



East Multnomah Soil and Water Conservation District

Headwaters Farm Reaches Full Maturity as it

Enters Fifth Year Supporting New Farmers

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Contact: Rowan Steele, Farm Incubator Program Manager, rowan@emswcd.org, 503-935-5355
<http://emswcd.org/>

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East Multnomah Soil and Water Conservation District (EMSWCD) is accepting applications for the Headwaters Farm Incubator Program from October 1st through the 31st. The Headwaters Incubator Program (HIP) leases farmland to motivated, experienced individuals to help them launch their own farming business. The farm also demonstrates riparian and agricultural conservation practices, illustrating how farms can maximize yield while protecting or enhancing natural resources. As the farm and program have grown in scale and complexity, so too have the farmers and their businesses grown in experience and ability. This year marks the point when “graduates” are beginning to transition off and begin their farm businesses as independent operations.

New farmers often face financial, institutional, and cultural barriers to starting their own farm business. Without access to capital, training, or established farm networks, many farmers do not have the resources to successfully establish a business. In Oregon and nationwide, these issues are compounded by an aging farmer demographic. The Headwaters Incubator Program seeks to help new farmers overcome these barriers by providing access to low-cost farmland, infrastructure and equipment, while also assisting with business development, training opportunities, and a peer support network. The fourteen farms now enrolled in the program produce a wide variety of products (diversified mixed vegetables, edible and cut flowers, honey, canned preserves, medicinal and culinary herbs, and various value added products) which are sold at farmers markets, restaurants, wholesale, and through a variety of other direct marketing channels.

Headwaters Farm is a 60-acre property on the outskirts of Gresham that is owned and managed by EMSWCD. When it was purchased in 2011, the property had serious soil quality, erosion, and invasive weed problems. EMSWCD staff and incubator farmers have worked diligently on improving the soil quality and production capacity while protecting creek-side habitat and other natural resources. This



work has included projects ranging from soil building practices and pollinator habitat establishment to addressing erosion through cover crops, native plantings, and improved farm roads. Most recently, construction began to improve two onsite culverts and remove one creek crossing altogether, which will improve stream health in the North Fork of Johnson Creek and eventually allow salmon to pass.

The Headwaters Incubator Program will soon open the application period for its fifth year, offering land, training and a wide range of infrastructure, tools, and equipment to help new farmers get started. As some of the incubator farmers prepare to transition off the farm and into their new business ventures, EMSWCD staff will continue to seek innovative ways to further improve the program and help sustain local farms, forests, wildlife, and communities.

The East Multnomah Soil and Water Conservation District (EMSWCD) is a unit of local government whose mission is to help people care for land and water. The EMSWCD is led by an elected board of five directors and works entirely on a voluntary, non-regulatory basis with landowners, land managers, and other residents east of the Willamette River centerline in Multnomah County. All of the EMSWCD's work is geared toward keeping water clean, conserving water and keeping soil healthy.

Contact Rowan Steele, our Farm Incubator Program Manager, with any questions about Headwaters Farm or the Farm Incubator Program at Rowan@emswcd.org or (503) 935-5355. Learn more about the program at <http://emswcd.org/farm-incubator/>, or read entries submitted by Headwaters farmers at <http://emswcd.org/from-the-farm/>.



The EMSWCD service area includes all Multnomah County east of the Willamette River. The location of Headwaters Farm is also shown here.

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