



## **Start a S-mall P-lot In-cubator**

*Agricultural self sufficiency is factoring into more and more urban sustainability plans. So more and more cities are starting to move commercial food production closer to home, and one way to do that is by establishing S-mall P-lot IN-cubators. Here are some basic starting points for starting a farm incubator in your city or town:*

### **Eligibility Requirements**

Typically farm incubators are designed to develop and support entrepreneurial farmers. As such, incubator participants are expected to meet stated economic viability standards and may be required to provide some financial information on their operations. Incubator farms are not gardens or hobby farms. They are commercial businesses that provide significant income sources during the growing season.

### **Land Bank**

This is a mechanism by which local governments identify and acquire surplus properties to convert them to productive use which should include commercial farming. Identifying those parcels appropriate for farming can be incorporated in the dispensation process of these properties. Where properties are intended to be sold for fair market value, a policy could be established to transfer those parcels to farmers at below market pricing when specific conditions are met.

### **Agricultural Policy for Open Space**

Land owned by the public sector can also be designated for farming, and cities can consider allowing commercial farming as a use for portions of open space areas.

### **Permanently Designated Farm Districts**

If appropriate land is available, cities can consider designating areas within their borders for permanent farming use.

### **Low cost/No cost land access**

To keep farmers within cities or attract them from outside their borders, urban farmsteading programs could be developed that would offer low cost or no cost access to foreclosed or abandoned properties with eventual transfer to the farmer once certain conditions are met.

### **Zoning**

Elements of farming need to be allowed in both commercial and residential districts. It might also be appropriate to designate special agricultural districts. Considerations in zoning include defining sub-acre or small scale farm in terms of scope, whether or not it includes animal husbandry; lot size; use of greenhouses or other structures; signage; and onsite sales of farm products.

**Agricultural protocols**

Farm incubators need to provide protocols based on commonly accepted organic farm practices. They typically cover soil preparation and maintenance; weed, pest and disease control; compost application; irrigation; soil tests; recycling of organic waste and waste water; and equipment use.

**Infrastructure**

General infrastructure - minimum requirements include restroom facilities and security fencing. Common office and meeting space are also valuable amenities.

Farm infrastructure - sub-acre farm infrastructure typically includes a cooler, post-harvesting station, shed and irrigation. Greenhouse, commercial kitchen facilities and onsite farmstand are valuable add-ons. The incubator can own and rent out the infrastructure or assemble it in a start-up package that is provided on a lease/purchase agreement; or all farm infrastructure can be the responsibility of individual incubator participants.

**Equipment**

Mechanized equipment is limited to a 5 to 10 hp rototiller. All other equipment is either hand operated specialty farm tools such as a seeder, stirrup hoe, collinear hoe and cultivator or standard issue garden grade tools. Typically these are the responsibility of the individual farmer, though a rototiller and other equipment may be owned and rented out by the farm incubator.

**Delivery vehicle**

Typically farmers equip themselves with their own delivery vehicle.

**Security**

As mentioned above under infrastructure, the farm incubator site should be fenced to limit public access to the site and to deter vandalism and theft.

**Utility hookups**

Electric and water access should be provided by the farm incubator.

**Insurance/Liability**

The farm incubator requires a minimum level of liability insurance coverage be carried by all incubator participants and which also covers the farm incubator.

**Farmer Contract**

A written agreement that stipulates to incubator participants the terms of participation in the farm incubator should include:

- cost of land rental
- cost of utilities
- equipment uses and fees, if applicable
- insurance requirements
- agricultural protocols
- financial reporting, if applicable

**Micro level financing**

A farm incubator may provide recommendations on sources for micro level financing, with the typical need of start-up capital being \$5,000 - \$25,000.

**Market Access**

Farm incubators can provide connections to the wide variety of urban sales channels including farmers markets, restaurants and the institutional and government markets. Partnerships with local agriculture departments, local farming organizations, and food advocacy groups can aid in identifying market opportunities.

### **Training**

Farm incubators can provide both professional farm training as well as educational programs for children and the public. Partnerships with *SPIN-Farming*, local agriculture departments, local farming organizations, and food advocacy groups can aid in cultivating new farm talent as well as public understanding and support of robust, locally-based food systems.

*Cities are impulsive, boisterous, spontaneous, and competitive, while agriculture is plodding, tranquil, deliberate and deferential. SPIN-Farming is helping to envision a world where for one to be right, the other does not have to be wrong. To find out more about the new spin on urban farming, visit us at [www.spinfarming.com](http://www.spinfarming.com).*

**SPIN- FARMING MAKES AGRICULTURE ACCESSIBLE TO ANYONE ANYWHERE!**