict guidelines for on-farm support.

**Elma C. Lomax Incubator:**
[https://www.carolinafarmstewards.org/lomax-farm/](https://www.carolinafarmstewards.org/lomax-farm/)

**Description:** An incubator and farm internship program located in Cabarrus County, NC


- Apprenticeship membership fee of $20/ year
- includes particular expectations in program including:
  - production plan
  - business plan
  - participation fees
  - 20 hours / week
  - Monthly meetings
  - Annual development meetings
  - 4 volunteer work days
  - 1,000,000 liability insurance
  - Lease agreement
  - CFSA Member
Business Model: A non-profit implementing place-based food systems solutions that helps operate and provide technical assistance for 60 Vermont farms. The organization assists in sustainable management of land and supports a staff of 22 people.

Land Acquisition: Over 350 acres of land in vegetable, herb, and food production; Lease land to 9 small – medium farmers (mentor farms and incubator farms) Providing around $1.4 million in products

Educational Training: They offer consulting and technical assistance including Farm Business Planning. Additional training programs include the Vermont Farm and Forest Viability Program, Beginning Farmer Business Planning and Coaching, and the Vermont Land Link program.

Cooperative Aggregation and Distribution: Currently have 6 farms on land- within 135 acres. The entire organization helps contribute to 60 full time, part time and seasonal jobs

- Diggers Mirth:
  4 farmers on 15 acres half of the acreage goes to cover crops for regeneration of soil
- Intervale Community Farm:
  500 member CSA- 20 acres organic vegetables/ fruits/ flowers/ herbs
  4 full time staff + part time employee (9 full time staff in the summer)
- Half Pint Farm:
  1.5 acres- baby and specialty vegetables
- Pitchfork Farm:
  6 acre organic vegetable farm-
- Sugarsnap:
  farm to table caterer-2.5 acres
- Stray Cat Flower Farm:
  1 acre cut flowers / annuals and perennials and bulbs
- Hallow Herbs:
  certified organic medicinal herb cooperative

In addition to aggregating from multiple farm sites, there is also an Intervale Food Hub that started in 2008.

The food hub includes direct to consumer and institution drop off as well as wholesale vendor to Sodexo @ the University of Vermont. The food hub also aggregates from around 40 Vermont producers.

Intervale Center:
https://www.intervale.org/programs
https://www.intervalefoodhub.com/

Description: Founded in 1988 in Vermont.
**Business Model:** Created in partnership with the WSU Extension and GrowFood.org (non-profit)

Viva does not provide seeds, transplants, greenhouse supplies, crops, hoop house, irrigation, packaging, marketing materials, fees, business licensing, -- these expenses are on the farm business.

**Marketing Strategy:** Viva provides market outlets for farmers through selling, aggregating and distributing in wholesale channels or CSA program.

**Land Acquisition:** 33 acres leased from Port of Skagit; 3 farm locations- Mount Vernon and Woodinville. All land is certified organic; farmers can receive .25-5 acres at Rural Incubator; 2-10 acres at Agricultural Park and .25-2 acres at King County.

**Incubator Program:** To participate in incubator it is required to participate in the practicum course as well as complete business and production plan. The incubator provides access to greenhouses, equipment, processing, and additional technical assistance. There are also opportunities for access to a revolving loan fund for financing or for equipment.

**Educational Training:** Offer bilingual courses for farmers-including business development. Training program includes a practicum sustainable agriculture class offered through Skagit Valley College which is a 9 month course.

**Viva Farm:**
https://vivafarms.org/

**Description:** Located in Skagit Valley, Washington.
Rural Roots and Cultivating Success Curriculum:  
https://www.cultivatingsuccess.org/home

Description: Partnership with Washington State University, University of Idaho, and a nonprofit organization Rural Roots for a collaborative education program for sustainable small-scale farming.

Educational Training: Participatory based education including peer-to-peer learning, a variety of food business and supply chain presentations, small group discussions, and hands-on activities. Programming includes Whole Farm Management and Planning, Business Planning, Entrepreneurship and Marketing, on-on-one consulting, and multiple additional on-farm workshops.

Farm Beginnings Collaborative:  
http://farmbeginningscollaborative.org/about/

Description: Started in 1996 in Minnesota as a Land Stewardship Project. It is farmer member run and supports training for new farmers in alternative growing practices. Many organizations can offer Farm Beginnings as a curriculum. Those that do choose to offer the curriculum belong to the Farm Beginnings Collaborative (FBC), which is a national alliance of currently 13 organizations that serve 14 states.

Marketing Strategy: As a part of FBC, their business model promotes collaboration amongst partners, which also leads to the tracking of outcomes and outputs amongst their partners. This leads to a significant advantage to sharing about the program and promote the product.

Educational Training: The Farm Beginnings Curriculum promotes a farmer led and focused on sustainable agriculture. It includes classroom sessions, farm tours and mentorship. The program is a yearlong program that includes business-planning, field days and workshops, as well as on-farm mentoring. Of the hundreds of graduated farmers, a survey in 2015 showed that 80% were still farming.  
http://farmbeginningscollaborative.org/frequently-asked-questions-faq/
Land Acquisition: Utilizes and promotes the New England Landlink (NELL) that helps farms and land owners connect. They have assisted hundreds of farmers. Farmers looking for a farm pay a fee of $25/ year for contact information and updates on properties. Similarly, farm property owners can list property and request farmers to rent, lease, manage, purchase, etc. There is no cost to the farm owner. They also list properties within 7 states.

Educational Training: Exploring the Small Farm Dream Course- see description below

The institute developed the “Explorer” workbook as a guide for the classroom and assistance to farmers wanting a deeper dive in the start-up side of the business.

New England Small Farm Institute:
https://www.smallfarm.org/index.php

Description: The New England Small Farm Institute supports farmers in various stages of their career from on-farm workshops, farm mentors, and curriculum. The organization is a land-based, non-profit that started in 1978. Many of their special projects revolve around beginning farmer programs or growing new farmers, but they also have projects within Mobile Processing Unit, Pioneer Valley Grain, and progressive-homeschool.blogspot.com

On farm mentors are part of educational training. Similar to beginning farmers, mentors also receive a guide for best practices in mentorship.
https://www.smallfarm.org/main/for_on_farm_mentors/

Incubator Program: Offer the NEWOOF (North East Workers on Organic Farms) as a regional apprenticeship placement program. Different farms are listed that range in scale, crops, business models, wages, and living arrangements. The program assists apprentices in the logistics of training, requirements and educational material.

• For Apprentice’s- there is a list request form to be filled, as well as a $10 fee

• For Farms- they can be added to the list through email (*the farm listing has not been updated since 2015*)
Educational Training: Optional for anyone looking to start a small farm or food business. The course can be taught in different ways, but includes in person workshop, discussion, and self-assessment.
https://www.sare.org/Learning-Center/SARE-Project-Products/Northeast-SARE-Project-Products/Plain-Language-Guides-for-New-and-Under-Served-Producers/How-to-Begin-Your-Small-Farm-Dream

Description: A curriculum designed to help aspiring farmers determine if farming is right for them, as well as the scale of operation that is appropriate. There are multiple platforms for the curriculum including workshops, workbooks, and courses. An additional component is the “Explorer”, which offers a workbook for decision making. The program is sponsored in Massachusetts, New Jersey, New York, Ohio, Pennsylvania, Rhode Island, Virginia and Canada.
https://www.smallfarm.org/main/for_new_farmers/exploring_the_small_farm_dream/courses/

CRAFT- Collaborative Regional Alliance for Farmer Training:
https://craftfarmapprentice.com/

Description: Began in 1994 as a cooperative of local farms in an effort to promote educational opportunities for farmers, including apprenticeships. They also support additional organizations supporting the CRAFT model, and they exist throughout the nation.
https://craftfarmapprentice.com/links

Land Acquisition: Have two levels of farms: Participating Farms and Associate Farms. Participating farms have apprentices and allow for apprentices to attend all educational programming conducted by CRAFT. Associate farms to not have apprentices, but support CRAFT and may host farm visits.
https://craftfarmapprentice.com/what-we-do
Business Model: All programs mentioned are provided at a fee to the participant. This includes workshops, land access, equipment and other technical resources for the incubator participants. Unique aspects of the program include a charge per acre or ¼ acre plot which include fees for maintenance, fees, irrigation, trainings, storage, etc. Additional fees may apply as well for technical assistance, equipment, pesticide use, or cooler use.

Educational Training: Multiple courses are offered through New Entry including:
- Explore Farming (FREE): introductory program to agriculture as well as the food system
  https://nesfp.org/farmer-training/explore-farming
- Crop Production ($600): getting started in growing crops for commercial businesses
  https://nesfp.org/farmer-training/crop-production-course
- Farm Business Planning ($400): writing your business plan
  https://nesfp.org/farmer-training/farm-business-planning

Incubator Program: Incubator Program: An incubator farm that provides small plots and access to tools and technical assistance. In order to receive land, it is required to have a business plan (completion of the Farm Business Planning Course). In addition to the business plan, the program requires an application and farm liability insurance. Following the incubator program (which can be for up to three seasons), New Entry helps transition to an independent farm site.
https://nesfp.org/farmer-training/incubator-farm/program-details

Cooperative Aggregation and Distribution: While not directly aggregated through New Entry, the incubator farm and graduates can sell through World Peas food Hub or any markets identified by the grower.

New Entry Sustainable Farming Project:
https://nesfp.org

Description: A Tufts University training program supporting farm businesses. They offer a series of educational courses, promote various food system networks, and collaborate on incubator farms. Organized through Tufts University with partners in several departments in USDA and the Massachusetts Department of Agricultural Resources.
Additional Resources:

- https://nesfp.org/farmer-training
- https://nesfp.org/food-systems/national-incubator-map
- https://www.beginningfarmers.org/beginning-farmer-training-programs/
- https://www.smallfarm.org/main/for_new_farmers/reckon_with_risk/the_guide/
- https://www.agmrc.org/commodities-products/vegetables
- https://www.agmrc.org/commodities-products
- https://www.agmrc.org/commodities-products/foodsearcher-tool
- https://www.agmrc.org/business-development
- https://www.extension.iastate.edu/smallfarms/
- http://www.theseedfarm.org/showcase/112
- https://nesfp.org/NIFTI
Work Cited:


