

# Growing Veteran Farmers

**“It’s about partnerships and  
collaboration”**

Presented by: Joe Ricker (COL-Retired)

# Agenda

- Background and status and what NAP and SRAP IN did
- Ideas on establishing a Veteran Program

# My Background (nonprofit)

- 2015 took Boots to Business, Beekeeping classes, etc.
- In July 2017 bought my property, about 10 acres in rural Indiana
- Attend local programs for Veterans in Agriculture under Purdue
- April 2018 planted 200 apple trees-3-5 year to harvest
- April 2019 planted 50 more, About 3 beehives
- Jul 2019-promoted and moved to DC
- DoD Skillbridge in Dec 2021
- Retired Army Colonel-June 2022
- Consultant with AgrAbility-Veteran Outreach-June 2022
- Oct 2022 Spec Crop Grant and SBCG-COVID awarded (\$200K)-two years
  - Failed first time in 2021
- Featured Farmer Indiana Statefair-2023
  - Recommended by Indiana Grown Director
- Purdue Master Gardner
  - Paid for by AgVet Grant

# 2024-Momentum is picking up

- Jan 2024 Awarded NRCS Equity in Conservation Partnership
  - Made aware of opportunity by NRCS
    - Operation Groundwork supports two Veteran Farms-\$110K per year
    - Farm 2 School Grant-Planning Jun 2024
    - American Farm Bureau Federation Farmer Veteran of the Year Nov 2024
    - Jan 2025, Indiana Dept of Veterans Affairs Nonprofit Partner for 2025

# Impact-2024

- Operation Groundwork Donations
  - Donate: 60 dozen eggs, 20 whole chickens, over 60lbs fresh produce to food pantries
  - Almost 30 in person or webinar classes
  - Over 200 Veteran participants in classes
  - 70 attendees Jan 2024 workshop, 80 or more in Jan 2025
- Over 500 new members (total 1600) to non-profits (At Ease Orchard and Veterans IN Farming)
- 3 Veteran Farms in Indiana State Fair Feature Farms in 2024
- Harvested
  - 30 gallons of honey
  - 800 lbs of apples

# Where we are today

- 6 part-time employees-4 workers, 3 admin (2-business and social media)
- 3 regular volunteers to support the non-profit
- Strong relationship with Indiana Grown, Indiana Dept of Veterans Affairs, USDA both Nationally and Locally, AgrAbility and Purdue
- Way Ahead
  - AgriVet Challenge (over \$25K to Vet Farms in Indiana)
  - 2 more Veteran Farms

# What can you do?



# Identify Organization-Empower them!

- Veteran Nonprofit in Agriculture almost every state
  - Skilled and passionate person in charge
  - Check 990's IRS search nonprofits
  - CCUA, FVC Chapter, The Veteran Farm of NC, Arcadia, and VA's
- Helps sell their name, build their credit
  - They may not know the process
- Build into your meetings or process
- Use their name in a grant
- Let them know the process how to get your endorsement



# Spiral Growth

- Put in for a loan, grant, whatever now.
  - Don't fear denial, get the comments and build on them!
- Start small and build on it, proof of principle (Army Term-PoP)
- Help them tell their story
  
- Review and provide comments from your perspective

# Discussion

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- How did/would you do it?
- I am happy to mentor

**Questions/Comments?**

**Joe Ricker**

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