

# LA PLATA COUNTY FOOD PLAN

## INCUBATOR & BEGINNING FARM PROGRAMS

Incubator and beginning farm programs are designed to support new and aspiring farmers by providing essential resources and structured guidance. These programs offer critical benefits such as hands-on experience in sustainable agriculture, access to resources, mentorship from experienced farmers, and opportunities for networking within the agricultural community. They create a supportive learning environment that fosters knowledge exchange while helping participants navigate financial planning and operational challenges. Additionally, some programs provide access to farmland for those who may not otherwise have it.



### BENEFITS

- Provide hands-on training and encourage learning through direct experience
- Offer access to shared resources, such as land, tools, and equipment, reducing the financial burden on new farmers
- Connect participants with mentorship opportunities from experienced farmers
- Build networking opportunities within the agricultural community, helping farmers build relationships with industry stakeholders
- Develop financial literacy and business planning skills within new farmers, preparing them for the economic realities of farming
- Encourage diversified and sustainable farming practice
- Promote environmental stewardship and innovation

### CHALLENGES

- Securing consistent and long-term funding
- Increasing uncertainty around program sustainability
- Ensuring access to land and resources for participants
- Maintaining infrastructure, such as equipment and irrigation systems
- Navigating complex regulatory requirements around environmental standards, labor laws, and farm practices
- Tailoring educational content to meet the needs of farmers with varying experience levels
- Balancing diverse needs of multi-grower sites, including land allocation and resource usage

Many forms of incubator farms exist, but all rely on land-based areas for training and include multiple growers on-site. This may include on-farm and classroom-based training and education for new farmers to learn production methods, business practices, and transition models.

Incubator farm programs cultivate a sense of belonging and shared purpose among participants. They provide more than just land and education; they create a space where farmers can collaborate and exchange ideas, fostering social connections that are essential for long-term success. Farmers benefit from both the practical knowledge gained and the emotional support of being part of a like-minded network. This community-driven approach helps reduce the isolation often felt by new farmers and creates a wellness-centered environment, where participants can grow both personally and professionally.

Incubator farm programs address the significant barriers that beginning farmers face by providing access to essential infrastructure such as land (Ewert, 2012). Access to affordable land is a primary barrier for many aspiring farmers, and incubator farms mitigate this by offering low-cost leasing options. Within focus groups, it was named that “programs like Land Link could be a helpful addition for La Plata County to better connect farmers with land owners.”



Incubator farms like Fort Lewis College Incubator Program provide shared infrastructure that reduces startup costs and fosters a collaborative environment where farmers can share resources, ideas, and techniques.

Local and state policies can facilitate options for land access, educational opportunities, and the use of environmentally sustainable farming practices. By supporting agroecological methods, governance structures promote long-term environmental stewardship and economic viability. Additionally, policies can prioritize inclusivity by ensuring all farmers have access to land and markets. Incubator farms create opportunities for new farmers to build sustainable businesses by offering financial training and access to resources that are otherwise difficult to obtain. Programs support economic self-sufficiency by training beginning farmers in agricultural entrepreneurship. An example of this is the Refugee Agricultural Partnership Program (RAPP) which provides essential financial resources, to help farmers gain skills and access to funding.



IOWA STATE UNIVERSITY  
Extension and Outreach

This institution is an equal opportunity provider. For the full non-discrimination statement or accommodation inquiries, go to [www.extension.iastate.edu/legal](http://www.extension.iastate.edu/legal).

VEA ESTE PÓSTER  
EN ESPAÑOL

[bit.ly/LPCespañol](http://bit.ly/LPCespañol)

