

Snake Den Farm: Request for Proposal

Agricultural Leaseholds



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Snake Den Farm — Request for Proposals: Agricultural Leaseholds

Summary:

The mission of the Northern RI Conservation District (NRICD) is to foster a community-based approach to the stewardship of natural resources. Our goal in the management of Snake Den Farm is to bring the land back into agricultural production, and to do so using systems and methods that complement this mission. With sustainability and resource conservation as guiding principles, we plan to:

- Provide good land for agricultural enterprises
- Offer secure, fair, long-term lease agreements
- Offer opportunities for leaseholders to build equity
- Use Best Management Practices that enhance the integrity of Snake Den Farm's natural resources
- Foster a bond between farm and community
- Create a resilient whole-farm system which offers opportunities to leaseholders and their business goals, encouraging communication and exchange between farm enterprises

We are currently offering leaseholds between 2-7 acres. No commercial animal operations at this time.

Project Scope:

The Northern Rhode Island Conservation District (NRICD) is seeking conservation-minded agricultural producers with several years of experience who are looking to establish an agricultural enterprise at Snake Den Farm in Johnston, RI. As the land is owned by the State of Rhode Island, Snake Den Farm offers a uniquely secure lease opportunity for farmers. We offer eligible leaseholders the choice of long lease terms, options to renew, and potential for increased acreage over time. NRICD is also dedicated to partnering with farmers to build infrastructure and create a collaborative, farmer/producer-driven, financially successful agricultural community on the site. That said, this project is in the startup phase. We have accomplished much thus far with limited financial and staff resources, and it is expected that leaseholders at Snake Den will focus mainly on running their own great farm enterprises, but Snake Den Farm at present is definitely geared toward resourceful individuals who are excited to be part of creating a new project, are able to cooperatively problem-solve, and feel they can work well within the overall vision.



Eligibility:

NRICD is seeking agricultural producers with:

- Several years of farming experience, gained either through running their own enterprise or by having a range of experience in skilled work for other farms.
- A farm or business plan that will work on 2-7 acres that includes a viable enterprise budget.
- A working knowledge of, or commitment to learn, methods of conservation farming, and agree to use conservation best management practices (BMPs) on their leaseholds.

What is the Northern RI Conservation District?

The NRICD works in partnership with private landowners, farmers, municipalities, state and federal agencies, and non-governmental agencies in Providence County. NRICD is not a regulatory or enforcement agency, but rather provides assistance to those who desire to work cooperatively to face conservation issues.

The NRICD is a non-profit, quasi-public organization that functions as a facilitator for meeting the needs of the local land user in the conservation of soil, water and other related natural resources. We foster a community-based approach to the stewardship of northern Rhode Island's natural resources through education and outreach into the communities, technical assistance, and partnerships with other agencies. As a member of the National Association of Conservation Districts, we are part of a community of over 3,000 districts across the U.S.



NRICD and Snake Den Farm

In 2010 the NRICD sought assistance from the Rhode Island Department of Environmental Management (DEM) to see if we might find a home for our office among abandoned state buildings. DEM offered the use of a house at 2283 Hartford Avenue in Johnston, under the condition that we restore it to a useful condition. We set to work fixing it up as our new home and today the building houses five not-for-profit entities with similar goals to the NRICD.

It just so happens that this new office sits right on the southern edge of a 1000 acre piece of woodland known as Snake Den State Park. Because of this proximity, and based on our success in restoring the run-down house that became our office, DEM approached the NRICD about its willingness to manage a large and historic piece of farmland and buildings located in the middle of the park, the Snake Den Farm on Brown Avenue in Johnston.

After about a year of negotiations, the NRICD signed an agreement to transfer the management of the farm from DEM control to NRICD. The use of this beautifully preserved 150-acre farm and homestead (which includes 2-3 bedroom, 1 bathroom farmhouse with an upstairs tenement apartment) is now in the hands of NRICD, with the DEM providing oversight.

Over the course of the last few months, we have been working to build a farmland lease program that suits the needs of farmers in Rhode Island. One of our internal goals has been to educate ourselves on the biggest challenges that face RI Farmers. Through discussion, consultation, experience and research, we've deduced that a particular concern for Rhode Island agricultural producers is, increasingly, finding land on which to build stable, long-lived farm businesses.

Secure land tenure, through affordable ownership or progressive long term leases, can often outweigh the need for access to *more* land on which to farm. Without the land security, farmers can have trouble building equity; without equity, farmers lack access to capital on which to grow their businesses. This squeeze appears to really hit those farms that are in year 5-10 of their growth, and can really be a make or break point. Too often, innovative and productive farmers leave our community when a fair deal on land cannot be found. In the end, this reality has become a limiting factor on the growth and variety of the RI agricultural community.

To address this apparent dilemma, our first step will be to open land to producers who in some way fit the mold described above. We are very open to a diversity of enterprises, experience levels and cultural practices, but at present we are focusing on folks who have at least some years of experience in the field, are at an evolution point in their current enterprises, and who additionally share NRICD's ethic of sustainability and stewardship.

The start-up phase of our tenure at Snake Den got rolling in November 2013. During these months, we completed a farm manager selection process, inspected and repaired the property, crafted documents on which to build programs, conducted research on best and highest uses, and consulted with the farm community for advice and ideas. This phase is presently coming to a close in March 2014, as our new farm managers take up residence on the 1st floor of the farmhouse. In addition to having great skill in management, they happen to be growers themselves who will lease land for their enterprise, but are also tasked with taking an active role in the daily stewardship of the property and all its inhabitants: farmers, foxes, fencerows, fields and flowers.

Amenities & Opportunities:

This farm project is new, but there are already well-established organizational support structures in place. NRICD brings a wealth of experience, resources and connections to the table. With on-site support from our Farm Managers and state-level support from our partners at DEM, NRICD has an abiding commitment to helping farmers thrive, grow, and access diverse & profitable markets. There is support and interest from historical and agricultural communities, and the property itself is cherished by Rhode Islanders from many backgrounds.

It is imperative to the mission of Snake Den Farm that agricultural production begins as soon as possible. We know that farmers need access to good land, so we are offering what we can in the quickest timeframe we could manage. This means that management will be active and competent but current infrastructure offered is basic, basically laid out in our Fee Schedule. While the most immediate focus is on getting the land back into production, there is planning in place for future events, projects and programs, and exciting potential for many more.

As well, NRICD expects and encourages the birth of cooperative ventures among agricultural producers and is committed to being a partner in these potential new ideas. Our goal is to facilitate the growth of a lively and engaged community of farm entrepreneurs.

Site Amenities:	Benefits & Opportunities:
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Landcare and maintenance of common land and margins • Prime farm soils; level, not-too stony fields • Plentiful water resources • Up-to-date electrical service • Access to dry & winter storage rental • Access to Indoor meeting space & bathroom • Room for propagation houses and equipment storage • Good farm roads • Access to wood lot as heating resource for greenhouses and outbuildings • 24 Hour security • Snow removal • Silos available (in good repair) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Long term lease security • Room for leasehold expansion • Close proximity to urban markets • Potential for program growth and in-house grant-writing help • Cost-sharing on improvements • NRICD Ag-tech support • Support and aid in getting NRCS-funded improvements/contracts • Workshop and skill sharing opportunities for/among farmers • Nearby trails, orchards, and farms for the enjoyment of you and your customers • Potential for development of value-added enterprises, farm kitchens, or other food-based businesses • Multiple event & meeting venues

Leaseholder Fee Schedule

		\$\$/UNIT	UNIT	CYCLE
Basic Fees	Cropland	\$200.00	Acre	Year
	Land Management Fee (includes base barn storage + machine shed access)	\$800.00	Leasehold	Year

Extra Usage Fees	Harvest & Wash Area Access	\$240.00	Leasehold	Year
	Additional Harvest Area	\$180.00	100sf	Year
	Irrigation Water Hookup	\$150.00	Leasehold	Year
Fee based on 1/3 of the rate charged by Providence Water.	Irrigation Water rate	0.00053	Gallon	Month
	Additional Barn Space	\$0.25	Sq. Foot	Month
Farmers who plan on moderate electric useage, excluding refrigeration, can pay this flat fee per year.	Electric Plug-in privilege	\$60.00	per farm	Year
Fee based on the current National Grid cost per kilowatt-hour for electrical service.	Refrigeration Operating Fee	\$5.00	Labeled Amp	Month

For questions regarding fee schedule details, please email gdemarco.nricd@gmail.com, with Fee Schedule in the subject line. Details can also be discussed at farm tours.



Conservation Farming and Best Management Practices

As a Conservation District, NRICD's mission and goal for getting the farm back into production has a lot to do with keeping the health of its natural resources in mind. We are looking for farmers to lease the land who account for the effect of each action they take upon our natural resources. **Conservation Farming is a philosophy that uses careful farm planning methods and Best Management Practices (BMPs) to protect and enhance natural resources while maintaining high production values.**

At Snake Den, the wisdom of previous farm generations has blessed us with well-tended fields that sit astride a pristine watershed. Mature forests and abundant wildlife surround this farmland. To preserve this awesome legacy, we ask that farming practices at Snake Den Farm will follow a set of BMPs that maintain or improve soil health, use integrated pest management, and improve water quality. The BMPs that will be required at the farm include:

- Crop rotation and cover crops
- Proper composting and compost application
- Timely and careful manure or fertilizer application
- Proper maintenance of field edges and lanes
- Using Integrated Pest Management (IPM) plan to achieve low to no use of pesticides
- Weed and disease management
- Irrigation and watering practices that conserve water
- Equipment use that avoids or mitigates soil compaction, plow pans and erosion
- Soil testing
- Record Keeping

In addition, we expect you to be a good neighbor and steward: maintain your land to the standards set in the management agreement, keeping your leasehold (including margins, headlands and lanes) in good condition. Materials and supplies should be kept in accordance with management agreement.

For more detailed information on the BMPs and land use standards, please refer to additional resources on the Snake Den Farm website, "Land Use and Best Management Practices." If you have additional questions, please email qdemarco.nricd@gmail.com, with BMPs in the email subject line.

Application Procedure for Farm Manager and Leaseholder Positions at Snake Den Farm

TIMELINES

Monday, March 3: Request for Proposals advertised.

Wednesday, March 12, 10 am-12 pm: Snake Den Farm Tour. Interested producers are welcomed to visit the farmstead to learn more about NRICD, the Snake Den Farm program and to see the facilities.

Saturday, March 15, 10 am - 12 pm: additional Snake Den Farm Tour.

Friday, March 21st: Completed proposal must be submitted to NRICD by 4 pm (**NO EXCEPTIONS**) via email or hand delivery

Please send completed proposals to: Gina DeMarco, NRICD 2283 Hartford Avenue, Johnston RI 02919; gdemarco.nricd@gmail.com.

Week of March 21st: Board begins candidate review process.

Week of March 31st: Interviews begin for potential leaseholders.

Week of April 14: Producers offered leaseholds.

NRICD Review Process:

- Applicant meets with program staff in person or over the phone, which includes an introduction to the NRICD, Snake Den Farm, and the Snake Den Farm Program.
- If the application seems feasible and it is a good match for our needs, the staff will enter the applicant's name for consideration by the NRICD Board.
- Staff compiles qualifying applications and supporting materials for presentation to the Board for vote.
- Upon reaching a decision, the Board will announce that the position has been filled and will negotiate a contract and lease with the selected applicant.

Application Document:

Please complete the below application and submit with the necessary supporting documents:

- Farm Plan or Business plan (Something demonstrating financial viability and basic budgets for your agricultural business--see the NRICD website for resources & templates)
- References (3)
- Resume/work history

Name of Applicant(s):

Farm or Business Name:

Address:

Daytime Phone:

Evening/Weekend Phone:

Email:

1. Please describe the agricultural enterprise you wish to establish at Snake Den Farm. Tell us what you plan to grow/produce, approximate range of acres, and your general practices.

2. If you have one, describe your current agricultural enterprise. If you *work for an enterprise but are not yourself the owner*, you can answer by talking about your role(s) within it:

- What is produced?
- How are your products sold or otherwise distributed?
- How many years has it been in production?
- Do you take active role in most of the business?
- Can you point to some of the key challenges to the enterprise? (These could be internal, external, economic, social, environmental, etc.)
- Has the enterprise been able to meet these challenges? How, and what was your role? (Changes in methods, capital, hard work, cost-cutting)
- Characterize the land/resources of your current farm site: acreage, road access, soil, natural resource concerns, structures, water system, ownership, proximity to markets, etc.

- How and why has your production gone up, down or stayed the same during the past 5 years? Same question for acreage?

3. How will your enterprise fit into Snake Den Farm?

- How will moving or expanding into Snake Den grow or improve your enterprise?
- Are there specific areas of the farm you would be most interested in?

4. Agricultural Practices:

- Summarize your current agricultural practices, and how you came to incorporate them into your enterprise. Include, but don't limit yourself to:

cultivation	pest and disease management
soil health and fertility	tools, equipment
irrigation	season extension
risk management	harvest and packing
whole farm management	livestock

- Would your agricultural practices change with a move/expansion to Snake Den Farm?
- Are you interested in developing additional skills/farming practices?
- Would you be comfortable leading a workshop tailored to farmers on any of your farm practices?

5. Equipment needs and experience:

- What equipment do you use regularly in your work?
- Will a move or expansion to Snake Den Farm change your equipment needs?
- Describe operating proficiency with relevant equipment, especially safety procedures.
- Will you be keeping and maintaining equipment at Snake Den?
- Are you willing to share equipment, purchase equipment with other farmers, or lease use of other farmers' equipment?

6. Marketing Plan:

- Because we would like to foster a sense of community among farmers in the area, and avoid direct competition with the farm across the street, we will not have a farmstand at Snake Den. What is your marketing strategy?
- Is this consistent with your current marketing plan and if not, describe how the shift will impact your business.

7. Additional Needs:

- What will you require for storage space?

8. Sustainable and conservation farming best practices:

- Do you have experience with the Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) or other conservation and land management entities?
- What is your definition of:
 - Stewardship
 - Conservation
 - Sustainability

How do you plan to use these principals on the farm?

9. Snake Den Farm will necessarily be a shared resource:

- What is your experience working collaboratively? Do you have a vision for how to collaborate with other producers on this site? (For instance, farmer LLC, producer's co-op, etc).
- Besides getting the land back into production, one of our longer term goals is to build an agricultural and educational community at Snake Den. How interested might you be in participating in future programs or projects? Would you be interested in mentoring beginner farmers at some point?

10. Agricultural Enterprise Plan/Business Plan:

11. Additional Questions

- Is there anything else you'd like to tell us about yourself?
- Please describe any previous farm experience (or other relevant experience) that did not fit into the above questions?

Checklist

In order for your proposal to be considered by the Northern RI Conservation District, you must complete the following:

- Farm Plan
- Completed Application
- Resume for Employment
- Three references that NRICD will contact

NRICD is an equal opportunity provider and employer. Please call NRICD at 401.934.0840 or email gdemarco.nricd@gmail.com with any questions.