



Linda and Gene Farley Center  
for Peace Justice & Sustainability

## The Farley Center Farm Incubator

Linda and Gene Farley Center for Peace, Justice, and Sustainability

Springdale, WI

*"The Linda and Gene Farley Center for Peace, Justice and Sustainability is dedicated to socially progressive change, community partnership, sustainability and ecological justice."*

### Basic Statistics:

**Structure:** Hybrid  
(nonprofit + farmers' co-op)

**Year Founded:** 2010

**Number of Farmers:** 9  
businesses, 24 adults  
involved

**Number of Staff:** 8  
(6 PT, 2 unpaid)

**Size:** 10 acres

**Plot size:** .125-2 acres

**Rent:** none

**Time limit:** no

**Scope of operations:**  
Vegetable production,  
organic practices  
(certification will be  
complete in fall 2013)

**Website:** <http://farleycenter.org/index.php/farm-incubator/intro-to-farm-incubator#>

### Background

Springdale, WI is a small town (pop. 1904) about 16 miles southwest of Madison, WI. The area around Springdale is rich in farming, especially corn and soybeans. According to Janet Parker, the Farley Center Farm Incubator Facilitator, the Farley Center Farm Incubator is a project that grew out of both the region's organic farming activity and the need for social justice advocacy for new and beginning farmers.

The story of the Farley Center Farm Incubator began long before its founding in 2010. Linda and Gene Farley owned farmland near Madison, and for about 15 years, they had welcomed a few Madison families to plant gardens on the land. Janet Parker worked with community gardeners in Madison, and she introduced to the Farleys several urban gardeners who wanted to expand their operations and grow for market. By 2009, several of the families were growing vegetables for sale at farmers markets, and one grower was selling Mexican specialty crops wholesale to Latino groceries. In 2010, the Farley Center for Peace, Justice and Sustainability was founded as a non-profit. The land was donated by the Farley family, and the informal farming arrangements with the family became the farm incubator. Most of those first growers on the Farley land were recent immigrants, from Asia, Latin America and Africa. Some came with very strong farming skills, drawing on millennia of farming tradition in their home countries, while others were beginners. A small group of farmers and Farley Center staff applied for and received a Beginning Farmer and Rancher Development Project (BFRDP) grant in 2010 to fund the Farley Center Farm Incubator and its associated programs. A neighbor has provided an additional 20 acres of farmland rent-free, making it possible to bring new farmers into the incubator

### Project Structure

The Farley Center Farm Incubator welcomes any beginning farmers to apply, and is particularly focused on immigrants and socially disadvantaged farmers, including primarily Latinos and Hmong immigrants. The Farley Center does extensive outreach



among these communities to recruit both incubator participants and incubator staff. In keeping with the Farley Center's social justice and partnership ethics, all decisions about the function and mission of the incubator project are made in collaboration with the farmers. There are nine farm businesses cultivating at the incubator in 2013, and about 15 more people (family members and workers) are regularly at the Center helping those nine farmers. Only one of the growers is full-time farming during the growing season; all the others have off-farm jobs also.

**Curriculum:** The curriculum at the Farley Center Farm Incubator began as a relatively informal, farmer-driven process. Workshops and trainings were offered on an as-needed basis with few requirements for attendance or participation. Over the last couple of seasons, however, the Spring Rose Growers' Cooperative (see sidebar for more information) and incubator staff have begun coordinating and formalizing the incubator curriculum. The Farley Center Incubator also relies on some conference opportunities in the area, like the annual Immigrant and Minority Farmers Conference and the MOSES Organic Conference.

**Infrastructure:** The Farley Center farmland was already in agriculture, but very little infrastructure for vegetable production was in place -- there was just one small tractor, a tiller, and some very limited irrigation. Each season the farmers have contributed sweat equity, dramatically improving the facilities and equipment at the incubator. Farmers and incubator staff discuss infrastructure priorities at the end of each growing season and the farmers build or install the infrastructure improvements themselves. For the 2013 growing season, major infrastructure improvements included a boost in irrigation, installation of a second cooler and a second hoop house, and the purchase of additional farm equipment to add to the project's capacity.

**Markets:** The Farley Center farmers sell at farmers markets, to grocery stores and restaurants, to schools, and through two collaborative, multi-farm CSAs. One CSA is managed by the Spring Rose Growers' Cooperative, and the other is managed

***“The farmers are at the center of the infrastructure improvements. They make all the decisions and set priorities for what to do first, and put time and energy into the building projects.”***

***-Janet Parker  
Farm Incubator  
Facilitator***

## **Spring Rose Growers' Cooperative:**

One of the most unique aspects of the Farley Center Farm Incubator is its close partnership with the Spring Rose Growers' Cooperative. When the incubator was founded in 2010, the four farm businesses that were already farming on the land decided to form a cooperative. The Spring Rose Growers' Cooperative, with the support of a USDA Small Socially Disadvantaged Producer Grant, has since implemented extensive technical assistance programming aimed at producers like themselves.

Today the Cooperative has 8 farm members, some of whom are also Farley Center incubator farmers. The Farley Center shares offices with the Growers' Cooperative in Madison.

The partnership between the Farley Center Farm Incubator and the Growers' Cooperative extends to many aspects of the incubator's operations, including joint staff meetings, shared planning, training coordination, and collaborative decision-making.

*For more information about the Spring Rose Growers' Cooperative, visit their website at <http://springrosegrowerscoop.com>.*

by the farm incubator. The two CSAs have about 100 members combined. Because farmers market opportunities are fairly saturated in the greater Madison area, the Farley Center has also begun to create new markets to reach customers who may not always have access to existing farmers' markets. For example, incubator farmers and staff have started farm stands at a Madison WIC clinic and at a VA hospital.

**Transition:** The Farley Center Incubator does not have a formal process for transitioning farmers off the incubator site. Some participants have moved on to their own land, and the Farley Center has supported them through that transition. However, there is no limit to the amount of time a participant can farm on the incubator site. For new and beginning farmers who are interested in finding their own land, the Farley Center has established a successful land link program to connect new farmers with landowners in the Madison area. The Farley Center's transition programs may evolve in the future, and Farley Center staff and farmers are currently having conversations about how to make the land link program more useful.

## **Project Management**

An application is required of all potential participants who are interested in farming at the Farley Center Farm Incubator. There is no fee to apply, and the Farley Center Incubator does not charge rent for its incubator plots. Incubator staff used to ask for a business plan along with a potential participant's application, but this is no longer required for first-year growers. Janet explains, "We don't require a business plan first anymore. We start from many of the farmers' strength and passion, which is production, and we help them out on the business and marketing side. Farmers know when they apply that they need to complete organic certification and a business plan by the end of their first season."

**Communication:** At the Farley Center, "interpretation is the piece that pulls it all together." A significant portion of the incubator's USDA BFRDP grant money was spent on interpretation services - providing professional quality interpreters, translating all of the incubator's important documents into multiple languages, and hiring staff with cross-cultural and bilingual capacity. One of the most innovative communication strategies at the Farley Center is the Spring Rose Growers' Cooperative YouTube channel. Farmers and staff have created a series of videos and radio spots in Hmong and Spanish, covering information about how to build a low-cost cooler, how to build a hoophouse, and more. In addition to interpretation, regular monthly meetings are critical to maintaining good communication at the incubator.

**Definitions of Success:** Like everything else at the Farley Center Farm Incubator, the project's definition of success is developed in partnership with the incubator farmers. Currently, the incubator does not have a formal definition of "success" for participants, but farmers are in ongoing conversations about what success means to them in the context of their participation in the incubator project. Some of the most common definitions mentioned in these conversations include:

- a feeling of great pride in being pillars of their community,
- dedication to growing socially appropriate food that is not always accessible,
- the pleasure of being their own boss and teaching others,
- defraying food costs for family and friends,
- bringing in income (in some cases equal to a minimum wage job), and
- using land in an environmentally sensitive way.

**Successes and Challenges:** The farmers' accomplishments are the big success of the first three years of operation of the incubator. There are thousands of Hmong farmers in Wisconsin, but Hmong growers at the Farley Center and in Spring Rose Growers Cooperative are the first in the state to certify organically and to market through CSA. The nine incubator farmers are making their farming dreams a reality and also contributing their time, brains and muscle to building the farm incubator. In just three years, the incubator has transformed from an idea and a few acres of farmland into an organic farming hub where immigrants and other beginning farmers share fields, hoopouses, coolers, tractors, and profitable marketing. Across language barriers, incubator farmers who emigrated from Asia, Latin America and Russia share farming tips, tools, camaraderie and business strategies with US-born beginning farmers.

The biggest limitation the Farley Center Farm Incubator is currently facing is a need for more land. A few private landowners have offered plots of land to the incubator, as has the county parks department, but water access is limited on some of them. The incubator will need to find more land soon, because there will likely be new farmers joining the incubator project in 2014.

### **Plans for the Future:**

The future of the Farley Center Farm Incubator is, like most other things, a decision that will be made by the farmers. Janet explains, "I think we're at the place now where the farmers involved are going to be making more big decisions about the future of the programs. I suspect that there will be more farmers coming on next year and we would like to be able to continue providing access to land, equipment, and marketing support."

## **Additional Resources:**

Spring Rose Grower's Cooperative YouTube Channel, <http://www.youtube.com/user/SRGC2013>

Farley Center Incubator Fact Sheet, 2013  
<http://nesfp.org/nifti/fcfactsheet>

Farley Center Farm Incubator Application, 2014  
<http://nesfp.org/nifti/fcapplication>

Farley Center Land Link Meet-Up Flyer  
<http://nesfp.org/nifti/fclandlink>

*This case study relies primarily on information gathered during a phone interview on July 15, 2013 with Janet Parker, Farm Incubator Facilitator of the Farley Center Farm Incubator. Additional information was compiled from a nation-wide survey of farm incubator projects conducted in May 2013 and from the Farley Center website.*



Author: Meaghan Overton  
NIFTI Program Associate  
<http://nesfp.org/nifti>