

Increasing the Pace of Farmland Protection

*Funding Opportunities & Strategies to Save
Massachusetts Farms*

MLTC Land Trust Conference
March 23, 2024

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Agenda

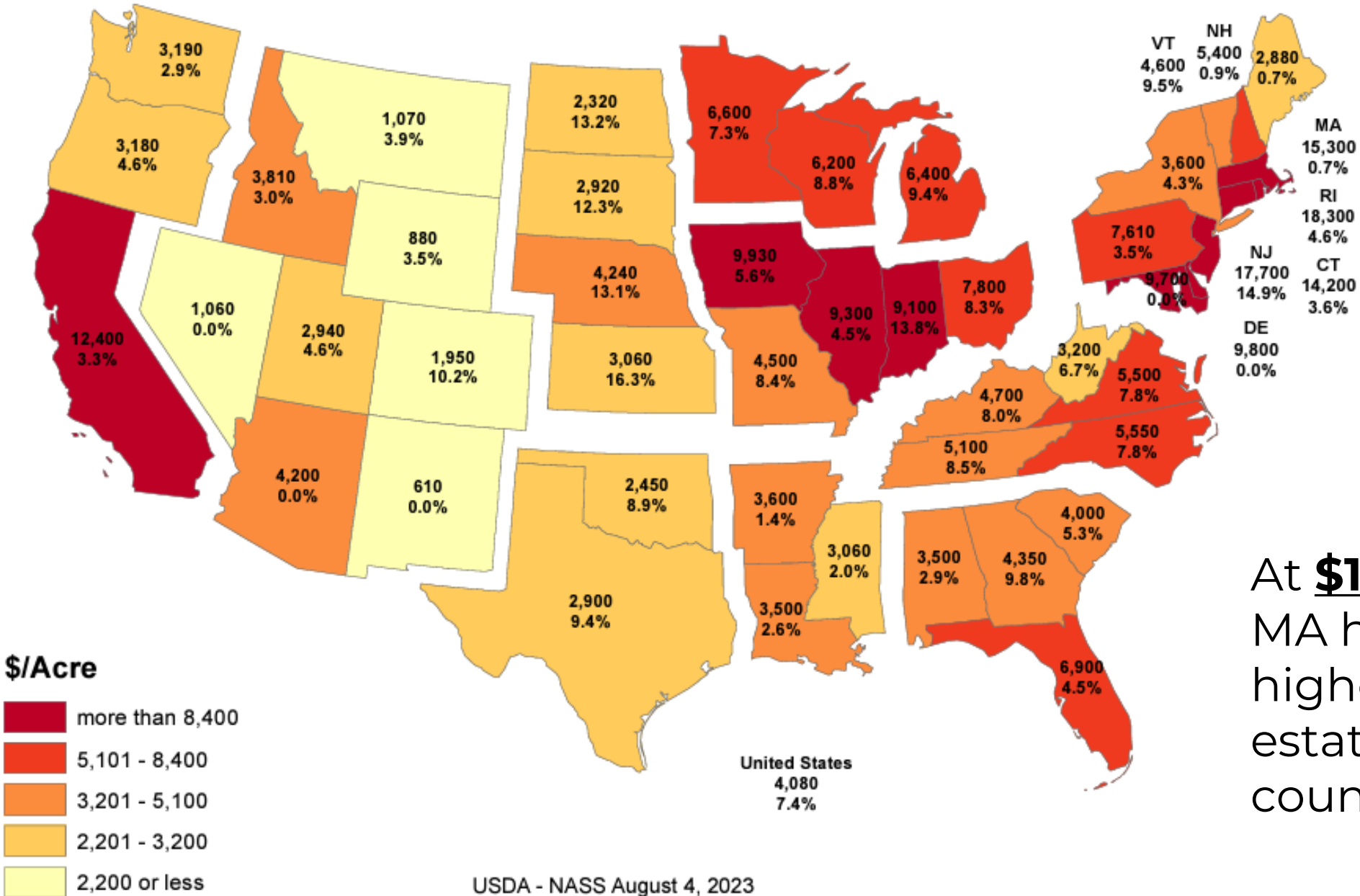
- 1) MA Farmland Threats & Protection Goals**
- 2) What's Working?**
- 3) Farmland Protection Tools**
- 4) Farmland Protection Funding Sources**
- 5) Case Studies**
- 6) Next Steps & Calls to Action**
- 7) Q&A**

An aerial photograph of a rural landscape. In the foreground, a residential development with several houses and a winding road is visible. The middle ground shows a mix of green fields and wooded areas. In the background, there are large, open fields, some of which appear to be agricultural, and more distant hills. The overall scene illustrates the interface between residential growth and farmland.

MA Farmland Threats & Protection Goals

2023 Farm Real Estate Value by State

Dollars per Acre and Percent Change from 2022



At **\$15,300** per acre, MA has the 3rd highest farm real estate values in the country (NASS, 2023).

Rising housing costs is a major barrier for farmers and farm workers

MA has the 3rd highest home values in the nation.



“Massachusetts’s median sales price as of Sept 2022 was **\$568,800**. If we look back at Sept 2019’s median price of \$421,000, we can see the increase in median price has ***gone up 35.1% in three years, which is an 11.7% annual growth rate.***”

The rate of price increases for the last three years is a little ***over twice the normal historical price growth rate nationally.***”

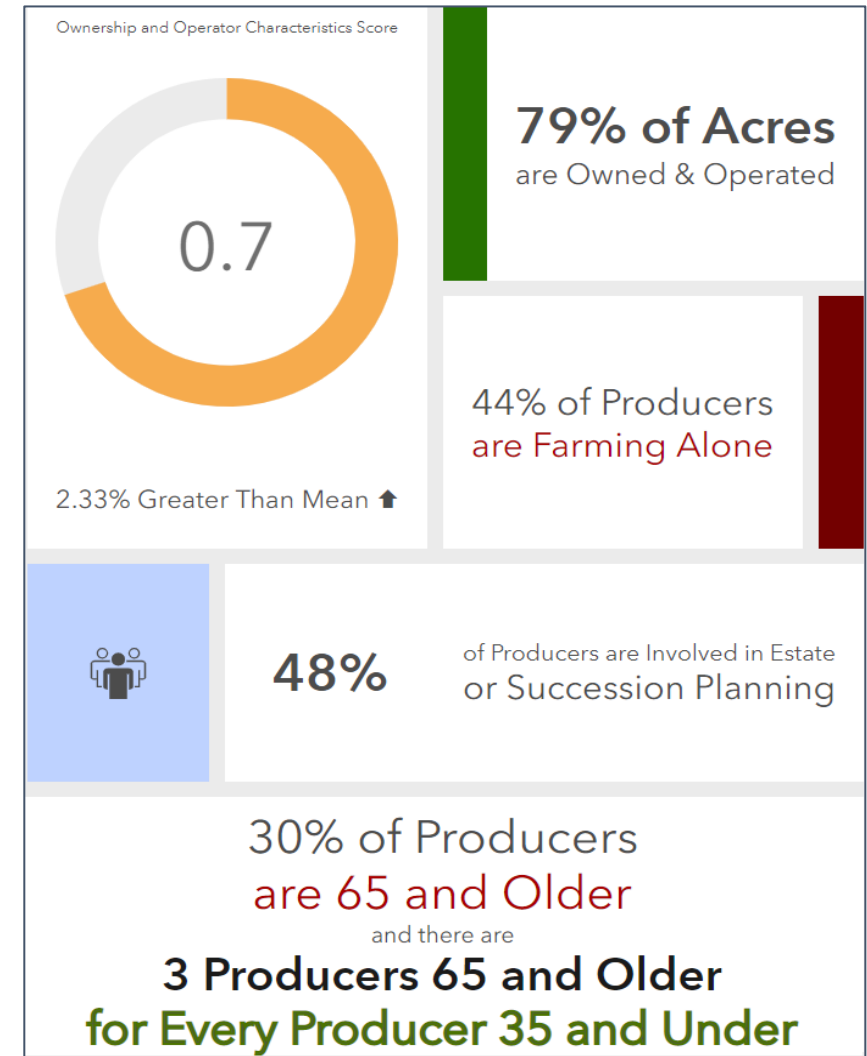
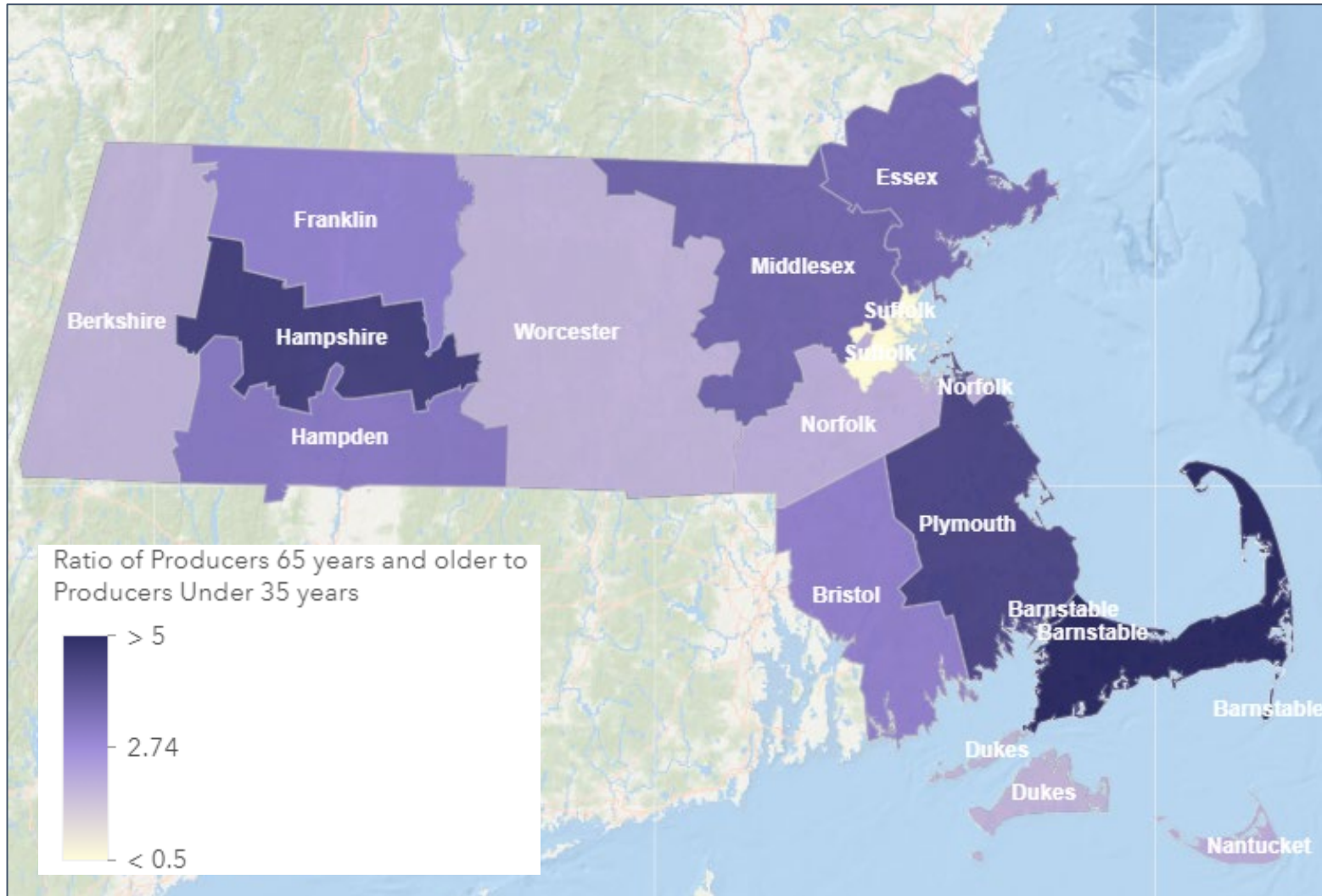
[Housing Market & Prices Massachusetts 2023 - Home Value Estimator \(realadvisor.com\)](#)

Farms are easier to develop

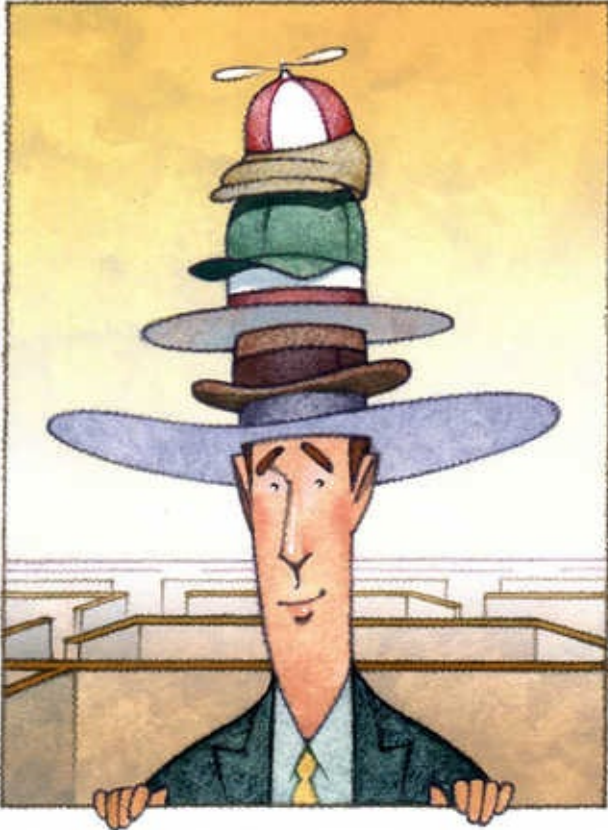


- Flat
- Cleared
- Good soils

An Aging Farmer Population & Lack of Succession Planning



Farmer income (2022 Census)



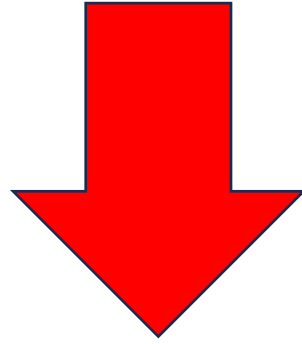
- Only 36% had net income
- 774 Farms made more than \$50k (11%)
- = Many work other jobs as primary occupation.

Development Pressure!



- Age
- Farmland prices
- Housing prices
- Attractive to developers
- Income challenges
- Lack of successor
- Climate Change

2022 Census of Agriculture

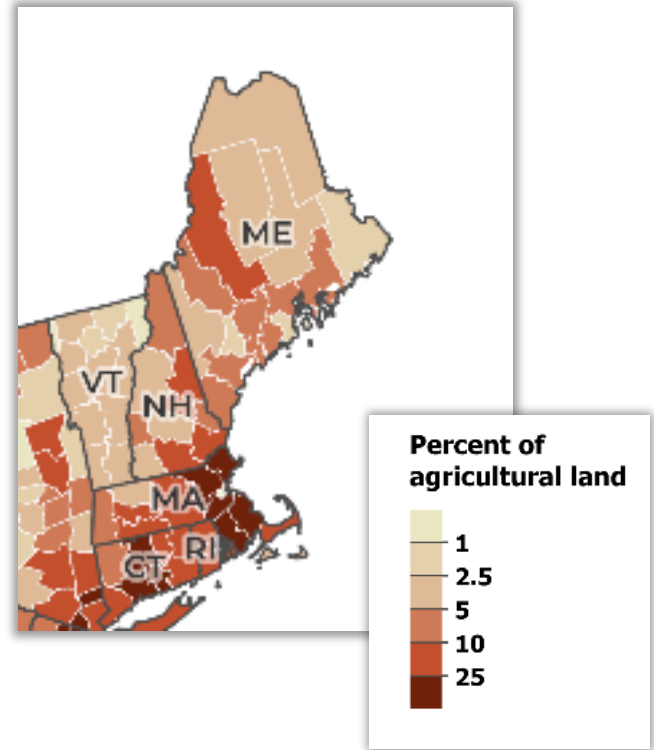


From 2017 to 2022, Massachusetts lost **27,202** acres in farms (or **5.5%**)





% of Agricultural Land Projected to be Converted by 2040



Percentage of Agricultural Land Projected to be Converted by 2040

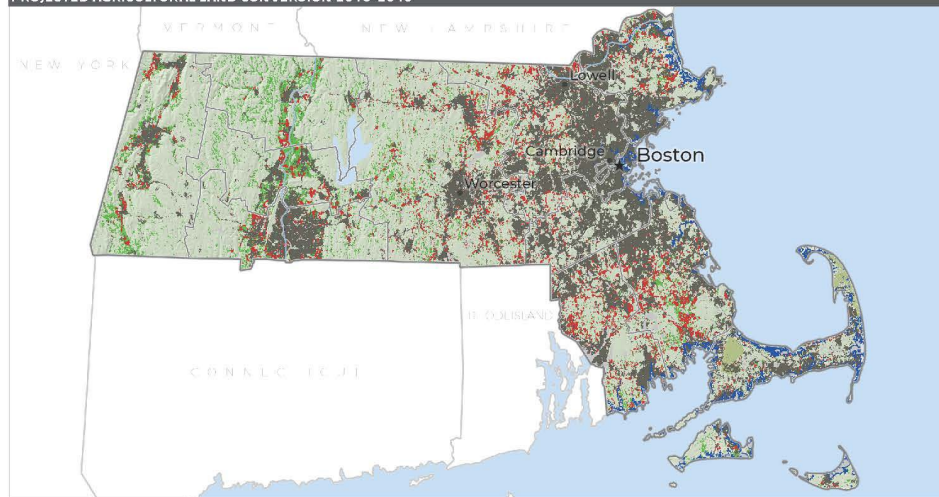
	Business as Usual	Runaway Sprawl	Better Built Cities
New Jersey	16.0	20.1	10.0
Connecticut	15.8	20.9	10.3
Massachusetts	14.8	17.9	10.0
Rhode Island	14.5	17.6	9.8
Delaware	12.5	16.6	8.1
North Carolina	11.6	16.2	6.4
New Hampshire	8.3	10.0	5.2
Tennessee	8.2	11.5	4.6
Maryland	7.8	10.8	4.3
South Carolina	7.5	10.1	4.4
Florida	7.4	9.1	4.9
Virginia	7.3	10.2	4.0
Contiguous U.S.	2.0	2.6	1.1



2040 Future Scenarios Massachusetts

Farms Under Threat 2040: Choosing an Abundant Future mapped three scenarios of development between 2016 and 2040. If recent trends continue, **73,800 acres** of Massachusetts's farmland will be paved over, fragmented, or converted to uses that jeopardize agriculture. **That's 15%**. Bay Staters can slash conversion, save farmland, and safeguard the future of agriculture and the environment by choosing compact development.

PROJECTED AGRICULTURAL LAND CONVERSION 2016-2040



Projected agricultural land conversion from 2016-2040 in the *Business as Usual* scenario.



*Farmland is composed of cropland, pastureland, and woodland associated with farms.

On recent trends, from 2016 to 2040:

Bay Staters will pave over, fragment, or compromise

73,800 acres of farmland.

60% of the conversion will occur on Massachusetts's best land.¹

That's the equivalent of losing

1,200 farms,
\$91 million

in farm output, and

4,900 jobs based on county averages.²

Hardest-hit counties:

- ▶ **Worcester**
- ▶ **Plymouth**
- ▶ **Bristol**

¹ Freedgood et al. 2020
² Census of Agriculture 2017

- If recent trends continue, MA will lose **73,800* acres of farmland** by 2040
- 60% will occur on the state's best ag land
- Equivalent of 1,200 farms, \$91 million in farm output, and 4,900 jobs
- Hardest hit counties will be Worcester, Plymouth, Bristol

*the equivalent of nearly all the farmland that MDAR has protected in the last 43 years.

Massachusetts Clean Energy and Climate Plan for 2025 and 2030

June 30, 2022



at least 30% by 2030



MASSACHUSETTS FARMLAND ACTION PLAN 2023-2050

UMassAmherst
Donahue Institute



Increase the pace

JANUARY 2023



Expanding Nature's Benefits Across the Commonwealth

A Vision and Strategy



33% by 2030

30% x 2030 = 7 times historic rates
(Acres)

141 projects a year (avg acres)

Most ever by APR = 52

Historic Avg by APR = 22

5 year avg = 8.5/year

*And # of acres & # of projects are trending down



What's Working!

- **You!** Land trusts, towns, dedicated conservation community
- **New plans:** data, guiding documents (Farmland Action Plan, Resilient Lands Initiative, Healthy Soils Plan)
- **Increased eligibility for funding:** Farmland of Local Importance adoption--83 towns so far
- **Range of farmland protection tools:** APR, Private APR, ACEP-ALE, WRE, RCPP, CR, etc.
- **Some increased staff capacity!**
- **Increased dialogue around farmland protection tools:** e.g., MLTC Ag Conservation Workshop Group, ACEP-ALE Program Sub-Committee of the NRCS State Tech Committee

Quick Overview of Farmland Protection Tools in MA

And who can help with them!

- **APR**
- **Private APR**
- **Farm Viability Enhancement Program → to APR**
- **ACEP-ALE**
- **WRE**
- **RCPP**

*(EEA CRs not being discussed)

APR (held by MDAR)

*Securing a Farming
Future since 1980*



**Agricultural
Preservation
Restriction
Program**

Eligibility

- 5+ contiguous acres
- Devoted to Ag or Hort for 2 previous years

Timing

- Rolling Applications
- Quarterly Ranking
- 1.5-2 Years +/- to close
- Signed by MDAR, not EEA

Funds

- 5-10% Local Match
- 50% from non-APR
- MDAR = Up to \$17k/\$34k an acre
- Title, appraisal, 50% survey+, BDR, Closing

Funds

- Average **2-3M** a year
- **+ \$10-\$20 Million MORE! to commit by Dec 31st**
 - P&S
 - RFR coming April/May

Required Terms

- Requires commercial ag/hort
- No Dwellings (Labor Housing OK)
- Limited Impervious Surfaces
- OPAV

"Private" APR (Not held by MDAR)



Eligibility

- 1+ acre
- In active Ag or Hort use
- Within the vicinity of other viable agricultural parcels

Timing

- Rolling Applications
- Rolling reviews
- 90 days = doable, but quick!
- Signed by MDAR & Municipality, not EEA.

Funds

- None yet....
- RFR coming soon!
April/May
- Expected to have annual funds
- May come with additional strings attached - TBD

Required Terms

- Requires commercial ag/hort

Farm Viability Enhancement



Agricultural
Preservation
Restriction
Program

Eligibility

- 5+ contiguous acres
- Devoted to Ag or Hort for 3 previous years
- Generated at least \$40,000 in gross farm income

Timing

- Early Spring each year
- **Applications due by 4pm on Thursday, April 18, 2024**
- About 1 year to complete the business planning & TA

Funds

- Grant funds of \$100,000 - \$200,000 for improvement projects
- One on one business planning & TA
- Short-term restrictive covenant

Required Terms

- 10-15 year restriction
- Can do two terms (20-30 years total)
- Prohibits any uses except agricultural uses.

APR

- Graduates are great candidates for APR
- MDAR has a program that tracks when covenants expire and refers them to APR

Agricultural Conservation Easement Program- Agricultural Land Easement (ACEP ALE)

- **Eligibility:** Multiple pathways, usually 50% Prime, State, Local important soils.
- **Timing:** Application deadline each fiscal year, Rolling applications
- **Funds:** NRCS provides matching funds **(50%)** to eligible entities for the purchase of agricultural land easements.



Wetland Reserve Easements (WRE)

- **Eligibility:** Private/Tribal owned land with 50%+ wetlands that have been:
 1. Farmed or converted prior to 12/23/1985, or
 2. Former or degraded wetlands that occur on lands that have been or are used for food and fiber, including forestry, or;
 3. More! Including flooded farmland, riparian areas, and adjacent lands.
- **Timing:** Application deadline each fiscal year, Rolling applications
- **Funds:** Set \$/acre: **\$7,200-\$13,500/acre**
- **NRCS Pays 100% AND** Survey **AND** Restoration Costs
- NRCS holds the restriction



Regional Conservation Partnership Program (RCPP)

Partner-led solutions

- Separate pot of \$ from ACEP
- **Eligibility:** Flexible ALE & WRE "like" projects
- **Timing:** 5-year projects, annual opportunity to apply
- **Funds: up to \$25 million**
- **Restriction Terms:** Entity-held easements and US-held easements.



Farm Protection Funding: *Opportunities & Timelines*

2024 Outlook and Beyond



2024-Federal Funding Sources (NRCS)

Agricultural Land Easement Program (ACEP-ALE)

- Traditional ALE Funds ~**\$1.92M**

→ 2024 Applications total \$6,593,000 (more demand than funding, **BUT** demonstrating demand can help us get more funding)

Wetlands Reserve Easement (WRE)

- Traditional WRE Funds ~**\$756,607**



We can get more money if you apply!

IRA funds toward ALE or WRE projects - (\$0-\$5.8M) IRA funds will be increased significantly over the coming years

- Initial request submitted \$3,095,000

→ Total possible for 2024 → \$2.7M - \$8.5M+

(Needs to be obligated by September 30, 2024 and spent by 2027 (3 years), plus an optional 1-year extension (2028).)

2024 Federal Funding Sources

National allocation

There's a lot
of money!
APPLY!
Prepare in
advance!

Regional Conservation Partnership Project (RCPP)

- \$1.5 billion RCPP funds available, including \$1.2 billion from IRA (**\$2.7 billion**)
- Looking to prioritize projects that focus on climate mitigation benefits.
- Early April 2024 expected for NFO to come out—possibly 90 days to apply.
- Some RCPPs are already on-going in MA
- Significant potential for additional projects moving forward

→ Total possible for beyond 2024 → a lot of \$\$\$, TBD

2024 Federal Funding Sources

State Programs

We have
LOTS of
money!
Apply!

- **American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA) → MDAR APR Program**
 - \$4.2M for "Whole farms" (local important soils, forest, etc.)
 - \$2.67M for regular APRs (or whole farms)
 - Possibly an additional \$2-3M for APRs (TBD)
 - ~\$6.87-\$9.87M+ for farmland conservation (APRs or Private APRs).
Must be contracted by end of CY 24, spent by CY 26.
- **APR Capital Fund** (state funds toward APRs) \$2.295M spent by end of FY24, June 30, 2024.
- **Farmland Futures RFR = up to \$8M**. Committed by end of '24, spent by end of contract (TBD)

→ Total possible for 2024 → ~\$9.165M - \$20.165M

Summary of Potential Funding



Calendar Year 2024:

Between ~\$11.9M and \$28.7M+ for permanent farm conservation projects must be allocated in 2024 to maximize these funds.

Significant federal funds expected for 2025 and 2026

2024 Timeline

State fiscal year 2025 starts July 1

Federal fiscal year 2025 starts Oct. 1

Application 2024 Deadlines

	Dec '23	Jan '24	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sept	Oct	Nov	Dec '24
ALE	FY'24 Batching Period Deadline												
	Applications accepted anytime, must be obligated by Sept. 30, 2024												
WRE	Applications accepted anytime, must be obligated by Sept. 30, 2024											FY'25 funding must be obligated by Sept. 30, 2025	
ALE/WRE with IRA Funds	Applications accepted anytime, must be obligated by Sept. 30, 2024												
APR (Batched Quarterly)	Applications accepted anytime. Ranked quarterly but September 1st cutoff for 2024 funding.												
Private APR (Funded)					RFR pending April/May, must be contracted by Dec. 31, 2024								

Get in your applications!

We have until Dec 31st to commit **\$9-\$20M** worth of funds!

* This list does not include unfunded Private APRs, EEA-funded grants (e.g., Conservation Partnership, LAND, Landscape Partnership, etc.), which are often used by land trusts and towns to conserve farms.

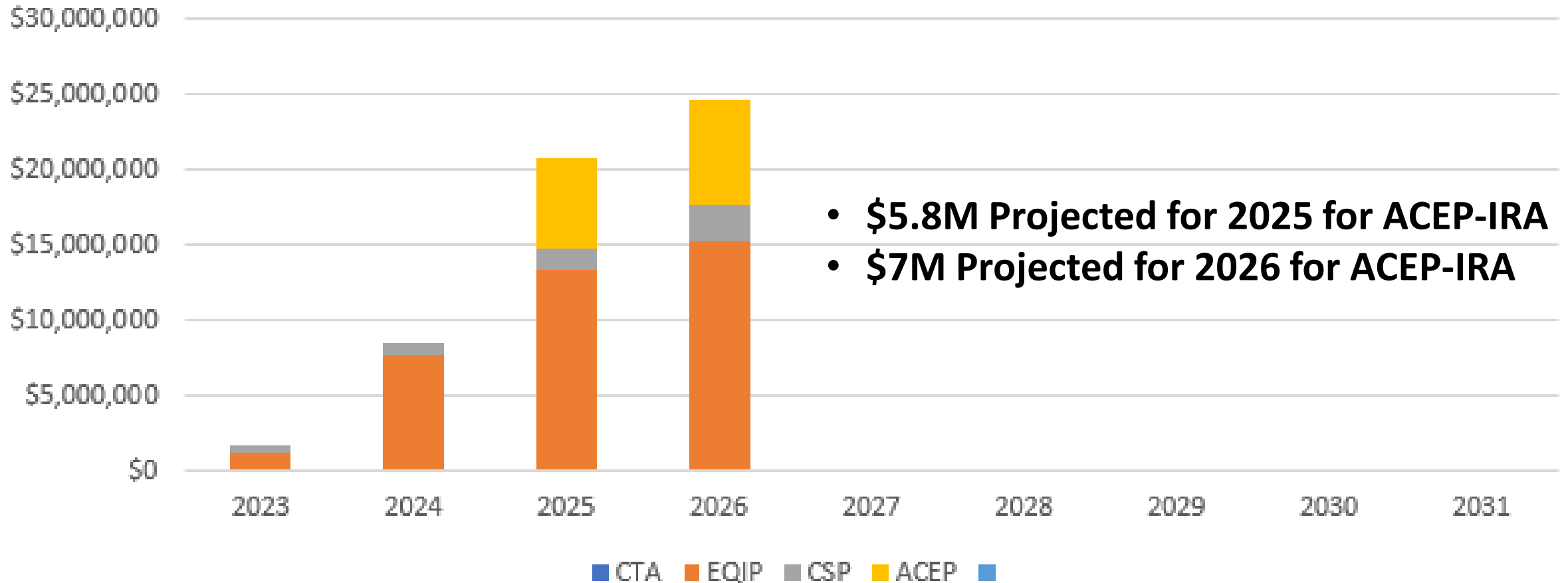
$$\sim \$2.7M - \$8.5M + \$9.165M - \$20.165M =$$

~\$11.9M to \$28.7M+ total in 2024



Massachusetts Projected Funding

State IRA FA Projection



- **\$5.8M Projected for 2025 for ACEP-IRA**
- **\$7M Projected for 2026 for ACEP-IRA**

2025 Projected Timeline

State fiscal
year 2025
starts July. 1

Federal
fiscal year
2026 starts
Oct. 1

Application 2025 Possible Deadlines

	Nov/Dec '24	Jan '25	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sept	Oct	Nov	Dec '25
ALE	Possible FY'25 Batching Period Deadline	Applications accepted anytime, must be obligated by Sept. 30, 2025											
WRE		Applications accepted anytime, must be obligated by Sept. 30, 2025											
ALE/WRE with IRA Funds		Applications accepted anytime, must be obligated by Sept. 30, 2025											
APR (Batched Quarterly)		Applications accepted anytime, FY 24 funds (not ARPA) must be spent by June 30, 2025											
Private APR (Funded)		???? Program Structure, Applications, funding & award dates TBD ?????											

TBD. We expect an increase of funds!

On average we have until June. 30th to spend up to **\$2-3M** worth of funds!

TBD.

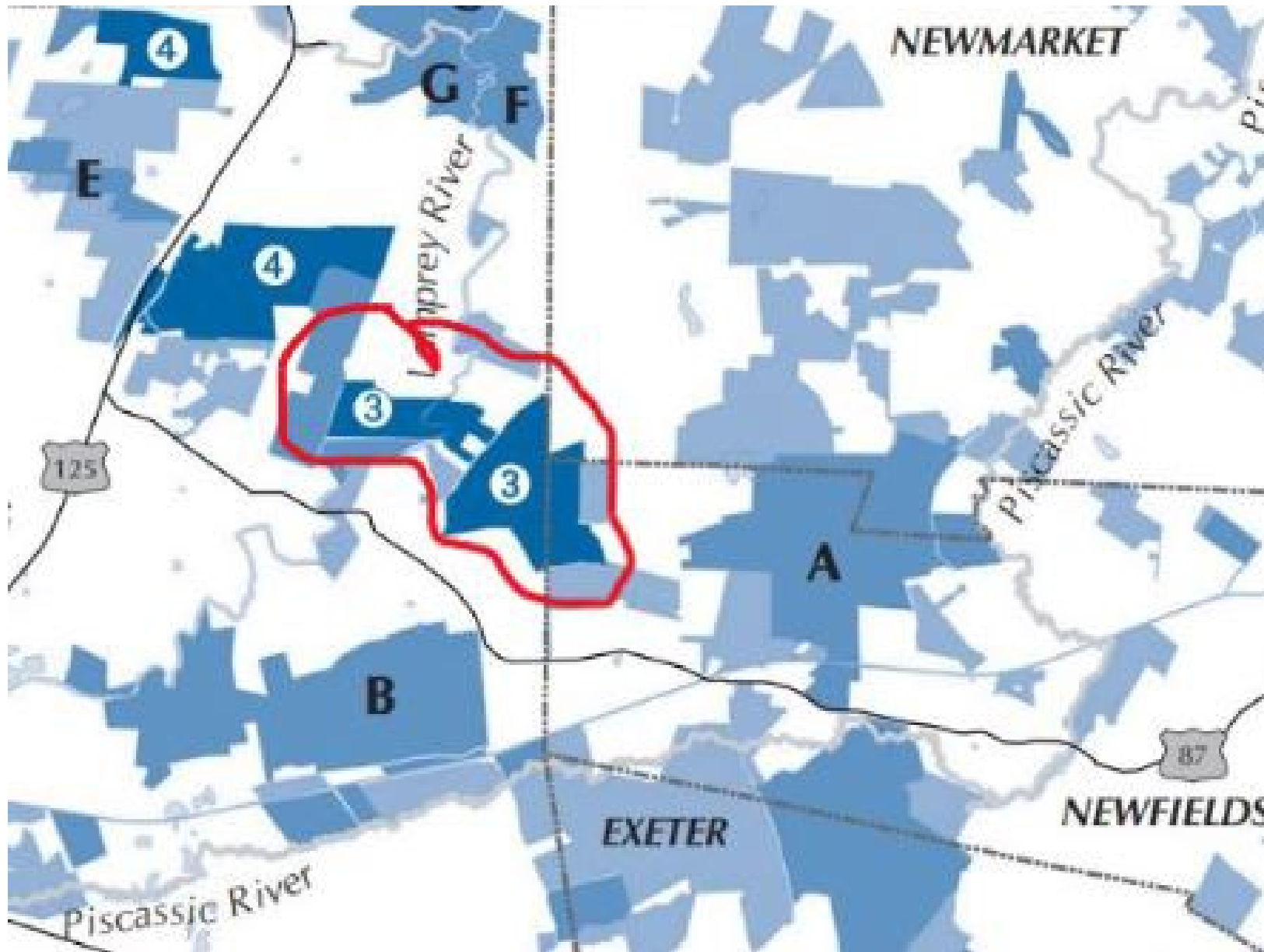
* This list does not include non-funded Private ARPs, EEA-funded grants (e.g., Conservation Partnership, LAND, Landscape Partnership, etc., which are often used by land trusts and towns to conserve farms.

 Total \$\$ TBD, but significant funds anticipated

Case Study #1 ACEP ALE & WRE

- Prime Agricultural Soils
- Priority in the Land Conservation Plan for New Hampshire's Coastal Watersheds
- Key link in connecting more than 1,000 acres of conservation land
- New Hampshire Wildlife Action plan highest ranking habitat in the state and region
- Natural Heritage Bureau hits
- Wellhead protection area and drains toward a nearby high-yield aquifer
- 1,790 feet of frontage on both sides of the Wild & Scenic Lamprey River
- More than 2,500 feet of scenic frontage of farm fields and forest





261 acres
 \$1,319,662
 total easement/purchase price

82 acres ALE =
 \$322,500 (50%)
 of \$645,000

179 = WRE @
 \$3,502/acre
 = \$626,912

**ALE+WRE=949,412
 (72%) of purchase price**

Fee simple of forested uplands for no extra cost (covered by WRE payment)

Case Study #2 FLI/Whole Farm



FLI Soils have qualifying conditions and must be verified by NRCS to be "official"

FRMLNDCLS	SoilAcres	% Soil Type
All areas are prime farmland	68.59	15.4%
Farmland of Local Importance	105.3	23.7%
Farmland of statewide importance	98.38	22.1%

APR Applicant = 444.35 acres

Existing APR	All areas are prime farmland	Farmland of Local Importance
Exclusion	Farmland of statewide importance	APR Applicant

0 345 690 1,380 2,070 Feet

Center: 73.37735°W 42.057124°N

Data Provided by MDAR, NCRS, & MassGIS 2021 Imagery

Created by Massachusetts Department of Agricultural Resources

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Next Steps & Calls to Action!

How Land Trusts & Towns can help accelerate the pace of farmland protection!

▪ **Get more applications in!**

- ACEP & WRE! Demonstrate demand!
- ARPA—Apply for APR or Farmland Futures RFR--if we don't use it, we lose it (~\$6.87-\$9.87M+ by Dec. 31, 2024)

▪ **Reach out: We are here to help!**

- **NEW:** AFT Farmland Easement Support Specialist
 - **Coming soon:** More resources & learning opportunities!
- NRCS & MDAR staff
 - **NEW:** MDAR's Farmland Action Plan Implementation Coordinator

▪ **Join the Conversations!**

- MLTC Ag Conservation Working Group
- ACEP-ALE Program Sub-Committee: April 10th is next meeting!
- **Coming soon:** Online resource and discussion group platform for MA land trusts and towns through AFT's National Ag Lands Network

▪ **Adopt Farmland of Local Importance in Your Town**

- Grab a fact sheet to learn more!



'Snacks & Farm Chats' APR Info Session



Wednesday, March 27

at 6 p.m.



Middleborough Public Library

102 N. Main Street

Middleborough, MA 02346

&

**Flapjacks & Farm chats, April 9th 12-2, Ioka Valley Farm,
Hancock, MA (Free brunch!)**

Any Questions?

