



big river farms
a program of the food group



FARMER EDUCATION PROGRAM

Why does the program exist?

So that all people who desire to farm have access to education, land, infrastructure, markets, resources, and connections to meet their goals.

Am I eligible?

You are eligible for the program if...

- You would like to learn more about operating an organic vegetable farm in Minnesota
- You want to farm commercially (sell what you grow)
- You identify with a group that is historically under-represented in farming (immigrant, refugee, person of color, women, LGBTQ, veteran, low-income, or other)
- You have access to the resources needed to participate (transportation, money for the costs of farming, enough time to meet program requirements)

What is included in the program?

The Farmer Education Program provides education, land and infrastructure, and access to markets for beginning farmers.

Education

One-on-one Support: Each farm team meets at least three times a year with program staff for a 1:1 goal setting meeting, midseason check-in, and end of season review meeting. Staff is available for additional technical assistance as needed throughout the year, including in-field help for farmers at Big River Farms.

Classes & Farm Tours: Classes vary year to year based on farmer interest. They are taught by program staff, local farmers, and other experts. Winter classes are held weekly in St. Paul, and growing season classes are less frequent and take place at Big River Farms and other area farms. ***Note that due to social distancing requirements, most group classes will be held on Zoom until further notice.*

Topics covered:

- Goal setting
- Production planning
- Organic certification
- Marketing
- Financial planning and taxes
- Record keeping
- Crop families and profiles
- Pest and disease management
- Soil health
- Greenhouse production
- Post-Harvest Handling
- Food Safety
- Harvesting
- Tractors and equipment
- Fertility
- Irrigation
- Direct Seeding & Transplanting
- Organic Sprays
- Tool Maintenance & Sharpening
- Weed Management
- Trellising

Continuing Education – When funding is available, BRF provides scholarships for farmers to attend farming workshops and conferences outside of BRF.

Land & Infrastructure

Land: Big River Farms operates a 150-acre, certified organic incubator farm in Marine on St. Croix, where we rent plots of land to beginning farmers. Plots available to farmers range from ¼ acre to 6 acres, with 50% of the total land rented being planted in cover crop each year. All land at Big River Farms is farmed organically and must pass the annual inspection. Land allocation is based on availability, fulfillment of program requirements/learning objectives, and a detailed management plan, and is subject to staff discretion.

Infrastructure: Shared infrastructure is available for farmers who rent land at Big River Farms. It includes a 9-foot deer fence, access to water, use of a heated greenhouse, pack shed, on-farm storage, tractor work, shared tools/equipment, access to a farm store, and utilities.

Markets

Independent Markets: Farmers are encouraged to establish their own independent markets while in the program. Staff support, classes, and other resources are available to assist in this process. Big River Farms is not responsible or able to purchase all produce grown by farmers.

Farmers Market: Farmers participate in the shared farmers' market stall to learn about farmers' market processes and sell their own produce. Farmers markets are typically in the Twin Cities and take place over the weekend.

CSA & Wholesale: Limited produce markets are available through the Big River Farms CSA and wholesale accounts. Farmers are the producers for these accounts, which allows for a starting market and educational opportunity. Contracts for these accounts are established with farmers at the beginning of the season.

Where do I start?

There are different points of entry into the program depending on your interest, experience, and level of commitment. The next few pages provide information on the different options.

Option 1: Classes Only

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| Who Should Enroll: | Farmers and community members who want to learn about organic farming or transition to organic, but have land elsewhere or are unable to commit to farming land at Big River Farms |
| Program Duration: | NA |
| Time Commitment: | Participants can enroll in a single 2-3 hour class, a series of select classes, or the entire season |
| Participation Requirements: | <ul style="list-style-type: none">✓ Complete required assignments & records✓ Attend three 1:1 meetings |
| Cost: | Individual class: pay as you can; suggested price \$20 Entire season: \$250 |
| What's Included: | <ul style="list-style-type: none">○ 1:1 Meetings○ Mentorship○ Classes○ Farm Tours○ Networking opportunities |

Option 2: Independent Plot

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| Who Should Enroll: | Farmers who have at least 1 year of experience farming on ¼ acre or more in Minnesota or a similar climate and would like to learn more about production, markets, business planning, food safety, and organic certification while farming an independent plot at Big River Farms |
| Program Duration: | 1-4 years |
| Time Commitment: | Hours vary week to week, but at a minimum consist of: 5 hours/week, January-March* 15-20 hours per week for each ¼ acre, April-October* 5 hours/week, November* *Estimates <i>do not</i> include time driving to and from the farm! |
| Participation Requirements: | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Demonstrate competency in core farming skills ✓ Make a commitment to farm organically ✓ Complete required assignments & records, including a detailed budget ✓ Attend three 1:1 meetings per year ✓ Attend required classes & group meetings ✓ Maintain plant health and control weeds ✓ Community work |
| Cost: | Education: \$250 Land & Infrastructure: \$250/acre Not included: Other Farming Expenses (see below for details) |
| What's Included: | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ 1:1 Meetings ○ Classes & Farm Tours ○ In-field Help ○ Networking opportunities ○ Land ○ Infrastructure ○ Market Opportunities (CSA, Wholesale, & Farmers Market) |

Option 3: Whole Farm Management

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|------------------------------------|---|
| Who Should Enroll: | Farmers who have completed the learning objectives of the Basic Education Program and want to gain experience in whole farm management as they operate as an independent business at Big River Farms |
| Program Duration: | 1-4 years |
| Time Commitment: | Hours vary week to week, but at a minimum consist of: 5 hours/week, January-March* 15-20 hours per week for each ¼ acre, April-October* 5 hours/week, November* *Estimates <i>do not</i> include time driving to and from the farm! |
| Participation Requirements: | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Demonstrate competency in core farming skills ✓ Make a commitment to farm organically ✓ Attend three 1:1 meetings per year ✓ Attend select required classes & group meetings ✓ Maintain plant health and control weeds ✓ Contribute to community work ✓ Obtain independent organic certification ✓ Responsible for own tractor work ✓ Manage a cover crop rotation ✓ Responsible for own markets |
| Cost: | Education: \$250 Land & Infrastructure: \$250/acre Not included: Other Farming Expenses (see below for details), organic certification fees |
| What's Included: | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ 1:1 Meetings ○ Classes & Farm Tours ○ In-field Help ○ Networking opportunities ○ Land ○ Infrastructure ○ Market Opportunities only as available (CSA, Wholesale, & Farmers Market) |

How much does it cost?

| 2021 Fees | Education (flat fee) | Land & Infrastructure (based on acres) | Total |
|---|---------------------------------|---|-------------------------|
| <i>100% Actual Cost – 1 Acre</i> | <i>\$1940</i> | <i>\$2155</i> | <i>\$4095.00</i> |
| Classes Only | \$250 | - | \$250.00 |
| ¼ Acre Plot | \$250 | \$62.50 | \$312.50 |
| 1 Acre Plot | \$250 | \$250 | \$500+ |

Other farming expenses (These expenses range from \$500-\$1500 for a ¼ acre of land.)

- Seeds and transplants
- Cover crop seeds
- Irrigation drip lines, hoses, sprinklers
- Mulch, trellising, row cover, traps for pests
- Organic pesticides and fertilizers
- Soil, flats, and tags for greenhouse production
- Harvest containers and harvest supplies
- Produce boxes
- Farm promotional materials
- Tools
- Liability Insurance (This is required farmers selling outside of BRF and recommended for all. It costs between \$85-\$400.)

Frequently Asked Questions

How many classes am I allowed to miss?

Regularly attending classes, meetings, and other scheduled events is an important part of the program – if you are not interested in an education, this program is not for you.

Required and optional classes are different depending on your year in the program and existing skillset.

How much money will I make?

How much money each farmer makes varies depending on many factors: level of experience, time spent at the farm, consistency of markets, weather, etc. A first-year farmer with ¼ acre might generate \$1,500 in gross sales over the season, whereas an experienced farmer on ¼ acre could make \$3,000. We focus first on developing good production skills, and once farmers have a good product, we will move to business and marketing.

Can I farm with my friends and family?

Yes. Program costs are per farm team, which can consist of any number of people and whomever you choose. One to two farmers are designated as primary contacts, and they will receive all communication from staff and will be responsible for relaying information to the rest of the farm team.

Will Big River Farms buy all of my produce?

No. We will contract a limited number of crops with returning farmers who have proven themselves capable of producing quality produce, but will never be able to buy everything you grow.

Can I grow whatever I want?

Farmers make their own crop plans, which must meet organic standards, fit within each farmers' budget, and may not contain invasive species. BRF may also contract some crops for our aggregated markets.

Can I have animals at the farm?

Unless you are at the farm every day, no. We currently do not have any staff available to take care of animals every day.

Can I grow things other than vegetables, like mushrooms, perennials, and bees?

Currently our program only offers education on organic vegetable production. We are open to reviewing proposals from returning farmers who wish to use the farm as a space to try something new – approval will be on a case-by-case basis.

Can I come to the farm whenever I want?

In addition to required class/meeting times, you can come to the farm whenever you want between 30 minutes before sunrise and 10:00 PM at night.

Where is the farm located?

Big River Farms is inside the Wilder Forest, just outside of Marine on St. Croix, MN. It is a 30 mile/40-45 minute drive northeast of St. Paul, and a 35 mile/45-50 minute drive northeast of Minneapolis.

I am not low income – is the cost the same for me?

Our organization works hard to raise funds to help subsidize the cost of farming for people who would otherwise be unable to afford it. If your financial situation allows you to pay more than the rates listed, please talk with our staff to determine a price that's fair for you.

How do I apply?

- **Step 1: Contact our office** at 651-433-3676 or bigriverfarms@thefoodgroupmn.org to find out about upcoming information sessions and classes.
- **Step 2: Attend an information session** to go over the program details, ask questions, and tour or see a slideshow of the farm. Applications will be available.
- **Step 3: Turn in your application** to the Farmer Education Program Staff by December 1st. You can email it to bigriverfarms@thefoodgroupmn.org, or mail it to Big River Farms, Farmer Education Program, 14220-B Ostlund Trail N, Marine on St Croix, MN 55047.
- **Step 4: Our staff will follow up with you** to determine if the program is a good fit and with information about what comes next. Decisions on program acceptance will be shared no later than December 31st for applications received on time.

For more information...

Big River Farms is a program of The Food Group, a nonprofit organization with the mission, “*Fighting hunger. Nourishing our community.*” Learn more about Big River Farms and the other programs of The Food Group online at:

www.bigriverfarms.org | www.thefoodgroupmn.org

Big River Farms
14220-B Ostlund Trail
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