

Farmers-to-Farmland Shared Land Access Model for Beginning Farmers and Ranchers



Prepared for USDA Beginning Farmer and Rancher Development Program
Project #2021-06633

SAN JUAN ISLANDS
AGRICULTURAL GUILD



WSU EXTENSION
San Juan County



CONSERVATION
DISTRICT
SAN JUAN COUNTY, WASHINGTON



LCLT
LOPEZ COMMUNITY
LAND TRUST
Building a Sustainable Island Community



AGRARIAN TRUST



Agricultural
Resources
Committee
of San Juan County



SAN JUAN COUNTY
CONSERVATION
LAND BANK

Farmers: Bruce Gregory, Candace Jagel, Faith Van De Putte, Greg Meyer,
Lori Ann David, Meike Meissner, Sasha Moghadam, Taylor Diepenbrock

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Collaborators

Farmers-to-Farmland Steering Committee

Candace Jagel, San Juan Islands Agricultural Guild & Farmer, Snowberry Farm
Chelsea Thorpe, San Juan Islands Agricultural Guild
Emma Rastatter, San Juan Islands Agricultural Guild
Kristen Arnim, San Juan Islands Agricultural Guild
Peggy Bill, San Juan Islands Agricultural Guild
Stephanie Coffey, San Juan Islands Agricultural Guild

Land Access Advisory Group

Brook Brouwer, WSU Extension, San Juan County
Bruce Gregory, San Juan Islands Conservation District & Farmer, Mitchell Bay Farm
Charlie Behnke, San Juan County Conservation Land Bank
Faith Van De Putte, San Juan County Agricultural Resources Committee & Farmer, Midnight's Farm
Greg Meyer, Beginning Farmer
Lori Ann David, Farmer, Aurora Farms
Meike Meissner, Farmer, Stonecrest Farm
Rhys-T Hansen, Agrarian Trust
Sandy Bishop, Lopez Community Land Trust
Sasha Moghadam, Beginning Farmer, Joon Farm
Taylor Diepenbrock, Beginning Farmer, Morning Star Farm

Facilitator

Sarah Severn, Sarah Severn Consulting

Model Report Authors

Candace Jagel, Chelsea Thorpe, Emma Rastatter, Kristen Arnim, Peggy Bill

I. Overview

Given the high cost of land in San Juan County and the impending retirement of existing farmers, the San Juan Islands community is seeking to connect beginning farmers to land and resources.

Findings from a USDA Beginning Farmer and Rancher Development Project (BFRDP #2016-03316) showed that access to land and connection to existing resources are the greatest needs of beginning farmers in San Juan County. In response, as part of this follow-up BFRDP project #2021-06633, a model for land sharing and collaborative land management has been developed to address these needs. The goal of this model is to increase lease opportunities for beginning farmers and ranchers (BFRs).

The model would jump-start BFRs through a support system that draws upon the experience and resources of project collaborators and syncs with other BFR services. The Farmers-to-Farmland Shared Land Access Model for Beginning Farmers and Ranchers (F2F Model or ‘the model’) described in this report is designed to connect beginning farmers to land and provide access to the resources they need to succeed. The F2F Model is designed to be replicated within San Juan County and by other communities facing similar challenges.

The F2F Model sets up a system whereby an intermediary entity works with landowners and farmers to access and manage agricultural land. The entity holds a ground lease to establish a site for the program and then subleases to multiple beginning farmers who farm the shared land. The intermediary entity could be an existing nonprofit, a new nonprofit, or any combination of partnerships.

The Model

For farming to continue in San Juan County, we must actively cultivate our next generation of farmers. Landowners, farmers, local organizations, and community members can work together towards this goal using the F2F Model developed as part of this project. Implementation of the model will address the objectives to increase lease opportunities and access to local resources for BFRs in San Juan County. The model will jump-start beginning farmers through a support system that draws upon the experience and resources of project collaborators and syncs with other agricultural services. The model will put agricultural land to use, strengthening our economy and increasing food security in our community.

Mission

To increase the success of beginning farmers in San Juan County through shared land access, resources, infrastructure, and collaborative support.

Principles

The principles below represent the core values that guide us in our work to facilitate land access for new farmers in San Juan County.

Stewardship

We protect and cultivate the health of our food systems and the planet. We foster holistic land management and innovative stewardship practices such as permaculture, soil building, and carbon sequestration.

Transparency

To promote successful relationships among farmers, land owners, other stakeholders, and the community, we provide a clear vision and parameters for achieving our goals, and we practice open, professional, inclusive, and transparent communications.

Accessibility/Equity for farmers

We boost farmer success through a model that promotes long-term access to farmland, living wages for farmers, and the ability for the farmer to build equity over time.

Resilience

We identify and implement strategies that help farmers adapt to changes in climate, economics, working conditions, and societal needs, as they evolve.

Justice

We stand against racism and oppression of any kind. We believe there is no food justice without racial and economic justice, and we commit to advocating for equitable and just access to farmland in San Juan County.

Agricultural Ethic

We foster a community culture that recognizes the social value of a thriving local food system; the importance of conserving farmland; the compatibility of resource protection and agriculture; the role of agriculture in community resiliency; and the need for farmers to have affordable, long-term access to farmland.

Who this model serves

The Farmers-to-Farmland Land Access Model for Beginning Farmers and Ranchers is designed to serve BFRs seeking to farm or already farming in San Juan County. As the program expands, BFRs from outside the county could be recruited into the program. The model supports multiple compatible leases on a property, promoting shared resources such as infrastructure and increasing cost efficiencies for the farmers. Whether it is complimentary farming and ranching practices or a unique division of space, shared land is key to this model, as it offers entry for BFRs without the means or experience to purchase or lease their own farmland.

In addition, this model serves the San Juan Islands community, getting more farmers on the land to produce the food that sustains our local food system. The model also serves landowners who wish to see their land continue to be used for agriculture but who may not wish to farm or manage farmers themselves.

Management

Management of the model could be undertaken by an existing nonprofit, a new nonprofit, or any combination of partnerships. Management is intended to include general program management, site selection, negotiation and oversight of the lease, ongoing communication with the landowner, and selection and coordination of beginning farmers.

The Ag Guild is a 501(c)3 nonprofit “dedicated to fostering a vibrant, resilient and sustainable local food system in San Juan County, Washington.” As the project director and collaborator for the BFRDP 2021 grant project, the Ag Guild is a likely candidate for the management of the F2F Model. In addition, the Ag Guild managed BFRDP #2016-03316, has established relationships with multiple organizations providing agricultural services in San Juan County, has the ability to provide stability and longevity as farmers come and go through the model’s program, and can serve the entirety of the county. As part of this model, the Ag Guild could act as the management organization, overseeing the program and working as the intermediary between the land owner and BFRs. The Ag Guild’s managerial role would include evaluating the land sites to determine scale and viability for shared farmland access, developing a scope of collaborative uses, facilitating leases of farmland from landowners, facilitating subleases with BFRs, connecting BFRs to local and regional resources, acting as an intermediary with partner organizations, maintaining communications, and evaluating and the project.

The Land

To be successful, the shared farmland access approach presented here depends on identification of farmland, public or private, that can support various farming activities. The land must be of a sufficient size to allow multiple farmers to establish their own

farm operations, and it must have sufficient infrastructure to meet the needs of these farming operations. Another critical component is the availability of water throughout the year, including in the dry summer season, which generally lasts four months. The shared land access model anticipates long-term lease of the farmland. This points to ownership of the land by an entity, organization, or individual that shares the goal of supporting farming in San Juan County.

There are prime agricultural soils on public and private land throughout San Juan County. There are 8,184 acres in Current Use Farm and Agriculture in the county.¹ Several conservation organizations exist that seek to protect and conserve priority lands throughout the county. These organizations include the Land Bank, a public land conservation organization, and the Preservation Trust, a private non-profit land trust. Through conservation easements and fee-simple purchase, the Land Bank and the Preservation Trust have protected over 2,400 acres² of farmland throughout the county. Additionally, there are private farmland owners who may be interested in engaging in a shared farmland access model. Landowners also include community land trusts, such as Lopez Community Land Trust, who have worked to preserve farmland and may be a candidate for this model.

The San Juan County Conservation Land Bank (Land Bank) and the San Juan Preservation Trust (SJPT) currently lease the majority of their farmland preserves to local farmers; however, they are limited by mandate and/or current capacity to manage and support the development of more complex farm operations and lease arrangements. Thus there is an opportunity for a partner organization, such as the Ag Guild, to take on this role to assist in developing more diverse and viable production on these lands and facilitate access for beginner farmers and ranchers. Discussions with these organizations will continue as this model is refined to define parameters and responsibilities of partner organizations, decision-making processes, and more.

Given the added complexities of leasing to multiple tenants on one piece of land, farmland owners such as the Land Bank, Preservation Trust, or private landowners may not wish to lease to multiple farmers on the same piece of land. They may also be less likely to lease to an inexperienced farmer. There is a need for an organization, such as the Ag Guild, that is willing and able to step in and provide support, management, and assurance that the land and resources will be stewarded.

San Juan County Conservation Land Bank

As a public conservation organization, the Land Bank derives most of its funding from a 1% real estate excise tax. Through conservation easements and fee owned public land

¹ 2023 Tax Year Statement of Assessment.

<https://www.sanjuanco.com/DocumentCenter/View/27784/2023-Tax-Year-Statement-of-Assessments>

² BFRP #2016–03316. 1,400 farmland preserves, 1,000 conservation easements.

preserves, the Land Bank fulfills its mandate “to preserve in perpetuity areas in the county that have environmental, agricultural, aesthetic, cultural, scientific, historic, scenic or low-intensity recreational value and to protect existing and future sources of potable water³.” As one of the largest agricultural landowners in San Juan County, the Land Bank is a potential partner in providing farmland for collaborative management.

San Juan Preservation Trust

Established in 1979, SJPT is a private, nonprofit, accredited land trust dedicated to helping people and communities conserve open space and farmland in the San Juan Islands of Washington State. Together with private landowner partners and member/supporters, the SJPT has permanently protected more than 300 properties, 50 miles of shoreline, 25 miles of trails and 19,000 acres on 21 islands. A 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization, the SJPT receives no direct tax revenue and depends on voluntary contributions to do its work. Its mission is “to conserve the natural beauty, vital ecosystems, and unique character of the San Juan Islands for future generations; care for the lands and waters under the Trust’s protection; and connect people to nature, to each other, and to the Preservation Trust.”

SJPT is the largest farmland owner in San Juan County, primarily due to the donation by a private landowner of Red Mill Farm, a 748-acre farm in the heart of San Juan Island.

Private Land Owner

With the average age of farmers in San Juan County being 60.3, it is likely that much of privately owned farmland will see its farmers aging out in the coming years. Because of the prime agricultural soils on privately owned land, there is an opportunity here for a partnership between the Ag Guild and private landowners. The Ag Guild already works with private landowners through the Farmers-to-Farmland program and has an established presence in the county. Private landowners may see a benefit to keeping their land as a working farm, both to qualify for an agricultural tax status and because they believe in the mission of the F2F Model. Because the model offers a layer of management and support, private landowners may be more willing to support BFRs as tenants on their farmland.

Applying the shared land access model to private land could result in one or more BFR tenants farming the land or even collaborative arrangements, such as succession planning or land sharing where the owner/farmer works part of the land but other parts are leased and utilized by one or more BFR tenants. It is worth noting that the careful drafting of lease agreements and application of the communication plan is as necessary with a private landowner as with a county or nonprofit organization. The security of a long-term lease may be less possible in these situations as well.

³ San Juan County Conservation Land Bank. <https://sjclandbank.org/about/>

Community Land Trusts

A community land trust is a nonprofit, place-based community organization that holds land for the benefit of the community it serves. There are three community land trusts in San Juan County, on three different islands, with a primary focus of providing access to affordable housing. Lopez Community Land Trust (LCLT) operates on Lopez Island with a mission to build “a diverse, sustainable Lopez Island community through affordable housing, sustainable agriculture, and other dynamic rural development programs.”⁴ At this time, LCLT has two active agricultural leases, both leased by a single farm business. In a shared-land situation, if LCLT or another local community land trust were to apply the F2F Model to their land, they would have an intermediary organization managing the BFR tenants.

Collaborative Services

San Juan County is fortunate in its robust array of agricultural services. However, one problem that has been identified is difficulties for beginning farmers to access these services. The F2F Model strives to inform and connect BFRs to agricultural services. The Advisory Group spent time building a mind map (see Appendix E) of services available to farmers in San Juan County for education and training, research, infrastructure, access to markets, and project development. The main resources this model would connect to BFR participants will be:

Ag Guild

- FARM Fund grants and microloans
- F2F Mentorship Program
- San Juan Islands Food Hub
- Island Grown in the San Juans Program: branding, promotion, mapping, and networking
- Brickworks commercial kitchen

Economic Development Council of San Juan County (EDC)

- Business counseling, workshops, and other educational opportunities

Farmer’s Markets

- Lopez Island
- Orcas Island
- San Juan Island

Northwest Agricultural Business Center (NABC)

⁴ Lopez Community Land Trust. <https://www.lopezclt.org/about/>

- Business counseling specifically for farmers
- Business planning, feasibility, and implementation guidance
- Connection to markets, capital, and other resources

Island Grown Farmers Cooperative (IGFC)

Twenty-two-year-old livestock producers cooperative providing USDA-inspected, on-farm mobile meat processing and cut-and-wrap services, serving five counties in Western Washington

San Juan County Agricultural Resource Committee (ARC)

- Advisory group to the San Juan County Council regarding local agriculture

San Juan Islands Food Hub

- Online marketplace for local food and agricultural products

San Juan Island Grange #966

- Chicken incubation equipment
- Commercial kitchen
- Growers' Circle (weekly meeting for growers)

San Juan Islands Makers Guild

- Materials promoting agriculture and farmers in SJC
- Events and markets

San Juan Islands Conservation District (SJICD)

- Farm planning and technical assistance
- NRDC Farm Cost-Share Program administration
- Equipment loan program: no-till drill
- Voluntary Stewardship Program (VSP) with guidance on meeting county code
- Annual farm tours (on three islands) organization

Taproot Lopez Community Kitchen

- Shared facilities for commercial food processing
- Food storage

Washington State University Extension, San Juan County (WSU Extension)

- Cultivating Success—Whole Farm Planning Course: offered statewide, online, as a bilingual program providing Spanish interpretation and resources in Spanish
- San Juan Islands Agricultural Summit
- Equipment loans for soil and forage testing

San Juan County Farm Community

- Experienced farmers who can act as mentors (looking at the NIFTI criteria- you are going to need mentors for the BFRs)

Housing Challenges

San Juan County is currently experiencing acute problems related to affordable housing. This presents challenges for the existing and potential workforce in the county, including BFRs. The Agricultural and Food System Housing Market Study for San Juan County details the connections between housing affordability and a strong local food economy. Affordable housing is not in the scope of the F2F Model or pilot project. However, the need for secure housing for BFRs will continue to be an issue. To address this, we will explore partnerships of existing affordable housing organizations and work to connect program participants with those resources.

Pilot Project

The Farmers-to-Farmland Shared Land Access Model for Beginning Farmers and Ranchers described above is intended to result in a ready-to-launch pilot project. The launch itself is not part of this grant project. The sections below refer both to the generic land access model and to a future pilot project in San Juan County.

To put the model into practice, the pilot project would need an intermediary organization acting as a project lead, holding a ground lease and managing farmland for sublease to multiple beginning farmers, as well as working with partner organizations for resources and assistance, collecting data, and evaluating outcomes. For best results, the chosen intermediary organization would maintain relationships with multiple organizations providing agricultural services throughout SJC, the ability to provide stability and longevity as farmers come and go through the model's program, and serve the entirety of the county.

For a future pilot project in San Juan County, the project lead could be one of several organizations. In writing this model, the group envisioned the Ag Guild taking on this role. However, a formal decision would be made at the time of pilot project implementation. In addition to commitment from the Ag Guild, letters of intent signed by partner agencies willing to participate in the pilot would also be obtained as documentation of buy-in.

II. Governance

To be a successful program over the long term, the shared farmland access program should be guided by a concise governance structure that clearly defines roles and

responsibilities of partner organizations, landowners, and farmers. Though it makes sense to house the governance of the program under one organization, guidance for governing the program should be drawn from the experience and perspective of all stakeholders, including local organizations, beginning and experienced farmers, and members of the community.

San Juan Islands Agricultural Guild

For the future pilot project, the Ag Guild would act as the umbrella organization managing the land access and coordinating the program. As a partner in the BFRDP grant project and an organization with a mission to further the local food system and support farmers, the Ag Guild is an obvious candidate to coordinate a land access pilot project.

Advisory Committee

Per the proposed future pilot project, under the Ag Guild, an advisory committee would oversee implementation of the F2F Model. The committee would offer advice and insight; the committee would not hold governing or fiduciary responsibility. The committee would consist of members who represent:

- The San Juan Islands Agricultural Guild
- Partner organizations, including San Juan Islands Conservation District, WSU Extension, Northwest Agricultural Business Center (NABC), etc.
- Local beginning farmers, possibly including participant/tenants
- Local experienced farmers
- Community members

Duties for the advisory committee would be primarily to:

- Meet regularly to receive updates on the pilot project
- Participate in the creation and revision of the management plan, communication plan, and evaluation tools
- Provide advice, insight, and recommendations on site assessments, lease elements, RFPs, dispute resolution, infrastructure improvements, etc.

Employees

Per the future pilot project, the Ag Guild would support one or more paid employees with responsibilities related to the F2F Model implementation. The responsibilities of the employee(s) would be primarily:

- Program administration, including but not limited to communications with landowners and farmer tenants, site assessments, negotiating and facilitating lease agreements, approval of infrastructure improvements, dispute resolution, collecting data for evaluation
- Schedule and facilitate meetings with the advisory committee

- Handle communications between the Ag Guild, the advisory committee, partner organizations, farmers, and the community
- Distribute RFPs as needed
- Organize the printing and distribution of the communication materials
- Create a system to organize and store data from surveys, etc.
- Update the website and manage social media

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III. Site Assessment

For the future pilot project, the Ag Guild would lead the process to identify, evaluate, and propose specific farmland properties for consideration as the pilot project site. The Ag Guild would collaborate with partner organizations to solicit suggestions of potential sites, including potential sites owned by the Land Bank, San Juan Preservation Trust, or private farmland properties.

Potential farmland sites would be evaluated to determine suitability for supporting numerous farm operations, whether farmed collaboratively, or as separate plots within the site.

Site Assessment Criteria

- Size and ability to support several farm operations
 - Suitability for livestock operations: Accessibility of pasture for rotational grazing, suitability for different livestock, availability of water or shelter
 - Suitability for market garden: size of plot, access and location, potential to site hoophouses, water access, drainage
 - Suitability for orchard, grains, or other speciality crops
 - Potential of the land to support separate operations, or operations working together to share space and infrastructure
- Soil type: suitability for various farm crops and uses
- Condition of the farmland: historic uses, extent of invasive species, compaction, etc.
- Availability and condition of existing infrastructure:
 - Fencing (livestock and/or deer fencing)
 - Water lines, pumps, spigots and other irrigation infrastructure
 - Greenhouse, hoop house, outbuildings, storage, barns and pack sheds
- Availability and condition of existing infrastructure including
 - Fencing (livestock and/or deer fencing)
 - Water lines to serve parts of property
 - Greenhouse or hoop house
 - Farm buildings including barns, storage, equipment sheds, etc.
- Availability of electricity
- Access roads
- Availability of potential farmstand location
- Ability to build or change necessary infrastructure as needed to support farm operations
- Availability of housing onsite, ability to site temporary housing, or housing nearby that can support BFRs
- Land Use zoning and code restrictions supportive of shared farmland model:

- Rural Farm and Forest
- Agricultural Resource Land
- Neighborhood assessment: Is the community near the site supportive of collaborative farming and multiple farm operations?
- Opportunity to expand operations: availability of adjoining or nearby land to support expansion
- Opportunity to negotiate long term or renewable lease with farmland owner
- Cost and terms of farmland lease

Based on the above criteria, the project team would compile a list of potential sites and rank sites according to potential uses.

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IV. Lease Tools and Elements

The F2F Model requires thoughtful and thorough lease agreements that accommodate the needs and expectations of landowners, the management organization, and participating BFRs. Each new relationship of land and tenant will require a unique lease. While it can be expensive, legal counsel or mediation during the lease drafting process is essential. This model does not assume or replace legal advice. It is highly recommended that organizations and/or individuals seek legal counsel while implementing this process.

For the F2F Model pilot project, the Ag Guild will negotiate and hold a ground lease with the landowner of a chosen site. The land will then be subleased to BFRs who have been approved to participate in the pilot project. Access to established and successful examples of ground leases and subleases can help prepare the Ag Guild and guide the process. American Farmland Trust offers a resource for the beginning process of drafting a lease. Utilizing this resource and answering the questions posed in the publication can be a good place for the Ag Guild to start in working with both the landowner and BFRs.

- [Drafting a Lease: Questions for Farmers and Landowners to Ask](#)⁵

Ground Lease

A ground lease is typically defined as the long-term lease of unimproved land or previously developed property that invites the tenant to develop or improve the land⁶. For the pilot project, once land and a landowner have been identified as appropriate a ground lease will be developed with the Ag Guild as the ground tenant. Typically, ground lease terms run between 50-99 years, and generally no less than 30 years. It would be prudent to include a caveat that a ground lease of this length may be difficult to execute due to specific requirements of farmland owners such as the Land Bank, as well as the newness of the program. The pilot project for this model may feature a shorter-term lease.

Examples of ground leases may be found here:

⁵ Armstrong, Rachel. Drafting a Lease: Questions for Farmers and Landowners to Ask. American Farmland Trust.

https://farmlandinfo.org/sample_documents/drafting-a-lease-questions-for-farmers-and-landowners-to-ask/. January 15, 2015.

⁶<https://www.utsystem.edu/sites/default/files/documents/Ground%20Leases/ground-leasesbasic-legal-issues.pdf>

- [Model Agricultural Ground Lease, Equity Trust](#)
- [City of Bainbridge Island and Friends of the Farms Master Lease and Management Agreement](#)
- [PASA Agricultural Ground Lease](#)

Subleasing

Acknowledging that each lease will be unique to the farmers involved, the land, and the situation, each relationship will begin with dialog. A helpful resource for this is the document [Drafting a Lease: Questions For Farmers And Landowners To Ask](#), published by Farm Commons.⁷ Questions include, but are not limited to, rights and uses of the land by the farmer, permission and access to facilities, production-related issues, renewal of the lease, communication requirements, and transfer of the lease. Examples of leases, sub leases, and lease templates can be seen here:

- [Land for Good: Elements of a Good Farm Lease](#)
- [American Farmland Trust: Farmland Leasing: Success for Landlords and Tenants. Fact Sheet](#)
- [Land for Good: Farmland Tenure and Leasing Legal Guide](#)
- [Equity Trust: Model Agriculture Ground Lease Commentary](#)
- [Land for Good: Sample Short-term Lease Agreement](#)
- [Lum Farms LLC Coffelt Lease 2022 FINAL.pdf](#)

Introductory lease

To begin the relationship between the farmers, management, and land, an introductory lease of 2-5 years will be negotiated for participants. This short-term trial period will be beneficial in determining a long-term fit of the multiple farm businesses on a site, the farmers with the land, and the farmers with the land owner. It will also provide an opportunity to refine and adapt lease terms as needed.

Established participant lease

Once an introductory trial period of 3-5 years has been completed, a longer-term lease can be negotiated with established participants. Depending on the farmers' needs, ground lease terms, and considerations regarding the land, lease terms may extend for more years.

⁷ Armstrong, Rachel. January 15, 2015.

<https://farmlandinfo.org/wp-content/uploads/sites/2/2019/09/Drafting-Lease-Question-Sheet-farm-commons.pdf>

Determining Rental Rate

A resource for determining rental rate is provided by The University of Vermont Extension: <https://www.uvm.edu/newfarmer/land/RentalGuide.pdf>

Lease Elements

Though every lease will be unique, various elements have been discussed by the group and suggested for inclusion. Defining financial responsibilities and the calculation of equity have been expanded upon in this section to offer more clarity in the decision making process.

For the F2F Model, we are defining the length of lease terms as follows:

- Introductory lease: 1-5 years
- Short-term lease: Less than 15 years
- Long-term lease: 15 or more years

List of Lease Elements

General

- Terms of the lease
- Rights of both the landlord and tenant
- Use provisions and restrictions
- Fees
- Insurance
- Default and termination

Specific

- Utilities
- Permitted and Prohibited Uses
 - [Steward's Regenerative Agriculture loan clause](#)
 - LCLT example
- Entry and access
- Maintenance and Repairs
- Alterations and Improvements
- Outline of how leasee builds equity on-site
- Farm Management Plan and Conservation
- Subletting
- Termination

- Default
- Monitoring and Reporting
- Insurance and Liability
- Dispute Resolution

Equity

Making the F2F Model a worthwhile investment for BFRs will depend in part on their ability to build equity. How to achieve this was a recurring discussion point in F2F Advisory Group meetings. In a traditional ground lease, ownership of the improvements to the land are often granted back to the landowner upon lease termination or expiration. Improvements such as infrastructure, soil amendments, and participation in the program's management all hold value that could be passed along to the BFRs. Any consideration of providing equity for the ground lease and sublease holders must also address how the equity will be covered, which organization, whether there are limits, what qualifies as reimbursable equity, etc.

Ensuring Equity

- Ground tenant and/or landowner buys back infrastructure from farmers
- Managing organization pays back or offers rebates to farmers for their time investments in the project (meetings, maintenance, improvements, etc.)
- A percentage of rent is held aside as equity for the tenant farmer.
- [Agrarian Trust Equity model](#)⁸

Lease Examples that Include Equity for Farmers

- [Indian Line Farm Lease Agreement](#)⁹ Where the leaseholder(s) retain ownership of all buildings and improvements on the site. The leaseholder retains the option to purchase the buildings and improvements back and resell them at replacement cost to another farmer.
- [Equity Trust Model Agricultural Ground Lease, Article 7](#)

Tools to Provide Equity

- Statement of Owner Equity. A balance sheet for farm businesses:
 - https://www.nrcs.usda.gov/Internet/FSE_DOCUMENTS/stelprdb1268725.pdf

⁸ The Equity Within the Agrarian Commons.
<https://www.agrariantrust.org/initiatives/agrarian-commons/equity/>

⁹ Indian Line Farm Lease Agreement. Center for New Economics.
<https://www.agrariantrust.org/initiatives/agrarian-commons/equity/>

- Valuing Sweat Equity
<https://farms.extension.wisc.edu/articles/sweat-equity-and-farming/>
- Assessing soil health and quantifying environmental improvements on land:
 - <https://farmlandinfo.org/improve-on-farm-conservation/>
 - https://www.nrcs.usda.gov/Internet/FSE_DOCUMENTS/stelprdb1268725.pdf

Financial Responsibilities

A key element to be determined in negotiations and defined in the lease agreement will be the financial responsibilities of each party. Thoughtful discussions should take place between the landowner and the Ag Guild for the ground lease, as well as between the Ag Guild and tenant farmers for the sublease(s). These responsibilities should include but are not limited to:

- Resources on the property
 - Water (e.g., pond)
 - Timber
 - Existing roads
- Infrastructure
 - Storage facilities (e.g., barns, pack sheds, refrigerated storage)
 - Wash stations
 - Growing structures (e.g., greenhouses, hoopouses)
 - Fencing
 - Roads
- Equipment
 - Maintenance and breakdown, dependent on ownership
 - Who pays for what and when will it be performed?
- Utilities
 - Electric, water, garbage
 - Determine how these will be valued and measured
 - If a pump is used for irrigation, who pays for the pump cost and maintenance

For the pilot project, a key question at the beginning will be who is responsible for building core infrastructure. For a beginning farmer operating under an introductory and/or short-term lease, core infrastructure investments would be a burden with the possibility of equity uncertain. To kick off the pilot project with BFRs on a chosen shared land site, the Ag Guild and or landowner may need to invest and budget for core infrastructure.

As the program grows and expands and BFRs transition to long-term leases, infrastructure improvements by the farmers themselves can be negotiated with approval from the landowner and Ag Guild, with terms specified in a long-term lease agreement.

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V. Management Plan

Management Plan for Collaborative Services

An essential element to the F2F Model is collaboration and the sharing of responsibilities and resources. By coming together as a community of farmers, mentors, educators, and service providers we can have a greater impact on our local agricultural environment. In order to harness this existing system of resources, the F2F Model's management plan will create a support system that connects BFRs in the program with local organizations and their resources. The management plan will include:

- A. Management structure
- B. Farm Plan with stewardship goals
- C. Communication plan
- D. Data tracking system
- E. Evaluation metrics

A. Management Structure

For the pilot project, the governance and management of the project will be overseen by the Ag Guild, its board, and the advisory committee described in the Governance section of this report. As the model evolves over time and is replicated, the management could be assumed by another nonprofit. Roles and responsibilities will include:

- Identification of farmland to be used for pilot project
- Coordination of assessment to determine compatibility, needs and
- Coordination of participating organizations
- Lead leaseholder
- Coordinate subleases

B. Site Stewardship and Farm Plan

A Farm Management Plan (FMP), also called an Individual Stewardship Plan (ISP), provides the framework for site stewardship. The FMP clarifies requirements and specifies standards of use between the landowner, ground tenant, and sublease tenants regarding land use. Ideally developed in cooperation between all parties, the landowner, the program manager(s), and BFRs will come to agreements on crop and livestock production that ensure standards of land use. Considerations in an FMP would include soil, water, air, plants, animals, and humans as well as regional climate adaptation change framework. Specifics to the chosen site will be determined as well, such as agricultural and infrastructure development opportunities. The site farm management plan will likely be included in the lease agreement or as an attachment to the lease.

In general, the F2F Model will strive to meet national and regional natural resource conservation goals. Actions such as promoting soil and water preservation, taking into consideration climate impacts, and fostering holistic land management and innovative stewardship practices such as permaculture, soil building, critical areas interface, and carbon sequestration.

For the pilot project, the San Juan Islands Conservation District will be an important partner and resource in this area. SJICD's ability to provide technical and financial assistance to meet conservation goals will be an asset to the Ag Guild and BFRs. Throughout the planning process, conservation and stewardship goals will be assessed and applied to the agricultural goals of the BFRs. Services to the farmer include a site visit, a natural resource inventory, noted resource concerns, discussion of goals, and recommendations to achieve those goals. SJICD's Farm Plan process can be viewed on their website at <https://www.sanjuanislandscd.org/farm-planning>.

SJICD oversees the newer Farm Management process using the state Voluntary Stewardship Program (VSP), "an alternative approach for Washington counties to address the state's Growth Management Act requirements on lands where agricultural activities take place¹⁰." The ISP process works with landowners and leaseholders and creates a stewardship plan for farm sites, helping to protect critical conservation areas, clarifying regulations, and assisting with qualifying for cost share funding to address resource concerns.

As an additional resource, an example of a farmland management plan can be seen with the Indian Line Farm Land Management Plan, detailing specifics such as tillable land, buffer areas, pasture areas, harvesting native species, amount of animal units allowed, etc.

- [Indian Line Farm Land Management Plan¹¹](#)

C. Communication Plan

Relationships

The F2F Model will encompass a variety of relationships. Providing shared land access will require thoughtful management of relationships with the land owner(s), farmers

¹⁰ San Juan Island Conservation District. <https://www.sanjuanislandscd.org/vsp>

¹¹Indian Line Farm Land Management Plan. Center for New Economics. <https://centerforneweconomics.org/apply/community-land-trust-program/indian-line-farm-land-management-plan/>

working together, and the community as a whole. In beginning this process, a few important resources will be helpful:

- [Managing Landlord-Tenant Relationships: A Strategic Perspective](#)¹²
- [Accessing Farmland Together: A decision tool for farmers](#)¹³
- [Cooperative Farming: Frameworks for farming together](#)¹⁴

Program Manual

Each BFR participant of the program will receive a program manual outlining in clear language the expectations of farming on shared land through the F2F program, an overview of how operations will be conducted, and a guide for accessing resources available. The intended audience will include the farmers participating in the program, Ag Guild staff working directly with the F2F program, potential landowners curious about how the program will be conducted on their land, as well as others wishing to replicate or learn about our F2F model. Though expectations and requirements will be written in the lease agreement, a handbook will allow accessibility and easy reference for participants, aiding in compliance with the requirements, record-keeping, communal decision making, etc. Examples of similar manuals can be seen with the [Cloud Mountain Farm Incubator Handbook and Manual](#)¹⁵ and the Intervale Center Farms Program Manual.¹⁶ The program manual is expected to be adapted as the program progresses and evolves, with new versions developing depending on land, makeup of farming, and things we learn along the way. As a general outline, the manual will include:

- Overview and guidelines of the program
- Land stewardship agreement
- ISP/FMP document
- Farm operations and safety
- Shared decision-making practices
- Meeting requirements
- Record keeping templates and requirements

¹² Ohio State University Extension.

https://farmlandinfo.org/wp-content/uploads/sites/2/2019/09/Managing_tenant_landlord_relationships_1.pdf

¹³ Accessing Farmland Together: A decision tool for farmers. Land for Good.

<https://landforgood.org/wp-content/uploads/LFG-Accessing-Farmland-Together-Decision-Tool.pdf>

¹⁴ Gilbert, Faith. Cooperative Farming: Frameworks for farming together. A Greenhorns Guidebook.

https://greenhorns.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/07/Greenhorns_Cooperative_Farming_Guidebook.pdf

¹⁵ CMFC Incubator Farm Manual.

<https://www.cloudmountainfarmcenter.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/12/CMFC-Incubator-Farm-Manual.pdf>

¹⁶ Farms Program Manual. Intervale Farm Center.

https://drive.google.com/file/d/185oTkPmcCHdvtlu8MRW5lvYI47sWE6c2/view?usp=share_link

- Community conduct
- Dispute resolution
- Lease agreement

D. Data Tracking System

Careful tracking of information by and for the BFRs participating in the program will provide a wealth of knowledge for the program as a whole and the farm businesses. Participants will be expected to keep production and financial records, made available to the F2F program administrators at the end of each season. Staff will provide assistance and templates for identifying and collecting data including farm logs and evaluations. Information collected will include but is not limited to:

- Production bed and/or pasture activities
 - Materials applied (brand or source)
 - Timelines
 - Rates/amounts
 - Cover cropping
 - Significant weather, disease, pest, or weed problems
- Livestock
- Farm Income (estimated volume amounts and/or dollar value)
 - Direct marketing
 - Wholesale marketing
 - Donated or provided at low cost to low income community members
- Goal review
 - Did the farm meet production goals
 - Did the farm meet financial goals

E. Participant Evaluation

Evaluation of the participants in the program based on the data collected above will allow for reflection on how all of the parties are adapting under the collaborative management and shared land structure as well as how the farm businesses are progressing.

Evaluation Metrics

Having a standardized evaluation process will provide the documentation required to assess progress, analyze potential problems, and identify where changes can be made. Metrics will include:

- BFRs
 - Introductory survey, to be conducted prior to

- Annual feedback survey including self-evaluation and evaluation of the F2F Program
 - Exit interview (in case of participant leaving the program)
- Ground lease holder
 - Annual feedback survey including self-evaluation and evaluation of the BFR participants
- Landowner
 - Annual feedback survey

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VI. Outreach Plan

Outreach goals

- To spread the word of the collaborative land access model to eligible BFRs seeking land lease opportunities. Focus will begin with BFRs within San Juan County or with the goal of farming in the county. Focus will expand through regional and nationwide networks to seek appropriate farmer lessees.
- To inform the public, local and partner organizations of the project and seek collaboration to support BFRs

Tools for outreach

- Ag Guild website
- Ag Guild and partner organization newsletters
- Social media
- Ag Summit
- Farmer networks
- [Farm to Farmer Find a Farmer tool](#)

Process

- Upon selection of project site and assessment by the Ag Guild and partner organizations, and once relevant lease documents are in order, an RFP will be drafted and approved.
- Outreach tools for local, in-county outreach to BFRs will distribute the RFP, relevant details of the project, and direct interested parties to the Ag Guild website and contact information.
- Local newspapers, public posting sites, local community forums, email listservs of partner organizations, and relevant public institutions such as libraries will be utilized to disseminate the RFP locally.
- The annual Agricultural Summit hosted in San Juan County, local farmers markets and other events will provide public outreach sites for educating potential BFR tenants of the project.
- Wider-reaching networks such as Farmland Trust, ATTRA, and other regional and nationwide networks will be utilized through social media.
 - *Add opening to recruit BFRs outside of the county

VII. Program Evaluation Metrics

Evaluating the F2F Model

Evaluation of the model will help program administrators determine if it is proceeding according to plan and fulfilling the goals. Evaluation and the data collected will enable new strategies and adjustments to be made to provide improvements and suit the needs of the organizations, landowners, and farmers utilizing the model. The type of data collected will ideally be easily measurable indicators that can be tracked over time. The conclusions drawn from the evaluation of data will be shared and communicated with stakeholders and partners, facilitating discussion and feedback for the model and projects created using the model. By quantifying the success of the model as well as enabling a system of adjustments, evaluation metrics can serve as a tool to engage stakeholders and demonstrate the model as a useful resource.

Evaluation Metrics will include:

- Baseline assessments
- Participant Evaluation Data (from the Management section)
 - Annual financial survey
 - Annual farmer surveys
 - Annual landowner surveys
- Internal assessments

Creation of Evaluation Metrics

As the F2F Model evolves and is put into practice, it is likely that the type, amount, and specifics of the metrics will evolve as well. To begin, the working group utilized existing resources to guide in the process of creating evaluation metrics for the F2F Model.

Voluntary Stewardship Program Ag Viability Table

The VSP, as described in the Management section of this document will help guide the stewardship goals of the program. Developed to apply to the San Juan County community in 2017, the VSP Ag Viability Table is an evaluation metric that contains the goals, strategies, indicators, and data sources for the program. A similar metric could be utilized for the F2F model evaluations as well.

- [VSP Ag Viability Table](#)

National Incubator Farm Training Initiative (NIFTI) Toolkit

Developed by NIFTI as a supplement to the Farm Incubator Toolkit, the Metrics and Evaluation for Farm Incubators guide¹⁷ is quite relevant to the F2F Model. The following elements seem applicable to metrics designed for the program:

Indicator	Tracking Mechanism/Schedule
<i>Short term/Mid term/Long term outcomes</i>	
Farmers connected to farmland	All participants in the program are considered to have land access.
Diversity of markets sold to	Number of marketing outlets sold to - yearly financial survey
Farmers connected to mentorship	How many farmers have a mentor? How much time have they spent with the mentor the past year/quarter?
Health of the land	Number of organic/sustainable/conservation/regenerative practices used by participants. Measured either by staff observation or farmer surveys. Soil testing.
Connection to off-program resources (classes, summit, etc.)	Checklist of resources - farmers can report which they have taken advantage of
Farmer income	Gross sales through cooperative marketing and other avenues - gathered annually or quarterly (confidentiality required)
Monetary value of crops and meat sold	Gross sales - yearly financial survey
Land in active agricultural use	Number of acres farmed by current and past participants
Current and past participants who make their livelihoods from farming	Percentage of total annual income from farming - yearly financial survey
Diversity of farm enterprises	Number and type of products produced and sold - multiple choice on annual or

¹⁷NIFTI Guide to Metrics and Evaluation for Farm Incubators.

<https://nesfp.org/sites/default/files/resources/NIFTIGuidetoMetricsandEvaluationforFarmIncubators.pdf>

	quarterly farmer surveys
Farmers meeting their business and personal goals	Requires documenting farmer goals prior to program participation and reviewing and updating these goals at least annually. Testimonials and stories about improvement in quality of life etc.
Community economic health	Amount of money (in terms of value of produce, wages paid etc.) recirculating within the community as a direct result of the new farm businesses
Community food security	Amount of fresh, local products entering into the local, and particularly underserved markets.

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VIII. Future Replication of the Model

The problem of land access for beginning farmers and the impending retirement of many existing farmers is not unique to San Juan County. This model has benefited greatly from the work done across the United States as other groups innovate and implement solutions. The F2F Model is designed to be replicated across San Juan County and beyond. As stated in The Land section of the Overview in this report, there are multiple opportunities for collaborative approaches to the management of conserved farmlands in San Juan County. Both the San Juan County Conservation Land Bank and the San Juan Preservation Trust have been identified as potential partners for a model such as this.

Outside of our immediate pilot project, this model could be replicated with a different managing body, on privately owned or donated land, and implementing other creative solutions to bring farmers together on shared land. The governing structure, lease tools, management plans, data collection tools, and evaluation metrics of this model are designed with flexibility in mind. The model could be replicated in any community that is struggling to balance farmland conservation interests, active farming, and development pressure.

All aspects of this model are intended to be freely shared and replicated.

IX. References

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