



# Grower Training Program

## Program Details

The Big River Farms Grower Training Program is a year-long certificate program that trains participants to cultivate crops for organic production, develop the basics for launching a farming business, and improve crop production.

The program operates year-round, with classroom learning in the winter and land-based training and in-field workshops during the growing season. Winter classes are held in the Twin Cities to learn and plan for the growing season ahead. Starting in March, the training program transitions to Big River Farms, located 30 miles from the Twin Cities in Marine on St. Croix, where trainees can put what they've learned in class into practice at the farm. Throughout the season, skill sessions, in-field classes, and field trips to other farms are key in demonstrating practical vegetable production. After completing the year-long Grower Training Program, trainees receive a Big River Farms Grower Training Certificate and can apply for a plot at Big River Farms for the following season. This program is designed to serve immigrant, limited-resource, and historically underserved individuals.

## Certificate Program: Learning to Grow for Market

**Grower Training:** An applied hands-on training course in organic farming and growing for market. Trainees will work together as a cohort on a BRF-run training plot at the farm and learn production skills while working on this plot. Led by a BRF Grower Training Instructor, trainees will collaboratively plan and operate a market garden training plot throughout the season, learning the foundation of growing operations month-by-month. Trainees will attend class and work in the training plot for an average of 8-10 hours/week, with the option of additional hours as desired.

**Classes:** Trainees enroll in introductory organic farming classes in the winter and spring before the season. Together, the cohort will create a crop plan with the guidance of the Grower Training Instructor.

**Field Training:** Classes and training will occur in-field from March to October. The goal of the program is to allow trainees to observe how a production farm functions and to participate as a way of learning. This model is intended to teach prioritization of tasks, in-field skills, and generally to understand all aspects of production for a vegetable farm before launching a business. Upon completion of certification, trainees can apply to the Incubator Program, which gives them access to their own plot at BRF. Incubator growers participate in advanced training courses to support the successful planning of their own plots and markets.

**Market Production:** In addition to working together on crop plan and production, participants will work together on marketing their crops. Selling to markets gives participants the experience of planning for markets, connecting with buyers, estimating harvests, post-harvest handling, pricing, and customer interactions.

Certification is evaluated based on trainee participation and competency in the training topics covered.

Training topics for certification include:

- Basics of Organic Vegetable Production
- Crop Families and Profiles
- Crop Planning
- Greenhouse Production
- Direct Seeding and Transplanting
- Weed control best practices
- Pest and disease management
- Soil Health and Fertility
- Harvest & Post-Harvest handling
- Selling to Direct and Wholesale Markets
- Small-scale Equipment Operation
- Irrigation Systems

## Program Commitment

### ***January - March: Farm Season Planning and Preparation***

6-8 Classroom Hours per week

### ***March - October: Growing Season In-Field Learning***

8-10 in-field work and training hours per week

\*Classes and trainings occur on weekdays and weekends. The schedule is to be determined before the season. Time estimates *do not* include communications & transportation to the farm.

## How much does it cost?

The Grower Training Certificate Program is \$800

*\*Scholarships may be available for financial assistance*

### **Is this program for me? Yes, if:**

- You would like to learn more about growing food using organic methods.
- You are interested in learning more about developing a farming business.
- 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 (*reliable transportation, program cost, time to dedicate to education classes and field work*)
- You want to work with a diverse community of staff, mentors, and growers.

### **What if I already have farming experience or a business?**

The application process will help growers and staff determine what level they start in the program, as some may have prior experience farming. In addition to the Grower Training Program, Big River Farms hosts an Incubator Farm Program for farmers established in their farm business and markets, offering land, infrastructure, advanced classes and mentorship support. Reach out to staff to learn more about the Incubator Program if you have farming experience.

### **How do I apply?**

**1- Contact Big River Farms Programs at [bigriverfarms@thefoodgroupmn.org](mailto:bigriverfarms@thefoodgroupmn.org) or call the farm office at 651-529-1409 to inquire about joining our program.**

**2 - Turn in your application** to Big River Farms by November 8. You may submit it in person, email it to [bigriverfarms@thefoodgroupmn.org](mailto:bigriverfarms@thefoodgroupmn.org), or mail it to Big River Farms, 14220-B Ostlund Trail N, Marine on St Croix, MN 55047.

**3 - Attend an open house or Meet & Greet** to review the program details, ask questions, and tour the farm. Applications will be available. Check the website for dates.

**Our staff will follow up with you** to determine if the program is a good fit and provide information about the next steps. Decisions on program acceptance will be shared no later than December 15 for applications received on time.

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](http://www.bigriverfarms.org) | [www.thefoodgroupmn.org](http://www.thefoodgroupmn.org)