INCUBATOR PROGRAM OVERVIEW

INTRODUCTION

INCUBATOR PROGRAM PURPOSE

New City Neighbors' Incubator Program helps emerging farmers move from agricultural training into operating their own small-scale farm businesses. The program provides access to land, shared infrastructure, mentorship, and markets while reducing some of the biggest barriers facing beginning farmers: affordable land, startup costs, equipment, and ongoing technical support.
The Incubator Program is rooted in New City Neighbors' vision of growing neighborhood leaders who strengthen thriving, equitable communities. We see farming not only as food production, but also as a pathway to entrepreneurship, leadership, economic opportunity, and stronger local food systems. Through the program, participants operate their own micro-farm businesses on dedicated plots at New City Neighbors' Ball Ave Training Center, with access to shared resources and ongoing mentorship. Our goal is to bridge training and independent farm ownership by giving beginning farmers the opportunity to develop production skills, build markets, and test and strengthen their farm business models.

WHY THIS PROGRAM EXISTS

Starting a farm requires more than agricultural knowledge. Beginning farmers frequently encounter significant barriers, including:

- Limited land access: Affordable farmland, particularly near urban markets and communities, can be difficult to secure.
- High startup costs: Irrigation, tools, equipment, growing infrastructure, and other startup expenses can make entering agriculture financially difficult.
- Limited support networks: Beginning farmers may lack access to experienced mentors, business coaching, markets, and a community of other growers.

These barriers can be particularly significant for farmers who have historically been excluded from access to agricultural land and capital. The Incubator Program gives beginning farmers an opportunity to establish and grow their businesses without first making a major investment in land and infrastructure.

WHO THE PROGRAM IS FOR

The Incubator Program is designed for growers who are ready to take the next step toward operating their own farm business. Applicants may include:

- Graduates of New City Neighbors' Farm Apprenticeship who have demonstrated agricultural skills, commitment, and leadership potential

- Participants or graduates of the MSU Organic Farmer Training Program
- Early-stage farmers with a clear farm business vision who lack access to affordable land and infrastructure
- Growers committed to contributing to an equitable, community-centered local food system

NCN considers factors including agricultural experience, business readiness, income, geography, and race/ethnicity as part of its participant selection process, with the goal of expanding access to land and entrepreneurship for growers who have historically faced barriers to entering agriculture.

OUR APPROACH

LAND ACCESS

Participants receive access to a dedicated approximately ¼-acre growing area for a defined program term. Incubator plots include field-growing space and an automated high tunnel, allowing participants to plan crops, establish markets, and operate a small-scale farm business.

SHARED INFRASTRUCTURE

Incubator farmers receive access to shared agricultural infrastructure and resources, including:

- Irrigation
- High-tunnel growing space
- Shared tools and equipment
- Tool storage
- Shared farm infrastructure

As the Ball Ave Training Center is developed, NCN also plans to provide participants with access to collective wash/pack facilities and cold storage.
This shared-resource model reduces the amount of capital beginning farmers must invest before they can begin producing and selling food.

TECHNICAL AND BUSINESS SUPPORT

Participants receive ongoing mentorship and coaching designed to support both their agricultural production and the development of a viable farm business. Support may include:

- Sustainable production practices
- Crop planning
- Financial management and recordkeeping
- Market development
- Regulatory requirements

- Farm business planning
- Leadership development

NCN's goal is not to operate participants' businesses for them, but to provide the resources, mentorship, and environment farmers need to build the experience and confidence to run increasingly independent farm businesses.

PARTICIPANT OUTCOMES

The Incubator Program is designed to give beginning farmers a real-world environment in which to build their businesses. Through participation, farmers can:

- Launch and operate an independent farm business
- Gain experience managing crop production, finances, and sales
- Develop and test markets for their products
- Access infrastructure that would otherwise require significant startup investment
- Build business and leadership skills
- Develop relationships with other growers, customers, and community partners
- Prepare for the transition to a more independent and permanent farming operation

The Incubator Program ultimately serves as a bridge between training and independent farm ownership, helping the next generation of growers establish viable businesses while strengthening the local food system.

PROGRAM FEES

Incubator participants pay an annual program fee based on their number of years participating in the program:

- Year 1: $250
- Year 2: $500
- Year 3 and beyond: $1,000 annually

Program fees are due March 1 of each growing season.
The program fee is not a lease or rental payment for the incubator plot. It contributes toward the cost of providing ongoing mentorship and access to, maintaining, and replacing resources within NCN's shared tool library.

NCN does not want the program fee to prevent an otherwise qualified farmer from participating. If the fee presents a financial barrier, NCN may consider opportunities to contract with an incubator participant to provide educational workshops or other programming for NCN youth employees. These

opportunities are not guaranteed, must be arranged and approved by NCN in advance, and will be compensated only after the agreed-upon work has been completed. Compensation earned through this work may be used by the participant toward their program fee.

APPLYING TO THE PROGRAM

Interested growers should complete the Incubator Program application by November 20, 2026. Applicants are reviewed using a scoring rubric that considers agricultural experience, business readiness, commitment, and alignment with the goals of the program. Participation in the Incubator Program is competitive, and available plots are limited. Participants should expect a response no later than December 18. Plots will become available on March 1 each growing season.