Increase Farmland Access Opportunities for Farmers

American Farmland Trust's "Farms Under Threat 2040: Choosing an Abundant Future" report projections show that from 2014 until 2034, 371 million acres of farmland in the United States—or 41% of all farmland—will 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

Over 40%
OF FARMLAND IS EXPECTED TO CHANGE HANDS BY 2035.

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 toward long-term agricultural use.

While uncertainty grows around the imminent transition of ownership for thousands of acres of New England's farmland, competition for available farmland remains high. Aspiring, beginning, and established farmers compete with one another and with developers seeking land for residential, commercial, industrial, and, increasingly, renewable energy development. The 2023 National Agricultural Statistics Service

IN 2023, THE AVERAGE PRICE OF AN ACRE OF FARMLAND IN NEW ENGLAND WAS
$10,113
WITH HIGHER VALUES IN SOUTHERN NEW ENGLAND THAN IN NORTHERN NEW ENGLAND

Agricultural Land Values survey found that the average price of an acre of farmland in New England was $10,113, 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. This makes land access for farming even more difficult for historically marginalized producers, including Black, Indigenous, and People of Color (BIPOC) farmers, beginning and/or young farmers, and veteran farmers.

Hungry Reaper Farm Co-Owners, Will O'Meara and Jill Verzino with Farm Manager Enya Cunningham in Morris, Connecticut

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[*] Hunter, M., A. Sorensen, T. Nogeire-McRae, S. Beck, S. Shutts, R. Murphy. 2022. Farms Under Threat 2040: Choosing an Abundant Future. Washington, D.C.: American Farmland Trust.

[**] American Farmland Trust, Land for Good. (2016) Gaining Insights, Gaining Access Project. Accessed (4/11/2024): https://landforgood.org/about/projects/insights

Priorities

▶ Increase funding and farmland access opportunities for young, beginning, and BIPOC farmers.

- Explore and support opportunities such as tax credits/exemptions, down payment assistance, expanded access to publicly owned land suitable for agriculture, state funding for Farm Link programs, and BIPOC-led land access initiatives such as the Vermont Land Access and Opportunity Board.

- Support state-funded farmland acquisition programs.

- Create state tax incentive programs that increase farmland access opportunities, including for urban producers.

- Fund research to address urban farmland access issues.

- Fund racial justice/equity training programming opportunities for white-led organizations.

▶ Increase business technical assistance that aids farmland access and succession planning support.

- Invest in the capacity of land trusts and state agency staff to offer and provide technical assistance that will aid in disseminating funding for land access programming.

- Provide direct one-on-one support to farmers seeking farmland.

▶ Promote data collection that helps gain a more accurate understanding of the number of historically marginalized farmers and their specific needs in the region.

Just Roots Farm, Greenfield, Massachusetts

Wingate Farm in Hinsdale, New Hampshire

▶ Incentivize land access solutions such as state land banks, Option to Purchase at Agricultural Value, state-run Buy/Protect/Sell programs, community land trusts, etc.

Relevant New England Programming

▶ Access, Succession, and Transfer Support Grants

▶ Berkshire County Farm Protection Program

American Farmland Trust
farmland.org/new-england-policy

IF YOU HAVE QUESTIONS ABOUT THE AFT POLICY PLATFORM, please contact AFT's Senior New England Policy Manager Chelsea Gazillo, at cgazillo@farmland.org or the New England Policy Associate, Eliza Paterson, at epaterson@farmland.org.