

Meet our New Farmers!

Who's growing what at the Ignatius Incubator Farm



TARRAH YOUNG

Tarrah Young, the New Farms Incubator Program's first farmer graduate, is drawing from skills honed as an incubator farmer to develop an organic vegetable, pork and turkey operation.

The Series

FarmStart's New Farms Incubator Program supports new farm enterprises by offering access to land, equipment, and infrastructure at reasonable rates, and by providing participants with mentorship and training.

The *Meet Our New Farmers!* series introduces our incubator farm participants, a group of new farmers whose diverse entrepreneurial strategies contain the seeds for a more just and sustainable regional food supply.

Participants in the program include:

Mike Driscoll - A second-career organic hops and barley grower

Matt Reeves - A young farmer with a background in biodynamic agriculture and horticultural therapy

Simon Jaques - A regional pioneer in organic coloured bean production

Tarrah Young - the New Farm Incubator Program's first graduate farmer!

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With five years' farming experience behind her

– one season as a CRAFT intern at Everdale Organic Farm, three as Everdale's Assistant Farm Manager, and an additional season running a 15-acre market garden in Yukon Territory – Tarrah Young entered the New Farms Incubator Program with a clear vision for her own enterprise.

Tarrah wanted to buy her own farm, where she intended to start an organic vegetable CSA,

a bit like the farms where she had worked in the past.

However, while Tarrah was well versed in organic vegetable production, she also found herself drawn to raising livestock – a venture for which she was not so well prepared.

Tarrah's original proposal to FarmStart outlined a small organic pork and turkey project. She rented space in the livestock barn at the Ignatius Incubator Farm, and arranged to lease the adjacent house.

Tarrah's operation included fifty turkeys and five rare-breed pigs, which she purchased as chicks and piglets, and raised to maturity.

This low-risk enterprise provided Tarrah with a tremendous opportunity to experiment and learn.

“What working with FarmStart allowed me to do was farm with very little capital input. I'm so glad I did it, because it's the first time I've done this on my own, and I didn't realize how little I knew until I started...

“So there was a buffer. There was this ability to start slow, not have to make farm payments, not have to invest in a lot of equipment, and even keep a day job.”

The animals matured quickly, with few complications. When the time arrived to sell her

turkeys, Tarrah sent out a mass email, and posted sign-up sheets at two local CSA pickups. All the turkeys sold.

By marketing directly to consumers, she was able to charge enough to cover her overhead, labour and feed costs, and reap a 5% profit. While Tarrah used a similar method to market her pork, she also discovered a lucrative market with high-end butchers and restaurants in Toronto. She may target this market in the future.

Since finishing the 2007 season at the Ignatius Incubator Farm, Tarrah and her partner have made some exciting changes. They have recently become the proud owners/operators of a farm in Ayton, ON.

“We have 50 acres. We'll be carrying on with the pigs and turkeys, adding on other forms of livestock gradually – year-

by-year – and starting a small veggie CSA. *And we'll put in a commercial kitchen, to make prepared foods out of all the excess meats and veggies.”*

Although she has left the Ignatius Incubator Farm, Tarrah intends to remain with FarmStart, as a mentor to future participants in the program.

“I feel that I'm in on the start of something really good, and really necessary. I think that I had the best preliminary farming education that one could hope for.

“But for those who don't get the opportunity to manage a farm, and even for those who do, I still feel like it's a huge risk to then jump into farming, where there's so much demand on you, financially. This program is a necessary step between interning and becoming a farm operator.”

What is FarmStart?

The objective of FarmStart is to **support and encourage a new generation of farmers** to develop locally based, ecologically sound and economically viable agricultural enterprises.

There are many challenges in agriculture today but there are also **many exciting opportunities**. By thinking about agriculture in new and innovative ways we can meet the challenges head on with a variety of solutions that promote a **a sustainable, healthy and regional food supply**.

Successful farms make important contributions to the health and vibrancy of both rural and urban communities. FarmStart encourages new farmers to engage in **entrepreneurial strategies that creatively turn challenges into opportunities**.



The Ignatius Incubator Farm - Guelph, ON

To learn more please visit www.farmstart.ca or call 519.836.7046