



American Farmland Trust, New England

2023 Policy Priorities

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. Since its founding in 1980 by farmers and citizens concerned about the rapid loss of farmland to development, AFT has helped protect over 6.5 million acres of farmland and led the way for the adoption of conservation practices on millions more.

Established in 1985, AFT's New England office works to save the land that sustains us all. As a national agricultural land trust, we have three priorities: protecting agricultural land, promoting environmentally sound farming practices, and keeping farmers on the land for generations to come.

From Augusta to Hartford, American Farmland Trust is committed to conducting and sharing the latest research, bringing together people and organizations, and participating in coalitions so that we can advance policies in the New England state legislature's that will create a better agricultural future for all New Englanders. Our policy work is our effort to create systemic change and ensure that producers across the region have the resources they need to prosper.

The following are AFT's Legislative priorities for the 2022 Legislative sessions across the New England region.



PROTECT NEW ENGLAND'S AGRICULTURAL LANDS FROM DEVELOPMENT

New England's agricultural lands provide multiple environmental, economic, and public health benefits that are often overlooked. Along with promoting a viable local food system, the region's working lands supply many nature-based benefits such as recharging the state's groundwater, controlling floods, and erosion, creating habitats for fish and wildlife, pollinating plants, sequestering carbon, removing pollutants from the air, creating space for outdoor recreation, and beautiful scenery.

In 2020, AFT New England released "[Farms Under Threat: A New England Perspective](#)" which emphasizes that New England's land base is roughly 67% forest, 9% farms, 5% urban and highly developed lands, and 4% low-density residential development, with the remaining 15% comprising water, transportation, infrastructure, and federal lands. New England agriculture is incredibly diverse across the landscape due to its geography, glaciated past, soils, and land-use history. The region lends itself to diversified operations on small acreages. Despite the longevity of these efforts, and the abundance of practitioners and policymakers championing good work, New England continues to face many complex and compounding threats to our land base, from development pressure to the conversion of farmland to climate change impacts.

Between 2001-2016, 37,300 acres or 35% of the region's farmland was converted to Urban and Highly-Developed Use. An additional 68,200 acres or 65% of the region's farmland was threatened by Low-Density residential development.

TO CURTAIL THE THREAT OF FARMLAND DEVELOPMENT IN THE REGION, AMERICAN FARMLAND TRUST SUPPORTS THE FOLLOWING POLICY PRIORITIES DURING THE 2022 LEGISLATIVE SESSION.

- ◇ Advance and strengthen farmland protection efforts in the region, including making farmland protection programs more flexible and accessible to small farms
- ◇ Ensure full funding levels for New England Purchase of Agricultural Easement (PACE) programs
- ◇ Increase the speed that state PACE programs (both legislative and administrative) expedite the rate of farmland protection
- ◇ Support the passage of the Uniform Partition for Heirs Property Act (UPHPA) in every New England state that has not implemented it to ensure due process in the courts for tenants in common who hold farmland and forestland



FOSTERING LAND ACCESS OPPORTUNITIES TO ENSURE THE FUTURE OF AGRICULTURE IN NEW ENGLAND

Over the next 20 years, 371 million acres of farmland (41% of all farmland) in the United States is expected to change hands. Farmers age 65 and older manage nearly one-third of New England's farms, and many of these farmers are looking to transition their farm operations to new ownership.

According to a 2016 report written by American Farmland Trust and Land for Good: [Gaining Insight, Gaining Access](#), over 92% of New England's 10,369 senior farmers do not have a young (under 45) farm operator working with them. In addition, other farmland owned by non-farming landowners is being transferred to the next generation, often without a clear direction towards long-term agricultural use.

While uncertainty is growing about the imminent transition of ownership for thousands of New England's farmland acres in the near future, we know that competition for available farmland is already high. Aspiring, beginning, and established farmers compete with each other as well as against developers seeking land for residential, commercial, industrial, and, increasingly, renewable energy development. According to a 2018 report written by the National Young Farmers Coalition, [Building a Future with Farmers](#), the biggest issue facing young and beginning farmers in our country is access to land tenure. The [2021 National Agricultural Statistics Service Agricultural Land Values](#) survey found that the average price of an acre of farmland in New England was \$9,025 with higher land values in Southern New England (Connecticut, Massachusetts, and Rhode Island) compared to Northern New England (Maine, New Hampshire, and Vermont). In general, the region has the highest cost of farmland per acre in the nation.

AFT NEW ENGLAND SUPPORTS THE FOLLOWING:

- ◇ Further policies and provisions that address farmland affordability and accessibility for the next generation of New England producers
- ◇ Promote, explore, and support the implementation of the Option to Purchase at Agricultural Value (OPAV) tool
- ◇ Support farmland access opportunities for young and beginning farmers (e.g. beginning farmer tax credits, down payment assistance programs, expanded access to publicly owned land suitable for agriculture, and state funding for Farm Link programs)
- ◇ Support increased funding to provide business technical assistance that will aid farmers in accessing farmland and seeking succession planning support
- ◇ Support land access opportunities for urban producers



SUPPORT INCREASING GRANT OPPORTUNITIES, GENERAL FUNDING, AND STATE ASSISTANCE FOR BLACK FARMERS, INDIGENOUS FARMERS, AND OTHER FARMERS OF COLOR (BIPOC)

The following excerpt was taken from AFT's [Farms Under Threat: a New England Perspective](#).

According to the [2017 USDA Census of Agriculture](#), New England's farmers are overwhelmingly white (94%). Of the 6% "non-white" farmers, we can see a few trends and compare those trends to the white farmer population.

The demographic makeup of New England's farmers is a product of our complex history of colonization, immigration, policies, and practices related to access to land, wealth, and resources over time. The legacy of colonization has resulted in the dispossession of land by native people, who, today, control a small fraction of the land they once did.

Rising land values, a rapidly aging farmer population, and barriers to access for the next generation of farmers create multi-layered challenges that require creative solutions and large-scale investments in our farms and farmers to promote a more diverse and just food system.

AFT NEW ENGLAND SUPPORTS THE FOLLOWING POLICY PROVISIONS THAT REPRESENT SOME OF THE FIRST STEPS STATE LEGISLATURES CAN TAKE TO INCREASE FARMLAND ACCESS OPPORTUNITIES FOR THE REGION'S BIPOC PRODUCERS:

- ◇ Support policies and provisions that are crafted by BIPOC led organizations and farmers who are at the forefront of these solutions, articulating what support is needed around these complex issues
- ◇ Support direct priority assistance and policy changes for BIPOC farmers to increase their long-term, secure land tenure, such as conservation easements, cultural respect easements, financing, and legal support, collaborative partnerships, racial justice training for historically white-led support organizations, and granting of land
- ◇ Support policies that will strengthen urban agricultural efforts for BIPOC producers in the region



PROMOTE AND SUPPORT CLIMATE-SMART AGRICULTURE POLICIES

Climate destabilization threatens lives, livelihoods, food security, and our economy across the region. Farmers, especially beginning farmers and farmers of color, have teetered on the edge of financial viability, and disruptions to the food system during the pandemic hit all farmers, but hit young, beginning farmers and BIPOC farmers hard. Recent changes in weather patterns and extreme weather events have caused uncertainty, increased indemnification costs, and in some cases, have destroyed a producer's season or even their entire operation.

There is hope for farmers who are supported in adopting regenerative and climate-smart practices which build resilience to weather fluctuations and help to mitigate climate change by reducing emissions. In her testimony to the U.S. House Select Committee on the Climate Crisis in the fall of 2019, Dr. Jennifer Moore, a USDA-ARS scientist with expertise in soil health and the prior climate director for American Farmland Trust, stated, "if U.S. farmers adopted cover crops on 25% of our cropland, and conservation tillage on 100% of tillable acres, we could potentially reduce one-quarter of the total U.S. agricultural emissions." In addition to this eye-opening opportunity, the soil is an inseparable part of our local food system, ecology, watershed, and economy. Climate change is no longer a distant problem for farmers. There is no more time to waste.

AFT NEW ENGLAND SUPPORTS THE FOLLOWING:

- ◇ Support funding for farmers to adopt climate-smart agricultural practices, implement stormwater infrastructure, and improve water management
- ◇ Support increased funding for government entities and non-profits to provide technical assistance to farmers that will aid them in developing conservation plans and strategies and restructure farm businesses and crop production to meet a changing climate
- ◇ Support state funding to pay for farmers to increase climate-smart agricultural practices (e.g. funding for equipment and seeds)
- ◇ Support research on and create state programs that pay farmers for ecosystem services (e.g. public carbon markets)



SUPPORT SMART SOLAR SITING AND DUAL-USE SOLAR GUIDELINES THROUGHOUT THE REGION

New England has committed to achieving at least an 80% reduction in greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions by 2050. As a result of state renewable portfolio standards and related policies, demand for renewable energy in New England is growing rapidly. According to a [2019 study prepared for the Coalition For Community Solar Access](#), to achieve the region's 2050 clean energy and GHG reduction targets, New England will need to accelerate clean energy resource additions to between 4,000 and 7,000 MW per year on average between 2021 and 2050. The majority of the additional capacity is projected to be new utility-scale solar, which is often located on farmland, followed by offshore wind.

AFT approaches renewable energy siting issues with nuance. For instance, despite being an ardent advocate for farmland protection, AFT has never been opposed to real estate development per se, recognizing its need and value. Rather, AFT has worked to channel growth away from our most critical farmland resources. AFT's stance on wind and solar energy installations is not to prevent siting on farmland, but rather, to push any such installation to be done in the best possible manner, one that maximizes climate change mitigation, while minimizing the impact on productive farmland. We call this "[smart siting](#)."

LEARN MORE

For more information on AFT's New England Policy work, visit farmland.org/new-england-policy

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AFT NEW ENGLAND SUPPORTS THE FOLLOWING:

- ◇ Encourage each state to develop and publish a state-specific definition of the land that is well-suited to agricultural production and warrants special treatment in solar siting decisions
- ◇ Support state-level initiatives to convene multi-stakeholder, consensus-building processes with representation from diverse members of the agriculture community, including BIPOC producers, to ensure smart solar siting, inclusive and equitable clean energy programs, and best practices to minimize and mitigate impacts to the most productive, versatile, resilient (PVR) farmland
- ◇ Support state and regional funding for research, technical assistance, and demonstration projects to test and evaluate dual-use solar/Agri-voltaic systems in support of clean energy targets
- ◇ Support market mechanisms that incentivize renewable energy development on degraded, already developed, or disturbed sites, including brownfields and redevelopment areas. In addition, support pilot programs for dual-use solar, including clear standards for performance and preference for siting on more marginal farmland