



American Farmland Trust

2026 Midwest Policy Platform

THE MIDWEST APPROACH

AMERICAN FARMLAND TRUST (AFT) is the nation's leading conservation organization dedicated to protecting farmland, promoting sound farming practices, and keeping farmers on the land. Home to more than 130 million acres of prime farmland, the Midwest is the agricultural heart of the country. From the hills of southern Missouri to the forests of northern Minnesota and across to the plains of eastern Ohio, AFT's Midwest team works with farmers, landowners, and conservation leaders to ensure producers have the tools and resources they need to steward their land for the long term.

Our policy work is coalition-driven and farmer-informed, translating local needs into practical state-level solutions. The recommendations below are not an exhaustive list of AFT's priorities, but rather highlight how our mission is translated into our advocacy efforts.

INCREASE ADOPTION OF CONSERVATION PRACTICES

Farmers face rising input costs, extreme weather events, and mounting soil erosion. Conservation practices that build resilient soils and protect waterways are still used on only a small share of farms. In 2021, just 7.2% of Midwest farms planted cover crops. Reduced state funding for conservation programs and NRCS staff cuts have further limited technical and financial support. To protect our land, inch by inch, we must dramatically scale up support for proven conservation practices.

- Expand state cover crop insurance rebate programs, such as Illinois' Fall Covers for Spring Savings (FCSS), to meet demand.
- Increase operating funding for Soil & Water Conservation Districts to ensure robust technical assistance.
- Require each state to publish clear educational resources on conservation practices, accessible information on financial and technical assistance opportunities, and comprehensive data on the adoption of conservation practices.



**CONSERVATION PRACTICES
YIELD A RETURN ON
INVESTMENT OF:
\$3 for every \$1 spent**

PROTECT OUR MOST PRODUCTIVE & RESILIENT FARMLAND

Farmland underpins the Midwest's food security, heritage, and economy, supporting 545,000 farms, 3.78 million jobs, and \$755.8 billion in output. Yet the region is on track to lose more than 3.45 million acres by 2040, 32 times the size of Chicago. Our agricultural future depends on policies that protect the land that sustains us.



**2,000 acres
OF FARMLAND ARE
CONVERTED EVERY DAY**

- Establish and fund Purchase of Agricultural Conservation Easement (PACE) programs in every state, with dedicated revenue streams that leverage federal, local, and private dollars.
- Offer tax relief incentives for permanent land protection.
- Strengthen agricultural land-use planning to balance development with farmland preservation.
- Build local capacity for farmland protection through outreach, training, and technical assistance.

IMPROVE LAND ACCESS & TRANSFER

With more than one-third of Midwest farms managed by farmers over 65—and land prices up 33% in just four years—the next generation of producers faces significant barriers to entry. At the same time, the financial, legal, and emotional complexities of succession planning are creating significant challenges for retiring producers. To keep agricultural land in production, we must urgently invest in farmland transfer strategies that support both landowners and land-seekers.

- Expand access for young, beginning, and BIPOC farmers through down payment and loan programs, public land leasing, and beginning farmer tax credits.
- Strengthen succession infrastructure by funding legal, financial, and mediation services, offering estate tax relief for land kept in agriculture.
- Establish and expand state Farm Link programs that connect land-seekers to land-sellers.



More Than 40%
OF FARMLAND IS
EXPECTED TO CHANGE
HANDS BY 2035

PROMOTE SMART SOLAR DEVELOPMENT

Without policy intervention, 83% of new solar development is expected to occur on farmland, converting nearly 350,000 acres in the Midwest by 2040. Renewable energy can benefit farmers and rural communities, but development must be designed to protect productive soils and maximize shared benefits.



83% of new solar
IS EXPECTED TO
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FARMLAND

- Define “agrivoltaics” in state statute and invest in research, demonstration, and financial incentives for dual-use projects.
- Establish minimum soil and water protection standards for solar development on farmland that maintains the land’s long-term agricultural potential through construction, operation, and decommissioning.
- Develop and implement mitigation fees that offset non-agrivoltaic solar development and support farmland protection programs.

BUILD A DIVERSIFIED & RESILIENT AGRICULTURAL ECONOMY

As input costs continue to rise—seed, chemical, and fertilizer costs are 25% higher than they were in 2021—many farmers and ranchers are struggling to make ends meet. Economic pressures paired with tax burdens, market consolidation, and a lack of local infrastructure, leave many farmers without a path forward. Diversified farms offer a stable, locally anchored food supply, and meaningful economic opportunities in the communities where they operate. Yet diversification alone isn’t enough, regional infrastructure and tailored technical assistance must keep pace.

- Establish statewide procurement guidelines and expand farm-to-institution programs (schools, hospitals, etc.).
- Support farm diversification with grants, technical assistance, and equipment-sharing programs.
- Revise crop insurance and conservation program rules to better serve diversified operations.



THE AVERAGE ANNUAL NET INCOME
FOR 73% OF MIDWEST FARMS IS ONLY
\$4,747

For more information about our policy work, please contact the Midwest Regional Director, Kris Reynolds (kreynolds@farmland.org) and Midwest Policy Manager, Claire Shipp (cshipp@farmland.org).