



big river
farms
a program of the food group

Incubator Program

Program Detail

The Big River Farms Incubator Program supports emerging farmers by providing affordable land access, farm infrastructure, business development, and training resources.

To participate in the Incubator program, you will either need to complete the Big River Farms Grower Training Program or have 2-4 years of farming experience in Minnesota or a similar growing climate. This program takes place at our farm in Marine on St. Croix, about 45 minutes northeast of Minneapolis. Our program is designed for limited resource farmers who need educational support and access to land, water, and infrastructure to help make their farming goals a reality.

You will be managing your own farm from start to finish so you will need a basic understanding of how to:

- Create a seeding and crop plan
- Create a basic soil fertility plan
- Prepare your field for planting
- Set up and manage an irrigation system
- Manage pests and disease
- Manage weeds
- Grow, harvest, and store produce following food safety guidelines
- Sell your produce

All farmers must:

- Be part of our Organic Certification program and submit records each season
- Attend required Farm Safety and Food Safety meetings
- Purchase liability insurance for your farm needs
- Demonstrate proper care of your field

If you meet these basic program requirements each year, you can continue in the program for up to 5 years.

What Infrastructure is Included?

Land: Growers can rent up to 2 acres of organically certified farmland. New growers typically rent 0.5 acres or less their 1st season. Depending on how well you manage your land and your business goals, you may be able to rent more land each year.

Greenhouse: Each farmer is guaranteed space in a heated greenhouse. You may be able to rent more if space is available. Space can be used from early March to late October.

Walk-in Cooler: Each farmer is guaranteed a limited amount of space in a walk-in cooler.

Equipment: Farmers can use small equipment and hand tools at no additional charge. You can use power tools and 2- and 4-wheeled tractors once you have received training. And you can hire Big River Farms staff to do rototilling, chisel plowing, and discing.

Irrigation: Water for in-field irrigation is available from May 15-October 15. You will need to provide your own equipment (hoses, sprinklers, drip tape). Access will be within 150 feet of your field. Irrigation connections may be shared with others.

Wash and Pack Shed: Growers have access to a wash and pack area. Big River Farms provides cleaning supplies. You will need to provide your own packing supplies.

Storage: You will have 1 pallet of inside storage space for your supplies. A food-safe storage space for wax boxes may be available upon request.

Bulk Purchasing Opportunities: Big River staff organize several bulk buying opportunities each year. This reduces your cost for potting soil, compost, fertilizer, straw, and farm supplies.

What Will you Learn?

One-to-one support: Our experienced farm staff are here to help. Talk with a staff member about pest management, weed control, how to use new tools, and more. We also offer in-field support and hands-on demonstrations.

Farm Visits: Our farmers have at least 4 opportunities each summer to visit other local farms.

Education Support: In January, Big River hosts classes for experienced farmers. Topics are chosen by farmers themselves or are based on the needs observed the prior year. These classes will be held on Saturday afternoons from 12:30-2:30 pm.

Business Development: Business planning is an important part of running a farm. Big River Farms has partial scholarships for farmers who complete any of the following courses:

- Land Stewardship Projects “Farm Beginnings”: \$300 scholarship
- Renewing the Countrysides “New Farmer U”: \$100 scholarship
- MN Farmers Market Association “Grow Your Green”: \$100 scholarship

Networking: You will benefit from the connections you make with other farmers in the program. You will also meet farm mentors, extension educators, government agency folks, and more.

How Much Does the Program Cost?

Land Fee	\$400 per Acre
Program Fee	\$500 per year
Liability Insurance	Average of \$600-800 per season, exact cost will depend on your farm needs and who you purchase your insurance from

How Do I Apply?

1. **Email Big River Farms** at bigriverfarms@thefoodgroupmn.org or call the farm office at 651-529-1409.
2. **Attend an open house** on September 25th, 6:00-7:00pm (virtual option) or October 18th, 2:00-4:00pm (in person at the farm) to go over the program details, ask questions, and tour the farm.
3. **Submit your application** to Big River Farms by **November 8th**. Email, or mail it to Big River Farms, 14220-B Ostlund Trail N, Marine on St Croix, MN 55047.

Decisions on program acceptance will be shared no later than **December 8th**.

Big River Farms is a program of The Food Group. Learn more about Big River Farms and the other programs of The Food Group at www.bigriverfarms.org.