GUEST ARTICLES (cont.)

Organic, Regenerative Farmland Hubs Drive Infrastructure Development

The Reshaping of American Agriculture

Chris Zuehlsdorff, CEO, Iroquois Valley Farmland REIT

Across North America, a quiet but powerful shift is reshaping the agricultural landscape. As the demand for organic and regenerative products continues to grow, so too does the recognition that scaling these systems requires more than individual farm conversions. It requires entire regional ecosystems.

Enter the concept of Farmland Hubs: geographically concentrated networks of organic and regenerative farmers, infrastructure, and markets that together create resilient, place-based food economies.

For nearly two decades, as one of the oldest impact investors, Iroquois Valley has been exploring how to support farmers beyond simply providing isolated land access. While long-term leases and farmland financing remain foundational, the next evolution in sustainable agriculture investment focuses on building clusters of regenerative activity where shared infrastructure, knowledge, and community drive long-term success.

From Individual Farms to Regional Ecosystems

The power of a hub model lies in its agglomeration effects. A single organic farm can struggle to access specialized labor, processing infrastructure, or nearby markets. But when a region reaches critical mass—multiple farmers, shared resources, and supportive local businesses—a self-sustaining ecosystem begins to form.

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GUEST ARTICLES (cont.)

These regional clusters allow for the development of shared storage and processing facilities, regional seed and grain networks, local supply chains linking farmers to nearby markets and bakers, and knowledge sharing and mentorship among growers. This approach reduces risk for both farmers and investors by anchoring capital and infrastructure in regions with proven or emerging organic potential.

A Case in Central Illinois

Central Illinois illustrates how this model can take root. There, a growing network of organic producers has helped establish one of the Midwest's most vibrant organic grain ecosystems. Farmers like Harold and Ross Wilken of Janie's Farm have transitioned from conventional to organic production, introducing ancient and hybrid wheat varieties in partnership with the University of Illinois. Harold and Ross employ and train additional local organic farmers, as well as regularly host field days for beginning farmers. Their creation of The Mill at Janie's Farm, the region's only organic flour mill, has in turn provided crucial infrastructure for other local producers.

This kind of regional hub not only strengthens the local economy, but also attracts mission-aligned investors seeking to back regenerative systems rather than isolated operations.

Criteria for Thriving Hubs

Iroquois Valley has identified several key factors for successful Farmland Hubs:

- High density of farmers seeking land within a defined region (often a 50-mile radius)
- Strong or emerging organic communities with established market access
- Soils well-suited to organic production without heavy irrigation
- Opportunities for infrastructure investment, such as processing or storage facilities
- Strong succession planning and intergenerational transfer potential

These criteria help concentrate investment where it can have the greatest environmental, social, and economic impact.

Measuring Impact Beyond Acres

As investors and agricultural innovators refine this model, four key performance indicators are emerging:

1. Environmental outcomes – measurable soil health and biodiversity improvements.
2. Ecosystem connectivity – depth of collaboration and knowledge exchange.
3. Regional infrastructure growth – expansion of processing, storage, and distribution capacity.
4. Operational efficiency – economies of scale that improve farmer profitability and investor stability.

By focusing on these interconnected metrics, farmland investment is moving beyond traditional financial benchmarks to evaluate holistic system performance.

Building the Future of Regenerative Agriculture

Farmland Hubs represent a growing trend toward place-based investing—the idea that capital can drive transformation by rooting itself deeply in local communities and ecological systems. Whether in Illinois, Montana, or other emerging regions, these hubs are demonstrating that scaling regenerative agriculture will depend not on isolated farms but on thriving, interconnected regions.

As the organic and regenerative sectors mature, the conversation is shifting from "how do we support individual farmers?" to "how do we build the ecosystems that enable them to thrive?" Farmland Hubs may hold the answer, serving as the connective tissue between capital, land, and the communities that cultivate our food and our future.

Chris Zuehlsdorff, CEO, Iroquois Valley Farmland REIT

Chris Zuehlsdorff is the CEO of Iroquois Valley Farmland REIT, PBC, a pioneering farmland investment company focused on organic, regenerative agriculture. The company provides long-term leases and mortgage financing to organic farmers and works to build a more resilient food system by preserving farmland for organic production.

Find out more about Iroquois Valley Farmland REIT here.

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