

## The Fauquier Education Farm Incubator Program

Narrative: There is a great deal of interest in learning more about launching a farming business, and very often these prospective new farmers are not coming from a farm family background or through agricultural colleges. The Northern Piedmont Beginning Farmer Program has been trying to help these new farmers make informed decisions about their options as they move forward and to familiarize them with programs that are available to assist them along the way.

Incubator programs are a means of offering these farmers a chance to gain access to land, equipment and technical experience. This exposure can help these new farmers gain valuable real-world production experience, and help them make more fully informed decisions about how difficult crop production can be. Those individuals who have successfully taken advantage of these incubator programs will be well positioned to move forward with land ownership or leasing options, while others can see that farming may not be for them, without having made costly investments in land and equipment.

The Fauquier Education Farm Incubator Program is intended to offer this real-world experience with small scale farming to individuals who are ready to start commercial vegetable or cut flower production but do not own land and equipment. In addition to land access these new farmers would have access to technical and training support from the Education Farm Director and limited equipment use. The goal is to enable these new farmers to establish experience and credibility that they can use in seeking other land leasing or purchase options. A further goal is to help these individuals make more fully informed decisions about their commercial farming plans.

This program is not intended for individuals seeking a home garden for themselves. Instead it is for individuals with a commercial farming intent. Any profits that will be generated through this incubator project will belong to the new farmer.

Program details:

Program administrators, Jim Hankins, Tim Ohlwiler

- 1-year lease, renewable up to three years. The 1<sup>st</sup> year is free, there will be a charge of \$100 per year for years 2 and 3.
- Applicants must apply in writing by March 1<sup>st</sup>. Preference will be given to prior students in the Northern Piedmont Beginning Farmer Program and veterans. Selected candidates for the program will be interviewed by the administrators and selection committee.
- Selection of the new farmers receiving plots in the Incubator Program will be decided by the Administrators and will be based on the applications and interviews.
- Anyone seeking to renew for a 2<sup>nd</sup> year must have completed the NPBFPP or be enrolled in that course.
- Before renewing for a 2<sup>nd</sup> year the new farmers must submit a basic Business Plan that is approved by the administrators. This plan will need to be updated and approved by the administrators before renewing for a third year.
- The plot is available from March 15<sup>th</sup> to November 1<sup>st</sup>. By November 1<sup>st</sup> the plot must be cleared of all non-organic material to allow planting a cover crop. (if the farmer chooses to plant his/her own cover crop it must be with a plan approved by the administrators.)

The Fauquier Education Farm will provide...

- Land, up to four plots, each slightly more than a quarter acre. Soil test will be taken and pH will be between 6.2 and 7.
- Access to water, and the Education Farm will provide irrigation tubing.
- Electric deer fence,
- Spring and fall tilling with a tractor, winter cover crop of winter rye.
- Access to walk behind roto-tiller and Billy goat mower by appointment.
- Bi-weekly meeting with Ed Farm Director by appointment.
- Trays of some of the same seedlings we are growing on the Education Farm, 1 tray of tomatoes, 1 tray of peppers, 1 tray of cabbage, 1 tray of broccoli, 1 tray of melons.

The new farmers must provide...

- All labor, Education Farm volunteers will not be asked to work in the Incubator plots.
- All seed, mulch and soil supplements other than lime. (except the trays of seedlings detailed above.)
- Must get preapproval on all chemicals used to fertilize or control insect pest and will keep documented records of every application.
- Must be available for early March meeting to train on roto-tiller and Billy goat mower.
- \$200.00 security deposit (cannot be waived for anyone) this will be returned only after the plot is cleared and ready for a cover crop.