

FEBRUARY 2021

**RE
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ION**

**GROWING
NEW
FARMERS**



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Ripe for
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PREAMBLE

As next generation farmers, our inheritance and history has us standing in a complicated place.

We live and farm across a place of mythology, identity and many-storied histories, for 'the bush' and the place it occupies in the Australian mind 'is by many accounts the source of the nation's idea of itself' (Watson 2014). So it follows that 'like the Anzac soldier and bronzed surf lifesaver, the farmer holds a special place in the Australian imagination' (Mayes, 2020).

From this place, from the farmers before us, we are inheriting deep knowledge, wisdom, ingenuity and innovation.

Yet this same place of inheritance is also one of colonial invasion and destruction. Our crops grow on land that was stolen through frontier wars, Indigenous dispossession and genocide. On land which, since its theft, has been subject to extensive degradation following the introduction of European farming practices, including the highest rate of mammalian extinction globally in the last 200 years (Foley 2020).

This is all part of the inheritance on which we draw, and the ground on which we stand.

As we look ahead it is evident that there are different pathways by which we can move forward from here as next generation land stewards, practitioners and students of the art of farming.

One pathway that is presented almost as a foregone conclusion follows the echoes of Earl Butz's famous words as the US Department of Agriculture Secretary in the 1970s - 'get big or get out'. That to succeed in Australian agriculture today means you need to go big - big acres, big debt, big machinery, big tech, big corporations, big global supply chains.

There is, however, a growing movement of 'next gen' small scale regenerative farmers who are seeking and farming in a different way.

We are finding ways to farm with and for community, not corporations. We are developing ways of farming that are as old and new as time, in that they connect people - growers and eaters alike - back with the land.

For we have learnt that what we do to the land we do to ourselves, and that choosing to 'get big' removes people from the land and replaces them with machines and distant managers, unfolding multiple consequences for people and our planet.

As the late, great Barry Lopez wrote 'the more superficial a society's knowledge of the real dimensions of the land it occupies becomes, the more vulnerable the land is to exploitation, to manipulation for short-term gain. The land, virtually powerless before political and commercial entities, finds itself finally with no defenders' (Lopez 1998: 138).

Here in Australia we are learning that our ecological foundations are at breaking point, and our land urgently needs defenders, lovers, stewards and students of every kind, given both our history and the future we are facing.

Climate change is coming at us hard and fast, and many of the beginner farmers we spoke to in this research are scared about what it means not just for us as farmers, but as people and communities. We know the risks are increasing and the state of play is transforming overhead and underfoot.

Hence we are choosing and learning to farm in a way that regenerates the land in order to build resilience to shocks across our ecologies, economy and communities.

PREAMBLE continued

To farm in ways that rebuilds soil health, fosters biodiversity and feeds our local and regional peoples, because when broader systems implode these ecological and social communities are what hold us upright. These past 18 months of bushfires, drought, floods and Covid-19 have reinforced the imperative for this embedded resilience.

Many of us are seeking to stand in a place of honesty and recognition of the ongoing history that brings our feet to our particular patch of earth. Agriculture has been at the forefront of Indigenous genocide and dispossession. This truth demands action of us, not just words of acknowledgement.

Living into this truth takes ongoing work and honesty.

We are independent folk, our growing movement of small scale regenerative farmers, and there's a lot we can, and are, achieving on our own.

But we are also interdependent - for the work we do and the challenges we face - are bigger than us.

This research is one step towards growing a collective effort to support and enable new regenerative farmers in Australia. In order to grow something new, we need to learn from what's already happening, from the gains already made, both here and in other parts of the world.

It is a step in recognition that we need community, solidarity and support to grow something other than what we have known before - for farming and the land on which all our feet rest, be it pavement or paddock or office floor.

Thanks for reading, we hope you find it useful.

The Farmer Incubator and Young Farmers Connect Crew.



OUR INTENT

In mid -2019, Farmer Incubator in partnership with Young Farmers Connect, received funding to conduct feasibility research into expanding our work in growing future farmers.

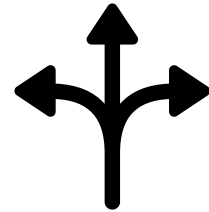
The intent of our research was threefold:



1. To develop an understanding of the Australian context re supporting a next generation of regenerative farmers: existing activity, challenges, needs



2. To learn from international initiatives: What works, what are the challenges, learnings & key enabling mechanisms?



3. To use this learning to inform our future pathways & share with others working with/in the position to support new growers

OUR FOCUS

There are a few things to bear in mind as you read through this report.

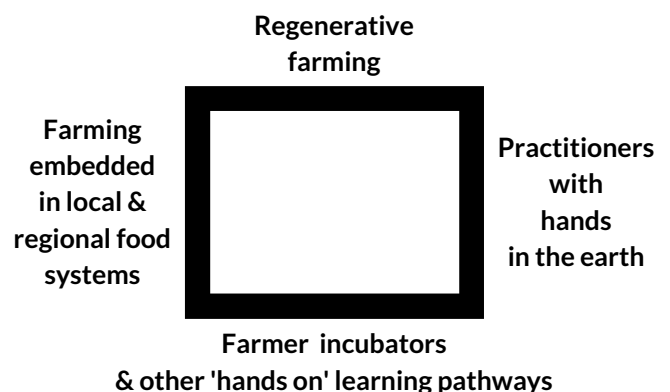
Firstly, the lens of our research is firmly focused on our next generation of 'human-scale' agro-ecological/regenerative growers, because that's who we are and who we work with and we're responding to a lack of research in this space.

Our research framework is set around 4 core tenants, illustrated to the right, which are informed in part by the work and focus of this segment of the new farming generation: farming embedded in local and regional food systems and regenerative/agroecological farming methods.

Our framework is also informed by our ultimate intent which is to translate our findings into tangible outcomes through our work and

broader collaboration and advocacy. While we have consulted academic literature and numerous other sources, the bulk of our research work has constituted speaking with and learning from new and aspiring farmers, educator and mentor farmers, incubator farm managers, staff and other key 'on the ground' practitioners.

We make no apologies for this. We're on a mission and so we've gone straight to the source.



WHO WE ARE

FARMER INCUBATOR

Farmer Incubator (FI) began in 2014 with the aim to facilitate new entrants into the Australian agricultural sector schooled in regenerative farming methods.

Inspired by farmer incubators in the USA, we work with supportive landholders to facilitate 'hands on' experience, access to land, resources, & networks of new and experienced farmers to remove barriers and create pathways for a new generation of Australian farmers.

In addition to farm tours & specialised workshops, the principle activity of FI has been the Pop Up Garlic Farmer (PUGF) Program, which over the past 7 years has supported up to 22 aspiring farmers per year, by providing plots on farms in & around Melbourne, along with seed, workshops, mentors & a step-by-step process for cultivating a garlic crop from seed to market.
(Refer to page 27 for more information on the PUGF program)

FARMERINCUBATOR.ORG

WHO WE ARE

YOUNG FARMERS CONNECT

Young Farmers Connect (YFC) are a national not-for-profit organisation committed to cultivating networks, resources and community for young farmers state and nation wide.

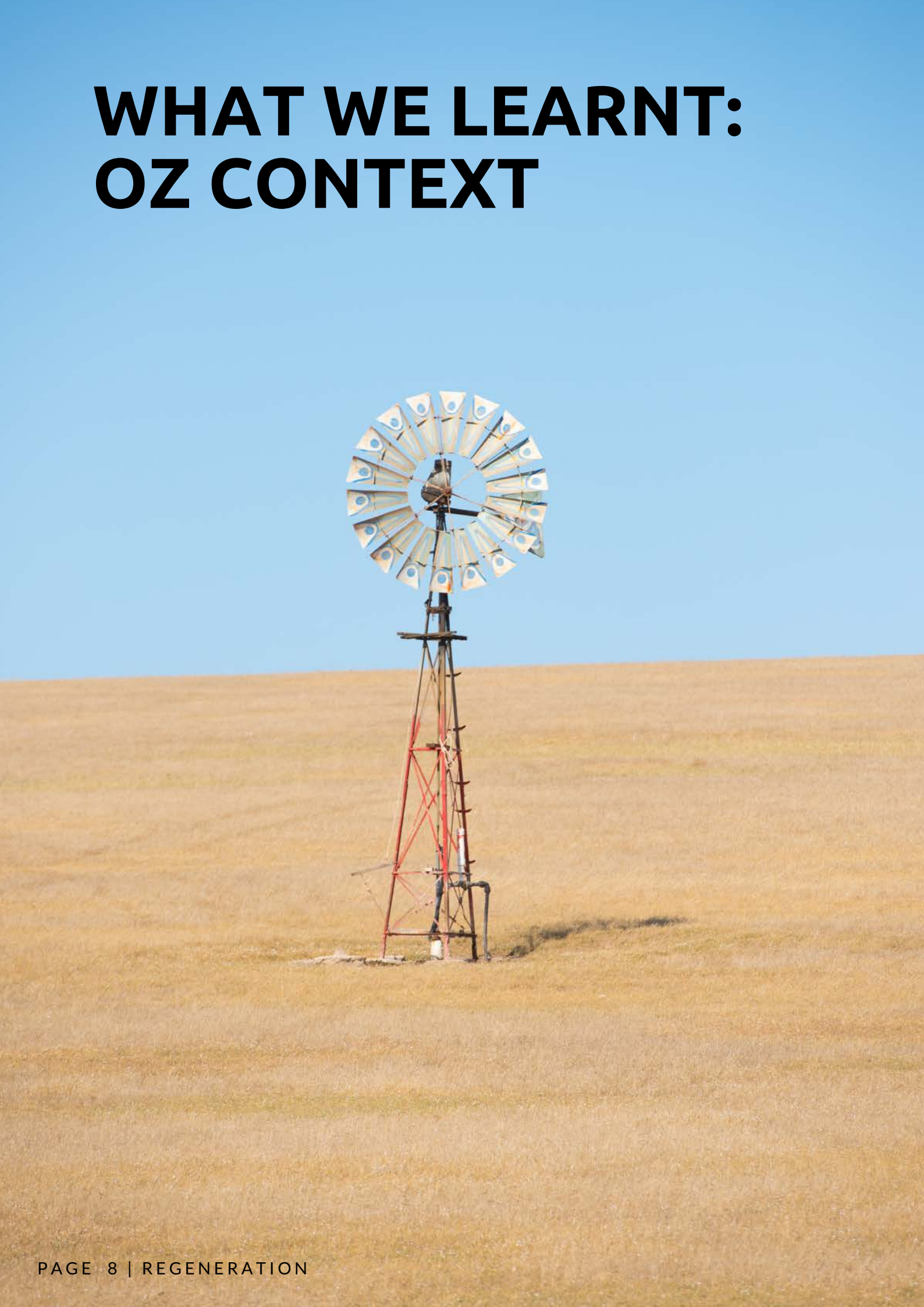
Through our network we provide educational platforms and community connections that encourage our young agrarians to farm for the future, supporting the use of regenerative, holistic & sustainable practices.

YFC is a community that provides a national framework for peer support and a network that facilitates opportunities, land sharing, collaboration, education, mentorship and industry support to new, young and aspiring farmers throughout Australia.

YOUNGFARMERSCONNECT.COM



WHAT WE LEARNT: OZ CONTEXT





OZ CONTEXT

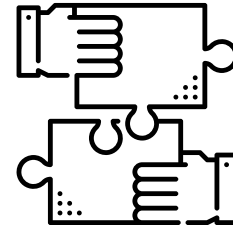
BACKGROUND

Phase 1 of our research involved:



1. Building an in-depth understanding of:

- Barriers, enablers and pathways for new and aspiring 'small-scale' agroecological and regenerative farmers in Australia
- Key learnings, needs, gaps and opportunities re existing formal and informal farm business incubation activities:



2. Developing relationships that:

- Strengthen YFC and FI networks for expanding our work and
- Build a sense of collaboration and collective endeavour (which we learnt has been critical in other parts of the world) to help grow enabling support networks and structures for new growers.

We took a three-pronged approach to investigating our core focus areas as outlined below:



Academic & grey literature



226 new and aspiring farmers.



25 new, aspiring and established farmers, educators and knowledge holders.

Limited research has been done into new regenerative and agro-ecological farmers in Australia, with most of the literature we have been able to find on new entrants into agriculture generally focused on conventional, broad-acre farming. While our findings below largely draw on the primary research we conducted through interviews and surveys, we ground and cross-reference this, where possible, with wider research and literature from Australia and beyond.

CHALLENGES FACING OUR 'NEXT GEN' FARMERS

Our research identified 6 key themes under which to group the challenges facing our new small-scale, regenerative farming generation. We provide an outline of these below before delving into each of them in more detail in the pages that follow:

1.

Access to capital

For farm start up,
establishment and
equity

2.

Access to land

Sky high land prices,
successional challenges
& lack of alternate
models

3.

Accessing hands-on learning pathways

Limited & piecemeal,
accessibility & cost

4.

Social challenges

Isolation, entering
farming as an 'outsider',
social pressure

5.

Lack of dedicated funding & support

compared to other OECD
nations

6.

Ecological & climatic challenges

Increasing risk and
uncertainty



1. ACCESS TO CAPITAL

STARTING OUT

In an economic environment of 'competitive productivism' (Dibden et al. 2009: 305) farming in Australia is generally characterised by 'low incomes and poor rates of return' with up to '75 percent of Australian farm businesses not generating sufficient returns to meet both personal needs and business growth (Lockie 2015: v). Entering an industry where a solid income is by no means guaranteed raises all kinds of questions around long-term income security, let alone the significant up front investment that can be required to get a farming business off the ground.

For those who are entering the farming game from outside a family farm, the capital challenge can be even more monumental. By the time you factor in land, tools and equipment, farm infrastructure and seed stock (animal/plant/other) starting a farm 'in a food system dominated by large-scale and capital intensive agriculture' is not a cheap proposition (Calo 2018: 371).

Hence, it was little surprise that of the 105 beginner farmers we surveyed, the number one challenge cited was a lack of access to capital. Sufficient capital was also the number one reason listed by 121 aspiring farmers for why they were not yet running a farming business.

ESTABLISHMENT

Once a farm is up and running comes the challenge of when the business will pay the operator enough of a wage to live on and/or support a family. Over 60% of the beginner farmers surveyed stated it would take/has taken no less than 2 and up to 10 years for their farming business to support them. Many described hectic schedules of balancing off-farm work alongside the more than full time work of establishing a farming business.

EQUITY & DEBT

Both beginner and aspiring farmers indicated that they are uncomfortable with the level of debt required to purchase land. This throws up an interesting conundrum: the lack of opportunity for land ownership for new farmers means no/limited equity, yet the 'family owned and operated farming businesses that dominate most areas of Australian agriculture would not be able to fund on-farm investments and maintain their working capital without debt' which is 'reliant' on the equity they hold from owning their land (Department of Agriculture & Water Resources 2018: 5), with the largest proportion of debt on farms stemming from debt from funding land purchases (ibid).

"Setting up a farm is not something you can do if you've got a few thousand dollars lying around...

To do what I would count as 'well', in the sense that a place supports you rather than you holding it up all the time, with good irrigation and proper fencing and all the tools you actually need to be a viable business, and cool rooms ... I'm putting it at about \$50,000 or \$60,000...."

BEGINNER FARMER 2020 INTERVIEW

"You can make money in this but you're never going to be rich so just the idea of having a huge mortgage is kind of terrifying and there are just so many things that can go wrong in farming and it's already stressful enough without a mortgage."

BEGINNER FARMER 2020 INTERVIEW

"Time vs money are the biggest factors.

Having to make a living alongside setting up a farm business.

I am having to farm part time in order to farm at all."

BEGINNER FARMER 2019/20 SURVEY

ACCESS TO CAPITAL: CASE STUDY

FARMERS SCHOLARSHIP: WILLUNGA FARMERS MARKET

A community response to addressing the capital challenge facing new farmers.

LOCATION: Willunga, South Australia.

Web: www.willungafarmersmarket.com.au/scholarship/

Willunga Farmers Market started with the focus of supporting producers in the local region and reactivating a rural town in decline.

Market organisers found that they were having to really hunt for small farmers or growers and that there weren't many new growers entering farming in the region.

"We were concerned that the small farms would get gobbled up or close.

Where was the incentive for small farmers or young people to try their hand at primary production?"

MICHAEL LEWIS,
WILLUNGA FARMERS MARKET,
2019 INTERVIEW

So the farmers market organising committee worked with local Natural Resource Management Group Hills & Fleurieu Landscape Board, to develop a scholarship program that would encourage and support new growers.

The program was launched in 2014, with the objective to develop new primary producers who will be in the industry for the long haul, and was carefully designed with input from stakeholders to ensure it addressed key needs for new farmers.

The scholarship is funded through a combination of sources including sponsorship from the Hills & Fleurieu Landscape Board and contributions from the farmers market stall fees, and the new farmers are matched with a farming mentor from the region.

The program has supported the start up of 6 new farming enterprises to date, covering a range of production types from market gardens to pastured lamb, olive oil, mushrooms and poultry.



"It's very rewarding to know that we're working with a new generation of enthusiastic people and we match that enthusiasm with our support... so it really is a community response to assist"

MICHAEL LEWIS,
WILLUNGA FARMERS MARKET,
2019 INTERVIEW

"In short, the mentoring and grant allowed me to make a real go of it. Without it, I would never have gotten it off the ground"

KATE WASHINGTON, VIVE FARM, 2015
SCHOLARSHIP RECIPIENT
(WILLUNGA FARMERS MARKET, 2019).

2. ACCESS TO LAND

LAND PRICES

Agricultural land prices have been on a steady upward trajectory in recent decades in most parts of Australia, with land values increasing alongside more competing demands for rural land (RIRDC 2007; Rabobank 2019). This ongoing trend directly impacts the accessibility of land for new farmers, as indicated by our survey results which found that the key barrier to accessing land for aspiring farmers was lack of affordability of farmland. 63% of beginner farmers cited that land costs more to purchase than the value of what can be produced on it.

PATTERNS OF LAND OWNERSHIP

The average age of Australian farmers is 57 (compared to the average age of an Australian worker of 40 years) (Wu et al. 2019). This ageing farming population is often dependent on the farm for income well past traditional retirement age - in 2007 the preferred retirement age for Australian farmers was 70 years of age (CGRC 2018), with more Australian farmers preferring 'semi-retirement than those in other countries' (RIRDC 2007: ix).

The need for older Australian farmers to remain on the land for income security equates to lower rates of inter-generational transmission of land ownership. This translates to the effective 'locking out' of new and aspiring farmers from access to over half our productive farmland.

OTHER MODELS OF LAND ACCESS

Alternative mechanisms that make land more accessible for new entrants to farming include community and farmland trusts, conservation easements and lease with equity agreements from retiring farmers (*Refer to the Glossary on page 69 for further information on these mechanisms, and page 55 for a case study of a land trust initiative*). Some of these have been and are being actively developed in other parts of the world, but our research has found these to be under/undeveloped in Australia.

The most common way of accessing land without ownership is through leasing, yet it is widely recognised that 'leasing of farm land in Australia is an under-utilised form of land tenure when compared with the high rates of leasing in England and Wales; and in the USA' (RIRDC 2011: ix). Accessing land to lease is also a challenge for new farmers. Demand exceeds supply, with many leases not publicly advertised but instead accessible through social and business networks (*ibid*), networks that those entering farming from outside a farming community/farming family may not have access to.

Even where land can be accessed through lease agreements our research has found there to be a range of challenges inherent in the traditional lease model for new farmers, a challenge that emerged very strongly through our interviews with beginner farmers.

2. ACCESS TO LAND

OTHER MODELS OF LAND ACCESS

Firstly there is the general trend of short-term leasing agreements.

Given the significant investment into soil health, water and other farming infrastructure required to operate a farm business, long-term access to a patch of land is critical, yet 'non-farming landowners are generally reluctant to lock in leases of sufficient length to justify some of these investments/improvements' (Carolan 2018:180).

Secondly, accessing land via a lease 'is mediated by the unequal power relationship between tenant and landowner' which brings with it an inherent insecurity for the new farmer in terms of duration of land access, autonomy and also loss of investment: 'farmers add value to unfarmed land, often investing substantially in infrastructure to support their operations and then learn that their landlord may want to sell the property' (Calo 2018: 371-372).

"Land that is available to me is based on short term leases which is hard to grapple with planning for the long term"

ASPIRING FARMER 2019/20 SURVEY

As one new farmer we interviewed stated:

'We didn't make a very good lease agreement.

We had a horrible landlord and that's actually why we ended up leaving the last farm....

There wasn't enough stuff in the lease agreement to protect us.

I would advise anyone going in to a lease to get a lawyer to write everything up ...


Your whole life is on the line and you're putting your heart and soul into it."

BEGINNER FARMER 2020 INTERVIEW

"The issue that's been playing on our mind lately is longevity, family, raising a family...

wanting to have a space where we can invest in the soil fertility and fruit trees and that's difficult when you're on someone else's land."

BEGINNER FARMER 2020 INTERVIEW



"We worked out it would take 400 years to pay for land if we bought here."

BEGINNER FARMER 2019/20 SURVEY

"I feel like there needs to be a little bit more confidence that the older generation or the land owners are going to keep their word and allow someone to stay on the land for a long period of time..."

If you're a regenerative grower your whole purpose is kind of building up that soil so you're putting massive amounts of investment back into something you might not necessarily be able to hold onto for very long."

BEGINNER FARMER 2020 INTERVIEW

"My market farming friends have had access to lease land but its been insecure and ends after a lot of work put into the soil and drip irrigation infrastructure set up."

ASPIRING FARMER 2019/20 SURVEY

"There are only so many things you can do on a lease and you know you're always kind of beholden to the whims of your landlord."

BEGINNER FARMER 2019/20 SURVEY

ACCESS TO LAND: CASE STUDY

HARCOURT ORGANIC FARMING CO-OP

A farmer-led initiative making land available for next generation farmers.

LOCATION: Harcourt, Victoria

Web: <https://hofcoop.com.au/>

Katie and Hugh Finlay have been running an organic orchard in Central Victoria for over 20 years. As they approached retirement, and with none of their children interested in taking over the farm, they looked at alternatives to selling and leaving the land outright.

"We've put so many years into building up our beautiful organic soil, it just seemed too tragic to get rid of the farm"

KATIE FINLAY,
HARCOURT ORGANIC FARMING CO-OP
(HOFC)
2019 FARMER INCUBATOR WORKSHOP:
LAND ACCESS &
CO- FARMING

The couple were approached by Sas and Mel of Gung Hoe Growers, a market gardening business, to see if they were interested in making some of the farm available for their new farming enterprise. Following the success of this partnership, the Finlays then invited other new farmers with complimentary farm businesses to set up their enterprises on the farm.

The Harcourt Organic Farming Co-op now consists of:

- Sellar Farmhouse Creamery - a micro dairy
- Gung Hoe Growers - market garden
- Tellurian Fruit Gardens - an organic orchard
- Carr's Organic Fruit Tree Nursery
- Grow Great Fruit

The arrangement on Katie and Hugh's farm has two tiers.

- The foundation is individual leases between the Finlays and each of the enterprises. The leases stipulate which land and assets the enterprise can use, that they must be organically certified, and how much water they have access to, for example.
- The group also decided to form a co-op, which is the second tier. All co-op members have an equal voice, and this is where things like co-marketing, collaboration and whole-of-farm issues (like fire readiness) are decided.

The aim of the co-op 'is to make the farm as productive and profitable as possible, within a collaborative framework and using regenerative and organic principles' ([HOFC website](#)).

"Without the generosity of opportunity to get on the land from Katie and Hugh, we wouldn't have been able to get the start that we did, and get on the land."

SAS ALLARDICE,
GUNG HOE GROWERS & HARCOURT
ORGANIC FARMING CO-OP,
2019 FARMER INCUBATOR
WORKSHOP: LAND ACCESS & CO-
FARMING.

ACCESS TO LAND: CASE STUDY

HARCOURT ORGANIC FARMING CO-OP

"We reckon this new way of farming
will be good for ageing farmers
like Katie and Hugh
who want to step back from active farming but
don't want to sell the family farm,
for emerging farmers who want to get started
but can't afford land,
and customers who are yearning for a
connection to the farmers who produce their
food.

In time we plan to share our model (but first we
have to figure out if it works!)"

HARCOURT ORGANIC FARMING
CO-OP WEBSITE



Image courtesy of Harcourt Organic Farming Co-op

3. HANDS - ON LEARNING OPPORTUNITIES

LIMITED & PIECEMEAL

The state of agricultural education in Australia has been under the spotlight in recent years given our ageing agricultural workforce, a general decline in enrolments in ag-related education and training programs between 2014 and 2017, demand for graduates skilled in agriculture outstripping supply and the fact that only 15 out of 43 Australian universities offer degrees in the discipline (CSIRO 2019, NFF 2019).

For aspiring and beginner farmers wanting to farm using regenerative and agro-ecological methods, their educational pathways are even more limited as most formal agricultural education courses 'remain biased towards a technocentric approach' and industrial forms of farming, across both science and management based programs (Cochrane et al. 2007).

While there are a few standout options for study, including the 2020 launch of the Bachelor of Science in Regenerative Agriculture at Southern Cross University, and the Diploma in Organic Farming at the National Environment Centre Riverina Institute, our research has found that many next generation growers are creating their own educational pathways.

'Hands-on' farming skills, along with the ecological knowledge, and business and financial acumen required to operate a successful farm enterprise are instead acquired through internships, WWOOFing, farm labour, programs and opportunities offered overseas, as well as through digital resources and print media.

Almost 70% of beginner farmers stated that their own self-directed learning and research was the most instrumental factor in transitioning them from an aspiring to a beginner farmer, with many citing podcasts, youtube and internships as components of these self-created pathways.

"We couldn't just go on WWOOFing because we were running out of money and I couldn't find anyone who wanted to pay us to do the kind of farming we wanted to do here and so we headed to the States. There are so many opportunities over there.

And paid opportunities."

BEGINNER FARMER INTERVIEW
2020

3. HANDS - ON LEARNING OPPORTUNITIES

ACCESSIBILITY & COST

The accessibility and cost of training programs and internships was cited as a challenge for many aspiring and beginner farmers, with 43% of aspiring farmers saying existing hands-on learning opportunities were not accessible to them. This was due to the cost of a training program, or the fact that an internship, often requiring relocation, offers no income.

An aspiring farmer responded to our 2019/20 survey that:
'when I was looking for opportunities in Australia, the internships I found required a huge financial commitment in that I would no longer be able to afford rent in the house I was sharing...I was also hesitant to make such a sacrifice..as the time commitment is long given that what you will get education wise is very unclear'.


Accessibility in terms of location and time was also cited as an issue by survey respondents, along with a recognition of the fact that it can take a certain level of privilege to be able to participate in an un- or low-paid internship program:
'It wasn't easy to find these opportunities, and I was in a position of privilege where I was not only able to drop everything in my life and move to complete my internship, I was also able to do it on only a small stipend. This would be inaccessible to some' (Aspiring Farmer Survey 2019/20).

The flip side of the hands-on learning conundrum is the cost and time incurred by host farmers. As one new farmer stated,

"Farmers running internships are teaching and trying to farm, and they're two separate full-time jobs!" (2019 Farmer Incubator Workshop: Land Access & Co-Farming).

One of the farm internship hosts we interviewed was passionate about supporting new growers and provides ongoing mentoring and support years after they have interned on the farm, but has stepped back from advertising internship opportunities. Operating their own farm business and managing family demands leaves less than adequate time and energy to provide a good learning outcome:

'We haven't done it (hosted interns) for a little while - just because it takes a bit out of us to have another person living here on the farm..and then the other thing is (with interns) we tend not to work to a schedule that is appropriate for jobs that need to get done but work to a schedule that suits a learning outcome...so we work along on different jobs and inevitably we fall behind on some tasks, and in veg farming, timing is everything' (Farmer Interview 2019).

A woman wearing a blue long-sleeved shirt and a dark headscarf is kneeling in a field, working with young plants. She is holding a small packet of seeds. In the background, another person wearing a green beanie with the word 'AUGUST' on it is partially visible. The field is filled with rows of young green plants supported by stakes. The ground is dark brown soil with some white plastic mulch.

"There are limited on-farm learning opportunities, diminishing the pool of experience to draw upon."

ASPIRING FARMER 2019/20 SURVEY

"Distance, cost and time make it hard to find suitable opportunities."

ASPIRING FARMER 2019/20 SURVEY

"I think opportunities to hone your skills is one of the biggest ones (challenges). In the States, we could get a paid job at a really high quality farm and hone our skills whilst earning a living which is a massive thing that you don't get in Australia."

BEGINNER FARMER 2020 INTERVIEW

"I can't afford to learn and not work."

ASPIRING FARMER 2019/2020 INTERVIEW

HANDS ON LEARNING: CASE STUDY

SAGE STEPPING STONE INTERNSHIP

A community focused on growing and training next generation farmers

LOCATION: Moruya, NSW

Web: www.sageproject.org.au/stepping-stone-internship/

Sustainable Agriculture and Gardening Eurobadalla (SAGE) is a not-for-profit organisation whose mission is to create and support a NSW South Coast sustainable fair food economy and food sovereignty for local communities.

SAGE runs a range of programs across the south coast region including education and workshops, a farmers market and a community garden. From 2013 SAGE ran an annual market garden internship program spanning 9 months. Taking one aspiring farmer per year, it taught many aspects of market gardening, with free use of the SAGE garden and equipment, and mentorship from a local grower.

While the program was very successful, SAGE could see the opportunity and need to expand the program, particularly given high youth unemployment rates across the region, and the big ask on the resources and time of the volunteer mentors. (For the last 2 years of the program mentors were paid 2 hours per week).

To address this, SAGE has been working with the community to expand the program into the Stepping Stone Farm - a market gardening business operated by multiple student growers under the guidance of an established grower. This hands-on teaching position is paid and will deliver a full-time learning curriculum to interns in all aspects of growing and farm business management.

"The Farm and its program, based on organic and regenerative farming practices, will provide opportunities for new farmers to develop the skills and experience to run a successful farm enterprise, and the knowledge to develop a business plan.

With the knowledge, skills and experience, these new farmers will have a better chance of securing capital and land access, and as a result be more likely to succeed in realising their farm."

SAGE WEBSITE

"It's been tremendously successful (the SAGE internship program) and it's a good story, but unfortunately, we've struggled to get these people to the next stage of getting a farm for themselves....

That's why we felt we had to make the program a lot more comprehensive, a lot longer and so we developed the idea of Stepping Stone Farm."

MARK BARRACLOUGH
SAGE, 2019 INTERVIEW.



4. SOCIAL CHALLENGES

FARMING CAN BE A LONELY GAME

Social networks have been identified as a key modulator of mental health in rural communities in Australia, while research has found that farmers who are younger, live and work on farm, experience financial hardship, or are isolated, are at particular risk of climate/drought related stress (Austin et al. 2019).

For those new entrants to farming who come from outside rural communities, the challenge of moving to rural areas and associated social isolation can be a significant challenge. Social isolation and moving away from urban centres was listed as one of the top 5 barriers identified to entering farming for aspiring farmers in our 2019-20 survey, while for beginner farmers, social isolation ranked at number 4r, on average, in the social and personal barriers they experienced.

As one aspiring farmer stated: 'many of us are coming from the city or returning to the land after a time away, so we lack the networks that we need to do simple tasks like borrow machinery, get advice or simply have friends who may provide emotional support' (Aspiring Farmer Survey 2019/20).

ENTERING FROM THE 'OUTSIDE'

Survey respondents also commented on the barrier of being an 'outsider' to often close-knit rural communities: 'there is stigma around city people wanting to be farmers and this can lessen opportunities' (Beginner Farmer 2019/20 Survey). This social barrier for first-generation farmers has been documented in research in the USA context by Carolan, who quotes a range of first generation farmers: 'It seems like you have to work twice as hard if you weren't raised on a farm to earn the respect of your neighbours' and 'traditional farmers treat me differently because I don't look like them which makes it a challenge to be part of their group' (2018:183,184).

For aspiring farmers, lack of role models/precedent in the farming sector of 'people who look like me' ranked equal 5th in their top 5 barriers to entry (2019/20 Aspiring Farmer survey). Broader research shows that gender diversity in farming is an issue, with agriculture in Australia possessing 'one of the lowest levels of employment for women' (Wu et al. 2019: 15), and that 'gender dynamics can hamper knowledge transfer ' across generations (Carolan 2018: 187).

4. SOCIAL CHALLENGES

ENTERING FROM THE OUTSIDE CONT....

Two aspiring farmers identified their female gender as a barrier to obtaining the opportunities they were seeking in pursuing their farming careers. Unfortunately we didn't have scope within this research to drill into this in more detail.

We also lack a more detailed picture of the unique social challenges facing non-white male new and aspiring farmers in the Australian setting. International research from other settler colonial nations is starting to shine a light on how 'whiteness is central to belonging' in rural environments, spawned through an ongoing history of colonialism, slavery, racial and class discrimination culminating in deep rooted narratives (Levkoe and Offeh-Gyimah 2020:584).. These position 'white farmers as stewards of the land, keepers of traditional knowledge and the key element of farming communities' and generally overlook the traumatic interplay of agriculture with invasion, genocide, dispossession and discrimination (ibid).

The impact of these forces on Black and Indigenous People of Colour (BIPOC) is multi-faceted, and multi-generational and asks vital questions of our new regenerative farming generation working to shape a new, just, equitable agriculture.

A RESPECTED, DESIRABLE CAREER....?

A recurring theme in terms of social barriers for new and aspiring farmers in our research was the lack of respect and confidence in the solidity of farming as a career from family members and broader community, as well as public opinion.

A beginning farmer wrote of one of their biggest challenges to commencing their farming journey being: 'disapproval from a family of academics who believed we had to go to university and that we could never make the money we said we could.' Another wrote: ' I remember wondering whether my own family and my partner's (now wife's) family would accept me as a farmer' (2019/20 Beginner Farmer survey).

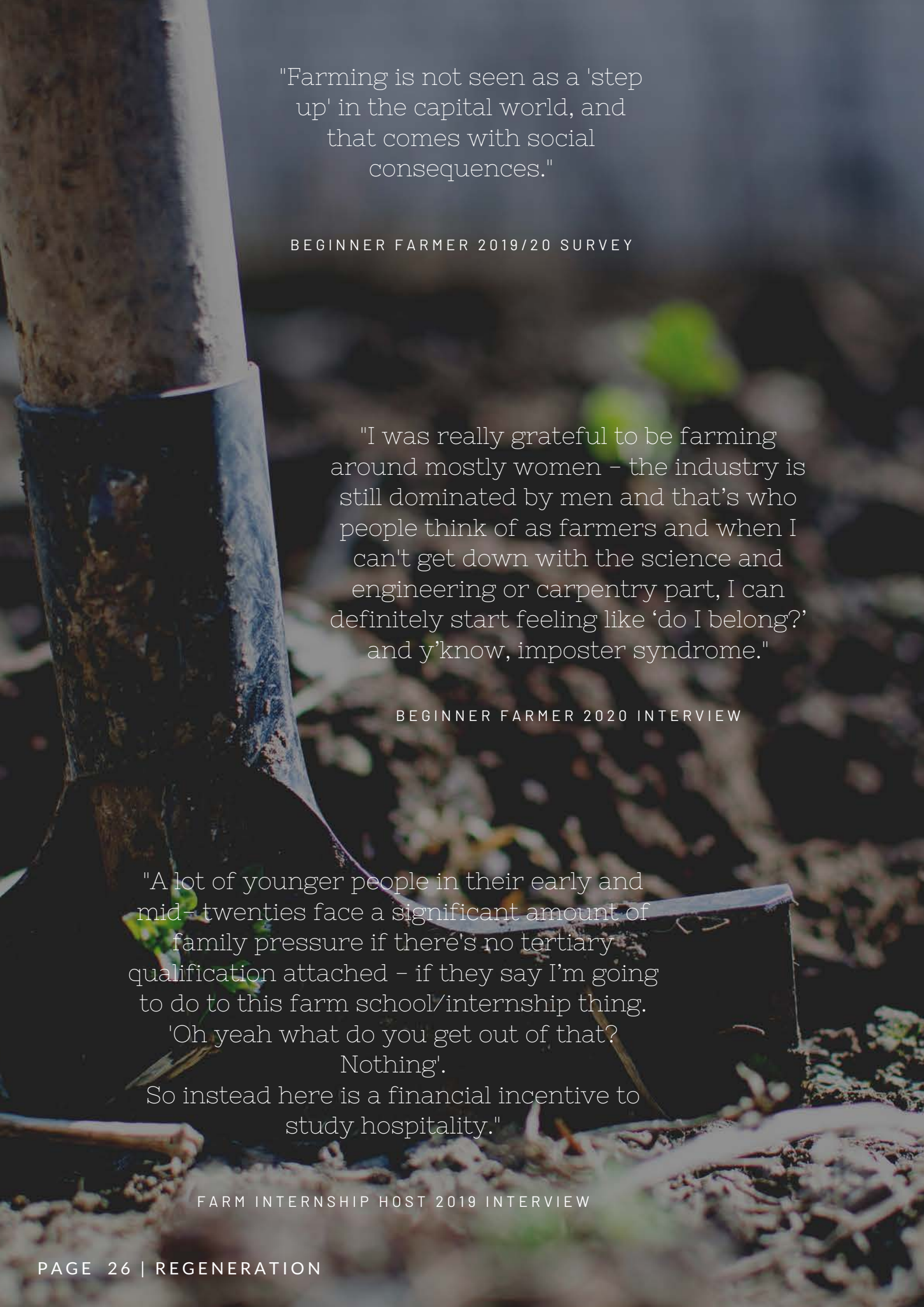
These survey findings point to other research findings of 'negative perceptions of agricultural careers held by the general public' (PIEFA 2018:19) including a research project which found that '56% of students were discouraged from agriculture by negative media stories, many stating that if they became a farmer they would 'go broke' (Hargraves, cited in PIEFA 2018:20).

4. SOCIAL CHALLENGES

A RESPECTED, DESIRABLE CAREER....?

It has been argued that this negative perception of farming is being driven by the increasing urbanisation of Australia's population and our lengthening food supply chains (PIEFA 2018). This contributes to a growing chasm between food producers and eaters which, together with media stories on negative impacts of industrial agriculture (i.e. animal welfare, environmental degradation, chemical use) erodes trust in farmers and threatens the 'social license' of farmers (PIEFA 2018: 7).





"Farming is not seen as a 'step up' in the capital world, and that comes with social consequences."

BEGINNER FARMER 2019/20 SURVEY

"I was really grateful to be farming around mostly women – the industry is still dominated by men and that's who people think of as farmers and when I can't get down with the science and engineering or carpentry part, I can definitely start feeling like 'do I belong?' and y'know, imposter syndrome."

BEGINNER FARMER 2020 INTERVIEW

"A lot of younger people in their early and mid-twenties face a significant amount of family pressure if there's no tertiary qualification attached – if they say I'm going to do to this farm school/internship thing. 'Oh yeah what do you get out of that? Nothing'. So instead here is a financial incentive to study hospitality."

FARM INTERNSHIP HOST 2019 INTERVIEW

SOCIAL CHALLENGES: CASE STUDY

FARMER INCUBATOR: POP-UP GARLIC FARMERS PROGRAM (PUGF)

Growing new farmers with community and co-farming models

LOCATION: Metropolitan Melbourne, Victoria.

Web: www.farmerincubator.org/pugf

Farmer Incubator's Pop-Up Garlic Farmer Program (PUGF) has been working to grow future farmers through a collaborative farming learning model that reduces the high costs and risks associated with entering farming.

Participants are provided with land, garlic seeds, tools and knowledge to help them grow and sell approximately 500 garlic plants.

The program functions as a series of 8 workshops throughout the year, where participants learn each step of the garlic growing process, from cultivating land and planting seeds to harvesting and marketing their product. Participants farm collaboratively at one of the 'pop-up' farm sites, and are supported by a site mentor.

Since 2016, Farmer Incubator has run 4 PUGF courses with:

- 74 participants going through the program from seed to harvest
- Over 80% of participants have been under 40 years of age, with a high percentage of females
- 8 different sites across metropolitan Melbourne have been activated and farmed on with all sites being offered for free/peppercorn lease

- Outcomes for participants have included development of basic farming skills, increase in confidence and the development of networks which have led to farming internships, and individual and co-farming endeavours.

"Farmer Incubator's Pop-Up Garlic Farmers Program gave me the boot I needed to get started."

BEGINNER FARMER, 2019/20
SURVEY



"The course gave me an experience of farming that was fun, collaborative and very rewarding. I've come away from the course with lifelong friends, a good skill base and a passion to continue small-scale farming. It has opened up opportunities for market garden internships which I'll be doing this year.

I'm very grateful, thank you!"

2015 PUGF PARTICIPANT

5. ECOLOGICAL CHALLENGES

AN INCREASINGLY RISKY BUSINESS AT THE FRONTLINE OF CLIMATE CHANGE

A marked increase in climatic variability is having a 'dramatic effect' on farms across Australia, and small farms are more likely to experience low cash incomes and negative profits during drought years (Hughes et al. 2019).

This places us next generation small-scale farmers on the frontline in terms of direct risks to our livelihoods and natural capital base in the face of climate change. This is both stressful, and scary.

As mentioned, the 2018 Australian Rural Mental Health Study has found that drought-related stress is higher among young farmers, particularly those who live and work on farm, are experiencing financial hardship and are located in remote areas (Austin et al. 2018).

86% of the beginner farmers we surveyed are experiencing unpredictable weather events that are requiring a rethink of management practices.

Many of the beginner farmers we interviewed spoke openly of their fear and consternation about what the future holds in the face of changing climate, particularly in light of the bushfire crises over the 2019/20 summer.

AN ALREADY DEGRADED NATURAL RESOURCE BASE

Our generations have grown up knowing that our natural environment is in a state of crisis. From the furore over the drying and bad management of the Murray Darling Basin to the lived reality and news stories of over-clearing, salinity, erosion and species loss, the facts are clear and undeniable.

A national land and water resources audit, and federal government scientific report on food security detailed the extent of land degradation across the continent, including salinity (5.7 million hectares of land affected/at risk, and increasing), soil acidification (50 million hectares in surface soil, 23 million hectares subsurface and both increasing), and the 'commonality' of soil erosion to food production areas (PMSIEC 2010: 11). Recent international analysis placed Australia as one of the top two G20 nations, ahead of China, USA and the UK, most at risk of ecosystem collapse, due to a decline in biodiversity and related ecosystem services including the provision of clean water and air, food, pollination and erosion control (Retsa et al. 2020).

5. ECOLOGICAL CHALLENGES

AN ALREADY DEGRADED NATURAL RESOURCE BASE

Upon this unstable foundation, many of us new and beginner farmers are grappling with the double task of building resilience & adaptive capacity in the face of climate change, while working to regenerate and restore land and ecosystems which have been pushed to the brink.



"I think climate change is as scary as fuck."

BEGINNER FARMER 2020 INTERVIEW

"It's pretty demoralising just watching your crops fail like that.

It's pretty anxiety-inducing when you're trying to put a lot of work into something and it's just constantly failing and you're hot and exhausted and the wind is constantly blowing and drying everything out.

I'm really terrified of what the changing environment is going to do to young farmers."

BEGINNER FARMER
2019 INTERVIEW

"It just feels crazier than ever.

Mentally that's really hard as well.

Having these smoky days and watching fires burn around you ...

It does make you try to think about what you can do to change it but it also feels a bit hopeless ...

because it feels like you can't actually prepare for it."

BEGINNER FARMER 2020 INTERVIEW

"These really unpredictable springs we've been having, these Summer heatwaves where it doesn't matter how much you irrigate it doesn't feel like anything stays in.

Last January I didn't plant anything for 6 weeks because it just wasn't possible."

BEGINNER FARMER 2020 INTERVIEW

6. LACK OF DEDICATED FUNDING & SUPPORT

Our research has found that hands-on training, internships and mentor programs for new small-scale, regenerative and agro-ecological farmers across Australia are piecemeal with limited formal funding schemes focused on supporting and creating pathways into regenerative agriculture. Ongoing support (via subsidies or tax breaks) for farmers that transition to or practice regenerative farming so that they can remain competitive without externalising ecological costs, is similarly lacking.

This is in somewhat stark contrast with the funding situation in other nations - both through government and philanthropic sources, where a significant amount of money is enabling the strong growth of a new farming generation.

That being said, there are some initiatives, particularly at a state government level, focused on supporting new and young farmers. These include the **NSW Young Farmer Business Program** which is focused on creating opportunities for young farmers and fishers to enter or expand their existing businesses through workshops, events and services that build their skills.

Another example is the **Victorian government's Young Farmer Scholarship** program which annually provides \$10 000 to 12-14 farmers under 35 years of age to invest in study and put their new skills to practice on farm (albeit without a focus on regenerative and agro-ecological learning.)

This support and funding is desperately needed, but it is not operating at a scale to meaningfully support and enable our new farming generation.

Our interviews and surveys with new and aspiring farmers spoke to this need for more dedicated funding, along with greater local government support in terms of navigating red tape and accessing services.

A recurring theme across our research was the strong role local government can play in supporting and enabling new farmers. Ideas were put forward for what local governments, along with other organisations, could do including:

- Mapping and identifying productive land in their Local Government Area and securing it as farmland
- Making vacant council land available to new farmers/training programs
- Funding subsidies and scholarships to support new farmers to access training and education
- Programs that enable new farmers to build relationship with local government/have a voice in policy
- Procurement policies which commit to sourcing produce from local farmers
- Programs that work with new farmers to navigate red tape and bureaucracy
- Financial grants and/or interest free loans for infrastructure and start up costs
- Regulation of corporatisation of farmland to prevent loss of farmers and rural decline

FUNDING & SUPPORT: CASE STUDIES

Resourcing the training and development of a new farming generation

USDA BEGINNER FARMER & RANCHER PROGRAM

LOCATION: USA

An example of what can be done at a federal level is the US Department of Agriculture's Beginning Farmer and Rancher Development Program which is exclusively dedicated to training the next generation of farmers and ranchers.

The program has funded \$217.5 million over the past 10 years to community organisations, academic institutions and producer groups, and provides the core funding for the majority of US based farm incubator and training programs we have spoken to in our research. All of these programs are focused on training growers in agro-ecological and regenerative methods.

The federal program was developed through the Food, Conservation, and Energy Act of 2008 under the Obama government in response to the rising age in American farmers and a projected 8% decrease in farm numbers between 2008-2018 (NIFA 2020).

LOCAL GOVERNMENTS DEVELOPING FARMER INCUBATORS

LOCATION: France

When we spoke with Reneta, the national network of farmer incubators or 'test d'ecocoles' in France we learnt that the burgeoning development of these programs is being driven, in part, by local governments.

Municipalities have, in recent years, become focused on rural and regional development and embedding short supply chains, and see the development and support of new farmers as a central part of this economic and cultural activity.

This is partly in response to the increasing interest in entering farming from those outside farming families, and therefore, the need for 'hands-on' training and education programs tailored to their needs.

Local municipalities are playing an active role in developing and supporting incubator programs including:

- identifying and/or providing farmland for incubator programs
- providing funding
- facilitating the bringing together of key partners (including agricultural colleges, farmers, co-operatives) to design and develop an incubator program specific to local needs.

FUNDING & SUPPORT: CASE STUDIES

Resourcing the training and development of a new farming generation

FARMSTART SEED CAPITAL

LOCATION: N.E. USA

A farm credit program for beginning farmers & new co-operatives that provides working capital investments up to \$75 000.

The program was developed to help ensure the success of local start-up farms, providing new farmers with much needed start-up funds & an opportunity to develop a successful credit record while learning the discipline of effective cash flow management.

Each participant is mentored by an advisor who works with them to further develop their business plan & business.

They also deliver a Young, Beginning, Small and Veteran Farmer Incentive program (YBSV) which provides additional incentives and support including interest rate assistance, discounts on loan fees and reduced rates for tax preparation, farm accounting and management software.

A joint initiative of Farm Credit East, Yankee Farm Credit and CoBank, the program has invested more than \$15 million in beginning farmers' businesses to date.

Web: www.farmcrediteast.com/products-and-services/new-farmer-programs/FarmStart



“The future of Northeast agriculture, commercial fishing and forest products industries is dependent on new entrants.

That is why we initiated this innovative program more than a decade ago to meet the demands for capital and financial management skills that entrepreneurs need to get started in various agriculture sectors.”

BILL LIPINSKI, FARM CREDIT EAST CEO.
(FARM CREDIT EAST 2018)

"I think access to grants would be a huge thing.

I just think that would be massive because financial support and mentorship are probably the two key things."

BEGINNER FARMER
2020 INTERVIEW.

"Funding etc. for paid farm internships. I think I could have spent more time learning how to farm if an internship spot was sponsored."

BEGINNER FARMER
2019/2020 SURVEY

"Now we can see more and more projects are developed by municipalities... (they) work on development of agriculture in the local area so with this, farmer incubators are an interesting tool for them so they are now developing more and more incubators."

RENETA, FRANCE
2020 INTERVIEW

"In regional areas we need a single agricultural contact within council.

All sorts of people disengage with council because you have to go there and there and here - to environment, community development etc.

For us when we're already busy and only have an hour to speak to council, I just need to go to one person and tell them my issue and just work with that person."

BEGINNER FARMER 2010 INTERVIEW

FARMING ON STOLEN GROUND

In the preceding pages we have spoken about the challenges facing small-scale, new, regenerative farmers in Australia, and a range of initiatives working to address those challenges.

Underpinning this work is the impetus to grow a new agricultural future, one that regenerates our ecosystems - not degrades them -and that threads resilience, vitality and community across rural, regional and urban areas.

This work, to grow something other than what we have known before, risks perpetuating colonial oppression, marginalisation and untruths if we fail to face up to our ongoing settler colonial history.

We may be farming regeneratively, we may be growing healthy food, building soil health, enhancing biodiversity, and growing new farmers - all inarguably good things.

But we are farming on stolen land.

Let's put it like this: how many Indigenous farmers do you know of in your region?

Mayes writes that 'many of the critiques of industrial agriculture and the corresponding proposal for small-scale agrarian agriculture fail to make the reflexive step of considering the role of both small and large agriculture in colonial

dispossession and the continuation of this legacy'(2020:9).

It is all too easy, and comfortable, for the new regenerative farming movement in Australia to fall into that same pattern. We wish to find another way.

So part of our research into the Australian context involved starting to build an understanding of work being done to support Indigenous farmers and land managers, what the key needs are and how we, as organisations, can be active allies for Indigenous food and land justice.

Our guiding principle for this research was supporting Indigenous self-determination. It is not the place of Farmer Incubator or Young Farmers Connect to develop a new Indigenous farming program, or to try and come up with answers to any of these challenges ourselves. We are wary of what Teju Cole terms 'the white saviour industrial complex' (Cole, 2012).

There is a range of incredible work being developed and led by Indigenous communities, farmers and knowledge holders.

We wanted to understand how we can support their goals and work if needed, and/or sit down, shut up and listen.

FARMING ON STOLEN GROUND

CONTEXT

A few points to provide context for the interviews and case studies to follow.

Firstly, CSIRO's research into Indigenous land management in Australia in 2013 detailed that while Indigenous interests 'are recognised formally through agreements or land title in well over half of Australia's land area', it is across only 16% of Australia that this recognition is through tenure (Hill et al. 2013: 1).

8.3% is through native title over a whole area, 12.9 % over part of an area and 39% through Indigenous land use agreements - which 'may give limited or no access for Indigenous land management purposes' (ibid).

16% of land tenure on this continent is held by our first peoples whose sovereignty was never ceded.

That tenure predominantly occurs in the northern parts of Australia, and is conspicuously thin on the ground across our more intensively farmed and settled 'food bowl' southern regions.

Secondly, where there is collaboration occurring between Indigenous and western natural resource management,

it is characterised by power imbalances between western scientific paradigms and Traditional Ecological Knowledge.

The same CSIRO report cited earlier found that one of the key barriers facing Indigenous Land Managers is 'limited respect, recognition and practical support for Indigenous knowledge and world views' leading to western systems 'playing the dominant role in education and how land management is practiced'(Hill et al. 2013: 2).

LISTENING & LEARNING

SOME CONVERSATIONS & SNAPSHOTS

Bruce Pascoe, Black Duck Foods.

Black Duck Foods was founded by writer and farmer Bruce Pascoe, with a vision to re-develop traditional food growing and country management processes for the economic benefit of Indigenous people and country.

Operating from a farm in Gippsland, the social enterprise is employing up to 8 local Yuin people to grow perennial tubers and grasses using traditional indigenous farming methods. This is part of a broader agenda to reform agriculture across Australia, and develop a process for the commercialisation of traditional food-growing, so other communities don't have to start from scratch.

Central to the work of Black Duck Foods is to create pathways to self-determination for Indigenous communities through sustainable farming livelihoods on country, and to 'inspire the broader Australian community to value this knowledge' (Black Duck Foods, 2020).

We spoke with Bruce while he was driving north one winter's morning, transporting some recently harvested seed of mandadyan nalluk to share with communities in and around Narrabri.

Bruce spoke powerfully about systemic racism, the flaws in government Indigenous employment schemes and the opportunity agriculture holds to

restore country and economic livelihoods to Indigenous communities:

"What Aboriginal communities need is land.

It sounds pretty obvious but if we are going to get involved in regenerative farming, we need land and we need employment, and not with non-Indigenous people in control."

BRUCE PASCOE 2020 INTERVIEW

"I think there is a lot of enthusiasm for regenerative farming in the country...but there's a long way to go to get Aboriginal involvement in that industry.

We have to maximise this momentum."

BRUCE PASCOE 2020 INTERVIEW

"We are talking about plants that our country's history and agricultural departments don't recognise...If the institution itself doesn't believe that Aboriginal people were farmers then you have no hope, why would we want our people to get educated there?"

BRUCE PASCOE 2020 INTERVIEW

LISTENING & LEARNING

SOME CONVERSATIONS & SNAPSHOTS

Bruce Pascoe, Black Duck Foods continued.

Bruce spoke of the importance of agricultural and horticultural training programs being schooled in Indigenous farming history, as well as taking steps to systematically address educational inequity:

"We need the educational institutions, horticultural training, to work with us, with people who have received really poor education because of systemic racism...

all those educators need really solid grounding in what happened in this country's history."

BRUCE PASCOE 2020 INTERVIEW

In terms of initiatives to support Indigenous agriculture, land justice and employment:

"We need it to be designed by Aboriginal people and we need to have our own measures of success...

We are not going to totally change Australian agriculture overnight.

Not going to reform Aboriginal employment overnight.

But by doing things systematically we can make long term impacts.

BRUCE PASCOE 2020 INTERVIEW

"I am seeing jobs, where people can own their own money, don't have to talk to government ever again and can make their own financial decisions.

That has incredible impact on Aboriginal communities.

It's all about self-determination".

BRUCE PASCOE 2020 INTERVIEW

LISTENING & LEARNING

SOME CONVERSATIONS & SNAPSHOTS

**Nathan Wong, Dja Dja Wurrung
Aboriginal Clans Corporation**

The traditional lands of the Dja Dja Wurrung stretch from Mount Franklin and Daylesford in the southeast of Central Victoria, to Castlemaine and Bendigo in the east, Boort to the north and Donald to the northwest. 87% of these traditional homelands are privately owned, with 65% of them used for agriculture and a total of 2.8% of the entire area owned by the Dja Dja Wurrung Clans Aboriginal Corporation.

In 2013 the Corporation entered into an 'historic native title settlement with the State of Victoria on behalf of all past, current and future Djaara People' (Dja Dja Wurrung 2017: 20). This settlement secured a range of rights including: the right to harvest certain flora and fauna for commercial purposes, support for economic development activities, freehold title of two culturally significant properties and Aboriginal title and joint management over 6 national parks and reserves (ibid).

We spoke with Nathan Wong, Program Manager of Land Strategy with the Corporation, to learn more about the work and aspirations of the Corporation, and what the challenges and needs are in relation to agricultural livelihoods.

Nathan talked us through a diverse range of activities that the Corporation is leading across the region, including:

- a cultural fire program which has been running for over 3 years which they are now working to embed, through a landscape approach to fire, across Central Victoria
- a kangaroo grass project looking at how the perennial native can be cultivated as a commercial crop on a broad-acre scale
- cultural management of yam daisies in natural remnant environments and how they can be rehabilitated
- a range of water management activities including the rehabilitation of waterways from mining activity in the region
- some developing initiatives exploring ways to support Djaarra farm ownership and resilient farm businesses.

"There is a desire to go in to farming that is culturally informed...but we don't own the land so access therefore has to be through lease or other agreements"

LISTENING & LEARNING

SOME CONVERSATIONS & SNAPSHOTS

Nathan Wong, Dja Dja Wurrung Aboriginal Clans Corporation

"How do we start to enable Dja Dja Wurrung people to be able to purchase farms but also have the support to manage them in a way that's going to pay the bills and implement native crops and approaches and then expand that out over time so that in 10, 15, 20 years we have farms that are 100% informed by Dja Dja Wurrung ways of doing things?"

Nathan also spoke about Traditional Ecological and farming knowledge, and ways the Dja Dja Wurrung Corporation are exploring how to best bring that knowledge into conversation with western agricultural practices:

"If there's one thing there's a lot of, that's knowledge
- knowledge that is held within the people
and then there is knowledge that is held within the land and the plants and animals as well..."

then it's also how to actually apply that in a contemporary context with contemporary tools and ways of doing things, how do we actually take what is known and adapt it to the modern way?

Because you're not necessarily wanting to go and harvest a paddock of yam daisies with digging sticks but probably not wanting to do it the way they do potatoes but there's somewhere in between."

And he spoke of the central issue of land access, and once that is secured, for it to be supported by a funding and investment framework which has a different conception of agriculture:

"Land access is number one.

But it's also creating an environment where people are supported and enabled to apply their knowledge to farming.

So it's not about taking on a farm and doing it the way it's been done for the past 150 years, but it's taking on a farm and going 'this is what we are doing now' - we are enabling the transition of those farms to a culturally informed management system."

LISTENING & LEARNING

SOME CONVERSATIONS & SNAPSHOTS

Outback Academy:
Clare O'Kelly (Executive Director),
Leanne Miller (Chair),
Neville Atkinson (Eastern Seaboard,
Murray Corridor Business
Development Manager).

An Aboriginal led, not-for-profit organisation, Outback Academy Australia (OAA) works with communities to build co-operative, ethical businesses using under-utilised lands and assets.

Their purpose is to drive game-changing approaches to Aboriginal business, employment, education, health and wellbeing.

We spoke with Clare, Leanne and Neville to learn more about their visionary work which includes:

- developing ethical, co-operative supply chains across Aboriginal land based businesses
- providing training and employment opportunities for Indigenous youth in farming, horticulture and land management
- establishing a National Aboriginal Womens Alliance/co-operative for fair trade bushfoods, botanicals, pharmaceuticals and nutraceuticals.

In August 2020, Outback Academy received funding, in partnership with the Tri-State NRM Alliance, for an intensive capability building program to engage Murray Corridor Aboriginal farmers in ethical, and co-operative supply chain development.

The program, funded by the Murray Darling Basin Economic Development Program, is working across Traditional Owners, community-held farms, and family-run/privately owned lands from the Murray Corridor.

This initiative, titled 'Follow the Flowers', refers to an emerging national co-operative of Aboriginal farmers applying regenerative farming practices for supply chain participation in honey, botanicals (with partner Aesop), Australian Wildflowers, food and linked tourism.

"Simply put, if we can connect as many farmers as possible operating as a supply group, an ethical supply group, farming according to the principles of which they put together themselves but are aligned to regen farming, then we start to get broad scale positive impact in terms of the environment and economic participation."

CLARE O'KELLY

LISTENING & LEARNING

SOME CONVERSATIONS & SNAPSHOTS

Neville spoke of the urgency they are feeling in relation to scaling up Indigenous land management and farming activities in the face of climate change:

"The other thing that is always going on in the background, that hasn't gone away, is climate change and the aspect of getting this done sooner rather than later, for all of us, no matter what our different perspectives...

This is also for legacy."

NEVILLE ATKINSON

and of the ongoing challenge re land access:

"One thing that is an issue for us, and for all of us, is having the financial capability to purchase those private lands or to support farmers out there or people who want to become farmers...

How do we overcome that aspect of being able to finance the purchase of that critical mass of land?"

NEVILLE ATKINSON

Clare spoke of the business opportunities Outback Academy have been developing for Indigenous farmers:

"One of our buyers are interested in taking anything Australian but what they were unsure about was how to do business in a way that supported Australian Indigenous people as producers of food, and not just bush foods, they're interested in food, so they've been talking to us about how they can support this."

CLARE O'KELLY

Leanne spoke of the central importance of women as producers and knowledge holders in this space, and of involving the next generation:

"Most of the women are landholders and Traditional Owners so they have probably 25-30% of their product already ready to go, and they also have a decision making role in some of the properties and are always looking out to find new ways of distribution. They also have a focus on young people, and bringing young people with them."

LEANNE MILLER

INTERNATIONAL CONTEXT

BACKGROUND

Phase 2 of our research turned our attention to the international context, to build our understanding of how other parts of the world are addressing the challenges facing new and aspiring farmers, and the lessons gained from these endeavours.

Our focus was on learning from farm incubator models which have rapidly proliferated in recent years, particularly in the United States of America. Similar to the traditional business incubation model, farm incubators work to 'help new and beginning farm entrepreneurs establish their own successful businesses by providing specific resources and services that are difficult for startup entrepreneurs to access on their own' (NIFTI 2013: 7).

While there are a diverse range of services and resources that incubator programs offer, depending on location, funding, target population and so on, 'the overall goal of farmer incubator projects is consistent: to minimize the barriers to entry for aspiring and beginning farmers' (NIFTI 2013: 7).

Our research in Phase 2 once again spanned primary and desktop research.

Our primary research was interview based, and we worked to develop a guiding set of selection criteria to speak with models which:

- **Sit across an age range:** new programs with contemporary 'start-up' lessons but also a focus on those that have been running for 20-30 years with lots of accumulated learning
- **Span a diversity of revenue streams including distribution, research and education activities - not just funding dependent**
- **Are across a range of locations - rural, peri-urban, urban & not all in the USA!**
- **Are of different organisational structures - non-profit, attached to university/education programs, for-profit**
- **Span a range of educational approaches:** accredited, formal, informal, structured, farmer led.

Alongside the process of identifying and mapping farm incubator models across the globe, our research team also undertook desktop research into academic and grey literature to provide background context and analysis of the development, structure and impact of the model and the thinking behind taking this 'hands-on', experiential approach to new farmer training, as opposed to more theoretical/academic models traditionally favoured by education and extension systems.

INTERNATIONAL CONTEXT

OVERVIEW

There's a vast range of farm incubator models across the globe, operating in a variety of forms.

There are over 100 incubator farms currently in operation in North America, and the oldest models there have been in operation for around 30 years. In response to the rapid development of the model in the USA and the need for peer learning and support mechanisms, the National Incubator Farm Training Initiative (NIFTI) was formed to facilitate a national network of incubators. They provide comprehensive one-on-one consulting, educational resources, and professional development opportunities for farm incubator programs.

France also has a national network of 'espaces test-agricoles' or farm incubator program, RENETA (Reseau National des Espaces-Test Agricoles), as mentioned earlier, which has more than 80 organisational members. Of these members, 45 are operational incubator farms and a further 30 incubators are in the process of being established. The history of incubators is more recent in France than in the USA, with the model emerging in the 2000s in response to the multiple barriers facing new farmers and in recognition of the need to foster and enable a new generation of farmers.

Meanwhile, over in the UK the Landworkers Alliance recently initiated a national network of Farmstarts (their term for Farmer Incubator programs) in response to the growing interest and development of models in the UK and inspired by the RENETA model in France.

The first UK Farmstart was launched in 2013 by the Kindling Trust, closely followed by other models including Organic Lea and Tamar Grow Local. A range of other 'hands-off' incubation programs exist in the UK, where farmers or organisations make land available for new/beginning farmers - but don't provide broader wrap around support common to other incubator programs.

The process of mapping and locating incubator farms in other parts of the world is complicated by the fact that many use different terminology to 'incubator', particularly in the developing world context.

We provide an overview in the map on the following page of where our research focused in terms of the international context - largely guided by ease of access and availability in the the midst of busy harvest seasons, programming and Covid-19.

INTERNATIONAL CONTEXT

OVERVIEW

Over 100 farm incubator programs are in operation in the USA, supported by NIFTI who facilitate a national network for support and training and an annual conference for peer learning.

A national Farmstart network has formed in the UK to support the 4 farmstarts that are already in operation, and a range of other 'hands off' models in operation focused purely on providing land access to new farmers.

RENETA, the national farm incubator network in France has more than 80 members: 45 operational incubator farms and a further 30 in development.

A range of programs operate across the African continent to train and support new organic/regenerative farmers including the Kulika Training Centre in Uganda. The African Agribusiness Incubation Network has been formed to support and enable incubation and accelerator programs in the agri-business sector.

WHO WE SPOKE TO

EUROPE

Landworkers Alliance, UK: Developing the national farmstart network in collaboration with farmstarts across the nation.

RENETA, France: The national network growing & supporting farmer incubators across France.

USA

VIVA Farms, Washington State: One of longest running farmer incubator programs in the states.

Big River Farms, Minnesota: Farmer incubator, diverse revenue structure.

Community Crops, Illinois: Farmer incubator, diverse revenue structure.

Juniper Gardems Training Farm, Kansas: Farmer incubator with diverse programming.

Elma C. Lomax Farm, North Carolina: Research & farmer incubator site.

New Entry Sustainable Farming Project: One of longest running farmer incubator programs and convener of the national incubator network.

Rogue Farm Corps, Oregon: On-farm training programs with farmer mentors.

For more information on the incubator and network models we spoke to refer to Appendix I on page 70.

WHAT WE LEARNED

OVERVIEW

Our desktop research in phase 2 encountered some challenges in relation to a lack of systematic research into the overall impact of farmer incubator programs internationally, and their role in 'developing alternative, sustainable, and inclusive community food and farming systems' (Smith et al. 2019:4).

Research across farmer incubator programs has largely focused on documenting the increasing development of the incubator models, and their practicalities i.e. structure and program design (Lelekacs et al. 2014; Melone, 2006; Overton, 2014; Winther & Overton, 2013).

That being said, there are a couple of key, overarching findings we want to put here at the outset, before getting into an in-depth discussion of the key themes that emerged across our primary and desktop research.

Firstly, the education and training model developed by most farm incubators is hands-on, social and experiential in nature. It is a model of learning that is supported by a vast body of agro-ecological literature that has shown that participatory social learning environments are crucial for agro-ecological learning and innovation (Kroma 2006; Barrentes & Yague, 2015; Hassanein & Kloppenburg, 1995) but also as an accessible education strategy for

farmers of all backgrounds, including those with limited formal education (Davis et al. 2012).

Secondly, farmer incubator programs on their own are not able to resolve structural barriers to land access for beginning farmers, particularly those from a socially disadvantaged background, given underlying cultural, social and financial barriers of race and power that sit beneath the surface layer of issues such as land prices and availability (Calo and DeMaster 2016).

However, some research has looked at the important role farm incubators play in providing avenues for diverse beginning farmers to commence farming and access resources, knowledge, training and land (Brodt, Feenstra, Kozloff, Klonsky, & Tourte, 2006; Overton, 2014).

For example, in depth research by Smith et al. (2019) into the Viva Incubator Farm program in Washington, USA, detailed how the program's structure is fostering a higher diversity of race, ethnicity, age and gender in new entrants to farming than state and national averages, and providing comprehensive support across experiential learning, land and market access to directly address the barriers facing beginner farmers.

WHAT WE LEARNED

INCEPTION: HOW & WHY FARMER INCUBATOR MODELS HAVE BEEN INITIATED

A common theme across each of the incubator models we spoke to is that the programs have evolved to meet a specific need in the local community, and were, and continue to be, very much shaped by local context as grassroots, community initiatives.

Most have been driven by organisations or businesses who stepped up to fill a gap in their local community, with prompts including:

- Refugee and migrant populations wanting to farm and needing support to access land and equipment, and adjust to new climate and growing conditions.
- An existing wholesale fresh produce business wanting to supply local produce to their increasing clientele but lacking the local farmers to source from, so moving into the training and incubation space to grow the farmers their business required.
- A local county government placing a halt on further development of agricultural land, and recognising the need to train future farmers to manage that land, so providing funding and land to a local organisation to initiate a farm incubator program.

- As mentioned earlier, in France many are being driven by local governments/municipalities as part of their rural and regional development work.
- An interesting aside that came up in our discussions with National Incubator Farm Training Initiative (NIFTI), the national network for incubators in the USA, is that one of the key enablers for farm incubators across the nation has been the open sharing of resources and 'guideposts' to help inform, inspire and guide communities in thinking about initiating an incubator program.

"Our incubation program was initiated in direct response to our community. We started working to support Hmong and Latino Farmers and it quickly became obvious land access was one of the biggest barriers. So we rented a 150 acre farm and started renting out smaller plots..."

BIG RIVER FARMS INTERVIEW 2020

"We think that farmer incubators are working so well in France because in each territory the incubators were developed in a very specific way regarding the context, regarding the different partners of the project and so this specificity of each farmer incubator is very important."

RENATA INTERVIEW 2020

WHAT WE LEARNED

THE FINANCIALS: FORMS OF REVENUE

There are two important points to make at the outset of this section:

- The financial model of incubator programs is very much influenced by the broader funding and resourcing context. In the USA the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) has a Beginning Farmer and Rancher Program which constitutes a significant funding source for many incubator programs. Incubator programs in France are also well supported by local and federal public money, while in the UK there is little to no public funding.
- The majority of farm incubator programs rely on funding for at least 50% of their operating costs. **Making land, equipment and education accessible for new and beginning farmers is not a profitable enterprise!** As a result many have developed and continue to evolve diverse revenue streams.

Revenue streams in addition to standard philanthropic and government funding that we have come across so far include:

- **PRODUCE SALES:**
produce sourced from incubator farms, supplemented by other local producers where necessary, sold through wholesale, CSA, food hub and farmers market outlets & a food van (NESFP) which services neighbourhoods that lack adequate fresh food access.
- **FUNDING FROM FOOD RELIEF ORGS:**
who pay incubators to deliver food to areas with poor to no fresh food access.
- **LAND OWNERSHIP:**
VIVA Farm owns the 3 sites of land on which the model operates, and makes 60% of its revenue from the rent farmers pay (the rent starts off low and increases the more experienced and viable the farmer becomes).
- **SCHOOL EDUCATION PROGRAMS**
that are paid for by schools/the education department or the local government (Lomax Farm).
- **COMMUNITY EDUCATION PROGRAMS, WORKSHOPS & EVENTS**
- **ADULT EDUCATION ACCREDITATION:**
Organic Lea in the UK has been able to create a strong revenue stream through getting its training program accredited as an adult education course that is therefore funded by the government.
- **SOCIAL PRESCRIBING:**
Manchester Veg is part of a social prescribing system: they run a community health program on one of their farm sites and local Doctors prescribe their patients to go and learn from them how to grow and cook fresh vegetables.
- **RESEARCH**
Lomax Farm receives funding to conduct field research that supports the needs of organic farmers in their local region.
- **NATURAL CAPITAL FINANCE**
A developing farmstart model in the UK is exploring options for getting paid for biodiversity/ecosystem services as a co-benefit of ecological farming practices on incubator sites.
- **ACCREDITED ON-FARM APPRENTICESHIP PROGRAMS**
An emerging focus of programs in the USA is to explore how to access funding by getting recognised and approved as sites of farm-based apprenticeships.

WHAT WE LEARNED

THE FINANCIALS: FORMS OF REVENUE

A key strategy that has come up across a few of the incubator models has been to merge or develop a partnership with a larger not-for-profit or university organisation in order to access more diverse funding streams and have greater financial security.

Another important point to make is that **none of the incubator programs we spoke to are making significant revenue through the services they provide to their new farmers.**

Generally the cost of training programs and rent of plots and equipment are set at a low price, and often further subsidised on an as-needed basis, in order to make programs accessible and affordable to people of all backgrounds.



"it's not the kind of thing that is generating a lot of revenue.

Our view is that we're trying to subsidise the cost of what it takes to start a farm so that people who are interested don't have to spend life savings on equipment and infrastructure.

We're trying to lower risk to make it more accessible – so it's not a money making project by any means ... "

2019 INTERVIEW

'Most of the projects subsidise it through other work...

for every organisation it is part of a number of things they do.'

2019 INTERVIEW

"I think we're typical of a lot of incubator farms in relying on some relatively large grants given out by USDA, some foundation or corporation money and, probably to an extent, individual donors or corporate donors."

2020 INTERVIEW

WHAT WE LEARNED

EDUCATION & TRAINING MODELS

The programs we have spoke with encompass a range of approaches to the education component of their incubator programs:

- Due to staffing and funding limitations, some models completely outsource the training through existing courses at local community colleges, adult education programs or universities.
- Others have placed a real focus on developing a curriculum 'in house' that is responsive to new farmer needs, including language and learning backgrounds, and bring in local farmers and graduates of the incubator program to teach aspects of the course.
- Common elements across those delivering training onsite include seasonal workshops that are task specific and hands on, an emphasis on self-directed learning, record keeping, goal setting and reflection and the importance of peer learning across the new farmer cohort.
- Some models require attendance and completion of a beginning farmer training course, either offered in house or offsite, in order to be accepted into their incubator program as a screening process for candidates but also to ensure a minimum level of knowledge.
- A couple of models in the UK initially weren't planning on offering training, but the lack of skills & knowledge in practical, hands on production skills across their aspiring farmer cohort meant training became a necessary component of their model.

"If you're going to be a farmer you've got to wear all these different hats ...

We don't have the expertise to be going way in depth on all of that, we're just trying to introduce people to the core concepts."

2019 INTERVIEW

"One of the hardest things is trying to make it accessible and trying to get people to produce things - financial statements and plans.

You can come to class but are you coming out with something you can use?

How can we have a class where people take it and implement it?"

2019 INTERVIEW

CASE STUDY

ROGUE FARM CORPS - FACILITATING INTERGENERATIONAL KNOWLEDGE TRANSFER

LOCATION: OREGON

WEB: ROGUEFARMCORPS.ORG

Rogue Farm Corps'(RFC) farm training programs offer hands-on experience on a diverse network of commercial family farms in Oregon for beginner and advanced students of agriculture.

RFC's **Internship Program** is an entry-level farm training program designed for the student with little or no experience. Interns live and train full-time on a host farm or ranch, participating in 840-1,400 hours of on-farm training and learning in-depth skills from their host farmer.

Rogue Farm Corps works closely with farm mentors to create a skill-based curriculum that is unique to each host farm.

Interns are provided with housing, farm-produced food plus some staples, and a monthly stipend. There is a tuition fee of USD\$1,750 required of interns, with some scholarships available.

RFC's **Apprenticeship Program** is an advanced-level farm training program designed for those who have completed RFC's Internship Program, a similar farm training program, or have at least one full season (or equivalent) of farming experience behind them. Over time, apprentices are given responsibility for different aspects of farm and business operations.



GIA MATZINGER
CENTRAL OREGON CHAPTER
COORDINATOR, 2020 INTERVIEW

"It was started by a group of farmers in the Rogue valley – first generation farmers who didn't have much familial support or a heritage learning about how to farm, and so they saw this need for training for folks like them.

They developed it out on their own and thought wouldn't it be great if there was more of a formal structure for this."

"USDA funding enabled us to create the legal internship structure that it has – we are not a registered internship program because it requires a lot of paperwork but we adhere to all of the guidelines."

"The intern and the farmer interview each other to make a match and sometimes there's personality, communication, work style differences and part of our role here has been a lot of training on how to build those skills – how to incorporate a structure of checking in with one another and keeping up to date on how things are going."

WHAT WE LEARNED

LAND ACCESS

The most common way farm incubator programs access land is to secure a long term lease from public or private landowners. NIFTI's 2017 survey of incubator farms across the USA found that 73% of models lease land.

A few interesting points have come up on this front in our conversations to date:

- Viva Farms are the exception to the leasing norm, having managed to raise money to purchase farm sites. The renting of this land to the incubatee farmers and graduate farmers has become one of their key revenue streams.
- Local government/councils have played a critical role in making public land available for secure long term leases to incubator programs in the UK, USA and France.
- Selecting or operating on incubator sites with biodiversity value, or the opportunity to regenerate a portion for this opens up a potential additional revenue stream in the form of conservation/ecosystem service payments.

Many of the programs we spoke with also make land access a specific focus in terms of supporting their new growers onto land post program completion.

Programs like Viva Farms who own enough land are able to rent plots out to graduate farmers for the short to medium term until they have the financial capability to find land elsewhere.

Other organisations support and provide connections to external land sites. For example, Rogue Farm Corps runs the Changing Hands Program, connecting beginning farmers and elder farmers explore opportunities for lease agreements, mentorship, and/or farm and ranch succession.

CASE STUDY

THE AGRARIAN TRUST - LAND ACCESS FOR NEXT GENERATION FARMERS

WEB: AGRARIANTRUST.ORG/

Initially launched as a project of the Schumacher Center for New Economics, The Agrarian Trust was established by a 'diverse group of stakeholders from across the United States, many of them farm service providers and beginning farmers who witnessed firsthand the formidable obstacles facing agriculture's next generation' (Agrarian Trust 2020). The Trust is working to expand and proliferate a unique form of agricultural land trusts, a legal land protection mechanism that creates 'democratic community ownership of farmland and related assets; ensures permanent, affordable land access to farmers; retains farmland for farming and related enterprises; and allows community access to land & related benefits' (TLC 2010).

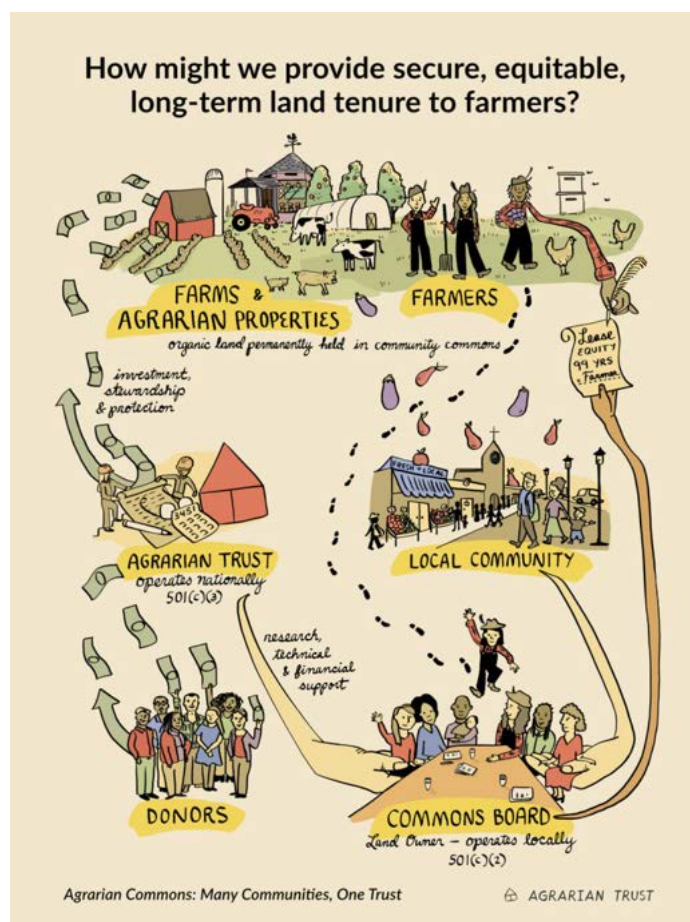
To date the Trust has:

- Launched 'Agrarian Commons' in 10 states across the country. These commons or 'farmland trusts' span 2,400 acres of diversified agriculture, each farm governed by local community boards.

The local Agrarian Commons buys properties from farmers and farmland owners in their region through the support and fundraising efforts of the national Agrarian Trust. The local Agrarian Commons leases those farms to farmers using a long-term affordable and equity-building lease (99-years when state law allows).

Each local Agrarian Commons is governed by farmers who hold leases, community stakeholders, and the Agrarian Trust. The Commons have an express focus on supporting farmland access for dispossessed farmers and farmers of colour.

- Spearheaded the development of a Faithlands: a growing national movement to connect and inspire faith communities to use their significant land holdings in the US to support local food systems, farmland access and restorative justice for dispossessed farmers.



ABOVE: A GRAPHICAL ILLUSTRATION OF THE FORMATION OF AGRARIAN COMMONS.

(Image courtesy of The Agrarian Trust)

WHAT WE LEARNED

KEY CHALLENGES

Financial sustainability was cited as the number 1 challenge by each of the incubator programs we have spoken to so far.

Other challenges include:

- Retention of incubator program staff: low pay, lack of structure and high stress roles has led to high turnover of staff across a number of incubator models
- Managing shared equipment and resources as well as maintaining standards across an incubator farm's diverse plots and activities in terms of maintenance, weed and pest control
- Developing effective communication strategies with participants: both in terms of language barriers with participants from non-english speaking backgrounds, but also finding ways to teach the hard reality of the farming profession without discouraging aspiring farmers.
- Participants having enough time to commit in early years when they won't be generating any/enough revenue from incubator program to live on
- Challenges specific to local context: i.e. unsupportive local government or difficult to navigate red tape or saturated local markets

"Funding is always the biggest challenge..."

We found that people are much more willing to donate for research and education than Farmer in Training programs."

2019 INTERVIEW

"I would say adaptability.

The future of the food system and our agricultural systems are just really in flux right now and so you have to continue to stay really adaptable as an organisation, and that's not always easy!"

2020 INTERVIEW

WHAT WE LEARNED

EQUITY & DIVERSITY

The issues around race, equity and inclusion we touched on for the Australian context featured across our interviews and research internationally.

Across settler-colonial nations like the USA and Australia the narrative around the status quo is the same.

Regenerative and small-scale agriculture is dominated by white, privileged, middle class folk. Existing internship and education programs can, and do, perpetuate that truth, as illustrated by the research of Levkoe and Offeh-Gyimah:

'our research shows there are a series of privileges associated with the ability to work for little or no remuneration and to access rural spaces where most ecological farm internships are located.

We argue that, while providing valuable hands-on learning for new farmers, the dominant model of ecological farm internship privileges white, middle-class young people and creates barriers to entry for racialized people limiting access to the subsequent education, training and other privileges that are awarded as part of the experience' (2020: 581).

Many of the programs we spoke with, such as VIVA Farms, Juniper Farms and Community Crops, have a direct focus on working with marginalised and disadvantaged communities to facilitate entry into farming and land access.

Some of the other programs we spoke with who don't have that specific focus were openly grappling with how to actively work on the side of equity, diversity and land justice for Black and Indigenous People of Colour:

"A lot of people in our network are really aware that the farming scene is a very very white place – it is something that people are wanting to address but it is also quite a challenging thing."

2019 INTERVIEW

"You can be passive about it, or actively working against the structures that are in place.

I don't think there is any in between.

We are actively working against structures that are in place, particularly because Oregon has had policies in place that have kept people of colour from owning land even into the 1970s so the idea is to face it with the lens of equity."

2020 INTERVIEW

CASE STUDY

SOUL FIRE FARM - UPROOTING RACISM AND SEEDING SOVEREIGNTY IN THE FOOD SYSTEM

LOCATION: NEW YORK

WEB: SOULFIREFARM.ORG

Soul Fire Farm is an 80-acre nonprofit organic farm that has become a leading training centre for farmers of colour, but it is also much more than this. It is a farm that feeds a community and is a centre for food justice organising.

Soul Fire operates:

- a Community Supported Agriculture (CSA) program explicitly aimed at addressing food injustice and 'food apartheid' in their local community. The CSA services up to 110 families and is based on the principle of Ujamaa, or cooperative economics' (Soul Fire 2019), designed to meet the needs of members by offering doorstep delivery and a sliding scale payment model along with fully subsidised 'Solidarity Shares' to families impacted by immigration and mass incarceration (ibid).
- a Black and Latino Farmers Immersion training program to increase the numbers of farmers of colour and provide 'a BIPOC (Black and Indigenous Person of Colour) space for people to reconnect to soil, understand the history of food injustice and acquire skills for reestablishing their relationship with food, land and farming' (Soul Fire Farm: 2019).
- an alternative to incarceration program that 'trains court adjudicated youth in farming and cooking skills'
- as part of the Victory Bus Project which provides transportation for families to visit loved ones in correctional facilities in upstate New York.

Leah Penniman, the co-founder of Soul Fire Farm was too busy with Covid-19 and the multiple demands on her time for an interview, but we have pulled some key quotes from a small segment of her powerful writing and work below:

"At Soul Fire Farm in Grafton, New York, we are attempting to meet a challenge presented to us by Curtis Hayes Muhammad, the veteran civil rights activist. He once said,

"Recognise that land and food have been used as a weapon to keep black people oppressed.

Recognise also that land and food are essential to liberation for black people"

"Black farmers once operated 14% of the nation's farms. They now operate less than 2%".

"When our ancestral mothers stood on the shores of Africa's Gold Coast, preparing to board transatlantic slave ships, they chose to braid seeds of okra and rice in their children's hair. They believed in a future of planting and harvesting. If they could maintain hope in the face of injustice we can, too'.

LEAH PENNIMAN
2016

WHAT WE LEARNED

IMPACT & EVALUATION

A consistent message across all of the incubator programs spoken to so far is that evaluation is important but all of them lack the time and resources to do it well.

Some relevant points that emerged here include:

- A core part of ongoing evaluation for many programs is in the planning, monitoring and reflection process that is conducted with program participants. This can include goal setting around professional and personal development and the farm business, and then reflection sessions that document how the participant is tracking with their goals and quantitative data including production and income figures.
- Many incubator programs have more intangible outcomes that they know are occurring but are difficult to measure i.e. the development of environmental consciousness or helping to foster a sense of belonging in refugee & migrant communities.
- Some programs we spoke to are revising and questioning their definitions of success to be broader than the number of farmers who go on to farm. These definitions are evolving as the broader impacts of programs come to light.
- A key strategy to get around resourcing constraints for monitoring and evaluation has been to develop partnerships with universities whose students can do the research & data collection as part of their studies.

"We're toying with: what does success look like? What are the other impacts that the farm has on peoples lives? People really love our program...we had a couple of focus groups this winter and had people from 10 years ago show up because this program had an impact on their lives."

2019 INTERVIEW

"There are things that are not as tangible but super important - folks that have gone through what a lot of refugees have gone through ...providing a space for those people to heal and adapt to living in this very different society ...they're some of those intangible things that are harder to track number wise."

2019 INTERVIEW

"We work with graduate students & they have been really helpful & supportive in doing this evaluation, a lot of it being driven by graduate students looking for projects . It's a nice synergistic use of resources."

2020 INTERVIEW

WHAT WE LEARNED

KEY LEARNINGS & ADVICE

The final question we asked at the end of each interview is focused on any key learnings and advice they have for folk looking to support new farmers or develop a farmer incubator program 'Down Under'.

Here are some of the key 'pearls a wisdom' shared to date:

"Start thinking more broadly re how you will define success.

We're starting to think it might not just be about incubating a farmer ... anyone going into food systems work would benefit from having knowledge of production and what it means to farm."

"Think about what are you trying to do... what is success, are the farmers going to move off or stay? Is that ok?

What are the different ways farmers can be successful?"

"There is a way of delivering curriculum that matters a lot...

if you can find ways to deliver curriculum in tandem with experience ..the closer you can link instructional fact sheets etc with an actual experience, both in time and in content, Then you really make it stick."

"Encourage a lot of independence from farmers. Try to build in that sense of ownership.

It's hard to undo reliance - if you establish this culture of 'we do that' then that's hard to undo."

CONCLUSION & RECOMMENDATIONS

Let's try and draw all these threads together.

There's a lot we can learn from what is happening overseas with innovative models, funding, widespread public and community support for new and aspiring farmers.

Back here in Oz there is great stuff happening on the ground but also some serious challenges facing our next farming generation - increased support and collaboration is urgently needed.

This research also shone a light on the importance of developing a broader advocacy agenda to build the support, attention and buy-in that is needed to support our future growers.

An overarching finding is that **many of the challenges facing us next generation farmers are structural and systemic and can't be comprehensively addressed by single pronged initiatives. To tackle challenges such as access to land, capital and hands-on regenerative farming training is going to take collaboration across a wide range of stakeholders.**

We can't tackle this on our own.

And we have learnt that there's a lot that all of us, whatever our place in the food system, can do.

For those looking to start initiatives and training programs to support new farmers:

Do it! We desperately need them, but move forward with a deep awareness of history, equity, inclusion and privilege and be up for open collaboration, not competition.

- Overseas experience shows that networks, and sharing of resourcing and knowledge across actors in this space strengthens the broader movement.

- We have compiled a range of resources, toolkits and references as part of our research to help inform your work and thinking. *Refer to the resource library on Page 63 for further information.*

To local, state and federal government:

Where are you?

A range of prominent international research points to **the centrality of supporting, funding and resourcing new farmers for the sake of our food security, planet and rural and regional economies** (FOLU 2019, IPES-Food 2016). We have put forward plenty of examples and ideas for what you can do to provide leadership in growing a next generation of regenerative farmers including:

- Developing a national funding scheme to support and seed incubator and training programs for growers
- Protecting our precious viable farmland for agriculture through zoning and policy, assisting with the development of new models of land protection and access (i.e. community land trusts and conservation easements) and making under utilised public land available and accessible to new growers.
- Funding subsidies and scholarships to support new farmers to access training and education in regenerative & agroecological farming
- Working with us to develop financial grants and/or interest free loans for infrastructure and start up costs
- Dedicated support for navigating red tape and regulations and easing prohibitive regulatory burdens (refer to [this submission by the Australian Food Sovereignty Alliance](#) for further information)

CONCLUSION

To philanthropy, investment and finance:

We need support.

There is so much potential for what could happen in this space but we need the funding and resourcing to do it. **Analysis from the Food and Land Use Coalition in 2019 found that a global investment in training young farmer entrepreneurs over the next decade of \$95-110 billion would deliver a three-fold economic return of \$300 billion (FOLU 2019).** Many of you have access to not only significant funds, but points of influence across the food system, and areas of land.

Work with us to:

- Support and amplify existing initiatives we point to in the report that are making big impact on a shoestring budget
- Develop community farmland trust and finance mechanisms to address head-on the top two barriers facing our next farming generation
- Engage with Indigenous communities to support land justice for our First Nations people, and strengthen their work to develop self determination through Indigenous farming enterprises
- Fund and enable the development of educational programs that equip us 'next gen' farmers to not only heal degraded ecosystems but build resilient businesses that can survive the increasingly challenging climate we are farming into.

To concerned and passionate community members:

Don't underestimate what you can do to support and enable the next farming generation.

Read again over some of the case studies provided here where community led initiatives are providing resourcing, land, training to next generation farmers for the benefit of the broader community.

- Do you own or have access to/awareness of vacant or under utilised land that could be made available to new farmers? Even 1/4 acre of land can be a viable beginning for new growers!
- Do you have a direct line or relationship with local government, funders and philanthropists or the media? Help amplify our cause and get us on the map.
- Are you supporting local growers in your region and helping to foster a community that values its farmers, fresh local food and the soil beneath our feet?
- Are you aware of any efforts to restore land justice to local Indigenous peoples in your region?

To established and retiring farmers:

We know you are busy and flat out and tired, but to us you are an invaluable resource in terms of your hard won knowledge and skills.

If it is within your capacity:

- Explore ways you can act as a mentor or adviser to new growers in your region, or
- Have a think about ways you might share your land to a next generation farmer
- We have provided some great examples in this report - delve back into our case studies for some ideas and inspiration.

And so to close:

The future is uncertain, and probably a bit rocky.

But we got soil underfoot, sun overhead and eventually, however long it takes, the rains still come.

So lets get growing.

RESOURCE LIBRARY

We've pulled together a range of useful resources, categorised into themes below.

FOR BEGINNING & ASPIRING FARMERS

SOME USEFUL OZ RESOURCES:

- *Farming Democracy: Radically transforming the food system from the ground up.* Australian Food Sovereignty Alliance. <https://afsa.org.au/afsa-merch/>
- *Call of the Reed Warbler.* Charles Massy. [Link to book.](#)
- Young Farmers Connect: [Resource Page](#)
- For land access take a look at the great work of [Cultivate Farms](#), and keep your eye on developments with the [Farming on Other Peoples Land initiative](#) at the Australian Food Sovereignty Alliance, as well as the work of [OriCoop](#).
- For distribution take a look at [Open Food Network Australia](#)

State government industry support:

NSW

[Young Farmer Business Program](#)

TAS

[Support for farming businesses and families](#)

VIC

[Young Farmers Advisory Council](#)

WA

[Ag Connect WA](#)

QLD

[Funding, grants, assistance](#)

SOME GUIDEBOOKS FOR STARTING OUT:

- *Beginner Farmers Guidebook.* Greenhorns. [Link to guidebook.](#)
- *Starting to Farm Guidebook.* California Farmlink. [Link to guidebook.](#)

FINANCE:

- *Affording our land: A financial literacy guidebook for young farmers (and all farmers).* The Greenhorns. [Link to guidebook.](#)
- *Farm Business Management,* California FarmLink. [Link to info.](#)

COLLECTIVE/COOPERATIVE FARMING:

- *Cooperative Farming: Frameworks for Farming Together.* The Greenhorns. [Link to guidebook.](#)

RESOURCE LIBRARY

LAND ACCESS, LEASING, SUCCESSION:

- *LAND.LIBERTY.SUNSHINE. STAMINA. A mini compendium of resources for beginning farmers on the topic of finding sustainable land tenure. The Greenhorns.*
[Link to guidebook.](#)
- *Finding Land to Farm: Six ways to secure farmland. ATTRA.* [Link to guidebook.](#)
- *Toolbox for leasing farmland. Land for Good.* [Link to toolbox.](#)
- *Find Farmland - Farmland Information Centre*
<https://farmlandinfo.org/find-farmland/>
- *Farm Succession Guidebook: California FarmLink.* [Link to guidebook.](#)

GETTING TO GRIPS WITH COLONISATION & LAND AND FOOD JUSTICE

- *Dark Emu. Bruce Pascoe.* [Link to book.](#)
- *Fire Country. Victor Steffensen.* [Link to book.](#)
- *Talking to My Country. Stan Grant.* [Link to book.](#)
- *The Yield. Tara June Winch.* [Link to book.](#)
- *Sand Talk: How Indigenous Thinking Can Save the World. Tyson Yunkaporta.*
[Link to book.](#)
- *Why Weren't We Told? Henry Reynolds.* [Link to book.](#)
- *Farming While Black: Soul Fire Farm's Practical Guide to Liberation on the Land. Leah Pennimen.* [Link to book.](#)
- *Braiding Sweetgrass: Indigenous wisdom, scientific knowledge and the teachings of plants. Robin Wall Kimmerer.* [Link to book.](#)
- *Eating as a settler-colonial act: Food justice and Indigenous sovereignty. Christopher Mayes.*
[Link to article.](#)
- *Conversation with Fran Bodkin on The Planthunter:*
<https://theplanthunter.com.au/people/dirt-aunty-fran-bodkin/>
- *First Nation Farmers. Landline.* <https://iview.abc.net.au/show/first-nation-farmers>
- *Food and Agriculture. Deadly Story.* [Link to webpage.](#)
- *The Killing Times. Paul Daley.* [Link to article](#)
- *Letter to a Young Farmer. Raj Patel.* [Link to letter](#)

RESOURCE LIBRARY

GUIDES AND CASE STUDIES FOR THOSE DEVELOPING NEW FARMER EDUCATION PROGRAMS/INCUBATOR MODELS:

- *The Farm Incubator Toolkit*. National Incubator Farm Training Initiative. [Link to toolkit](#).
- *How to Set up a Farmstart: A handbook for establishing and running a farm incubator site*. Landworkers Alliance. [Link to handbook](#)
- *Farm Incubator Case Studies*. National Incubator Farm Training Initiative. [Link to case studies](#)

SOME USEFUL REPORTS, ARTICLES AND RESEARCH: ENABLING AND TRAINING NEW FARMERS:

- *Civic Initiatives Supporting New Entrants Into Farming In Europe: Drivers Of A New Agro-social Paradigm?* University of Natural Resources and Life Sciences, Vienna Department of Sustainable Agricultural Systems. [Link to report](#).
- *Supporting the Next Generation of Farmers: Proposals for support schemes to assist the establishment and success of New Entrants to Agroecological Farming*. Landworkers Alliance UK. [Link to report](#).

ENABLING & PROTECTING LAND ACCESS:

- *The Agrarian Commons* for examples and inspiration for how we can transform land access and land justice here in Australia.
- *A Review of Farmland Trusts: Communities Supporting Farmland, Farming, and Farmers*. The Land Conservancy of British Columbia. [Link to report](#).
- *FarmLASTS project: Farmland Access, Succession, Tenure and Stewardship* research report <http://www.uvm.edu/farmlasts/FarmLASTSResearchReport.pdf>
- *Planning Reform to Create Sustainable Farming Livelihoods in the Countryside*. Landworkers Alliance UK <https://landworkersalliance.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2020/08/Planning-Doc.pdf>

THE GLOBAL PICTURE: DRIVERS & PATHWAYS FOR TRANSITIONING OUR FOOD & LAND SYSTEMS

- *Growing Better: Ten critical transitions to transform food and land use*. Food and Land Use Coalition. <https://www.foodandlandusecoalition.org/>
- *Breaking Away from Industrial Food and Farming Systems*. International Panel of Experts on Sustainable Food Systems. [Link to report](#).
- *Beacons of Hope: Accelerating transformations to sustainable food systems*. Global Alliance for the Future of Food etc. [Link to report](#)
- *Agro-ecology & Regenerative Agriculture Knowledge Commons*. Open Food Network. <https://about.openfoodnetwork.org.au/project/agro-ecology-regenerative-agriculture-knowledge-commons/>

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Glossary

Aspiring farmers: For the purpose of our interviews and surveys, we defined aspiring farmers as folk not yet farming but actively working towards becoming farmers through internships, work and study.

Beginning farmers: For the purpose of our interviews and surveys, we defined beginning farmers as folk actively running their **own farming business for 10 years or less.**

Community Farmland Trust: A community farmland trust is a type of community land trust. They are a democratically governed, member-based, non-profit organisation created to acquire and hold farmland for community benefit. These trusts provide long-term leases for secure tenure of farmland and housing, and promote ecologically sound farming methods. Community Farmland Trusts differ from **Farmland and Agricultural Land Trusts** which are not community owned but rather operate as non-profit, non-governmental organizations, usually with charitable status, that focus specifically on farmland preservation. An example of a Farmland Trust is the [American Farmland Trust](#) which has helped permanently protect over 6.5 million acres of agricultural lands since its formation in 1980.

Conservation Easement (a land protection mechanism developed in the USA): 'A conservation easement is a legal restriction added to the deed of a piece of property, which prevents the land from being developed, in perpetuity. The concept has been extended to preserving the historic elements of rural places, as well as preserving rural livelihoods through **Agricultural conservation easements or ACEs**. These are a common type of conservation easement that allows farming activity to continue, but precludes most other types of economic development on the property. In exchange for placing a conservation easement on their property, landowners are entitled to significant tax benefits and, in some cases, may end up with a lump sum cash reward'. (Definition courtesy of [Modern Farmer](#))

CSA: Community Support Agriculture: 'Community supported agriculture (CSA) is a partnership between farmers and consumers in which the responsibilities, risks and rewards of farming are shared.' The structure of CSAs vary widely but the farm customers 'often described as CSA members, are closely linked to the farm and the production of their food, and provide support that goes beyond a straight forward marketplace exchange of money for goods. This involvement may be through ownership or investment in the farm or business, sharing the costs of production, accepting a share in the harvest or providing labour'. (Definition courtesy of [Community Supported Agriculture UK](#))

Farmer Incubator Programs: Similar to the traditional business incubation model, farmer incubators work to help new and beginning 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' (NIFTI 2013). While there are a diverse range of services and resources that incubator programs offer, the overall goal is consistent 'to minimise the barriers to entry for aspiring and beginning farmers' (NIFTI 2013:7). The different services provided by incubator programs include:

- **Land:** providing low-cost or free rent for land, assisting with identifying suitable land for lease/purchase and matching landowners with incubatees.
- **Infrastructure:** providing low cost or free access to farming equipment, tools and infrastructure (i.e. coolrooms, sheds, wash stations, hoop houses) as well as access to utilities like water and electricity.
- **Knowledge:** creating opportunities for ongoing practical and relevant learning through a set curriculum or series of workshops and classes, facilitating farmer-to-farmer mentoring programs, and providing one-on-one technical assistance with farm operations.
- **Distribution:** Supporting farmer participants to find and enter farmers markets, CSA schemes and restaurant/other markets, facilitating wholesale accounts or institutional sales, establishing a CSA program for farmer participants to sell to the wider community.
- **Finance:** Working with participants to develop the accounting tools needed for business and market management, connecting growers with suitable financial advisors, banks, co-operatives and start-up grants and funding.

Overview of international models and networks we spoke with.

EUROPE

Name: Landworkers Alliance: UK Farmstart Network

Location: United Kingdom wide network

Year founded: 2018

Purpose: To help overcome some of the obstacles facing new entrants to farming, the Landworkers' Alliance is working with member organisations running 'farm-start' and 'farm-incubation' projects around the UK to develop a network of best practice and encourage the development of new opportunities.

Web: landworkersalliance.org.uk/farm-start-network/

Name: RENETA: the National Network of Farmer incubators (Réseau National des Espaces-Test Agricoles)

Location: France

Year founded: 2012

Purpose: 3 main focus areas:

- exchanging practices and consolidating skills (through meetings and seminars, collaborative tools, training activities, publications...)
- mentoring and expertise (through advice and support to facilitate the setting-up of new places for farming experiments)
- research and social innovation.

There are currently 58 farmer incubators in RENETA.

Web: www.accesstoland.eu/RENETA

USA

Name: Big River Farms

Location: Minnesota

Year founded: 2007

Target Group: Aimed at farmers who have historically been under-represented as farm owners (immigrants, people of colour, refugees). Participants graduate after 3-4 years but can continue growing on the land for an additional 3 yrs.

Program Structure: They run an Incubator Farm and Farmer Training programs. Programs vary from stand alone Educational classes, to shared farming plots (1-2 yrs), individual farming plots (1-4 yrs), organic transitioning training and whole farm management training. Each step has different pre-requisites and involve different costs. Plots range from 1/8 to 6-acre plots of certified organic land. Total farm size is 150 acres and is leased.

Web: bigriverfarms.thefoodgroupmn.org/about-us/the-farm/

Name: Community Crops Growing Farmers Incubator (Liberty Prairie Foundation Farm Development Program)

Location: Illinois

Year founded: 2013

Target Group: Aimed at beginning, immigrant and limited-resource farmers.

Program Structure: 3-5 year program. Participants must have first completed the 'Growing Farmers Core Skills Workshop Series' in order to apply to farm at Prairie Pines Incubator Site. The 10 workshops take participants through the entire growing season from Greenhouse propagation to season extension and overwintering. The Growing Farmers Training Program is called 'Community Crops'. The farm is 145 acres and is run on organic and regenerative principles.

Web: libertyprairie.org/programs/farmer-training/

Name: Juniper Gardens Training Farm: New Roots for Refugees

Location: Kansas

Year founded: 2008

Target Group: Refugee community of the Kansas region.

Program Structure: 4 year organic farming education program that provides land, farm equipment, a workshop curriculum, mentoring and English language classes.

Web: cultivatekc.org/our-work/new-roots-for-refugees/

Name: Elma C. Lomax Research and Education Farm

Location: North Carolina

Year founded: 2009

Target Group: Beginning farmers of all backgrounds.

Structure: On a 30.6 acre training farm, the Farmer-in-Training (FiT) program provides classroom instruction on the business of farming as well as hands-on farm experience. Program participants develop and manage their own agriculture business while receiving guidance from staff and seasoned farmers. Participants get: access to land to develop production skills and to share equipment and facilities. They also run an Organic Research initiative on the farm to support best practice organic growing in the region.

Web: carolinafarmstewards.org/lomax-farm/

Name: New Entry Sustainable Farming Project

Location: Massachusetts

Year founded: 1998

Target Group: Initially refugees with limited resources, but has expanded offering to all beginner farmers given the critical needs of the sector.

Structure: Provides a beginner education program with various access points ranging from introductory workshops for those brand new to farming through to a farm business planning course, and then the farm incubator program. In the farm incubator program, new farmers are provided with a small plot to farm, access to tools and infrastructure, as well as technical assistance from the farm manager and an opportunity to work alongside other new farmers.

Web: nesfp.org/farmer-training

Name: Rogue Farm Corps

Location: Oregon

Year founded: 2012

Target Group: Beginner farmers of all backgrounds.

Structure: Provides hands-on experience on a diverse network of commercial family farms in Oregon for beginner and advanced students of agriculture. Utilises existing farmers rather than operating their own incubator farm. The program was initiated by local farmers to address the skill and training gap faced by aspiring and new farmers.

Web: roquefarmcorps.org/

Name: VIVA Farms

Location: Washington State.

Year founded: 2010

Target Group: Aspiring and limited-resource farmers.

Structure: Provide bilingual training in holistic organic farming practices, as well as access to land, infrastructure, equipment, marketing and capital. VIVA offers a staged entry into farming with an 8-month hands-on farming practicum that is a pre-requisite for entry into their farm business incubation program.

Web: vivafarms.org/



Image courtesy of Days Walk Farm: The Farmer Incubator mothership

farmerincubator.org

youngfarmersconnect.com