

The Commonwealth of Massachusetts

Executive Office of Energy and Environmental Affairs



Department of Agricultural Resources

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APR Program Review: Response to Comments from APR Listening Sessions 2026

Compiled responses from the Hadley Senior Center, Lakeville Library, Shrewsbury Town Hall, and virtual listening sessions held in March 2026.

Hadley Senior Center - March 5, 2026

No.	Comment	MDAR Response
1	APR owners should be able to apply to the APR Improvement Program more than one time.	The Department is considering a revision to the eligibility criteria for future rounds to allow some APR landowners who have previously participated in the program to re-apply.
2	Is there a list of resources of the people who have the expertise for this particular kind of real estate transfer such as Realtors and lawyers ?	The Department cannot recommend particular service providers. Organizations such as Land For Good and American Farmland Trust may be of assistance.
3-5	3. There should be an option to include the house with the APR land. 4. Is there a spot somewhere on the farm that APR would allow us to build a house going into the future? 5. It's really important to hear about the housing issues and to also be able to say that MDAR is working with nonprofits, land trusts, or other folks to try to address those kinds of things.	For APRs that allow the landowner to request a dwelling on APR land, the Department may use its discretion to grant a Certificate of Approval to construct a dwelling. Most APR documents prohibit dwellings. There are many reasons for excluding dwellings from APRs, principally long-term affordability. The program has worked collaboratively with land trust partners on some APRs to preserve farm family housing with its own separate deed restriction while maintaining the farmland protection with an APR. Together these elements result in a sustainable whole farm model.

Lakeville Library - March 24, 2026

No.	Comment	MDAR Response
1	Does the Over-the-Cap policy apply to a private APR that would be held by a land trust ?	The Over Cap policy is not applicable to Private APRs. The policy applies to acquisitions of APRs funded by and held by the Department.
2	Why did you not look to Agricultural Commissions for assistance in monitoring your APR's ?	The Department procured the services of the Massachusetts Association of Conservation Districts (MACD) through a public bidding process to support the APR Program's annual monitoring obligations.
3	Under what conditions would waiver requests for OPAVs be approved or not approved?	The APR Program Regulations in 330 CMR 22.00 define the criteria to meet for a waiver of the OPAV, which can be found here: https://www.mass.gov/doc/330-cmr-22-agricultural-preservation-restriction-program/download
4	Is there any kind of discussion between the landowner and the APR program to come up with the right person to buy the property? Or is it ultimately just the APR program's job to make the decision?	If an APR contains a Right of First Refusal or an Option to Purchase at Agricultural Value, the Buyer must meet the criteria defined in the APR Program Regulations 330 CMR 22.00, which can be found here: https://www.mass.gov/doc/330-cmr-22-agricultural-preservation-restriction-program/download
5	Why can't pressure be exerted by the Department to get [APR] farmland back into production?	The Department uses an enforcement Standard Operating Procedure (SOP) to treat all compliance issues consistently and fairly. This SOP outlines methods to address underutilized APR land and we strive to resolve these issues with all available enforcement options we have at our disposal.
6	Why don't we see more support from MDAR or the Commonwealth for a Cost of Community Services study, which will demonstrate the importance of maintaining agricultural land and helping the taxpayer?	This is research the Department has supported in the past and could explore further should a funding source be identified to support this initiative. American Farmland Trust has been active in this space historically and has issued several publications on the subject.

Shrewsbury Town Hall - March 26, 2026

No.	Comment	MDAR Response
1	Are young people who are looking to do farming able to coordinate with MDAR when farmland becomes available due to an existing tenant farmer moving on?	MDAR does not currently maintain this information; however, newenglandfarmer.org is a great resource.
2	Is it possible to increase the 5% impervious surface rule to a 10% rule?	There currently is no pathway or waiver process to increase the impervious limit.

Virtual Listening Sessions - March 10 and 30, 2026

No.	Comment	MDAR Response
1	Is it possible to change the timing of how the SARA grant is awarded?	The Department grant programs operate within the window of the state Fiscal Year which runs from July 1 to June 30 of the following year. Every effort is made to ensure the application is released to give plenty of time for farmers to complete their projects in time. The SARA grant awards are usually one of the first awards to be issued in the Fall to allow for timely completion.
2	Loans to support purchases of APRs by farmers who can provide evidence they are established and viable would be helpful.	There are multiple farm lending entities that may consider loans for the purchase of an APR, such as USDA Farm Service Agency, Farm Credit East, or even some local banks.
3	If you were to have a worker cooperative or a farmer cooperative that is a group of people operating on the same amount of land, the cooperative structure might not necessarily have an owner. All of the workers may be owners. How would that work in terms of labor housing. For a farmer cooperative that is structured as a worker cooperative, will the owner-operator stipulation for housing on APR land be implemented for all worker-owners? Or because of the structure of the business, will they all be considered "employees?" If it will be implemented, I would like to speak about removing the ban from owner-operator living abodes on APR land.	The Department has existing guidelines regarding requests for the construction of labor housing. These guidelines outline that the occupant(s) must be employees of the landowner. If the APR is owned by a cooperative, the members would be the landowners, and therefore likely not eligible for labor housing. However, the Department would need to review an application in order to render a decision.
4	Are there any new grant opportunities that are open to privately held APR's?	There are several MDAR grant programs available for farms that do not have an MDAR-held APR. Further information can be found here: https://www.mass.gov/guides/agricultural-grants-and-financial-assistance-programs .