Building the Infrastructure for a New Generation of Farming

The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency reports that “there are over 285,000,000 people living in the United States. Of that population, less than 1% claim farming as an occupation (and about 2% actually live on farms). There are only about 960,000 persons claiming farming as their principal occupation and a similar number of farmers claiming some other principal occupation. The number of farms in the U.S. stands at about two million. In spite of the predominance of family farms, there is strong evidence of a trend toward concentration in agricultural production. Additionally, the average age of farmers continues to rise. In fact, about forty percent of the farmers in this country are 55 years old or older (Bureau of Labor Statistics).”

This concentration of agricultural production both in terms of geography and specialized, aging labor leaves the U.S. a very vulnerable position from a food security, safety, and sustainability point of view and does not maximize efficiencies. Addressing this issue is more than simply making affordable land available and enticing individuals to become farmers through the promise of improved livelihood and lifestyle. Rather it’s establishing and working towards efficient ratios of farmer/land to consumer; appropriate distribution methods to disperse risk/exposure and to improve efficiencies; and a business model for building the required infrastructure.

Main ideas/key points:
Provide sustainable infrastructure to professionally farm and become an integral and strengthening part of the larger economic system:

• Optimize and control location, access, implementation, and distribution based on efficiencies of supply (including land, water, infrastructure), demand (nutritional requirements and population), and distribution (distance, energy, and storage.)
• Professionally develop and hold lands for farming.
• Civic Farming: publicly owned parcels, professionally operated
• Steward Farming: privately owned (single family lots and backyards for instance), professionally maintained
• Create plan(s) to compensate land owners as well as farmers (not always one and the same)

This requires combining the best and wide ranging business practices, nutritional /cultural research, and technical/design tools to help answer the questions:
• What is the appropriate ratio of farmers and land to consumers? How can this ratio be dispersed to help ensure safety and success?
• Where is available and developable land located? Does it have water and basic infrastructure (roads, power, etc.) to make it a going enterprise? Is there a ready market? What is the mechanism used to hold the land?