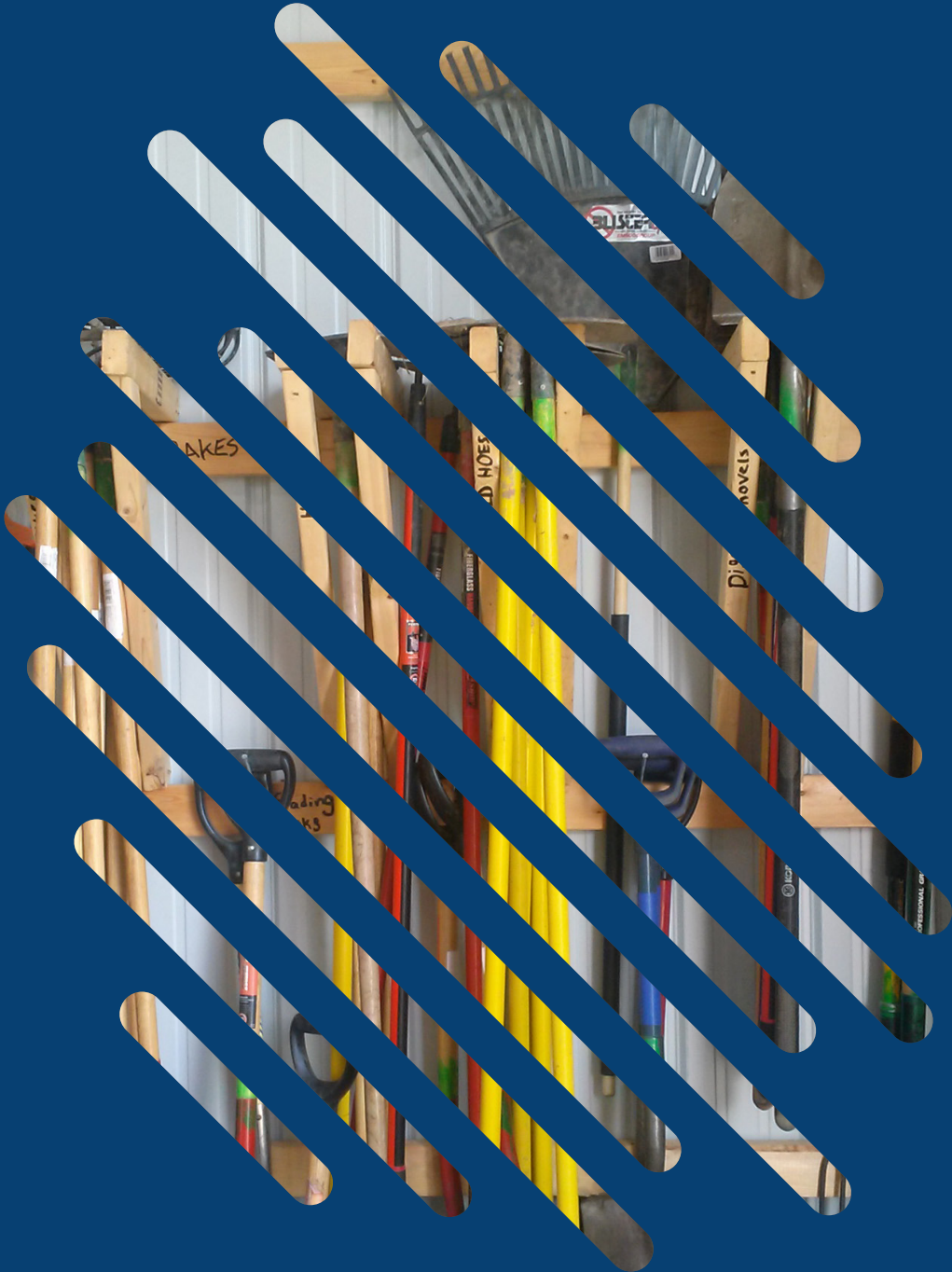


# Toolkit:

Combining Food Banks and Farm Incubators



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# Exploring Food Bank Incubator Farm Partnerships

## OUR TEAM

This toolkit was produced by four dedicated master's degree students from the University of Michigan with a wide range of expertise, from public health and business to communications and informatics. Our shared interest in a more innovative and inclusive approach to hunger relief brought us together for this 18-month graduate level research project with our client, The Greater Lansing Food Bank (GLFB).

## THE PROJECT

This project explored emerging and innovative food bank programming being implemented in select locations in the United States. GLFB is a unique case in that this Feeding America food bank also operates its own incubator farm. Typically, food banks and farm incubators are independent operations that approach the food system at different entry points. Our research sought to describe what makes incubator farms and food banks successful as independent entities, and then identify those crossover areas that make joint programming beneficial. This toolkit summarizes those findings and outlines the best practices for combining these two organizational models.

## THE CLIENT: GREATER LANSING FOOD BANK

Our client, the Greater Lansing Food Bank (GLFB), was founded in 1981 and serves seven counties throughout Central Michigan. In addition to its extensive food distribution services, GLFB also explores creative partnerships and programs to better serve its clients and community. Their Garden Project, which began in 1983, has directly connected the food bank to the community and now serves over 7,000 people annually. More recently, GLFB founded Lansing Roots, a farm incubator program. In 2013, the program was



started with the goal of helping people grow food as a source of nourishment and income. GLFB approached the University of Michigan's School of Natural Resources and Environment to be a client for a master's level thesis project, and sought to clarify the strengths and weaknesses of its current food bank-incubator model. The best practices identified in this toolkit are being used by GLFB to strengthen Lansing Roots programming and integration.

## THE TOOLKIT

It was also the intention of GLFB to produce a shareable end product. As the Lansing Roots program was underway, similarly-minded food bank administrators approached GLFB for guidance on starting incubators of their own. This toolkit is meant to serve as that guide. As such, our research have been generalized for use across the Feeding America network.

Examining the potential for integration between food banks and farm incubator programs was made possible with help from the Feeding America Network and the National Incubator Farm Training Initiative (NIFTI). Without a connection to these national organizations, our work would not have been possible. Similarly, we are grateful to those farmers, food bank personnel, and farm incubator managers who spoke with us at length about their work.

We hope this toolkit serves as a helpful guide for those food banks learning more about incubator farms, as well as those interested in starting their own.

Sincerely,

Kelsea Ballantyne (MBA, MS), Rebecca Baylor (MS), Alice Bowe (MS), and Jana Stewart (MPH, MS)

Our project, produced in partnership by the University of Michigan and the Greater Lansing Food Bank (GLFB), explores emerging incubator farm food bank partnerships.





### Partner: U-M + GLFB

In January 2015, U-M researchers launch 18 month project with Greater Lansing Food Bank to explore potential food bank & farm incubator partnerships.

### Collect Stakeholder Data

Connected with Feeding America and NIFTI, the national incubator farm training initiative, to collect survey and interview data from food banks and incubators.

### Identify Shared Needs

Analyzed data collected from stakeholders to identify shared needs across food bank and incubator farms.

### Create Best Practices

Compiled research findings into trackable metrics for successful food bank + incubator partnerships.

### Internal Analysis of GLFB

Identified components of Lansing Roots + Greater Lansing Food Bank partnership and compared to best practices.

### Promote Collaboration

Engaged with Feeding America and NIFTI national networks to share recommendations and strengthening potential partnerships.

# Food Banks + Incubator Farms

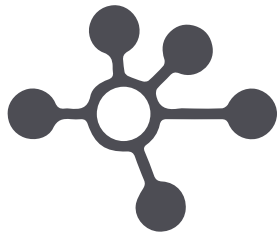


71%

Just over 70 percent of respondents say that providing healthy and nutritious food is one of their highest priorities.

7/10

Seven out of ten food bank respondents from across the United States (67%) are interested in learning more about partnerships with incubator farms.



49%

Almost half of food banks report distributing less than 3,000 tons of fresh food per year. Incubator farms could provide a way to increase nutritious food in the distribution streams.

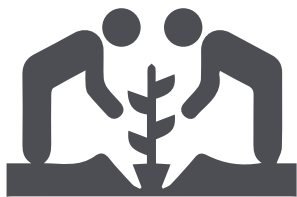


2013

Nutrition education increased by 14% from 2011

Food bank + incubator farm combinations are new and emerging. These two organizations often focus on separate stages in the food system cycle, one on end-stage distribution and the other on early-stage cultivation. However, these entities can also provide valuable services to one another.

When indicating their organizational goals, a significant percentage of food banks' include alleviating hunger (98%), increasing nutritional access (71%), and reducing food waste (17%) within their top two priorities. These goals help explain why the majority (67%) of food banks are interested in learning more about partnerships with incubator farms. Given that 49% of food banks reported distributing less than 3,000 tons of fresh produce annually, incubators can help increase food banks positive impact on the community.



40%

In 2013, forty percent of Feeding America food banks were engaged in supporting a healthier food system by operating gardens, farms, orchards, or raising fresh fish.

Farm incubator programming is especially viable considering that many food banks (40%) are already supporting a healthier food system by engaging with garden programs and other means of fresh food production.



15%

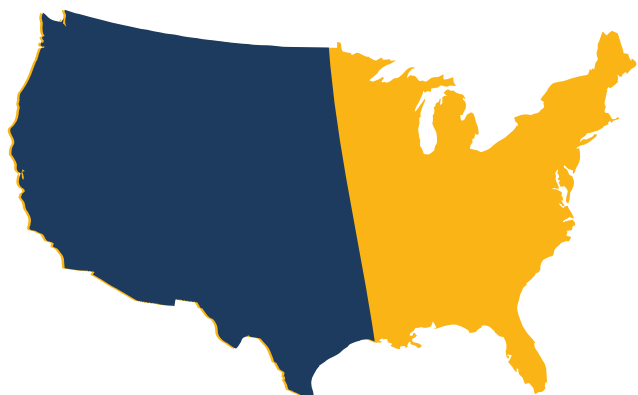
Percent of food banks sampled were interested in **adding** an incubator to existing programming

The majority of farm incubator programs (68%) are non-profit (501c3) organizations

# 127 Incubators

54%

The percentage of incubators serving refugee or immigrant populations



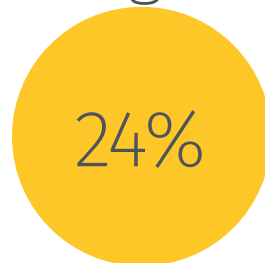
Over 38 states have ongoing incubator farm projects



15%

Composting programs by food banks

## Gleaning



Percent of food banks with farm gleaning activities in 2013

48.5%

Women represent almost half (48.5%) of all incubator farmers



54.9%

Federal grants are the most important source of funding for the majority of



## **A farm incubator project is a land-based multi-grower project that provides training and technical assistance to aspiring and beginning farmers.**

Like traditional business incubators, farm incubator projects help farm entrepreneurs establish their own successful businesses by providing specific resources and services that are difficult for start-up entrepreneurs to access on their own.

The resources and services offered by incubator farms vary depending on geographic area, demographics, funding, and other factors. However, the overall goal of farm incubator projects is consistent: to minimize the barriers to entry for aspiring and beginning farmers.

- National Incubator Farm Initiative

# Lansing Roots

Launched in 2013 with financial backing from the USDA-NIFA, Lansing Roots is an incubator farm program that complements the GLFB's existing Garden Project.



## Lansing Roots

Greater Lansing Food Bank is on a journey to broaden the scope of the food bank mission to include the nutrition and economic development of clients they serve. As part of this effort, GLFB launched Lansing Roots in 2013.

Lansing Roots is an incubator farm that grew out of the food bank's 31-year-long commitment to empowering people through community gardening. The program, the Gardening Project, includes over 27 acres of garden space from 100 different gardens

throughout a 7-county service area. However, GLFB believes that creating space for food banks and farm incubators to partner can help provide a more comprehensive approach to addressing hunger in vulnerable populations.

Farmers in the Lansing Roots program include aspiring farm entrepreneurs from low-income or refugee backgrounds. Many sell their produce through Community Supported Agriculture (CSA) or directly to members of the community.



The U-M SNRE team extensively interviewed both farmers and program operators at Lansing Roots to find out who they are and what they are looking for in an incubator + food bank partnership:

Team

## Meet the Members of Lansing Roots

### Bill Family Farmer

Bill is a 3rd generation truck farmer who goes from town to town selling produce. At Lansing Roots, he is developing his business strategy and experimenting with cover cropping. His favorite part of the program is the to a diversity of cultural farming practices he is



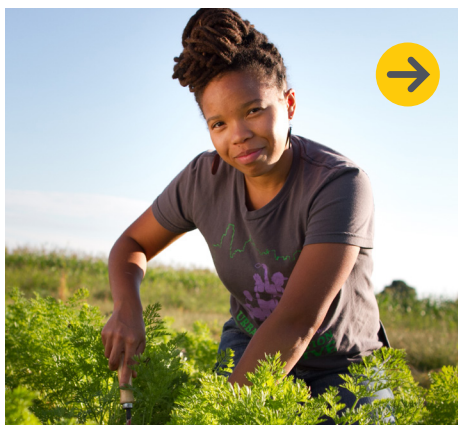
### Jit & Devi Transplanted Traditions

Jit and Devi, a bhutanese couple, came to Lansing after living as refugees in Nepal. Devi worked on a farm in Bhutan and now comes to Lansing Roots everyday. Here, she still uses some farming techniques from back home but has gained the



### Hamadi & Khadija Growing Futures

Hamadi and Khadija are growing more than food, they are growing a future for their family. The couple became interested in Lansing Roots because their families worked as farmers back in Somolia. They now share the same passion for growing food for their daughter and love that farming is "good exercise" for the whole family.



### Shakara Farming Food Justice

Shakara came to Lansing Roots after working as an urban farm educator in Philadelphia. She is passionate about food justice and sees farming as a nurturing act. In the future, Shakara hopes to supply underserved communities with fresh food.







# Best Practices 2015 - 2016

# How do I start a Food Bank Incubator Farm?

Answer the questions and follow the roadmap on the next page to better understand if your food bank is ready to start an incubator farm. Then use the best practices rubric and resources page to build your plan and evaluate progress.

DOES YOUR FOOD BANK UNDERSTAND THE SYSTEM VIEW OF POVERTY LEADING TO HUNGER?

ARE YOU LOCATED IN AN AREA WHERE THERE IS A NEED FOR FOOD DISTRIBUTION AND POVERTY ALLEVIATION?

ARE YOU LOCATED IN AN AREA AMENABLE TO FARMING ACTIVITIES?

DOES YOUR FOOD BANK HAVE A COMMUNITY-BASED GARDENING PROGRAM?

DOES YOUR FOOD BANK PURSUE INITIATIVES FOCUSED ON THE HEALTH OF YOUR CLIENTS?



## Foundational elements are required



## Then, a program can be built on the foundation



## Finally, other aspects can be implemented to enhance results

All of the rest of the characteristics are important to the success of an incubator but are not immediately necessary and instead are part of the structure for success that builds over time



Farming supportive climate



Food insecure populations



Connect hunger with poverty



Health focus



Food bank has initiated a community-based gardening program



Skin in the game

In-depth training program

Access to resources

Evaluation techniques

Comprehensive marketing

Evaluation

External partnerships

# Best Practices Rubric Summary

Use the best practices rubric to build your plan and evaluate progress.

## Incubator Farm

### #1 Supportive Culture of Excellence:

- 1.1 Skin in the game
- 1.2 Stair-stepping
- 1.3 Diverse Demographics

Incubator expects excellence from farmers, and in turn provides the environment to support successful completion of program.

### #2 Comprehensive Programming:

- 2.1 In-depth training program
- 2.2 Connection with skilled and enthusiastic mentors
- 2.3 Access to resources
- 2.4 Evaluation techniques

Incubator farm offers the training, education, and tools necessary to nurture successful farming techniques while completing the program.

### #3 Building Self-Sufficiency:

- 3.1 Access to land
- 3.2 Comprehensive marketing
- 3.3 Access to finance

Incubator is intimately involved in preparing farmer for success after completion in the program.

### #4 Internal Capacity:

- 4.1 Inclusive recruitment
- 4.2 Diverse funding sources
- 4.3 University partnerships
- 4.4 Evaluation

Stable internal infrastructure is in place for long-term incubator success and sustainability.

## Incubator Farm for Vulnerable Populations

### #1 Supportive Culture of Excellence:

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- 4.2 Diverse funding sources
- 4.3 University partnerships
- 4.4 Evaluation
- 4.5 External partnerships

Stable internal infrastructure is in place for long-term incubator success and sustainability.



## Food Bank

### #1 Food Justice:

Food bank is proactive in its approach to hunger, and considerate of how inventory choices impact individuals experiencing hunger.

- 1.1 Connect hunger with poverty
- 1.2 Supplemental resources
- 1.3 Respectful client intake



### #2 Effective Distribution:

Food bank infrastructure and relationships enable efficient distribution of resources to clients.\*

- 2.1 Coordination to meet needs
- 2.2 Develop important partnerships

### #3 Respectful Client Experience:

Client experience at the food bank is positive, flexible, and provides food security.\*

- 3.1 Client caloric needs met
- 3.2 Healthy food options
- 3.3 Client choice



## Combining Food Bank & Incubator Farm

### #1 Suitable Location:

The food bank's location is amenable to farming practices, and the area population is suitable for incubator ventures.

- 1.1 Farming supportive climate
- 1.2 Food insecure populations
- 1.3 Local food culture



## Combining Food Bank & Incubator Farm

### #2 Forward Thinking Mission:

Food bank actively pursues upstream solutions to hunger.

- 2.1 Connect hunger with poverty
- 2.2 Health focus
- 2.3 Economic development



### #3 Garden Program:

Food bank has initiated a community-based gardening program.



### #4 Farm production for Food Bank

Food bank has started or is starting to incorporate fresh produce, either from its own farm plot or through area farm partnerships.

### #5 Leverage Partnerships:

Food bank is conscious of client needs, and can connect clients with alternative resources that are beyond the food bank's capacity.

- 5.1 Partnership with economic development organizations
- 5.2 Partnership with Universities
- 5.3 Partnership with health care agencies
- 5.4 Partnership with local government (land trust)

### #6 Structure for Success:

Food bank and Incubator work collaboratively, engaging in open communication and support.

- 6.1 Resource support for incubator
- 6.2 Cooperation among administrative leaders
- 6.3 Shared culture

\*Note: If food bank does not distribute directly to clients, then evaluation of distribution agencies is needed to ensure client needs are met.

# Planning Guide

Before beginning a farm incubator project, evaluate your area, food bank and core competencies.



Farming Supportive Climate

Person Responsible \_\_\_\_\_

Date Completed \_\_\_\_\_



Food Insecure Populations



Connect Hunger with Poverty



Health Focus



Food Bank has Initiated a Community-based Gardening Program

After the evaluation is complete, begin to build the foundation.



Person Responsible \_\_\_\_\_

Date Completed/Status \_\_\_\_\_

1.1 Skin in the Game

2.1 In-depth Training Program

2.3 Access to Resources

2.4 Evaluation Techniques

3.2 Comprehensive Marketing

4.4 Evaluation

4.5 External Partnerships





# Best Practices Rubric - Incubator Farm

## Key Characteristic #1: Supportive Culture of Excellence

Incubator expects excellence from farmers, and in turn provides the environment to support successful completion of program.

### 1.1 Skin in the game: Create higher barriers to entry through experience, applications and cost.

#### What to look for:

Farmers invest in the experience through participation fees, which are calculated on a sliding scale.

Farmer already has formal education in farming techniques, and is an experienced gardener or farmer. The incubator is being used to experiment with the field as a business venture, as opposed to a hobby.

Incubator requires farmer to submit a formal application summarizing their knowledge, experience, and other details that will help identify candidates who are serious about farming as a career.

Program encourages farmer to take responsibility for their own experience, taking full advantage of resources available.

### 1.2 Stair-stepping: Provide clear timelines of program progress and graduation and offer entry at different levels for different participants.

#### What to look for:

Incubator has separate programming, such as garden programs, for beginners and novices. Organization may require completing one to two years in beginner program prior to enrollment in incubator.

Farmers will be organized into groups of similar skill level, and will move through the program as a cohort. Different cohorts will mentor and be mentored by other cohorts, and will gradually progress together to higher levels of instruction, coupled by diminishing levels of oversight.

Organization may offer separate incubator programming for different levels of farming experience to better serve the varying needs and skill levels of participants. For example, programming for less experienced farmers would include more instruction and mentoring on a monitored site, whereas programming for experienced farmers would focus less on technique and have more autonomy.

### 1.3 Diverse Demographics: Create a cohort with a variety of racial, ethnic, skill-level and socioeconomic groups.

#### What to look for:

Incubator attempts to balance a wide range of racial, ethnic, and socioeconomic groups, so farmers can teach one another from their experience, and learn farming techniques that may differ across cultures.

Incubator finds opportunities to blend different skill levels so mentorship opportunities are plentiful.

## Key Characteristic #2: Comprehensive Programming

Incubator farm offers the training, education, and tools necessary to nurture successful farming techniques while completing the program.

2.1 In-depth training program: Include hands-on learning that engages trainees and includes broad discussion of food system issues as well as detailed discussion of agroecology.

What to look for:

Farmer is trained in a wide range of farming techniques, but also understands which techniques are most appropriate for a given context or geographic location.

Farmer gains experience in crop rotation and soil health throughout their years in the incubator, so they can practice long-term planning and have the capacity to be farmland stewards.

Incubator has a demonstration farm that is actively maintained by program participants, to ensure farmers and learning and practicing various skills. Early skill levels may be required to work these farms before being allotted their own acreage.

2.2 Connection with skilled and enthusiastic mentors: Link existing farmers in the community with incubator trainees or other mentors currently participating in the program.

What to look for:

Incubators should cultivate relationships with the local farming community, and arrange opportunities for program participants to speak with and learn from farmers who already have their own farming operations.

Incubator program should require participants in various cohorts and skill levels to finding “teaching moments” where they can teach or learn something new from a fellow participant. This can improve skill-building and strengthen the program’s sense of fellowship.

2.3 Access to resources: Provide tools, infrastructure, and qualified and capable leadership to allow for success while at the incubator.

What to look for:

Incubator provides farmers with access to tools as necessary, ranging from hoes and rakes to running water and tractors. More advanced and experienced farmers in higher-level programming may be expected to furnish many of their own tools, whereas less experienced farmers may need more tool supplementation. The resources available should reflect the stair-stepping approach in Key Characteristic 1.2 and getting farmers to have Skin in the Game in

2.4 Evaluation techniques: Develop curriculum and forms to guide farmers through successful data collection and evaluation (ie: number of pounds produced and sold, soil quality, accounting systems, etc.).

What to look for:

Farmer is required to keep accurate records of their farm, such as pounds produced and sold; seeding, transplanting, and harvest dates; and various revenues, expenditures, and profits.

Farmer learns to track the types of evaluation metrics that are preferred by funders and investors, which will enable better financial tracking (as referenced in Key Characteristic 3.3).

## Key Characteristic #3: Building Self-Sufficiency

Incubator is intimately involved in preparing farmer for success after completion of the program.

3.1 Access to land: Access rates that are affordable and reduce the barrier of land acquisition; land leased at lower rates, land via land banks, or program-owned land.

What to look for:

Incubator endeavors to connect farmers with land owners and realtors, to facilitate viable independent farm operations after farmers complete the program.

Incubator assists farmer with the business-aspects of land acquisition, aiding in the search process, completion of applications, and identification of special opportunities or supplemental programs.

Incubator offers acres of its own land to program alumni, who may continue to grow on site at lease levels higher than program participants. This may be ideal when unused land is in short supply in a given geographic area, or when the price per acre is particularly high. This practice is linked to Key Characteristic 4.2.

3.2 Comprehensive marketing: Aid in developing marketing plans, assessing markets, and determining what to grow.

What to look for:

Farmer is familiar with all the types of markets to whom they may sell, and can make informed decisions about the ideal market for a given context. They can craft long-term plans to meet their needs.

Farmer has high-level support from incubator in entering into new markets. They are trained to formulate new market relationships and can tailor their efforts to the needs of a given market population.

Farmer has an understanding of the market value of various products, and understands their strengths and weaknesses as a grower.

3.3 Access to finance: Develop business techniques, data and plans to allow for access to finance at affordable rates.

What to look for:

Incubator Farm develops relationships with local banks and funding institutions to create understanding and pipeline for their farmers.

Incubator supports data collection and evaluation mentioned in Key Characteristic 2.4 that correlates with information required for securing funding from banks and other funding organizations to prove viability of farm enterprise.

## Key Characteristics #4: Internal Capacity

Stable internal infrastructure is in place for long-term incubator success and sustainability.

4.1 Inclusive recruitment: Develop culturally competent and inclusive recruitment strategies for incubator staff and build incubator capacity to recruit diverse farmers.

Incubator is able to actively recruit female farmers, as this is an underrepresented group in the field of farming and, along with Hispanic Americans, is one of the fastest-growing farmer groups.

Incubator makes a concerted effort to provide staff with professional development, catered to all racial, ethnic, and socioeconomic groups.

A diverse group of staff members are recruited to more effectively support the needs of farmers from a variety of backgrounds.



4.2 Diverse funding sources: Access funding from diverse sources (ie: charging for classes, wholesaling produce, owning land and leasing it back to farmers, etc.).

What to look for?

Incubator does not rely on a single funding source for a majority of its budget. Incubator pursues creative strategies that make the program more financially stable, while not encroaching on programmatic mission and client experience.

Incubator endeavors to acquire and own its incubator land, to the extent that is possible. If land cannot be acquired in this way, incubator pursues a rent-controlled relationship with current landowner. This allows for better long-term planning, organizational stability, and flexibility when setting participant fees.

Incubator makes active use of the demonstration farm and excess acreage for revenue, such as leasing land to program alumni and selling produce from demonstration farm to wholesalers.

4.3 University partnerships: Develop partnerships with universities to provide access to agroecology experts, land, and potential incubator members or mentors.

What to look for?

Incubator maintains relationships with academics interested in ecology, agroecology, food justice, environmental stewardship, etc., to stay current on farming best practices and the current state of the food system.

Incubator pursues relationships with land-grant institutions that may be able to supplement farm acreage.

Incubator utilizes partnerships to recruit experienced farming mentors or laborers.

4.4 Evaluation: For overall incubator define key performance indicators and track program elements (ie: returning farmers, pounds produced and sold, successful completion, etc.).

What to look for?

Incubator keeps up-to-date records on all participants as they move through the program, to help detail the personal progression of each farmer.

Incubator compares participant data over time to improve programming and better enable farmer success.

Incubator tracks, to the extent possible, the post-incubator success of its alumni. Incubator follows up with past participants for feedback on what the farmer might have benefitted from that was lacking.

# Incubator Farm for Vulnerable Populations

## Notes:

Sub-characteristics in **blue** are different from the sub-characteristics in the “Incubator Farm” section

\* The characteristics with an asterisk are the same as the “Incubator Farm” section

## Key Characteristic #1: Supportive Culture of Excellence

Incubator expects excellence from farmers, and in turn provides the environment to support successful completion of program.

**1.1 Skin in the game:** Develop metrics and effective intake forms to determine commitment and possibility of success for the incoming farmer; balance between overcoming barriers and hand-holding.

### What to look for?

Farmer has past experience in agriculture, likely as a laborer or as a farmer in their home country. Farmer may not have formal education or training in agricultural practices.

Farmer is personally invested in program completion to either 1) become a professional farmer, 2) supplement existing income, or 3) supplement family nutrition.

Incubator requires farmer to pay small participation fee. Incubator carefully determines the amount to charge for participation after taking into account the farmer’s financial capacity. A sliding scale may be used.

Incubator learns as much as possible about farmer’s needs and goals, which are gleaned from respectful conversations and, if possible, some intake forms. Incubator should gain a clear understanding of how much technical support and guidance will be necessary.

**1.2 Stair-stepping:** Create a system of advancement over time, such that farmers begin on smaller plots with greater oversight and graduate to larger, more independent plots.

### What to look for?

Farmer starts on small-scale acreage, and hones technical skills with the assistance of mentors and incubator staff. Once farmers have mastered the skills and tasks at this level, incubator will increase plot size and give the farmer more autonomy.

Incubator is flexible about farmer’s investment of time. Many farmers will have other full-time jobs, limits to transportation, or other contextual factors that will minimize time spent on their plot.

Farmers have access to all necessary tools and resources throughout their participation in the program. Incubators do not expect farmers to fund their own equipment use on site.

Incubator will offer continued land lease agreements to program graduates at reduced market rates. Farmer may have limited prospects in acquiring land, and may not be in the program to become a large-scale farmer.

## 1.3 Diverse Demographics\*

## Key Characteristic #2: Comprehensive programming

Incubator farm offers the training, education, and tools necessary to nurture successful farming techniques while completing the program.

**2.1 In-depth training program:** Create a hands-on learning program that engages trainees and is culturally relevant; training is simplified without losing content.

What to look for?

Incubator provides instruction that is catered to the technical needs of the farmers, who will likely be bringing diverse cultural and technical perspectives to their plots. Incubator works toward an overall understanding of a variety of techniques and provides farmers an opportunity to experiment with new practices. This process should not be “dumbed down,” but rather should be cognizant of cultural perspectives and language barriers. Farmer should take away an understanding of the food system’s big picture, particularly for those who are not U.S. citizens and may be unfamiliar with local processes or markets.

Incubator staff will be highly involved in a demonstration capacity, and will encourage hands-on learning on demonstration farms.

Incubator will make an effort to grow culturally relevant produce, and will be open to letting farmer have autonomy over the food they personally grow.

**2.2 Connection with skilled and enthusiastic mentors:** Link incubator trainees with existing farmers in the community or other mentors currently participating in the program. Mentors should have a cultural connection with farmers, or be passionate and experienced in working with vulnerable populations.

What to look for?

Incubator establishes partnerships with outside organizations invested in the success of a new generation of farmers.

Formal mentorship program is established, pairing first-time farmers or those without a strong farming background with those who are more experienced.

Established events which encourage interactions between LR participants and farmers in the community.

**2.3 Access to resources:** Provide tools, infrastructure, and qualified and capable leadership to allow for success while at the incubator.

What to look for?

Incubator provides farmers with access to tools as necessary, ranging from hoes and rakes to running water and tractors. More advanced and experienced farmers in higher-level programming may be expected to furnish many of their own tools, whereas less experienced farmers may need more tool supplementation. The resources available should reflect the stair-stepping approach in Key Characteristic 1.2 and getting farmers to have Skin in the Game in

Incubator is equipped with the basic essentials necessary to a real farm operation, so the experience is appropriate practice for farmers’ independent ventures. This includes the availability of washing stations, storage, electricity, and running water.

Access to resources is appropriate for all farmers, including those of lower socioeconomic status and various ethnic backgrounds who may need transportation or translation services.

**2.4 Evaluation techniques\***

### Key Characteristic #3: Building Self-Sufficiency

Incubator is intimately involved in preparing farmer for success after completion in the program.

3.1 Access to land\*

3.2 Comprehensive marketing\*

3.3 Access to finance\*

### Key Characteristic #4: Internal capacity

Stable internal infrastructure is in place for long-term incubator success and sustainability.

4.1 Inclusive recruitment\*

4.2 Diverse funding sources\*

4.3 University partnerships\*

**4.4 Evaluation:** For overall incubator define key performance indicators and track program elements but focus more on Key Progress Indicators (KPIs) related to social capital and poverty alleviation.

What to look for?

Incubator evaluation emphasizes farmer security above profits, such as increased family income and food security. Successful incubators for vulnerable populations will allow for produce grown to supplement the farmer's nutrition.

Incubator farms work to cultivate social capital by connecting farmers with one another and encouraging community building. Farmers should have a strong sense of social support from their peers and the incubator.

The level of social capital should help to support the mental health of the farmer via a sense of purpose and value.

Incubator provides an environment of continuing education, such that farmers are also able to improve other skills, such as language. Refugee or immigrant farmers may also need the space to expand their cultural understanding and knowledge, which may differ from their country of origin.

Incubator ensures that proper land stewardship is taking place on farmer plots. Farmer training will emphasize sustainable growing practices so that future farmers are land stewards.

**4.5 External partnerships:** Partner with economic development organizations and refugee organizations to minimize barriers to success and enhance overall experience of incubator participants

What to look for?

Farmers from refugee populations may not have the language or writing skills to apply for a spot at the incubator, and those barriers may persist into the incubator program itself. Incubator should be working with refugee organizations that can help with translation services and language instruction. Incubator may also have relationships with ESL instructors.

Incubator is able to connect refugees with Organizations trained to mentor this population through the transition to a new country. Immigrant transitions will often involve various logistical, mental, and financial challenges that the incubator is not equipped to handle but which are barriers to successful program completion.

Incubator can direct farmers from vulnerable populations to community development organizations and social workers for assistance with, for example, housing, unemployment, financial, and mental health services.

# Food Banks

## Key Characteristic #1: Food justice

Food bank is proactive in its approach to hunger, and considerate of how inventory choices impact individuals experiencing hunger.

1.1 Connect hunger with poverty: An understanding of the importance of combating poverty to lead to the elimination of hunger.

What to look for?

Food bank mission and values seek to address more than hunger in their communities. Food bank is forward-thinking, and makes connections to hunger's underlying causes.

Food bank leadership is well-versed in socioeconomic disparities and the gaps in their service area, and is making efforts directly or indirectly to address those issues.

Food bank evaluation measures outcomes beyond food distribution. Food bank may keep records on pounds of produce distributed, but should also be endeavoring to measure area trends in population poverty, average client income, and total clients served.

1.2 Supplemental resources: Provide additional information, services, or programs in conjunction with food distribution so clients are better able to address their underlying challenges.

What to look for?

Food bank has supplementary programming or partnerships in place to meet client's non-food needs, such as job training or funding support.

Food bank has staff on hand who are familiar with support programs not available directly through the food bank. These supplementary services may be offered by a range of organizations in the food bank's service area, such as housing assistance, career development agencies, temporary-staffing offices, health care clinics, and others.

Food bank offers SNAP or WIC assistance and outreach for clients.

1.3 Respectful client intake: The food bank is cognizant of the emotional weight clients experience in needing nutritional support, and their interactions and service of new clients are respectful of this.

What to look for?

Clients are greeted with kindness and respect, and staff are trained to engage with at-risk populations.

New clients are asked to submit only essential client information; food bank does not make the application process unnecessarily burdensome, embarrassing, or restrictive.

Food bank keeps all client records confidential.

## Key Characteristic # 2: Effective distribution

Food bank infrastructure and relationships enable efficient distribution of products to clients.

2.1 Coordination to meet need: Food bank's geographic footprint is organized for distribution efficiency, particularly large food bank organizations with multiple sites and warehouses.

What to look for?

Food bank is equipped with the facilities needed to properly handle and process incoming products, and product is transferred efficiently to the client.

Food bank minimizes the amount of product that becomes food waste.

Food bank communicates semi-regularly with suppliers about product needs to ensure sufficient inventory at all times.

2.2 Develop important partnerships: Food bank collaborates and communicates with other service providers in the area, and keeps local government informed about hunger in the service area.

What to look for?

Food bank has partnerships or lines of communication with community and economic development organizations, so all parties understand up-to-date hunger needs and poverty in a service area.

Food bank shares hunger data with local government officials so they know the current state of their constituency. Food bank can identify specific geographic spaces or populations in need of government support, and regularly report that information to local, state, or federal representatives.

## Key Characteristic #3: Respectful client experience

Client experience at the food bank is positive, flexible, and provides food security.

3.1 Client caloric needs met: Clients are provided with adequate amount of food to meet nutritional needs.

What to look for?

Food bank endeavors to offer a friendly and understanding distribution environment, such that clients feel comfortable asking for the amount of food they really need to sustain their families. Food bank rarely places a cap on the amount of food distributed to a particular client during any one exchange, nor on the amount of visits allowed during a specific time period. Food bank treats each client as an individual with unique needs.

Food bank offers flexible, considerate hours of operation, so that clients have a realistic opportunity to visit the



food bank for their family's nutritional needs. Food bank is ideally available to clients on weekends, and in the evenings on some weekdays.

3.2 Healthy food options: Clients have access to fresh fruits and vegetables as well as meat and dairy products.

What to look for?

Food bank attempts to stock as much fresh food as possible, and monitors how inventory aligns with federally-recommended diets and nutrition. Food bank works to address gaps in nutritional categories by initiating food procurement strategies.

Food bank markets its healthy products to at-risk populations who may have limited or insufficient access, such as small children, the elderly, or the homeless.

Food bank offers, or has partners who offer, nutrition education and counselling.

3.3 Client choice: Clients can take the items that are best for their family's needs and tastes.

What to look for?

Food bank has the quantity and variety in its inventory to match all client needs, ideally including a range of fresh, frozen, canned, and high-calorie items in all food groups. Client has autonomy over the products they take home.

Food bank does not pressure its clients to choose certain products over others. Food bank may utilize strategies to highlight certain products, but is respectful of the needs and tastes of all clients.

“The process for when stuff began was not the general practice of coming into the community and saying, ‘This is what we’re going to do for you.’ But actually having a series of community meetings and input sessions and idea sessions, and votes on exactly what it is that we could effectively do in the community.”

# Combining Food Bank & Incubator Farm

## Key Characteristic #1 Suitable Location

The food bank's location and population is suitable to farming practices.

1.1 Farming supportive climate: Incubator and Food Bank are located in an area amenable to farming activities.

What to look for?

Geographic location has a growing season of at least six months or more. This timing can be flexible if a food bank can install extended season facilities such as hoop houses.

Basic resources, such as land and water, are available in adequate supply and at manageable prices.

1.2 Food insecure populations: Incubator and Food Bank are located in an area where there is a need for food distribution and poverty alleviation.

What to look for?

Areas with lower socioeconomic status and more racial and ethnic diversity are more likely to have populations experiencing food insecurity. Different racial and ethnic groups may also have very limited access to culturally-appropriate foods.

Areas with limited access to supermarkets or grocery stores have populations who struggled to obtain healthy food products, and have less autonomy over their food choices.

1.3 Local food culture: Incubator and Food Bank are located in an area with a local food culture.

What to look for?

Culture of the service area is supportive of area growers, which is often present in areas with local food movements, slow food movements, and large immigrant communities.

Service area has an infrastructure in place to provide market opportunities to new growers, such as farmer's markets, local grocers, local-friendly chain supermarkets, and citizens interested in community-supported agriculture.

## Key Characteristic #2 Forward thinking mission

Food bank and Incubator actively pursues upstream solutions to hunger.

2.1 Connect hunger with poverty: Food bank understands the system view of poverty leading to hunger and the reinforcing feedback loop.

What to look for?

Food bank/incubator mission and values seek to address more than hunger in their communities. Food bank is forward-thinking, and makes connections to hunger's underlying causes.

Food bank/incubator leadership is well-versed in socioeconomic disparities and the gaps in their service area, and is making efforts directly or indirectly to address those issues.

Food bank/incubator evaluation measures outcomes beyond food distribution. Food bank may keep records on pounds of produce distributed, but should also be endeavoring to measure area trends in population poverty, average client income, and total clients served.

2.2 Health focus: Food bank pursues initiatives focused on the health of their clients.

What to look for?

Food bank attempts to stock as much fresh food as possible, and monitors how inventory aligns with federally-recommended diets and nutrition. Food bank works to address gaps in nutritional categories by initiating food procurement strategies, such as garden programs or on-site farm production, partnerships with area farms or farmer's markets, and healthy donations from area wholesalers.

Food bank markets its healthy products to at-risk populations who may have limited or insufficient access, such as small children, the elderly, or the homeless.

Food bank offers, or has partners who offer, nutrition education and counseling.

2.3 Economic development: Food Bank and Incubator pursues initiatives focused on the economic development of their clients.

What to look for?

Food bank/incubator's mission statement or strategic priorities acknowledge the source of client hunger, and the ways in which client services should be supplemented beyond food distribution.

Food bank/incubator has supplementary programming or partnerships to meet client's non-food needs, such as job training or funding support.

### Key Characteristic #3 Garden Program

Food bank has initiated a community-based gardening program.

What to look for?

Food bank has verified community support of garden- and farm-based programming, and has clients interested in gardening for recreation or nutritional supplementation.

Food bank has the capacity to arrange for plot space, and can oversee plot assignments to gardeners. Location of garden program plots is ideally spread evenly throughout the service area, so gardeners are more likely to live close to where they garden.

Food bank connects garden program efforts with job training efforts, and identifies clients who may be interested in more advanced professional farming development.

### Key Characteristic #4: Farm production for food bank

Food bank has started or is starting to incorporate fresh produce, either from its own farm plot or through area farm partnerships.

What to look for?

Food bank has the facilities to handle, store, and distribute fresh produce.

Food bank has access to land, a garden program, a farmer's market, or farmer partners for fresh food procurement.

## Key Characteristic #5: Leverage partnerships

Food bank and Incubator are conscious of client needs, and can connect clients with alternative resources that are beyond the organization's capacity.

5.1 Partnership with economic development organizations: Incubator and food bank foster relationships with key local and/or national economic development organizations.

What to look for?

Food bank/incubator is connected in some capacity with community and economic development organizations, so all parties understand up-to-date hunger needs and poverty in a service area.

Food bank/incubator staff are familiar with support programs not available directly through the organization. These supplementary services may be offered by a range of economic organizations in the service area, such as housing assistance, career development agencies, temporary-staffing offices, and others.

5.2 Partnership with Universities: Incubator and food bank foster relationships with universities in key development areas (ie: Land, research, resources, potential incubator participants).

What to look for?

Food bank/incubator has connections with University researchers, and can utilize expert knowledge to evaluate and improve their physical infrastructure, services, and methodologies.

Food bank/incubator endeavors to gain access to land owned and leased by University partners, who have stable ownership and land protection.

5.3 Partnership with health care agencies: Incubator and food bank foster relationships with health care agencies to develop programming and offer resources.

What to look for?

Food bank/incubator is connected in some capacity with health organizations, so all parties understand local hunger and malnourishment needs.

Food bank/incubator staff are familiar with local health clinics and can direct clients to needed services.

Food bank/incubator connects clients with health educators in the community to address important topics such as nutrition, chemical exposure risks, and other applicable health risks. Food bank/incubator leadership works directly with county health department and wellness educators to ensure that food security is being addressed at a regional level.

5.4 Partnership with local government (land trust): Incubator and food bank foster relationships with local government for access to land and funding.

What to look for?

Food bank/incubator develops relationships with local constituencies to utilize reserved land on easement and government-owned properties.

Food bank/incubator partnerships with local government help to connect organization with constituency-supported programming, such as farmers' markets, downtown development events, and local food culture.

Food bank/incubator has regular discussions and connections with local policy makers to improve ordinances and zoning bylaws for a more supportive local farming environment.

## Key Characteristic #6: Structure for Success

Food bank and Incubator work collaboratively, engaging in open communication and support.

6.1 Resource support for incubator: Food bank takes responsibility for partially supporting the efforts of its incubator to encourage growth and excellence, particularly in the early years.

What to look for?

Food bank allocates funding to help support incubator start-up operations and programming, either through budget allocation or staff support toward grant writing.

Food bank and incubator staff are shared whenever possible if operations overlap, particularly in administrative tasks.

Food bank and incubator endeavor to share facilities and supplies whenever possible to facilitate shared staffing arrangements and reduce overhead.

6.2 Cooperation among administrative leaders: Coordinators from both the food bank and incubator are engaged in open and constructive communication.

What to look for?

The leadership of both programs should have regular conversations about program goals and needs, and work together constructively

Food bank and incubator coordinators endeavor to identify joint programming opportunities to take full advantage of their unique relationship.

6.3 Shared culture: The leadership and employees of both organizations recognize the strengths and weaknesses of their conjoined programs, and are motivated to meet one another's gaps.

What to look for?

All staff members in both organizations are familiarized with the mission, strengths, and weaknesses of both entities, and are encouraged to engage with one another. Program coordinators for both the food bank and incubator are encouraged to share metrics, strategies, and community contacts.

“If the food bank can close the loop and bring the produce back to the food bank somehow and then reimburse the farmers, then I think you’ve really created a symbiotic relationship and I think it’s going to flourish.”.







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