



American Farmland Trust  
SAVING THE LAND THAT SUSTAINS US

**annual report**

2017



**We can't hope for a sustainable future  
without sustainable farms.**

—JOHN PIOTTI, *president, American Farmland Trust*

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(LEFT) *Fields of soybeans in Missouri*



*Ranchers in Utah*

**The mission of American Farmland Trust is to save the land that sustains us by protecting farmland, promoting sound farming practices, and keeping farmers on the land.**

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# From the Leadership

America is blessed with more arable land than any other nation on earth. This fertile farmland and ranchland is arguably our nation's greatest resource.

Alarming, however, we are squandering that vital resource at a rate of 1.5 million acres a year, which translates into three acres every minute. That loss of the nation's farmland and ranchland puts our future food supply—and our planet—in jeopardy.

Founded in 1980 by visionary farmers and conservationists, American Farmland Trust is the only national organization working across the aisle and around the country to protect farmland, support farmers, and improve our environment. We owe the organization's existence to a group of forward-thinking people who launched a national movement that has since protected millions of acres of farmland and ranchland while helping tens of thousands of farmers reduce their use of chemicals and rebuild soil health.

As we look to the future for farms, food, and communities, there are three pressing issues ahead of us:

- Stopping the loss of irreplaceable farmland and ranchland to development
- Advancing smart conservation practices that help restore our planet, and
- Attracting and assisting the next generation of farmers



*Buzz Thompson*



*John Piotti*

These three issues are fundamentally connected. Saving farmland is not enough. We also need to rebuild the soil that is the very foundation of life—and in doing so, combat climate change. And we need to support the farmers and ranchers who turn the basic elements of life—sun, soil, rain—into life-giving food and farm products for all of us.

In the report ahead, you'll read about how American Farmland Trust worked in 2017 to protect farmland and ranchland, advance soil-building farming practices, and give farmers and ranchers the tools to succeed. This holistic approach allowed us to have an outsized impact, made possible by you—our members and supporters.

Thank you.

A handwritten signature in green ink that reads "Barton Thompson, Jr." in a cursive style.

Barton (Buzz) Thompson, Jr.  
BOARD CHAIR

A handwritten signature in green ink that reads "John Piotti" in a cursive style.

John Piotti  
PRESIDENT AND CEO



**How we treat our land, how we build upon it,  
how we act toward our air and water, in the long run,  
will tell what kind of people we really are.**

**—LAURANCE S. ROCKEFELLER**



# Save Irreplaceable Farmland and Ranchland

**F**ertile, productive land is the foundation of American farming and ranching—the source of food, enterprise, and life itself.

A group of farmers and conservationists started American Farmland Trust in 1980 to draw attention to the wasteful development of the nation's best farmland and ranchland, which we need to grow food and fiber for all of America.

That group also set out to do something about it—launching a national movement that built programs and organizations around the country to help farmers and ranchers keep the nation's best farmland out of reach from developers.

As a result, today over 6.5 million acres of the nation's best farmland and ranchland have been protected for future generations. Yet we need to do much more, given the realities we face. At the current rate of development, we will lose another six million acres in just the next four years.

# 2017 SUCCESSES

Making sure farmers and ranchers have enough high-quality land to grow food and crops was at the heart of American Farmland Trust's mission for the year.

A sampling of achievements:

**USA** | Due to an expanding population, a changing climate, and other pressures, competition for land and water in the U.S. will only increase in coming years. Are we conserving enough farmland to ensure food security for future generations? That's the question studied

by American Farmland Trust's *Farms Under Threat* project, which kicked into high gear this year, developing the cutting-edge maps and analysis that graphically illustrate—better than ever before—how much farmland and ranchland we have lost in past decades. ■



**USA** | American Farmland Trust remained dedicated to crafting a 2018 Farm Bill that supports farmland as a strategic natural resource. Our nation's agricultural infrastructure—including farmland, topsoil, and millions of farmers—is as important as roads and bridges, and no less in need of new investment.

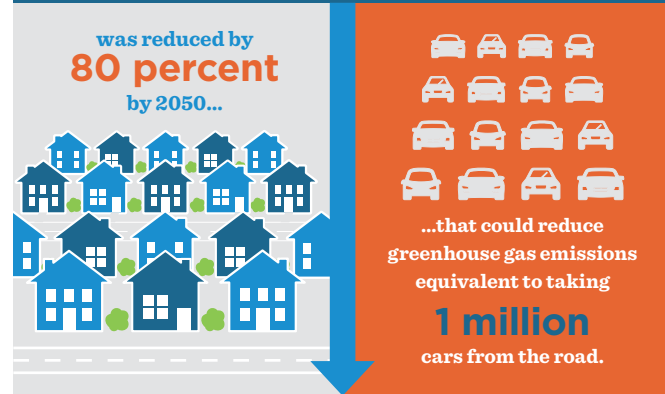
That was the message sent by American Farmland Trust president and CEO, John Piotti, when he testified before U.S. Congress in February about the urgent importance of saving farmland and ranchland and maintaining funding for conservation programs that help farmers protect wildlife, soil, air, and water. ■



**CALIFORNIA** | California loses more than 40,000 acres of farmland each year. In October, California governor Jerry Brown signed Senate Bill 732, a bill sponsored and supported by American Farmland Trust that helps local communities plan for agriculture. California law requires every county and city to adopt a general plan that establishes goals related to development. The legislation provides a framework to help communities map their agricultural land, identify conservation priorities, and support the long-term protection of farms and ranches. ■



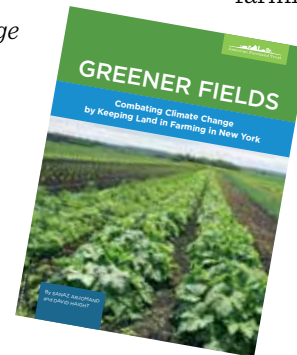
## If the annual loss of farmland to real estate development in New York



**NEW YORK** | An acre of farmland produces 66 times fewer greenhouse gas emissions than an acre of developed land, found a new American Farmland Trust report: *Greener Fields: Combatting Climate Change by Keeping Land in Farming in New York*. The report

also found that reducing the rate of farmland development 80 percent by 2050 could reduce greenhouse gas emissions equivalent to taking one million cars off the road—spurring calls for farmland protection

to be a key strategy in the fight against climate change. ■





**The soil is the great connector of lives, the source and destination of all.... Without proper care for it we can have no community, because without proper care for it we can have no life.**

**—WENDELL BERRY**



# Protect Soil and Water and Combat Climate Change

Our soil and water resources are fundamental to life—we cannot survive without them. American Farmland Trust advocates for conservation practices and programs that preserve not just the land but also our environment. Our work has helped hundreds of thousands of farmers adopt smart farming practices.

By using methods like no-till planting, crop rotations, and cover crops, farmers can protect and rebuild the soil—keeping it out of streams and rivers, and making the land more resilient in times of drought. The same practices that improve the soil also help in the fight against climate change by putting significant amounts of carbon back into the soil.

With the realities of climate change and water scarcity threatening our planet, so much more is needed. That's why American Farmland Trust plays a key role in getting more farmers to make changes, which can be risky for farmers worried about the bottom line. Our research and demonstration projects show what works—from region to region and farm to farm.

# 2017 SUCCESSES

American Farmland Trust worked to help farmers and ranchers adopt smart farming practices that protect land, water, soil, and wildlife—providing environmental benefits for all of us. A sampling of achievements:

**GREAT LAKES** | In the Great Lakes states of Ohio and New York, American Farmland Trust launched a major new project to reduce the amount of sediment and nutrients entering streams and rivers. Soil sediment and nutrient runoff are linked to algal blooms, which have compromised water

quality for millions of people. The project is part of a national AFT initiative designed to better understand and serve women landowners and work with them to implement conservation practices, increase permanent protection of farmland, and help farmers gain access to affordable land. ■



**MICHIGAN** | Much of our food supply would not exist without bees, which pollinate about 75 percent of all U.S. fruits, nuts, and vegetables. But bees and other pollinators are in trouble, with more than 50 wild species threatened or endangered. A pilot project launched by American Farmland Trust and partners in Michigan enlisted farmers to install high-quality pollinator habitat on protected farmland in exchange for “credits” that can be sold to sustainably minded corporations and people. ■



**USA** | Women are entering farming in unprecedented numbers. Nearly 301 million acres of U.S. land are now farmed or co-farmed by women, and at least 87 million additional acres are in the hands of women landowners. American Farmland Trust's national *Women for the Land* initiative addressed the obstacles that women landowners face in accessing conservation programs and resources by hosting "learning circles" that empower them to adopt environmentally sound farming practices, protect farmland, and improve the viability of their farms. ■



**CALIFORNIA** | A new American Farmland Trust webpage ([stewards.farmland.org](http://stewards.farmland.org)) showcased real-world examples of environmental stewardship by California specialty crop farmers who grow fruits, vegetables, and nuts. The site presents stories of farmers who have undertaken significant efforts to increase on-farm conservation practices and are willing to share their knowledge with other farmers. ■



**Over the last decade our country has lost an average of 300 farms a week. Large or small, each of those was the life's work of a real person or family, people who built their lives around a promise and watched it break.**

**—BARBARA KINGSOLVER**



*Farmers in Iowa*



# Connect Farmers to the Land and Communities to Food

Given the average age of our farmers and ranchers, millions of acres of American farmland will change hands in the next generation.

There are more than twice as many farmers aged 75 years and older as there are aged 34 years and younger, according to the 2012 Census of Agriculture. American agriculture has never faced such a demographic crisis.

But there is good news: After years of declining interest, more people than ever want to get into farming. The problem is that it is not easy to enter farming. Farmers need land. Yet in areas with high development pressure, they often need to outbid a developer for it.

By helping existing farmers stay on the land, and ensuring beginning farmers can access it, American Farmland Trust is working to solve a fundamental dilemma facing American agriculture. We make sure to never forget that it is people—our family farmers and ranchers—who feed and clothe us and sustain America.

# 2017 SUCCESSES

American Farmland Trust helped connect communities to healthy food while supporting beginning farmers and ranchers. A sampling of achievements:



**NORTHEAST** | While beginning farmers face hurdles in finding affordable farmland, retiring farmers also find that transferring ownership of their land is an onerous process. In 2017, American Farmland Trust expanded our Hudson Valley Farmlink Network to help beginning and retiring farmers in New York and New Jersey. Since launching, more than 2,000 farmers and landowners received personal coaching through the network, more than 35,000 people visited the [HudsonValleyFarmlandFinder.org](http://HudsonValleyFarmlandFinder.org) website, and more than 135 farmers put down new roots. ■

**USA** | The number of beginning farmers and ranchers in the United States is at a 30-year low, according to the 2012 Census of Agriculture. American Farmland Trust's *Farms for the Next*

*Generation* program gained momentum to help new farmers and ranchers overcome one of the most significant barriers to entering the profession: securing suitable land. Through the program, we

started training a core group of professionals to provide critical support for beginning farmers and ranchers as they embark on acquiring farmland and building their operations. ■







**KANSAS, MARYLAND,  
MICHIGAN, MINNESOTA,  
NORTH CAROLINA, OHIO,  
PENNSYLVANIA, VERMONT,  
WASHINGTON** |

Communities around the country want to protect their farmland while improving the health and well-being of citizens. But local governments often lack the know-how and resources to do so. In August, American Farmland Trust completed *Growing Food Connections*, a landmark five-year partnership that worked with eight diverse communities to bridge the gap between food production and food security. To share lessons learned, we released *Growing Local: A Community Guide to Planning for Agriculture and Food Systems*, with a comprehensive collection of local policies to protect farmland and support farms and local food. ■



**CALIFORNIA** | The San Francisco Bay Area has an extraordinarily rich food economy yet continues to lose its best farmland to development. Recognizing the integral role that farms and food businesses play in the Bay Area, American Farmland Trust and Sustainable Agriculture Education released an analysis, *The Bay Area Food Economy: Existing Conditions and Strategies for Resilience*, outlining strategies for building the region's farm and food economy for the benefit of farmers and citizens. ■

# 2017 • Making a Difference for

## January



AFT launches a major project to reduce soil sediment and nutrients entering the Great Lakes Basin, where compromised water quality affects millions of people.

## February

John Piotti, AFT president, testifies before Congress about the importance of protecting farmland and funding conservation programs that help farmers and ranchers.



## March



The Farms Under Threat project kicks into high gear, refining AFT's groundbreaking analysis that maps the irreversible loss of the nation's farmland and ranchland.

## April

AFT scales up the Women for the Land initiative, holding conservation learning circles in new states and communities to reach a growing number of women landowners.

## May



Our report, *Water Quality Targeting Success Stories*, highlights successful conservation projects where farmers and landowners achieved healthier streams and rivers.

## June

AFT releases *Growing Local: A Community Guide to Planning for Agriculture and Food Systems* to help communities strengthen their local food systems and economies.



# Farms, Food, and the Environment

## July

AFT launches the Land Access Trainers program to help new farmers and ranchers overcome a significant barrier: securing suitable land.



## August

AFT and partners host 60 farmers for Upper Macoupin Creek field day, talking to Illinois farmers about green practices like cover crops that protect water and soil.

## September



Florida's Winter Gardens Farmers Market is the people's choice winner for the second year in AFT's annual Farmers Market Celebration.

## October

California Governor Jerry Brown signs Senate Bill 732, legislation sponsored and supported by AFT to help local communities plan for the future of agriculture.



## November



*The Public Plate* report demonstrates how increasing public spending on fresh local food in New York could positively impact the health of six million people.

## December

Protected farms in Michigan prepare to install habitat in spring for threatened honey bees and other pollinators through our Farmland Pollinator Protection Project.



Learn more at [www.farmland.org](http://www.farmland.org).



# Summary of Activities



*For the fiscal year ending September 30, 2017*

## SUPPORT AND REVENUE

Individual Contributions*	\$5,196,453
Foundation Grants	3,362,725
Government Grants	1,863,412
Operating Investment Return	909,591
Non-Operating Investment Gain & Other	1,850,166
Other Income, Gains, and Losses	158,999
Rental Income	9,000
<b>Total Revenue and Support</b>	<b>\$13,350,346</b>

*\* includes bequests and planned giving*

*Additional financial statements are available upon request.*

## EXPENSES

National and Regional Programming	\$5,543,414
Public Education	1,882,376
Other Outreach and Communications	287,011
Other Programs	428,386
<b>Total Program Services</b>	<b>8,141,187</b>
Management and General	424,032
Fundraising	2,430,503
<b>Total Expenses</b>	<b>\$10,995,722</b>

## NET ASSETS

Beginning of Year	\$ 20,122,406
End of Year	22,477,030
<b>Change in Net Assets</b>	<b>\$ 2,354,624</b>



## In Memoriam

### DAVID ROCKEFELLER, SR.

Banker and philanthropist David Rockefeller, who died in early 2017 at the age of 101, was a champion of farmland conservation. American Farmland Trust was founded in 1980 by David's wife, Peggy, and the couple had the vision to recognize the importance of farmland to the nation's future long before many others did. They also acted to save it, protecting several thousand acres of farmland in New York's Hudson Valley. Their legacy extends to the millions of acres that American Farmland Trust has now helped protect across the nation.



## In Memoriam

### EDWARD "NED" BONNIE

American Farmland Trust recently lost a true friend. Edward "Ned" Bonnie was a steadfast supporter for nearly four decades. He served on our President's Council, and he and his wife, Cornelia "Nina" Winthrop Bonnie, were members of our Founders Society. American Farmland Trust is grateful for Ned and Nina's enduring leadership and support.

PHOTO CREDITS: Front cover: USDA photo by Mark Meyer, [www.flickr.com/photos/nres-ca/6131192142/in/gallery-158372921@N07-72157696506177284/](http://www.flickr.com/photos/nres-ca/6131192142/in/gallery-158372921@N07-72157696506177284/); Page i: marekuliasz/iStockphoto (soybeans), Shawn Linehan (ladybug); Page ii: Instants/iStockphoto (ranchers) Marilyn Nieves/iStockphoto (oranges); Page 1: Keith Mellnick (John Piotti); Page 2: ymn/iStockphoto; Page 3: Shawn Linehan (bud); Page 5: Shawn Linehan; Page 6: Jacob T. Beck; Page 7: USDA photo by Lance Cheung, [www.flickr.com/photos/usdagov/18571653814/in/album-72157654709370830/\(soil\)](http://www.flickr.com/photos/usdagov/18571653814/in/album-72157654709370830/(soil)); Page 8: Lindsay Morris (soil), USDA/Preston Keres (sunflower); Page 10: USDA/Preston Keres; Page 11: Shawn Linehan (hops); Page 12: Shawn Linehan (farmer with greens), Anthony Aquino (New York farmers); Page 13: Beacon City School District (child with lettuce), USDA/Lance Cheung (I'm your farmer), U.S. Air Force photo/Senior Airman Nicole Leidholm (farmers market); Page 14: ingaspence/Alamy; Page 16: Shawn Linehan; Page 17: Shawn Linehan (sunflower); Page 18: Nastasic/iStockphoto (rooster); USDA/ Preston Keres (garlic); Page 19: Rawpixel/iStockphoto (farmers); Shawn Linehan (apples); Page 20: Alden Pellett/Alamy (night), Shawn Linehan (sheep); Page 21: diego cervo/iStockphoto; Page 22: Jean-Claude Deutch/Paris Match (David Rockefeller), Anne Eberhart Keogh/BloodHorse (Ned Bonnie), Ashley Minkus/iStockphoto (corn); Page 23: Jennifer Langley/Unsplash; Page 24: johnnya123/iStockphoto





## President's Council

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*Charlottesville, Virginia*

**Anne S. Close**  
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**Richard Walden**  
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*Millville, Pennsylvania*



**American Farmland Trust**  
SAVING THE LAND THAT SUSTAINS US

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*A wheat field in Washington*

**JOIN US IN THE FIGHT TO SAVE OUR NATION'S FARMLAND. VISIT [WWW.FARMLAND.ORG](http://WWW.FARMLAND.ORG)**