

Farm Incubator and Grower's Program



2007 BRYAN FELLOW

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HOMETOWN: Ashe County, NC

MAJOR/DEGREE:
Master of Regional Planning,
Class of 2008

PROJECT TITLE:
Farm Incubator and Grower's Program

FACULTY MENTOR:
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COMMUNITY PARTNER:
Maverick Farms

PROJECT LOCATION:
Ashe and Watauga Counties

“The Bryan Fellowship enabled me to help Maverick Farms and the High Country create a program that redresses farmland and farmer loss. By training a new generation of farmers and connecting them with land, capital, resources, and markets we begin to rebuild local food systems and economic imaginaries.”



I worked with Maverick Farms, an educational nonprofit organization dedicated to preserving small-scale farming as a community resource and reconnecting local food network, to jumpstart a farm incubator and grower's program (FIG). The FIG program provides training for aspiring farmers in Watauga and Ashe Counties and works to connect them with land, capital, and resources to build their own profitable farm/value-added enterprises.

Project Goals

1. Promote innovative agricultural models that make locally grown food accessible and affordable to all and that support a living-wage for farmers.
2. Spread awareness about the region's agricultural performance and its potential.
3. Increase agricultural land under production.

Beyond the original objectives I also planned and executed a community summit for the FIG program, which brought together key actors and agencies to help with the project. We had about thirty people attend the summit and an additional forty people that expressed interest in the project but could not attend. A concept paper was sent out to all of these people in an effort to make linkages and connections with community resources and assets. I also developed a brochure template for FIG and applied for two large grants for FIG funding.

The economic, health, and environmental benefits of purchasing local food direct from farmers cannot be underestimated. The FIG project is al-



ready generating enormous enthusiasm from farmers, community-based organizations, and cooperative extension agents. Strengthening and expanding the High Country's small farm sector will directly create both jobs and a trickle-down effect on the economy by encouraging socially and environmentally sound economic development and increasing regional heritage and food tourism.

Each year, starting in 2008, the on-site immersion-training program at Maverick Farms will graduate at least one incubated farmer ready to start his or her own farming enterprise. This means that by 2018, the FIG training program will have produced between ten and fifteen new farmers and at least ten new farms. This does not account for the outputs from the Agricultural Commons Initiative, which could generate an additional thirty farmer-producers over ten years. If each of these farmers started or contributed to a thirty-member Community Support Agriculture program,

the measurable impacts of this newly trained workforce would include: 1,200 families in the region would be consuming locally grown food and approximately \$600,000 would be directly exchanged between consumers and farmers.

This fellowship has enabled me to become a more effective leader in the food justice and sustainable agriculture movement. In my research this summer, I discovered that there is a huge market potential in matching demand for locally produced food with supply and vast opportunity for small and mid-sized farmers to produce food for regional markets, and for both growers and value-added producers to sell locally. However, to realize this possibility we must work to rebuild food systems infrastructure in communities, retrain a new generation of farmers, and recognize and revalue their livelihoods. This means remaining food production and consumption as a collective and community responsibility. I see the FIG program as one step towards this vision.



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