

Bennington County Conservation District Bennington Veteran Incubator Farm:

Total Project Funds Awarded: \$115,000.00

The Veterans Incubator Farm (BVIF) is a two-year initiative designed to establish a veteran-led cooperative farming model on 12 acres of leased land at the Vermont Veterans Home (VVH). This program seeks to empower veterans by providing hands-on agricultural training, fostering market connections, and supporting their transition to independent farming while contributing to the local food system. Through a three-phase approach, this document emphasizes the work to be undertaken during the first two years, focusing on developing the cooperative model, building community engagement, and laying the groundwork for sustainable production.

In the first year, BVIF will focus on establishing the cooperative's foundational structure, forming partnerships with organizations within the Bennington Fair Food Initiative and external entities such as the USDA NRCS & RD, the Department of Veterans Affairs, the Bennington County Conservation District (BCCD), and the Conservation Law Foundation (CLF). These collaborations will support the program's infrastructure, legal framework, and environmental stewardship initiatives. During this time, the program will recruit and train 2-3 veteran farmers, equipping them with essential skills through workshops, mentorship, and participation in the Working Lands Workforce Development Program. Concurrently, infrastructure development will begin, including the installation of high tunnels, irrigation systems, and fencing, to support small-scale production and prepare for future expansion. Initial outreach to institutional buyers will secure purchase commitments, creating a stable market for the cooperative's products.

In the second year, the program will scale up production across the 12-acre site, leveraging agroforestry practices and diversified crop management to enhance yield and sustainability. Community engagement will be a priority, with events and outreach efforts designed to increase awareness and attract stakeholders. These efforts will not only strengthen ties between the cooperative and the community but also foster support for veteran-led agricultural innovation. By deepening market connections and refining cooperative governance, the program will position its veteran participants to transition to independent farming ventures in the subsequent phase while continuing to benefit from the cooperative's shared resources and market access.

The Bennington Veterans Incubator Farm aims to equip veterans with the tools, resources, and market connections necessary for sustainable farming success. Through its collaborative approach, the program will support environmental stewardship, strengthen the local food system, and serve as a replicable model for cooperative farming. Over its initial two years, BVIF will lay a strong foundation for both the veterans it serves and the broader agricultural community, fostering resilience and growth in Vermont's working lands.

	Description	Narrative	Y1: Jan 2025-Dec 2025	Y2: Jan 2026-Dec 2026	Total
Personnel	Community Food System Director	Executive Director of the BVIF intended to develop funding calendar, conduct outreach & engagement, and complete incorporation of Cooperative	\$20,000.00	\$20,000.00	\$40,000.00
Equipment	BCS Tractor	BCS Tractor, Primary Tillage, Mowing & Cultivation implements	\$11,000.00		\$11,000.00
Supplies	Hand Tools	Assorted Hand Tools for daily work	\$750.00	\$750.00	\$1,500.00
	Storage Container	Shipping container for storage	\$2,000.00		\$2,000.00
Other	Leverage & Project Funds	Funds to apply to match and/or NRCS Cost Share Projects	\$24,500.00	\$24,500.00	\$49,000.00
<b>Total Direct Costs</b>					\$103,500.00
Indirect					\$11,500.00
<b>Total Budget</b>					\$115,000.00