

The four pillars: Training, Land, Capital, and Markets.

Training

How do we train the next generation of farmers?

How will they know that they want to farm?

Is there a way for them to start out small?

What is the best way to train new farmers? Workshops, video library, incubator farms, homesteading fairs, mentor farmers?

Land

We can train the best damn farmers this side of Canada but if they don't have access to land, it's going to be a fruitless exercise.

How can we build a landbank?

Can we help draft leases to make sure each party knows what they are entering into?

Is the lease good for produce only or can there be livestock?

What will the exchange be? Farm status, rent, barter, exchange of produce?

What's the fair market value for farmland here in the valley?

Can we connect training and access to land for succession farming?

Do some people just need access to pasture?

Capital

You will notice in the top left hand corner of the photo that I mention start up costs. Fencing is a reality with the valleys large deer and elk population. As an example, my costs have been \$2/ft for fencing. There are more costs to think about...

How can we help finance new farmers? Microloans, grants?

Can co-ops help facilitate access to equipment?

Does every farmer need to have a processing kitchen or can they be shared (or mobile)?

What is best practice for storing produce and how can each farmer build a cool room for that?

How can we capitalize on new technologies like solar to low cost for new farmers? How will they access that technology?

How much does it cost to start up a small farm? Produce only? mixed use?

Market

Growing food is the easy part. Getting someone to buy it is the hard part. The reality is that we will need to make a huge effort to shift 60 years of car centered supermarket shopping habits. It is going to have to be both EASY and CONVENIENT for both the farmer and the consumer... that is a tall order!

What's the threshold before a farmer has to have quota? And for what products?

Are the farmers markets in the region operating at their best? Are they in the best locations?

How can we help them? Could they use park land?

What institutional purchasing could we leverage here in the valley?

Can we develop an app or website that allows consumers to easily buy produce from a farmer according to their postal code? Could that generate enough business for the farmer to then deliver? (Remember the old fashioned milk man?)

Where do bigger purchasers like restaurants come into the picture?

IDEA

Let's contract a not for profit that will build an entire video library of HOW TO FARM. Ranging from how to grow vegetables to raising and processing animals. Put it on youtube and make it free. But why would we make \$100,000 worth of videos and research free? A few reasons:

1. We need people to start somewhere as farmers. With local video production, we can recommend local sources of supplies, expertise and resources.
2. Even if people don't farm and just grow their own food, that is money they are saving that can be spent elsewhere in the economy. It will also be healthier for our citizens.
3. It will show we are pioneers. We have more unused farmland that we could ever hope to fill in my lifetime with local people. We are going to need a new generation of farmers as well to come to the valley.

This leads into the next phase of the idea, workshops. Once someone has watched these videos and tried some of them, the next step may be to get some boots in the mud on a "real" farm. We could work with local farmers to host workshops (pay them an honorarium for their time) for people interested in going from Novice to Intermediate farming. Once this newbie farmer has completed the workshop and some work on the farm, the mentor farmer signs off, saying that the apprentice has attended the workshop and put in some grunt time (free labour for the farmer?)

Once this apprentice farmer has taken a series of workshops spread through out the year as well as a small piece of land they have been working on, they may want to move to the next phase of LAND and CAPITAL.

The land should be easy enough to find and procure through a comprehensive land bank. This needs to be maintained by a third party who will seek farm land that will both ALR as well as residential land that is zoned for agriculture use. A suggest model looks like an initial start up requiring 200 properties that are evenly distributed through out the CVRD then to add 50-100 pieces per year and keep the bank up to date.

An important component to land banking is assisting land owners (and farmers) with leases. A host of variables could leave either party with a sour taste in the mouth because the farmer is investing into the land the the land owner does not want to be inconvenienced or fleeced. The proposal is simply to assist in draft leases that would help outline terms that neither party may be aware of. (*Refer back to the questions asked above in the LAND section*)

As for CAPITAL, we could work with a microfinancing organization to give loans to small farmers. Small scale farmers do not require the funds that large scale industrial farms requires because they don't use heavy machinery, meaning a ballpark of \$5000 loans.

With a history of attending workshops and presenting a business plan, a new farmer could then finance their new farm infrastructure like fencing, irrigation, soil, compost or livestock.

Even if not for CAPITAL, this method of training could also assist in succession farming by vetting aspiring farmer by showing them the hard work that goes into farming.

Lastly and most importantly is ACCESS TO MARKET.

Farmers market are the not the end game to selling produce for farmers. It is ONE avenue but it is also ONE day of the week to sell. A model has to be formed to allow farmers to sell 7 days a week. This also has to be done with the greatest CONVENIENCE on both the customer and the farmer.

One idea was to create an APP (for smartphones) that would act a direct conduit from customer to farmer. The app would allow the customer to search farms based on their postal code and to pay the farmer directly. This would then allow the farmer to make deliveries that are close to their farm and hopefully have enough deliveries to "make it worth while". Imagine the old days of the milk man... the customer could put a cooler on their front porch and have the farmers deliver.

In essence, this could be a "Craiglist for Farmers", requiring the farmer to update their own profile. The app would allow farmers to collect contact information of their customers as well for more marketing follow up and allow the customer to get to know their farmers.

Compared to other proposed models, this one would remove the need for a middleman or halfway storage points. It would be direct A to B allowing the freshest produce to get to the customer.