



## **American Farmland Trust Releases Report Detailing Threats to Farmland and Food Production in New England – Top Findings:**

**REPORT GOAL:** To inform, inspire, and galvanize action for a more diverse, secure, justice-based, and resilient agricultural system in New England.

On Feb. 19, 2020, American Farmland Trust will release “Farms Under Threat, A New England Perspective” at its Food, Farms, Fisheries, and Forests: Diet, Climate, Conservation, and a Healthy Future for New England conference, sponsored by Harvard Pilgrim Health Care Foundation.

American Farmland Trust is the national leader advancing farmland protection, regenerative farming practices, and efforts to help keep farmers on the land. We periodically undertake major research projects to catalog and analyze the mounting threats to America’s agricultural land and the farmers and ranchers who steward it.

In the last 15 years over 11 million acres of this nation’s irreplaceable agricultural land has been paved-over, fragmented, or otherwise converted to new uses that jeopardize farming. Rising development pressures and land values limit the ability of farmers, especially beginning farmers, to access land. Left unabated, these trends threaten food security, local economies, ecological integrity, climate resiliency, and the very fabric of our communities.

New England -- Connecticut, Maine, Massachusetts, New Hampshire, Rhode Island, and Vermont -- has a strong agrarian tradition but is experiencing severe development pressure. The New England Food Vision (2014) presented a bold proposal to produce 50% of New England’s food by 2060 (up from 12%), yet we continue to lose farmland at a rapid pace, while farmers face mounting economic pressures and the growing impacts of the changing climate – potentially challenging our ability to meet The Vision’s goals. Despite the reduction in housing starts brought about by the Great Recession in 2008, our new data shows a renewed uptick in development that has resulted in 19 acres per day, or 7,000 acres per year of New England agricultural land being lost or threatened between 2001 and 2016.

While much good work has been done across New England, we can and must do more. “Farms Under Threat: A New England Perspective” presents new information on the state of New England’s farmland and a framework for action that provides potential pathways forward.

## The following summarizes key findings from the report:

### Land

- In New England between 2001 and 2016 over 105,000 acres of open farmland were developed, fragmented, or converted to other uses. That's more than 19 acres every day. Two-thirds of that total (68,000 acres) fall into a new category of threat that has never been mapped and documented before ("low-density residential development," or LDR).
- 85% of New England's farmland is unprotected. While current farmland protection programs are essential and should be expanded, they alone will never do all we need; at the current pace, it would take 350 years and \$10 billion to protect New England's remaining farmland.
- 350,000 acres of potential high-quality farmland in New England was previously farmed, is still a part of a farming operation, but now lies under trees, illustrating the potential to increase New England's best farmland by at least 20%.
- 177,000 of New England's cropland and pastureland lies in flood plains, directly in the path of climate change (through increased flooding).
- The majority of New England's farmland supports livestock operations, with dairy being the largest single component. Yet between 2002 and 2017 we lost over 40% (nearly 1,100) of New England dairy farms, putting much of this land at high risk.
- While climate change poses imminent threats to New England agriculture, if our farms implemented just three widely-accepted conservation practices (planting cover crops, practicing no-till or strip till, and replacing inorganic fertilizer with dairy manure or compost), we could annually mitigate 1.65 million metric tons of carbon dioxide from the atmosphere, the equivalent of taking 360,000 cars off the road each year.

### Viability

- Farmers are struggling now more than ever given soaring land prices and highly volatile commodity markets.
- Two-thirds of New England's farms are small and likely part time; yet they make a major contribution both economically and environmentally, stewarding one-third of our total farmland.
- The remaining one-third of New England's farms steward two-thirds of the farmland. These farms are larger (over \$10,000 in sales) and are heavily dependent on market-based factors.
- Farms with revenues of \$10,000 - \$100,000 have more than twice the average labor cost (as a percent of total expenses) as farms with revenues of over \$1 million.
- Farms engaged in agritourism earn over 50% of their income from those activities—yet our regulatory structure is not adequately addressing agritourism special needs.

### People

- According to the 2017 Census of Agriculture, 61% of New England's farmers are over the age of 55, with nearly one-third of all producers over age 65. At least 40% of agricultural acreage has no estate or succession planning associated with it.
- Most non-white farmers are beginning farmers versus less than a third of white farmers are new and beginning.
- While we've seen a 50% increase in the number of non-white farmers, they control only 2% of the farmland; their growth in numbers has only kept pace with the growth of farmers overall.

#### About American Farmland Trust:

Founded in 1980, AFT launched the conservation agriculture movement. We have helped permanently protect over 6.5 million acres of farmland and ranchland, and reduced development pressure on over 300 million additional acres. We've championed environmentally sound farming practices that are now common on farms of all sizes across the nation. We've had a positive impact on over 500,000 farmers and ranchers. And on every American who eats. We raise public awareness through our No Farms No Food® message.