



PROPOSAL TO THE COLORADO GARDEN FOUNDATION FOR THE KAISER ELEMENTARY INCUBATOR FARM PROJECT

INSPIRATION:

There is an ever increasing demand for local produce and an interest in growing it. In addition, the experience of growing food and an understanding of how we are attached to the land on which we live is being sought out by an increasing large number of people. Urban agriculture is the best means to support this interest for the majority of the population living in cities, and its growth as field of endeavor indicates its perceived value. To this end, Veterans to Farmers (VTF) pursues its mission of training Veterans in agricultural systems, technologies, and business operations to help them achieve a fulfilling and sustainable lifestyle.

CHALLENGE:

The opportunity to preserve land for urban agriculture is quickly fading in Denver: only 9 of the original 307 farms that once existed in Denver 100 years ago are still in operation, and no mechanism currently exists for maintaining the remaining agriculturally zoned areas.¹ Development pressures and increasing land values resulting from a rapidly growing population are pushing the already less-than-profitable profession of urban agriculture off of its most critical resource: the land. Urban farmers often depend upon short-term land leases, leaving them with uncertain land-tenure, and at risk of losing any capital investment costs they make in the land they farm.

Furthermore, the demands for new-farmer education are higher now than they have ever been. As existing farmers age, studies estimate that as many as 50% of farmers will retire within the next decade.² New farmers are less likely than established farmers to come from a farming background, and as such, lack the basic skills necessary to run a successful farm.³

SOLUTION:

“An incubator farm project is a land-based, multi-grower project that provides training and technical assistance to aspiring and beginning farmers.”⁴

Incubator farms offer a low-risk opportunity for beginning farmers to share the financial burden of equipment and resources while learning alongside seasoned farmers, assist new farmers by eliminating barriers to land access, expertise, and ongoing training, and provide many community benefits, including:

- supporting an increasing need for access to healthy, affordable food ;
- stimulating the local economy by creating jobs to produce, process, and distribute local food;
- connecting urban dwellers with the land, thereby facilitating a firmer understanding of the natural world and appreciation of food production; and,
- decreasing the ecological footprint of our current food system.

VTF started out as only an idea when Founder and Marine Veteran Buck Adams was operating Circle Fresh Farms in Denver, Colorado. Buck made it a company initiative to reach out and hire fellow Veterans, thereby allowing them the chance to work and learn about food production in the comfort of a greenhouses environment. It was not long before hundreds of Veterans expressed their interest and the need to form VTF became abundantly clear. In 2013, VTF received its non-profit status and in 2014 Buck, along with Co-Founder and Air Force Veteran Richard Murphy, began offering farming classes to any interested Veteran. Since then they have seen over 80 graduates come through the program, many whom are now on their way to being a new generation of Veteran farmers.

¹ Beck, J., Warren, L. A. (2016). “The Case for Urban Agriculture & an Opportunity to Re-define Public Infrastructure.” University of Colorado Denver, College of Architecture and Planning.

² Katchova, A. (2010). Structural changes in US agriculture: financial performance of farms in transition. 114th EAAE, 15-16.

³ Ewert, Brianna M. (2012). Understanding Incubator Farms: Innovative Programs for New Farmer Development. MS Thesis, Environmental Studies. University of Montana: Missoula, MT. 157pp.

⁴ National Incubator Farm Training Initiative (NIFTI).



VETERANS TO FARMERS AND DENVER METRO FARM STARTERS COLLABORATIVE

VTF helps Veterans assimilate effectively, productively and permanently into private citizenry by providing training in agricultural practices that in turn leads to urban homesteading and/or business ownership. The next best step for these VTF program graduates is to continue their farming education on an incubator farm.

VTF supports the Denver Metro Farm Starters Collaborative (DeMFarmS) and their mission to create a farm incubator program and associated land trust in the Denver Metro Region. VTF is submitting this application to the Colorado Garden Foundation Major Grant Program to fund the construction and operation of the first DeMFarmS incubator farm on 2.5 acres of fallow land at the Kaiser Elementary School, located at 4500 S. Quitman Street in Denver.

PROJECT PLAN:

The proposed Kaiser Elementary Farm Incubator will:

- provide 4-8 beginning Veteran farmers with low cost land, tools, infrastructure, and access to utilities (irrigation, water);
- create substantial opportunities for ongoing training, mentorship and one-on-one technical assistance covering all aspects of a farm operation and business operations; and,
- help participants find and enter markets (farmers' markets, restaurants, or other sales outlets, wholesale institutional sales).

Incubator participants and the lead farmer will share farm resources including tools, cold-storage space, bulk material storage areas, and common areas. Because this project will be situated on DPS land, a portion of the food grown on the farm will be made available to the Kaiser cafeteria. The existing Kitchen Community curriculum could be expanded and increase DPS student engagement with farming and food.

A map depicting the proposed incubator farm and a proposed farm layout are available upon request.

SCHEDULE OF IMPLEMENTATION:

Initial site infrastructure (described below) would be installed in spring of 2018. One resident farmer would spend the first full growing season tending the farm and preparing soil. Apprentice farmers would undergo a vetting process, and after assignment would begin work on the Kaiser Incubator Farm beginning by the 2019 growing season.

Each apprentice farmer would spend a minimum of three (3) years on the Incubator Farm before applying to the Hatched Farm Program, a future endeavor of DeMFarmS that will provide graduates of the Incubator Program with access to low-cost farmable land within the Denver Metro Area where they will be allowed to further pursue their agricultural business.

PARTICIPATING ORGANIZATIONS, CONTRIBUTORS, VOLUNTEERS, AND IN-KIND DONATIONS

DeMFarmS is a collaborative that includes representatives from VTF, DPS, Rocky Mountain Farmers Union, Mile High Farmers, Denver Botanic Gardens, the Kitchen Community, Groundwork Denver, GoFarm, Sprout City Farms, Jefferson County Conservation District, Colorado State University Extension, Regis SEED Center, and Colorado Center for Sustainable Urbanism, many of whom have volunteered their time over the last two years to bring the Incubator Farm Program Pilot to fruition. Letters of recommendation from many of these organizations have been provided in support of the Colorado Garden Foundation Grant application and are available upon request.

Contributions are expected in the form of financial and in-kind donations from participating organizations and other donors, with official solicitations anticipated once the MOU between VTF and DPS has been executed. This is expected to take place before the end of 2017. Additionally, VTF is exploring options for matching up to \$25,000 in funds previously donated by the Gates Foundation for the development of a Veterans' cooperative to support marketing and distribution from the Kaiser Incubator Farm. At this point, Denver Water has agreed to waive the farm tap fee of approximately \$15,000 for the new irrigation supply.

FARM ACCESS:

Parking and Foot Traffic:

- The incubator farm employees will park in the school parking lot located on the north side of the school on the side streets. Employees will access the farm on foot via the concrete pathway leading from the parking lot on the north end of the building into the farm area. Between 4 and 8 farmers will access the site each day.



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Delivers and Vehicle Access:

- Deliveries will be scheduled to avoid school hours, and can be coordinated between VTF and DPS, as appropriate.
- Any vehicles, deliveries, or machinery (i.e. tractors) accessing the property will do so from the existing access point on the southeast side of the building off of W. Tufts Avenue.
- No access will be provided through the adjacent Denver Parks and Recreation property unless authorized through Denver Parks and Recreation.

Veterans to Farmers: Board of Directors

Richard Murphy – Executive Director

Scott Bauer – Board Chair

LeeAnn Murphy – Board Secretary

Jeanette Tutzauer – Board Treasurer

Daryl Goode – Board Member

Joe Burner - Board Member

Summary of Veterans to Farmers Overall Budget

REDACTED.

VTF Colorado Garden Foundation Grant: Evaluation

To properly evaluate an incubator farm project, a mixed-methods (quantitative and qualitative) approach is required. During the one-year funding period, our focus will be establishing the site and recruiting incubator participants. Our goal is to have the site ready for a fall 2018 planting, some of which would be diverted to the Kaiser Elementary cafeteria. Quantitative data collected in the first year will include:

- amount and approximate value of produce grown, calculated by weighing produce and comparing with Colorado Department of Agriculture market averages to determine value
- volunteer hours separated by task, collected by tracking project hours during work days and other events that involve community participation in the farm

Additionally, any educational programs offered to the school community will be evaluated using qualitative methods. Depending on the age group of students participating in education, an appropriate method will be selected from the following list: pre and post surveys to determine knowledge gain, focus groups, and/or individual interviews with selected students.

Once incubator participants have been screened and selected, the following baseline information will be collected from each participant:

- basic demographics
- anticipated
- pre-assessments of farming skills and financial literacy with respect to managing a farm plot.



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The first full growing season on the farm will take place in 2019 with four to eight farmers and an additional experienced teacher/farmer. Long-term evaluation, to be completed after the funding cycle, would be conducted to determine the impact of the project. This will also take the form of a mixed-methods approach. Quantitative data included in this evaluation includes:

- a count of farmers still farming post-participation
- the number of farmers served overall by the project
- actual percentage of household income derived from the activities on the farm
- an accounting of the ways in which participants spent time at the farm project (activities will include: working on the farm; attending scheduled farm workshops and skills sessions; providing tours of the farm and educational sessions to the school and community).

This information will be collected by surveying current and past participants on a yearly basis and will continue to be collected for as long as the farm exists. The following qualitative information will also be useful in our evaluation:

- post-assessments of farming skills and financial literacy with respect to managing a farm plot
- description of the diversity of the resultant farm enterprises

We will continue to collect the crop value information outlined in year one. All of this information will be used to make improvements to the program and to inform future incubator farm sites.

By the end of the funding cycle, we will have completed three tasks: (1) installing the farm infrastructure; (2) finalizing the farm curriculum both for incubator participants and the school community; (3) recruiting our 2019 class of incubator participants. Success will be measured in the following ways:

- (1) Maintain a construction schedule, finish installing irrigation and all structures and preparing the ground by the fall of 2018.
- (2) Submit a completed curriculum for review by farm education partners (CSU, DBG and Kitchen Community) by the end of 2018.
- (3) Successfully recruit and onboard 4-8 incubator farm participants to begin training and farm work in early 2019.

Further success will be marked by: (1) observing an increase in knowledge and skills from farm participants; (2) helping participants successfully transition from the incubator farm to their own projects; (3) experiencing high yields on the land. These metrics will be deemed a success if:

- (1) An increase in knowledge and skills is observed by analyzing the pre- and post-surveys
- (2) Interviews with graduated participants show that at least 30% of farmers are able to transition to their own farm project
- (3) Yields (in both weight and value of crops) are consistent with state averages

The results from the project will be used by VTF to make improvements to the Kaiser Farm. DeMFarmS will use the evaluation when seeking buy-in and investment in future incubator projects around the Denver Metro area. An annual report of farm activities will be compiled and made available to shareholders and any community members who would find the information useful. Additionally, we plan to use the resources of the National Incubator Farm Training Institute (NIFTI), including conferences, webinars, regional meet-ups and publications, to disseminate relevant evaluation data regarding the Kaiser Farm Incubator Project.

Veterans to Farmers has never received funding from the Colorado Garden Foundation. VTF will be able to leverage their social media and marketing resources as well as those of the partner organizations. Combined social media followers of these organizations are in excess of 250,000. Additionally, VTF and Denver Botanic Gardens have a track record of gaining attention from both print and television media to cover activities conducted under their existing partnership. Kaiser Elementary and Denver Public Schools have agreed to allow farm signage on the school property. The Colorado Garden Foundation would be recognized as the main sponsor of the program in all of these outlets.