

<b>Title:</b>	<b>Lansing Roots: Beginning Farmer Training Program</b>		
<b>Sponsoring Agency</b>	NIFA	<b>Project Status</b>	COMPLETE
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<b>Submitted By</b>	Alex Bryan	<b>Date Submitted to NIFA</b>	12/17/2015

**Program Code:** BFRDP

**Program Name:** Beginning Farmer and Rancher

**Project Director**

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**Recipient Organization**

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**Performing Department**

{NO DATA ENTERED}

**Co-Project Directors**

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**Departments**

{NO DATA ENTERED}

**Non-Technical Summary**

The Garden Project of Greater Lansing Food Bank (GLFB) and partners propose to address seven (7) of the priority topics of BFRDP: 1) Mentoring and apprenticeship, 2) Curriculum development, 3) Basic crop farming practices, 4) Specific types of practices. 5) Entrepreneurship and business training, 6) marketing strategies 7) adoption of new technologies (hoophouses, season extension). Long-term goals: Lansing Roots: Beginning Farmer Training Program are to 1) Increase number of small-scale producers/ market-growers in Lansing area. 2) Improve economic livelihood of low-income individuals/families through self-employment in farming. Specific objectives we will employ to achieve these goals include: 1. Provide an incubator farm within Lansing for up to 24 farmers at a time for their first 2 to 5 years farming. 2. Develop a marketing cooperative in Lansing area to serve both incubator farmers and other small-scale growers who want to scale-up. 3. Provide educational opportunities to new small-scale growers in the Lansing area. 70% or more of program participants will be limited resource, socially disadvantaged, immigrant or refugee beginning farmers. Approximately 70% of the total program budget will be used to address this population. The GLFB has a 30 year record of facilitating food production and a network of over 5,000 current participants. Our partners, Michigan State University Student Organic Farm; Organic Farmer Training Program has a nationally recognized farmer training program. The Lansing Urban Farm Project has an established apprenticeship program focusing on limited resource residents. Combining the skills of each we will work with primarily limited resource and socially disadvantaged populations from the Garden Project's existing network of gardeners.

**Accomplishments**

**Major goals of the project**

Lansing Roots: Beginning Farmer Training Goals and Objectives Expected Long-Term Impact #1: Increase the number of small-scale producers growing for market in the Lansing area. Expected Long-Term Impact #2: Improve the economic livelihood of low-income individuals and families through self-employment in farming.

**What was accomplished under these goals?**

**Incubator Farm (Expected Long-Term Impact #1)**

**Type: Started farming**

29 participants affected by change  
29 total unique participants

**Type: Change in knowledge**

29 participants affected by change

29 total unique participants

**Type: Plan to continue farming**

21 participants affected by change

29 total unique participants

**Lansing Roots Incubator Farm Highlights (2013 - 2015)**

- Total Unique Participants- 18 farm businesses, 29 farmers
- Participation increased each year: 8 farms/13 farmers in 2013, 9 farms/15 farmers in 2014, and 12 farms/23 farmers in 2015
- Over 9 acres in rotating production; natural and sustainable management
- 55 % of farms produced typical Michigan crop yields for at least one crop
- 72% of beginning farmers continue to farm
- Funding continuation of Lansing Roots Farm Incubator Program
  - We have leveraged the success of this BFRDP Grant to secure private foundation funding, an USDA-LFPP Grant, and budget support from our Board of Directors that will ensure our viability through 2016 and beyond

The Lansing Roots Program has had significant quantitative and qualitative success since its beginning in 2013. With support from the USDA-NIFA, we have helped many aspiring farmers by reducing their barriers to success. As our program moves forward, we look to continue the development of the 29 farmers we have worked with already, reach out to new farmers, and greatly increase the economic impact in the Greater Lansing area.

In order to develop a setting that reduces barriers to entry for new farmers, Lansing Roots offers participants a number of resources: access to land and farm infrastructure, mentoring and technical assistance, educational workshops, and a marketing collective through which they could sell their produce. Participants were recruited from the greater Lansing area through e-mail listserves, information sessions, and personal contacts between program representatives and interested individuals. Over 90% of the incubator farmers identify as limited resource, and many of them were also immigrants or refugees.

The vast majority of farmers interviewed report positive perceptions of the mentoring provided on the farm, with 92% indicating positive perceptions of the mentoring and 100% indicating increased knowledge of farming. Participants were overall very happy with their ability to learn while on the incubator farm and one farmer said, "If you didn't learn something, you just didn't show up." They also reported satisfaction with the availability of program staff to assist with any challenges that arose, with one participant saying, "They were a text or phone call away."

The farm has had incredible support from local organizations and individuals, with over 300 individuals providing thousands of hours of volunteer service to make Lansing Roots possible.

As with many new farmers, the participants working on the incubator farm have not all seen substantial changes in their financial status from participating, but with increasing skills are increasing their ability to see significant growth.

Over the course of the last three years, many participants have also indicated that the incubator farm provides them with additional benefits, including providing fresh food for their families and their communities as well as providing an avenue for exercising and promoting wellness.

**Marketing Collective (Expected Long-Term Impact #2)****Type: Increased sales**

Measured 1 years after training

11 participants affected by change

17 total participants with continued sales

**Lansing Roots Marketing Collective Highlights**

- \$65,000 in gross sales 2013-2015
- 2015 marketing collective
  - 24 farms (over 50 individuals total)
  - 5 farmers' markets/farm stands
  - 4 wholesale accounts
  - 64 CSA Subscribers
  - \$37,000 gross sales
- 64% of total participants reported increased sales
- Marketing cooperative received special mention in televised press conference with U.S. Senator Debbie Stabenow

(2015), including meet and greet and photo op with farmers.

Over the last three years, Lansing Roots has cultivated a marketing cooperative to support new farmers in the Lansing area in selling their produce locally. The marketing cooperative has sold produce through farmers markets, wholesale vendors, has created a community supported agriculture (CSA) program, where local residents can buy shares of the crops grown by participating farmers. The CSA program is progressive in its approach of partnering with local businesses to offer workplace delivery. With support from these businesses and their human resources departments, health and wellness coordinators, and office management, we were able to reach out to over 2000 employees to market our CSA.

Many of the incubator farmers selling their crops through the marketing cooperative's CSA report being satisfied with that process both as a way of making money and as a learning mechanism. One participant reported about the CSA, "I believe they are doing a good job. I would like for them to continue doing what they are doing. The CSA box packing was fun. We learned at the workshop how to pack things and how to make things ready."

Although the farm experienced extreme weather events for two consecutive years; the gross number (2 in 2013, 4 in 2014, 7 in 2015) and overall percent (25 %, 27%, 58%) of incubator farmers earning \$1000 or more increased. 71% of returning incubator farms reported increased sales from 2014.

As climate change continues to shift the spring and fall planting and harvest schedules, and as we deal with situations like June-July 2015, where our farm received over 13 inches of rain; we will continue to adjust our growing practices and marketing strategies. Though discouraged by the failures caused by extreme conditions, farmers have used their struggles as a learning tool and motivation to diversify their businesses to withstand an unknown future.

The CSA has grown over the last two years and in 2015 included 64 shares; with 14 shares available at a subsidized rate for low-income individuals. 69% of our non-subsidized CSA subscribers were at one of our corporate partner locations, where we offer workplace delivery to incentivize participation. Many shareholders had overwhelmingly positive experience with the CSA, beyond the benefit of having access to fresh produce. One individual reported, "I felt like I was part of a wonderful community. Sometimes in an urban settings it is hard to find a good sense of community so the CSA really impacted my life that way!" Another reported, "I think the CSA this summer was a good experience for my family. We tried many things that I would not have tried otherwise and now have some new favorites. For that I am very appreciative."

The number of farmers participating in the marketing cooperative has increased, from 13 farmers in 2013 to 24 farmers in 2015. The number and type of sales outlets has also diversified to include farm stands at local corporate partner locations and wholesale sales to individuals alongside more traditional farmers markets and wholesale accounts.

## **What opportunities for training and professional development has the project provided?**

### **Educational Goals**

#### **Type: Classroom-based course/farm-based workshop**

36 educational events, 227 total participants

#### **Type: Change in Knowledge**

131 affected by change

227 total participants

#### **Type: Plan a change in behavior/approach**

147 affected by change

227 total participants

#### **Type: Change in skills**

Measured 1 years after training,

17 participants affected by change

Although the "change in skills" number seems small in comparison to our total participants, it highlights the difficulty in doing long-term and follow-up evaluation. We continue to strive to improve in this area.

#### **Type: Apprenticeship**

12 total participants

12 participants affected by change

From 2013-2015, Lansing Roots offered workshops covering a variety of topics relevant to beginning farmers. Workshops were hosted by Lansing Roots Staff and other local farming experts and were a mix of classroom education and hands-on, teaching new skills and providing opportunities for them to practice using them. Workshops covered a wide range of topics, including seed starting, power equipment use and safety, food handling, marketing, weed and pest management, and bee keeping. They were offered on evenings and weekends, had interpreters present, and were offered at no cost in order to make them accessible to all farmers hoping to attend. Participants overall were very satisfied with the knowledge they gained

in the workshops (84%) and indicated that they plan to use it in their own growing practice (97%).

In 2015, our Demonstration Farm hosted a weekly series of 13 workshops in 2015 that were less formal and focused heavily on hands-on skill development and mentoring by example. These workshops were marginally successful in terms of attendance, but offered participants one on one education that is difficult in larger, more formal workshops. Participating farmers use the demonstration farm as a space for learning about best practices in small-scale, sustainable farming. Produce grown on the demonstration farm is distributed to low-income families in the Lansing area.

Farmers could also receive individual educational mentoring from Lansing Roots staff members. In reference to the mentoring experience, one participant explained, "You want to work with the staff, they are really helpful, if you want to learn something you're going to learn very quickly. They'll make sure you know the things."

Lansing Roots staff members have observed many of the incubator farmers using skills covered in workshops for things like pest management, bed prep, and irrigation. Comments from interviews and surveys also indicate growth of participant knowledge in many areas. In a survey of 14 previous participants in educational programming, (85%) indicated that they remembered and had applied something from the workshops they attended the previous year.

From 2013-2015, in partnership with the Lansing Urban Farm Project, a total of 12 local individuals participated in an apprenticeship program where they learned small-scale farming skills on a local urban farm. 100% reported increased knowledge and skills. 2015 featured the first two dual-program participants; one who was a second-year apprentice with LUFPP focusing on marketing and another first-year apprentice who also started a small farm business at the incubator farm.

#### How have the results been disseminated to communities of interest?

{Nothing to report}

#### What do you plan to do during the next reporting period to accomplish the goals?

{Nothing to report}

#### Participants

##### Actual FTE's for this Reporting Period

Role	Non-Students or faculty	Students with Staffing Roles			Computed Total by Role
		Undergraduate	Graduate	Post-Doctorate	
Scientist	0	0	0	0	0
Professional	1	0	0	0	1
Technical	1.5	0	0	0	1.5
Administrative	0.2	0	0	0	0.2
Other	0	0	0	0	0
Computed Total	2.7	0	0	0	2.7

#### Student Count by Classification of Instructional Programs (CIP) Code

{NO DATA ENTERED}

#### Target Audience

##### Limited Resource Individuals

##### Education workshops

210 target audience participants

227 total participants

##### Marketing cooperative

45 target audience participants

71 total participants

##### Incubator Farm

48 target audience participants

51 total participants

Lansing Roots has provided a program supporting a very diverse target population of limited resource individuals over the course of the grant period. The program offered all participants translation services for individualized mentoring and workshops; making the incubator experience accessible for everyone. One incubator farm participant reported, "I think that [Lansing] Roots gave me the courage to do this. Having the support there and the people and infrastructure was completely instrumental in my feeling like I can do this. [...] I've learned so much this year that would make it possible for me to continue."

Business and crop planning was also done with cultural and language barriers in mind. For example, a group of non-English speaking and mostly pre-literate Bhutanese farmers used crop plans created by the Lansing Roots team made of symbols, pictures, and numbers to help them better understand the farm planning process.

The marketing cooperative continued to provide support to limited resource farmers by removing the time and resource burden of going to market to sell their produce; while providing the opportunity for them to learn and apply the necessary skills. One group of four refugee families formed their own "family" farming cooperative to leverage skills and resources that different members brought to the table. Others practiced their money handling and customer service skills at farm stands, and still others learned the system of CSA packing and distribution.

In 2015, an educational support scholarship to the Student Organic Farm-Organic Farmer Training Program was awarded to a limited resource student. She successfully completed the program and was very satisfied with her experience.

## Products

{Nothing to report}

## Other Products

### Product Type

Other

### Description

Type: Classroom-based course/farm-based workshop

36 educational events

227 participant individuals

Type: Farm Incubator

29 participant individuals

18 participant farm businesses

Type: Marketing Cooperative

32 participant farm businesses

Type: Apprenticeship/Internship/Scholarship

13 participant individuals

Type: (other) Farm Tours

200+ audience members

8 promotional items

This includes private business sector groups, public government staff and elected officials, university students, university professors researching food systems, Annual Open House events, and hosting a social justice workshop tour.

Type: Media Exposure (Print, TV, Radio)

11 promotional items

Highlights: Local TV features "ELFCO TV" (2013) and "Bright Sides" (2014), front page article of Lansing State Journal (2015)

Type: Web-based and Social Media Exposure

5000+ audience members

8 promotional items

Highlights: 2 staff profiles on Michigan Good Food Fund website, 2 websites and 3 Facebook pages featuring different aspects of our program.

Type: Newsletter, Print (General Information)

750 audience members

9 promotional items

Type: Newsletter, Print (Workshops)

750 audience members

9 promotional items

Type: Newsletter, Print (CSA Promotion)

750 audience members

2 promotional items

Type: Event Flyer (Farmer Recruitment)

Unknown audience

3 promotional items

Flyers promoted the incubator farm program in the local communities of Lansing, East Lansing, Holt, and Mason.

Type: Event Flyer (CSA Promotion)

Unknown audience

2 promotional items

Flyers also promoted the CSA in the local communities of Lansing, East Lansing, Holt, and Mason. Some examples of places where they were posted include community boards and food pantries.

Type: (other) Listserv E-mails and E-Newsletters (Workshops)

5000+ audience members

22 promotional items

Type: (other) Listserv E-mails and E-Newsletters (Farmer Recruitment)

5000+ audience members

9 promotional items

Type: (other) Listserv E-mails and E-Newsletters (CSA Promotion)

5000+ audience members

8 promotional items

Type: (other) Information Session (CSA Promotion)

300 audience members

3 promotional items

Type: Newsletter (CSA Member E-Newsletter)

95 audience members

40 promotional items

Type: (other) Farmers Market Table

50 audience members

6 promotional items

Type: (other) Conference Presentation/Information Session

50 audience members

3 promotional items

Type: (other) Community Gardens Bike Tour

10 audience members

1 promotional items

Type: (other) Partnerships

Allen Neighborhood Center, Crandall Brothers, Eaton Conservation District, Foodshed Farm, Frosty Acres,

Hayhoe Asphalt, Hunt Holt Kiwanis Charity, Immigrant and Refugee Resource Collaborative, Incu-Bake, Lansing Urban Farm Project, Lutheran Social Services, City of Mason, Michigan Agriculture Environmental Assurance Program, Michigan State University Center for Regional Food Systems, Michigan State University Department of Entomology's IPM Lab, Michigan State University Extension, Michigan State University Product Center, Michigan State University Student Organic Farm, Michigan Works, NIFTI-National Incubator Farm Training Initiative, MIFFS-Michigan Food and Farming Systems, MIFMA-Michigan Farmers' Market Association, Nifty Hoops, NSAC-National Sustainable Agriculture Coalition, Tree Keepers

**Changes/Problems**

{Nothing to report}