



YOUNG-ARMOS INCUBATOR FARM CONCEPT • FEBRUARY, 2016

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS – 2016 UPDATE

GENERAL QUESTIONS

What are the goals of the project?

The goals of the project are to restore seasonal wetland and upland habitat in conjunction with the creation of an incubator farm on the 45-acre Young-Armos property and to demonstrate the compatibility of managing land for sensitive species with responsible farming practices.

What is an incubator farm?

An incubator farm is a land-based, multi-grower project that provides training and technical assistance to aspiring and beginning farmers. The incubator farm aims to help new and beginning farm entrepreneurs establish their own successful businesses by providing specific resources and services that are difficult for startup entrepreneurs to access on their own. The overall goal is to minimize the barriers to entry for aspiring and beginning farmers. For more information, see www.sonomaopenspace.org/youngarmos.

INFRASTRUCTURE

Where will water come from?

The water source would consist of a new well or enhancement of the existing well. The effect on the water table would be evaluated as part of the project planning. No other properties that were evaluated as part of the County Lands project had developed water resources.

2016 Update: Preliminary discussions with Sonoma County Water Agency (SCWA) indicate that a project of this size will not have a significant negative impact on the water table, however additional studies would be carried out as part of early planning efforts. In addition, in the summer of 2015 the Sonoma County Agricultural Preservation and Open Space District's (District) consultant [Prunuske Chatham, Inc. (PCI)] installed piezometers (a tool to measure water quantity underground) which will continue to capture data through the winter. This data will be useful in the spring to determine water availability.

Is there enough water to support this operation? How will the water be used? Is the groundwater safe to drink and/or use for irrigation purposes for row crops?

The District is working with the SCWA to assess the groundwater on the site and will not use water that contains harmful levels of contaminants or that is not suitable for irrigation of crops.

Could there be water catchment?

Water catchment, recycled water, and other water conservation strategies will be evaluated as part of the project planning process.

2016 Update: The concept includes some basic water conservation and capture strategies, though this will need to be developed as planning continues. Recycled water has been ruled out as an option, due to lack of access at a reasonable price point.

**Is the soil suitable for farming?**

Detailed evaluation of the soil's suitability for farming would be part of project planning, but preliminary research has indicated that the soil is suitable for farming. The property has been in hay production for several years, so it may need amendments to be as productive as possible.

2016 Update: As part of the Feasibility Analysis that PCI completed in Sept 2015, the soil was tested for its potential to grow row crops and provide feed for livestock. The results indicate that the soil is suitable as-is for certain applications (i.e. grazing), while other applications (i.e. row crops) will need amendments. In an effort to bolster the soil's nutrients, the District planted a cover crop (a mixture of plants) on the site in November 2015. This additional organic material will help any future agricultural operations on this site.

Will the irrigation types be flexible?

Yes, the design of the irrigation type and system will need to be able to meet a variety of farmer/crop needs.

Would there be a farm stand?

A farm stand will be considered as part of the long term planning process. Farm stands offer a great way to interact with surrounding community, but require additional cost.

What kind of restrooms would be on site?

We expect that portable toilets and hand washing stations will be sufficient for the planned activity.

What kind of production facilities will be on site?

There will likely be a very low tech wash and pack structure, and a small cooler for storage.

Could there be a demonstration garden?

Currently, there are no plans to host a demonstration garden, but rather to focus on a creating a robust farm business incubator.

Will there be a place for the public at large?

The general concept of an incubator farm does not lend itself to public access, other than occasional educational events and to have a place to purchase food or other agricultural products. There may be an opportunity to incorporate a spur trail from the existing "North Rohnert Park Trail," which runs adjacent to Young-Armos along Wilfred Creek, into the property. This could provide the general public a glimpse into the world of agriculture.

2016 Update: The District received some feedback requesting a small public meeting space be included in the site. Ultimately, this may be cost-prohibitive for this project, but the concept right now includes such a space.

PLANNING**What is the general timeline for this project?**

There will need to be a planning phase and design phase if the project is approved to be move forward, and construction phase. At a minimum, this project is expected to be a 1-2 year process, assuming continued forward progress. Development of programming would occur on a parallel track to site preparation. Farmer/participant



selection, additional fundraising for infrastructure, equipment and staff would be part of the programming development, and would happen at the end of the design phase.

2016 Update: As of February 2016, the project team has developed a concept for the site. This concept will need to be approved by the District's Board of Directors before any additional studies or planning is completed. That approval is expected to be requested in Spring 2016. If approved, additional planning, studies, and public meetings will take place over the course of 2016 and into 2017. Assuming no major obstacles arise, construction on the site may begin as early as Summer 2017, and would be open for students in late 2017.

Why is this site the best place for an incubator farm? There aren't any other sites for this type of operation anywhere in the County?

The Young-Armos property is an appropriate site for this type of operation because it is large enough to accommodate both row crops and grazing animals, is zoned for agricultural uses, and is close to neighborhoods so those living nearby can easily purchase locally grown, fresh produce. It was one of the few properties out of the 17 county-owned lands that were assessed that is suitable for farming based upon its location, access, and existing fencing.

What other sites were considered?

The "Assessment of County Land for Food Production" final report evaluated 17 properties already owned by the County agencies, but unfortunately most lacked water or infrastructure. Young-Armos was deemed the best option to develop a farm business incubator project on a County-owned parcel.

What are the impacts of farming on wildlife?

An in-depth study is required to address this issue specifically for the Young-Armos site, but ultimately farming practices would need to be compatible with adjacent wildlife habitat and migration patterns. In addition to the farm component, the District is proposing to restore seasonal wetland and upland habitat for California tiger salamander, an endangered amphibian occurring on the Santa Rosa Plain. One goal of the project is to demonstrate the compatibility of managing land for sensitive species with responsible farming practices.

Is cultivation / tilling compatible with CTS habitat?

Farm practices would need to be compatible with adjacent wildlife habitat and migration patterns. The District, in consultation with the regulatory agencies, will be developing a series of Best Management Practices to ensure wildlife habitat and farming practices are compatible.

Who pays for this project?

The District's Expenditure Plan states that the District will preserve 'agricultural land use and open space.' The District's contribution would be limited to the initial purchase and ongoing maintenance of the land, and related improvements to protect the identified conservation values (agricultural use and biotic habitat), but would not pay for incubator farm programming or related costs. The University of California Cooperative Extension (UCCE) is securing grants and other funding sources to offset start-up costs.

Does Measure F allow for the use of taxpayer funding towards such a project?

The Agricultural Preservation and Open Space 2006 Expenditure Plan sets forth the open space designations eligible for protection with Measure F funds. These areas include **Community separators and greenbelts**, which are defined as "lands that function as open space to separate cities and other communities and protect



city and community identity by providing visual relief from continuous urbanization. These lands are frequently subject to development pressures, and therefore, have been identified as priority sites for acquisition to prevent urban sprawl, to retain the rural and open character of the county and to preserve agricultural uses.” Also included are **Agriculturally productive lands**, defined to “include working farms and ranches and other lands used for the production of food, fiber, and plant materials and the raising and maintaining of livestock and farm animals.”

Since the District and others have been working on this for so long, what are the costs/economic investments for tax payers?

Both the District and the UCCE are seeking to leverage taxpayer funds to the greatest extent possible, through securing outside grants and the use of competitive procurement practices. The goal is to minimize the costs of implementing this concept, in order to achieve the most benefit for the community.

What is the long term plan for property?

Assuming that an incubator farm is developed on the site, a non-profit organization would run the day-to-day operations and the District would maintain ownership. Ideally this property would eventually be sold to an entity or private buyer that will keep the property in agricultural use, with the District retaining a conservation easement over the property.

How developed does any planning need to be in order to move forward?

Planning will need to include an evaluation of the water table, soil suitability, and other factors, and a proposed site design before a decision can be made to move forward. It is essential to have community support in order to move forward.

2016 Update: In order to develop a concept plan, the project team has completed a Feasibility Analysis to look for any potential significant issues with a primary focus on CTS habitat restoration. The report is available on our website (www.sonomacounty.org/youngarmos). No significant issues were identified in this early study, but more research will be required as the project moves forward. In addition, community meetings will continue to provide input into the project as the planning process continues.

Have we received agency approval given presence of California Tiger Salamander (CTS) habitat?

CTS tend to live in areas that are in agricultural use. The site design and programming of cultivated areas would need to accommodate the presence of this species on adjacent land and also potential for migration through cultivated areas. The resource agencies will be able to make a determination once we have developed a site design for them to review.

Could we have multiple sites around the county? With multiple focuses?

Yes, this site could be a model for other privately-owned or non-County-owned sites with similar or different focuses if there is enough community support for projects such as this one.

What permits are required?

The District will be working with all local, state, and federal agencies as appropriate. Specific permitting needs will be determined as the project evolves.



NEIGHBORHOOD IMPACTS

What would the hours of operation be?

This would be determined through the programming development, but likely similar to other small farms (Tierra Vegetables on Airport Boulevard, for example). The close proximity to residential areas would be considered when specifying working hours for any potential project.

How would this impact the views from the neighboring homes?

Without a more concrete project plan, it's difficult to say precisely what adjacent homes would or would not see. However, project planning would include creating and reviewing three-dimensional sketches of any proposed site design and potential elements to determine impact on views.

Who would neighbors contact if there was a problem? Who is enforcing the rules?

Members of the public would be able to contact the land manager, who at this point is the District. There would also be a farm manager once the farm is functioning. Either the District or the farm manager would be able to respond to any concerns about activities at the site.

Will the farm be noisy and kick up dust? Will the livestock make it smell like manure?

Due to the "small-scale" nature of this farm, it is anticipated that the impacts will be minimal. Farmers using this land would have small plots and would be working independently from one another, thereby creating an irregular and dispersed schedule. There may be opportunities to reduce any impacts of farm activities, such as planting of a hedgerow along the fence. With regard to livestock, because of the limited size of the parcel, the herd will be relatively small and it is anticipated that the impact of these grazing animals will be insignificant. Any manure utilized could be composted with other organic materials on-site, which when managed properly eliminates any smell.

PROGRAM

Who will be utilizing this farm?

This incubator farm will be available to aspiring farmers or ranchers with a year or so of experience that are trying to establish a business and need access to land, equipment, and training. These are folks who want to work hard, hone their craft, help bolster the local economy, and contribute to a healthier community by providing fresh, locally grown food.

What types of programming would be available?

Though the specifics are to be determined, the general concept is a based upon a student/teacher model for a small group of aspiring farmers or ranchers. There will be a farm manager who serves as an instructor working one-on-one; individual mentorships can be arranged. Appropriate courses at the Santa Rosa Junior College and/or Sonoma State University are encouraged.

What types of products / crops?

Again, specifics are to be determined, but most likely crops would include fruits, vegetables, flowers, herbs; livestock would likely be small ruminants (goats, sheep, etc.).

**What will be the selection process for farmers?**

Specifics are to be determined, but the process would require (at a minimum) a "Request for Proposals" (RFP), interviews with experienced farmer/rancher panel, and at least a basic business proposal.

Are there farmers and ranchers who have expressed interest in this concept?

Yes, there are many who have expressed interest in using the services provided by an incubator farm. There is a limited amount of viable farm land in Sonoma County and many are in need of land. UCCE's Beginning Farmer and Rancher program graduated nearly 70 individuals hoping to start a business that would benefit from this type of program. This project is supported by Farm Bureau, FarmLink, CAFF, Farm Trails, Farmers Guild, and others.

Would there be "real" production or just to train farmers?

The concept is a mixture of both training and production. The farmers are growing what they want to sell. This is a farm business incubator, so they need to have a business plan. But, as part of their participation in the program, they would receive training about how to go about the business of farming or ranching.

How much land would each farmer get? Would additional education be mandatory? Is there a waiting list for farmers interested in the program? What will the process be for farmer turnover?

These details are to be determined, but typically incubator farmers start out with about ¼ acre, and can increase annually depending on their successes, and how much land is available. Continued education is desired and an online curriculum could become part of the programming. A waiting list would likely be developed should the project move forward. Typically farmers on incubator farms stay up to 5 years – it is up to the individual farmer to decide how long they want to stay.

What percentage of foods in the County is produced locally? Is there a target percentage?

The current percentage is less than 10%. The goal is to increase overall county production another 10%; with the public increasing their local purchasing by 10%.

NEXT STEPS**What are the next steps? How will you follow up with us?**

This FAQ document was the first step in continuing an open dialog with our partners, our neighbors, and the public. Based on the feedback from our initial meeting, we will continue our planning efforts and return with a more concrete plan for discussion. Those who have expressed interest in the project and/or provided contact information at our public meeting will be notified when additional public meetings are scheduled.

How can people become involved in the planning process?

Future public meetings will provide a venue for project-specific feedback and input. In addition, community members are welcome to attend Board of Supervisors' meetings where plans for the farm business incubator will be discussed and finalized.