

Great Lakes Incubator Farm

Leadership Team: *Koffi Kpachavi, Samantha Wolfe*

Advisory Council: *Don Coe, Parker Jones, Laura Rigan, Mike Rivard, Emily Umbarger*

Bank: *State Savings Bank* **Insurance:** *Fischer Insurance* **Accounting Firm:** *In-house*

Fiduciary Contact Information: *Grand Traverse Conservation District
1450 Cass Rd, Traverse City, MI 49685
Phone: 231-941-0960*

Website: *natureiscalling.org/glif*

Business Overview

The Great Lakes Incubator Farm (GLIF) program of the Grand Traverse Conservation District is an active, land-based agricultural program that fosters the growth and development of new and beginning farmers in Northwest Lower Michigan. In the US, the average age of a farmer is 57.5 years old. It has become increasingly difficult for retiring farmers to transition their land to new farmers to keep the land in agricultural production, while young and beginning farmers face significant challenges in building new agricultural operations due to high start-up capital costs for land, infrastructure, equipment, and the like. The GLIF program lowers these common barriers that typically deter individuals from starting a farming operation by giving them the opportunity and flexibility to create an agricultural business with significantly reduced start-up costs and allows farmers to gain expertise as they grow. By cultivating new producers in this region, the Great Lakes Incubator Farm program aims to: aid in the succession of local farmland, create a local farming model based on principles of regenerative agriculture, build resilience in our local food economies, and create a lasting culture of health and wellness. The Grand Traverse Conservation District is positioned to build GLIF into a successful program due to the comprehensive, dynamic knowledge and expertise offered by its multi-departmental staff in conservation, natural resources, and agriculture. Our long-standing community support and strong partnerships with governmental entities, local municipalities, the agricultural community, and environmental/agricultural related agencies and organizations, research institutions, and technical assistance professionals allow us to utilize and call upon local partner support for additional guidance, support, and learning opportunities for our GLIF farmers.

Market Problem/Opportunity

Increasingly, young and beginning farmers lack the resources, capital or land availability to make their farm businesses a reality. Due to the industrialization of agriculture and increase of large farms, smaller-locally focused farms are being compromised with higher land, infrastructure, and startup costs. Incubator farmers need place/space to be able to learn and

grow a business without the burdens of starting a new business. This could change the outcome of losing swaths of farmland due to the current aging farmer population. This farm model can increase local food access, education, and connection to local farms and provide a model that can be replicated to train young or beginning farmers.

As of 2016, there are 130 operational Farm Incubator Programs (FIPs) in the United States, a FIP is defined as a *“land-based, multi-grower project that provides training and technical assistance to aspiring and beginning farmers.”* As of today, there are no operational multi-farmer Farm Incubator Programs in Northwest Michigan that encompass the comprehensive training and support that GLIF will provide to its participants.

Solution/Value Proposition.

The Great Lakes Incubator Farm program seeks to launch new farm businesses by making farmland, equipment, infrastructure, and learning opportunities available to program participants at GTCD's Great Lakes Incubator Farm. These items are rented out at a reasonable rate, typically at or below market value. Farmers in GLIF can stay for up to five years. After that, they are expected to graduate out of the program to another site where they will continue to grow their business. By graduation, GLIF participants should have well-established markets and sales accounts, efficient and effective production methods, a broad understanding of critical farmer skills including good environmental stewardship and business management, farm record keeping (crop management and business), a well-established farm support network, and a detailed business plan with financial records.

One of the key components of the Great Lakes Incubator Farm program is our dedication to our educational offerings for our participants as well as the general public that we serve. Participants will follow a guided education component, and the farm will also serve as a demonstration farm. This will allow people of all ages in our communities to experience regenerative agriculture first-hand through observation and hands-on learning.

Marketplace/Competition

The incubator farm model has been thought of as a 'multiplicity of local foodsheds' in which the program provides a locally based agricultural and food production system that is tightly linked to a community's social and economic development. Longevity of the localized food system depends heavily on beginning farmers- a shift from the past of multi-generational family farms having a large portion of the market. The region is an optimal area for beginning growers, as there is access to many markets and retail outlets as well as a boost in available customers during the growing season due to being a highly traveled area in the summer months. Farmers are able to establish themselves through multiple market outlets in the area. The region is lucky to be a part of a strong local food movement. Many who live here full time or even seasonally understand the importance of supporting local food and local businesses.

Marketing Strategy

Identifying purchase decision making processes and patterns will rely heavily on the incubator farmers identified retail methods, and will continue to grow and adapt as they establish their business. As part of the incubator farm program, the incubator farmers will learn how to identify best markets for their business as well as how to identify the consumer's decision making process. Buying from incubator farmers will not only support beginning farmer businesses, but also sustain the future of farming, and succession of farmers who are aging out. Buying locally will help support the economy and cycle dollars locally while socially benefiting the lives of those through success in their business. This project and opportunity for young farmers checks all food systems sustainability sectors including: environmental, economic and social. Incubator farms are designed to help beginning farmers enter the market at low costs, and build their business model with low financial inputs and risks.

Leadership Team

- Koffi Kpachavi: Executive Director of the Grand Traverse Conservation District (GTCD). He also runs a private sustainable hobby farm in Beulah, MI.
- Samantha Wolfe: Michigan Agriculture Environmental Assurance Program (MAEAP) Technician at GTCD. Samantha has a background in environmental education and a passion for systems-level change to reduce environmental impact. In her role with MAEAP, she works with local farmers to assure they are mitigating on-farm risks to natural resources.

The leadership team is very dedicated to this project. They have conceived it and have been tirelessly working on it in a volunteer capacity since its inception. Their combined experience will certainly benefit the project and is poised to make it a success.

Financial Projections

Financially, the Great Lakes Incubator Farm is starting at square one. Initial fundraising and grant procurement will help pay for the bulk of expenses: land rental fees, initial infrastructure, and program development. Although minimal, GLIF will have small amounts of income from: farmer rental fees, and payment for services, and public workshops and events. Once the land base is identified, an inventory of existing infrastructure and infrastructure needs will help us further identify specific funding needs and opportunities for the farm. We assume that some infrastructure, tools, and equipment may be donated or sponsored by local organizations and/or existing or retiring farms - lowering the cost of initial start-up.

Initial Infrastructure needs:	Ongoing Expenses:
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Greenhouse and hoop houses - Farm Equipment and implements - Utilities and irrigation well - Wash and pack facility - Walk-in Cooler - Office space / work facility 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Farm Manager Salary - Utilities - Branding and Marketing - Promotion - Farm maintenance - Equipment maintenance and upgrades

Contribution Opportunity

A contribution to the Great Lakes Incubator (GLIF) Farm program is an investment in the future of our community and will foster a new generation of skilled farmers and entrepreneurs who will be at the forefront of innovation in regenerative agriculture and the local food movement. A resilient community needs reliable food systems for its health, well-being, and sustainable economic development.

GLIF seeks the following: Financial gifts to cover operational expenses. In-kind donations such as equipment and expertise. Time and relationships to connect our farmers to local resources. Because farmland is the largest barrier to new farmers, GLIF will accept farmland donations or farmland access to benefit the program and its participants. All donations to the program are tax-deductible.