

Protect Agricultural Land from Development and Conversion



SHAWN LINEHAN

Jones Family Farms in Shelton, Connecticut sits on 400 acres of protected farmland.

NEW ENGLAND'S FARMLAND PLAYS A VITAL ROLE IN OUR REGIONAL ECONOMY AND FOOD SECURITY, WITH



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New England's farmland plays a vital role in our regional economy and food security, supporting the region's economy with over 32,000 farm businesses, close to 116,800 jobs, and roughly \$2.8 billion in direct revenue.* Protecting New England's local farms provides the region with long-term food security, meaning that regardless of disruptions in the global food system, local food will still be grown for New Englanders. According to AFT's [2020 Farms Under Threat: A New England Perspective Report](#), between 2001–2016, over 105,000 acres of agricultural land were lost to development or threatened by development pressures. AFT also estimated in the [2040 Farms Under Threat Report](#) that if current development and conversion rates continue, the

region will lose 267,100 acres of farmland in the next two decades. That's the equivalent of losing 3,300 farms, \$291 million in farm output, and 13,100 jobs, based on county averages.

Since 1978, the region's various Purchase of Agriculture Conservation Easement (PACE) programs have protected 435,338 acres of farmland. According to AFT's [2023 PACE survey](#), the region has invested \$542 million in farmland protection efforts.** Although this is a significant amount, it is a far cry from the \$10 billion needed to protect the remainder of the region's farmland. Furthermore, a 2023 report released by [New England Feeding New England](#) states that if our region wants to produce thirty percent of the food we consume by 2030, we must bring 590,000 acres of farmland back into agricultural production.†

The following priorities will expedite farmland protection efforts in the region and keep farmland in the hands of farmers.

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OF FARMLAND IN THE NEXT TWO DECADES.

* Pottner J. & Barley L. 2020. Farms Under Threat: A New England Perspective. Washington, DC: American Farmland Trust.

** Freedgood, J., M. Hunter, J. Dempsey, A. Sorensen. 2020. Farms Under Threat: The State of the States. Washington, DC: American Farmland Trust.

† 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.

Priorities

- ▶ Ensure adequate and secure state funding is available to protect farmland (e.g., consistent state bonds; dedicated conveyance fees; proceeds from mitigation funds; revolving loan funds for buy/protect/sell projects).
- ▶ Improve State PACE Programs
 - Reduce the amount of time it takes to close on Agriculture Conservation Easements.
 - Update statutes to leverage funds from federal, local, and private sources.
 - Improve to be more flexible and accessible to small farms, urban farms, beginning farmers, and historically marginalized producers.
- ▶ Promote provisions within easements that facilitate land access, such as the Option to Purchase at Agricultural Value.

- ▶ Explore alternative land protection arrangements that will increase Indigenous land sovereignty and promote conservation opportunities for other historically marginalized groups (e.g., cultural respect arrangements).
- ▶ Continue to improve the current use of agricultural taxation programs.
- ▶ Advance and expand state-wide planning efforts that include requirements and incentives for agricultural-focused land use planning practices that accommodate community growth (e.g., affordable housing) while directing development away from agricultural lands.

Relevant New England Programming

- ▶ Berkshire County Farm Protection Program
- ▶ Connecticut Working Lands Alliance



COURTESY OF MOLLY HEUSS, MAINE FARMLAND TRUST

A Forever Farm in Aroostook County, Maine