

Massachusetts Farmland Action Plan



2025 Progress Report

Annual focus – Building momentum with MDAR programs

Last amended 12/18/2025

For more information:

[Farmland Action Plan Webpage](#)
[Farmland Partnership Program Webpage](#)

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Introduction

In December 2023 the Massachusetts Farmland Action Plan (MFAP) was released and implementation began.

Implementation picks up speed

This second progress report shares 2025 progress on implementing the Plan. It builds upon what was shared in the 2024 progress report and reflects additional conversations with potential partners who may lead or assist with implementation of tasks within the Plan. Progress and next steps are being shared so that potential partners and interested individuals can see how everything fits together and continue to discuss.

What is the plan about?

This 2025 Progress Report builds upon the foundation of existing resources available on the [MFAP webpage](#). If you are not already familiar with the Farmland Action Plan and implementation to date, there are several resources on the [MFAP webpage](#) that give a brief overview of the plan, its importance and initial implementation steps.

Implementation Matrix

The implementation matrix is a living document that tracks next steps to address needs and changes, what partners have done and what partners plan to do. The matrix represents a review of the items from the Plan in an effort to:

- Identify a potential timeline for implementation
- Identify lead and other potential implementers
- Clarify language to ensure clear understanding of item
- Check whether additional tasks are needed to assist with implementation of actions

For more information about the matrix, how to use it and how to suggest edits, please visit the [matrix portion of the webpage](#). The first version of the matrix was published online in early 2025 and is being updated periodically.

Questions, comments and getting involved

If you have any questions, comments or would like to get involved with implementing any tasks, please reach out to Katharine Otto, Farmland Action Plan Coordinator. Katharine.s.otto@mass.gov

By the Numbers

Adding to the data that was shared in the [MFAP](#) and [2024 Progress Report](#), the following is a summary of additional trends and statistics.

Farmland Action Plan Implementation

People engaged

It has been important to build the number of people connected into the Farmland Action Plan in the first two years. From the first email update in August 2024 to just under 200 people, to the December 2025 newsletter which is expected to go to around 500 people, this represents a significant increase in awareness and engagement with implementation of the MFAP.

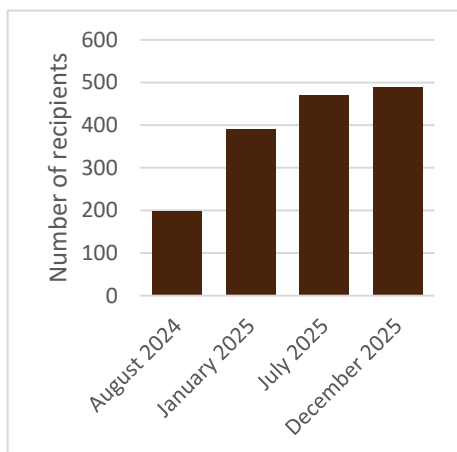


Figure 1 - Number of recipients of updates on MFAP Implementation updates from MDAR.
Source: MDAR 2025.

Sign up for regular newsletter updates on the [MFAP webpage](#).

Implementation supported

Beyond the work being completed by MDAR staff and other partners using their existing funding sources and programs, in 2025 MDAR awarded \$1.9 million in grants through the new Farmland Partnership Program to support implementation of Plan tasks by partners. Learn more in [Highlight 1 \(Start the Farmland Partnership Program\)](#).

¹ Data Source: MDAR APR Program 12/8/2025. The Agricultural Preservation Restriction (APR) program is a voluntary program where MDAR can pay

Land Protected with APR

To date, over 76,445 acres of farmland have been protected across Massachusetts through the Agricultural Preservation Restriction (APR) Program¹.

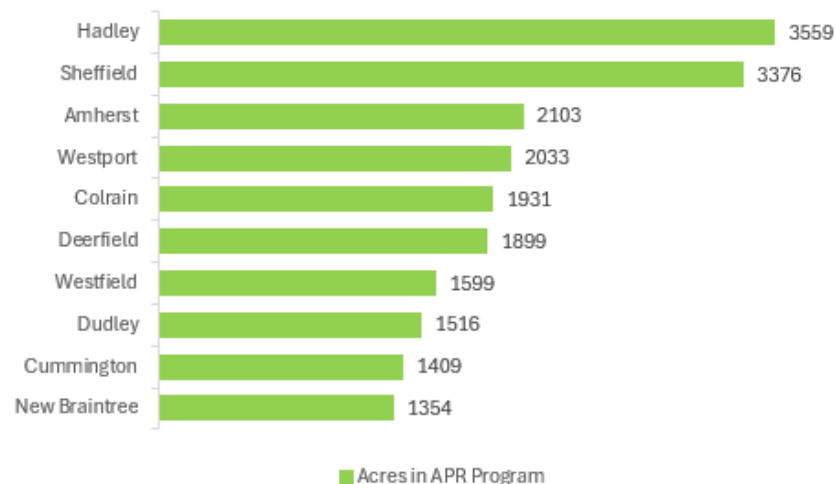


Figure 2 - This chart summarizes land protected through MDAR's APR Program from 1980 through December 8, 2025 in the ten municipalities with the most acreage in the Program. Data source: MDAR APR Program 12/8/2025. Note: Reported APR acreage can be subject to change with boundary verification.

In Fiscal Year 2025 there were a total of 7 APR ownership transfers processed by MDAR that had Right of First Refusal (ROFR, 2

farmland owners in exchange for a permanent deed restriction to retain the land for farming. Learn more on the [APR Program webpage](#).

properties) or Option to Purchase at Agricultural Value (OPAV, 5 properties) terms.²



² Note: This does not include APRs which MDAR was not notified about, because they do not have ROFR or OPAV language or were exempt from the

ROFR/OPAV waiver process. Data source: MDAR 9/17/2025. Learn more about [OPAV and ROFR on the APR Change of Ownership webpage](#)

Tasks and Highlights for 2026 – 2027

The following section gives an overview of some of the recent work by Farmland Action Plan partners that already had momentum and what is planned for the next year.

With more than 400 items within the MFAP it is not easy to prioritize which tasks should come first! The focus of 2024 was to get an understanding of which tasks already had momentum and what could be started within the next year. 2025 built on this.

For most tasks the matrix identifies lead implementers who are the champions that drive the task. In some cases, partners were already doing the work on this topic and the priorities of their own organization aligned with the Plan.





The 2025 highlights are some of the tasks that are being worked on. For 2026 we hope the highlights will better reflect the input of all partners and interested people, particularly as the Farmland Partnership Program gets started. Please see the [“Next Steps”](#) section for more information.

Future versions of this report and the matrix will share more information about what is being done or has already been done, as it becomes available.

How are the highlights organized?

The highlights mostly focus on tasks under one action – i.e. a cohesive group of things to be done. Sometimes tasks from more than one action are included together in one highlight if there is significant overlap in implementation at this time.

The highlights have icons to indicate which goal from the MFAP they support:

Icon	Goal abbreviation	Goal language
	Protection	Accelerate the permanent protection and stewardship of farmland
	Access	Increase access to farmland
	Viability	Support and enhance the viability of farms and farmland
	All	Implement all goals

What are the opportunities for and barriers to implementation?

There are opportunities for and barriers to implementing most of the tasks outlined in the Plan – some which are already known and others which are not. We will explore these more when work starts on specific activities and tasks.

Comparing to the last Progress Report

The following table shows how the Highlights from this report were included in the previous year (2024) Progress Report. Please see the Highlight page for more details about what changed and why.

2024 ID	2025 ID	2025 Progress Report Highlight (With hyperlinks to the relevant section)	Notes
	1	Start Farmland Partnership Program	New
2	2	Leverage federal funding to protect farmland	
	3	Leverage non-federal funding to protect farmland	New
3	4	Build capacity of entities to protect farmland	
	5	Build awareness and capacity of municipalities to protect farmland	New
	6	Increase awareness of protection programs	New
4	7	Increase applications to protection programs	
5	8	Prioritize protection of whole farms	
6 and 8	9	Build state farmland licensing program	Combined two highlights
7	10	Expand farmland transfer and succession education and technical assistance	



Highlight 1 – Start the Farmland Partnership Program

How did this highlight change since 2024?

This is a new highlight that focuses on the major administrative milestone for supporting implementation of the Farmland Action Plan – creating the Farmland Partnership Program.

Why is this important?

The Plan outlines many tasks and several new initiatives. Potential partners expressed a need for additional funding to support some of their work.

Announced in February 2025, the Massachusetts Farmland Partnership Program (FPP) is a new grant program to help implement the Farmland Action Plan at the local, regional or statewide level.

The goal of the program is to build networks of partners who work together collaboratively and in coordination to protect farmland, enhance farm viability, and ensure access to farmland.

This will be achieved by providing funding to eligible partners to work with farmers, farmland owners, agricultural service providers, municipalities and others to protect farmland, enhance farm viability, and ensure access to farmland, as well as coordinate and collaborate between partners as a cohort.

Who is the program manager?

Katharine Otto at MDAR – Katharine.s.otto@mass.gov

Applications

For the first round of funding, with applications due May 2025, MDAR received 14 applications requesting \$7.4 million, that

proposed 393 projects (“sub-activities”) to implement specific tasks in the MFAP matrix.

Which partners are involved?

There are seven groups of partners working on projects awarded funds in 2025 to work on projects in 2026 and 2027. The following are the partners funded, with the lead partner for the group listed first for each group:

- American Farmland Trust (AFT) with Massachusetts Land Trust Coalition (MLTC)
- The Carrot Project (TCP) with Southeastern Massachusetts Agricultural Partnership (SEMAP) and Community Involved in Sustaining Agriculture (CISA)
- Franklin Regional Council of Governments (FRCOG) with Pioneer Valley Planning Commission (PVPC) and Berkshire Regional Planning Commission (BRPC)
- Land For Good
- New Entry Sustainable Farming Project with Nuestras Raíces, Pocasset Pokanoket Land Trust (PPLT) and Growing Places
- Southeastern Regional Planning and Economic Development District (SRPEDD) with Wildlands Trust and Old Colony Planning Council (OCPC)
- World Farmers with Massachusetts Food System Collaborative and Nipmuc Indian Development Corporation (NIDC)

What is being done?

A total of \$1.9 million was awarded in grants for individual projects and common activities. A wide variety of tasks are being implemented through Round 1 of the Farmland Partnership Program. The projects funded by the Farmland Partnership Program must be clearly tied to implementation of specific tasks in the MFAP Implementation Matrix. [Figure 3](#) summarizes how many projects fall under each MFAP goal.

Many tasks are being implemented statewide, while some are being implemented on a more regional level with a view to being replicated in other regions in the future.

For a list of which tasks are funded to be implemented through this program, please visit the [Farmland Partnership webpage](#).

In addition to work on specific tasks, all partners involved in the program will participate in various coordination activities and collaboration opportunities, including regular meetings with MDAR staff and other partners on other funded projects.

Where can I learn more?

Learn more on the [Farmland Partnership webpage](#), including December 2025 grant award press release

How can I get involved?

For updates on how to get involved with implementation, please sign up for the [Farmland Action Plan Newsletter](#) and contact the person listed on the [Farmland Partnership Program webpage](#).

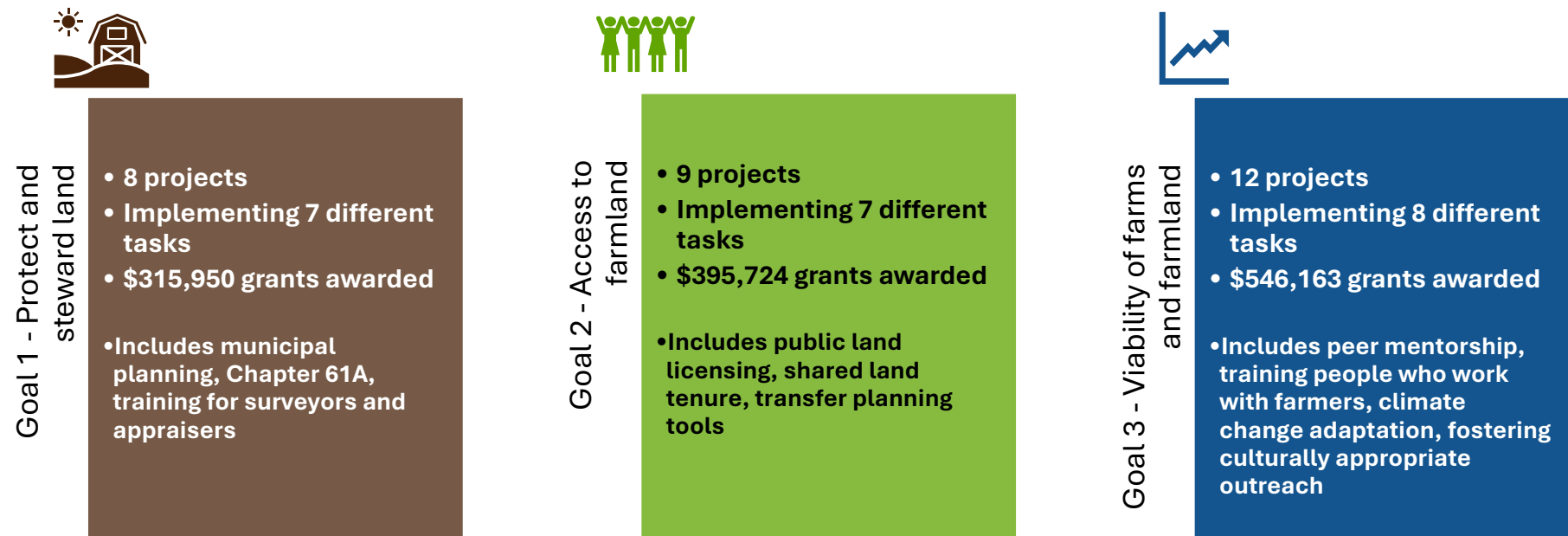


Figure 3: Summary of grant awards for the 2025-2027 Program



Highlight 2 – Leverage federal funding to protect land

How did this highlight change since 2024?

This highlight existed in 2024. With the changes to the federal environment since early 2025 it has become more important to diversify funding sources to support farmland protection and so [Highlight 3](#) was added to recognize the need to leverage non-federal funding sources. There have been some changes to which tasks are featured in this highlight to reflect the new federal environment.

Why is this important?

Federal funds through the USDA's Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) can cover up to 50% of a farmland easement cost. Federal funding allocation for a state is partially based on how much funding was used in previous years. Using more federal funds shows a need so more funding can be allocated in future years. Using more federal funding reduces the amount of state and local funds that are needed.

Which part of the plan does this contribute to?

- Goal I: Accelerate the permanent protection and stewardship of farmland.
- Strategy I.A: Permanently protect farmland through purchases of agricultural restrictions.
- Action I.A.3: Leverage the maximum amount of federal funding available

What new tasks are likely to be added soon?

We recognized that the matrix did not cover the full breadth of federal funding options in the tasks listed. As such, MDAR has drafted an additional task to fill this gap under Action I.A.3.

The following is the draft text³

ID	Task language
1482	Expand use of other federal funding sources where available that are not ACEP-ALE for farmland protection.

Where can I learn more?

- [APR Program Webpage](#)
- ACEP-ALE Land Eligibility: Projects that Further a State or Local Policy. [AFT and NRCS webinar 4/25/2024](#)
- [Designating Farmland of Local Importance \(FLI\) resource by AFT](#)
- [List, map and details about municipalities with soils designated as Farmland of Local Importance \(FLI\) in Massachusetts](#) (collated by USDA)
- [NRCS Agricultural Conservation Easement Program \(ACEP\)](#)

³ Likely to be included in the winter 2026 version of the matrix

2025 Progress – Using ARPA funds for farmland protection

This story is original to this Progress Report and relates to implementation of Tasks 1482⁴.

Over \$7.5 million in funds through the American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA) were applied to bring the following farm properties into the APR Program in FY 2025:

- Herrick, Rowley (137.5 acres)
- Galenski Farm, Whately (55.7 acres)
- Pine Island, Sheffield (448 acres)
- Hamel, Southampton (29.8 acres)
- Douglas Warner, Williamsburg (31.7 acres)

For FY26 \$665,200 in ARPA funds will be used to bring two additional properties into the APR Program.

Learn more on the NRCS ACEP [ALE Website](#) and [American Farmland Trust Farmland Information Center webpage](#).

Contact [Ron Hall](#) at MDAR for more information.

Long Term Progress – Using federal funding for farmland preservation

This story is original to this Progress Report and relates to implementation of Tasks 1010⁵, 1012⁶, and 1482⁷.

The Federal government is a critical partner in efforts to protect farmland in Massachusetts. MDAR frequently partners with NRCS through the Agricultural Lands Easement (ALE) Program to acquire APRs. NRCS acquires a co-holder interest in the property and reimburses MDAR for 50% of the cost of the APR. By participating in the federal ALE program MDAR is able to significantly leverage its state funding to protect more agricultural land than it could otherwise. Of the 995 APRs that MDAR currently holds, it partners with NRCS on 350⁸.

ACEP-ALE funding is also used for protecting farmland held by entities other than MDAR, such as municipalities and land trusts.

Learn more on the NRCS ACEP [ALE Website](#)

Contact [Ron Hall](#) at MDAR for more information.

⁴ Task 1482 - Expand use of other federal funding sources where available that are not ACEP-ALE for farmland protection.

⁵ Task 1010 - Meet NRCS eligibility criteria for their programs to show demand for federal resources from ACEP-ALE which will increase available federal resources.

⁶ Task 1012 - Educate land trusts and municipalities about the availability of the NRCS ACEP-ALE program for private APRs and to strategize how to best use ACEP funds.

⁷ Task 1482 - Expand use of other federal funding sources where available that are not ACEP-ALE for farmland protection.

⁸ Data Source: MDAR APR Program. 9/17/2025

2025 Progress – Increasing municipal adoption of Farmland of Local Importance

This story is original to this Progress Report and relates to implementation of Task 1020⁹.

Farmland of Local Importance (FLI) is land that is locally important for crop production but not categorized as prime farmland, unique farmland or farmland of local importance¹⁰. Local soils may be designated as FLI by municipalities in collaboration with USDA-NRCS.

The APR Program has integrated FLI into its parcel evaluation sheet to help determine a parcel's suitability for protection by the APR Program.

To date 130 of 351 municipalities in Massachusetts have designated FLI.¹¹ Several partners in Massachusetts have been assisting municipalities.

Learn more with [Designating Farmland of Local Importance \(FLI\) resource by AFT](#) and [Farmland of Local Importance \(FLI\) in Massachusetts Summary collated by USDA](#).

⁹ Task 1020 (including winter 2026 edits) - Support programs to help municipalities identify locally important soils and encourage towns to petition NRCS for classification of farm soils of local importance (FLI).

¹⁰ USDA – [Designating Farmland of Local Importance in Massachusetts. November 2021](#).

¹¹ USDA - [Map of Massachusetts Towns with Farmland of Local Importance Designated. 6/20/2025](#).



Highlight 3 – Leverage non-federal funding to protect farmland

How did this highlight change since 2024?

This is a new highlight for 2025, created in response to the changes in the funding environment since early 2025, as described in [Highlight 2 \(Leverage federal funding to protect land\)](#).

Why is this important?

Farmland protection always requires a variety of funding sources. MDAR provides state funding for protecting farmland through an APR, alongside federal funding where possible. Whether using federal and/or state funds for most of the cost of protecting farmland, there will always be a local match – whether coming from municipal or private sources. Some farmland protection also occurs just using local or private funds. With the changes to the federal environment since early 2025 it has become more important to diversify funding sources to support farmland protection.

Which part of the plan does this contribute to?

- Goal I: Accelerate the permanent protection and stewardship of farmland.
- Strategy I.A: Permanently protect farmland through purchases of agricultural restrictions.
- Action I.A.4: Identify and secure additional resources to purchase farmland in fee and via restrictions and to steward protected properties. And Action I.B.3: Identify opportunities to increase CPA funding and its application

to protect farmland and affordable on- and off-farm housing.

Where can I learn more?

- [APR Program](#) by MDAR
- [Community Preservation Act \(CPA\) Funding](#)

The following are some examples of non-MDAR state funding sources which have provided funding for farmland protection¹², even though not primarily designed for it:

- [Municipal Vulnerability Preparedness Program](#) by EEA
- [Landscape Partnership Program](#) by DCS
- [Conservation Partnership Program](#) by DCS
- [Local Acquisitions for Natural Diversity \(LAND\) Grant Program](#) by DCS
- [Tribal Land Acquisition Grant](#) by DCS
- Resilient MA by EEA (through funding available to MDAR)
- Healthy Soils Program by DCS (through funding available to MDAR)

¹² These support Task 1040 - Continue and expand incentivizing municipal farmland protection through state grants such as EEA conservation grants, APR, etc.



Highlight 4 – Build capacity of entities to protect farmland

How did this highlight change since 2024?

This was Highlight 3 in 2024. A new [Highlight 13](#) was created to recognize specific work to build capacity of municipalities.

Which part of the plan does this contribute to?

- Goal I: Accelerate the permanent protection and stewardship of farmland.
- Strategy I.A: Permanently protect farmland through purchases of agricultural restrictions.
- Several actions including Action I.A.5: Ensure that interventions to prevent conversion are readily and quickly available. And Action I.A.6: Build capacity of state agencies, land trusts, municipalities, and other entities to protect land.

Why is this important?

Many groups can protect agricultural land. Building capacity of state agencies, land trusts, municipalities and other entities will mean more staff are able to work on and complete agreements to protect land.

Where can I learn more?

- [Farmland Protection in Massachusetts Overview](#) for Massachusetts Land Trust Coalition given by AFT and NRCS
- [Option to Purchase at Agricultural Value \(OPAV\) and Rights of First Refusal \(ROFR\)](#)
- Also see [Highlight 11 – Supporting Municipalities](#)

¹³ Task 1042 - Establish the authority for MDAR to purchase and hold land.

2025 Progress – Creating a Buy-Protect-Sell Program at MDAR

This story was first shared in the [January 2025 newsletter](#). It relates to implementation of tasks 1042¹³ and 1043¹⁴.

In November 2024, Governor Healey signed Mass Leads: An Act Relative to Strengthening Massachusetts' Economic Leadership, more informally known as the economic development bill. Among many other activities, the bill directs MDAR to establish a program to acquire land and make it affordable and accessible to farmers. Prior to this, MDAR did not have the authority to purchase land in fee, and having that capacity was one of the priority recommendations from the Farmland Action Plan (see tasks 1042, 1033 and 1043). This will be an important tool in helping mitigate farmland loss, and will allow the department to move quickly to purchase farmland when it becomes available for sale and apply permanent restrictions to ensure it does not convert to other uses in the future.

In early 2025, MDAR began researching and developing ideas for a new Buy-Protect-Sell program. In July, MDAR hired a new Agricultural Land Use Planner who is working to get the program up and running. In November, MDAR hosted the first presentation and discussion for community members, farmers, land trusts, landowners, and other interested individuals to provide input to help shape the program so it reflects the needs and values of Massachusetts' agricultural community.

¹⁴ Task 1043 - Establish an MDAR buy/protect/sell program.

More news about the program and opportunities for involvement in its development are forthcoming.

Contact [Jasper Cowley](#) at MDAR for more information.

2025 Progress – MDAR Exploring Creating a New Private APR Grant Program

This story is original to this Progress Report and relates to implementation of Task 1096¹⁵.

In Spring 2025 MDAR solicited input for a new Private APR grant program intended to reimburse entities for the costs associated with protecting farmland with Private APRs. Comments were valuable in the creation of the program. Unfortunately, due to 2025 funding uncertainties, the program was postponed.

Among the comments received are the following:

- Keep the application as simple as possible.
- Applicants need clear guidance regarding what is expected to be submitted as part of the application and clear guidance on ranking criteria.
- Deadline to spend the funds should be longer than one year to help applicants meet requirements of other programs, especially ACEP-ALE, that could add time to the project.
- Consider creating two tracks: one for due diligence costs, one for acquisition costs.
- Funds should be able to be used to acquire the fee and/or the restriction.

- Consider allowing joint applications between land trusts and municipalities if one will acquire the fee and one will acquire the restriction.
- Buy-Protect-Sell transactions should be allowed.

Contact [Gerard Kennedy](#) at MDAR for more information.

¹⁵ Task 1096 - Explore establishment of a state-funded grant program to provide resources to land trusts, municipalities, and other entities to purchase, hold,

and steward agricultural restrictions (APRs) and conservation restrictions (CRs) that allow agriculture.



Highlight 5 – Build awareness and capacity of municipalities to protect farmland

How did this highlight change since 2024?

This is a new highlight for 2025 recognizing an increased effort to build the capacity of municipalities alongside the [other entities in Highlight 3](#).

Why is this important?

Municipalities are an important entity for protecting farmland. They can hold restrictions/ easements on protected farmland like MDAR, land trusts and other entities. They also have additional opportunities to get involved with protecting farmland under Chapter 61A when it is being sold and ensuring it continues to be farmed through the Right of First Refusal process (ROFR). To enable more municipalities to take advantage of these opportunities we need to build awareness and capacity of municipal staff and officials.

During 2024 and 2025, there were several requests for additional information about how to incorporate farmland protection into municipal plans, including Open Space and Recreation Plans (OSRPs), which is also a useful pre-step prior to protecting farmland.

Which part of the plan do this contribute to?

- Goal I: Accelerate the permanent protection and stewardship of farmland
 - o Strategy I.A: Permanently protect farmland through purchases of agricultural restrictions.

- Action I.A.3. Leverage the maximum amount of federal funding available.
 - o Strategy I.B: Further develop and implement additional tools to avoid farmland loss and retain farmland.
 - Action I.B.2. Enroll more agricultural land in Chapter 61A.
- Goal III: Support and enhance the viability of farms and farmland.
 - o Strategy III.A: Ensure that laws, regulations, programs, and investments support farm viability.
 - Action III.A.2. Explore implementation of mechanisms that would increase the number of municipalities instituting Right to Farm bylaws and agricultural commissions.

Also see [Highlight 3](#) (Leverage non-federal funding).

Where can I learn more?

- [MDAR Agricultural Commissions webpage](#)
- [MDAR Ag Resources for Municipalities webpage](#)

2025 Progress – Supporting AgComs

This story was first released in the [late March 2025 newsletter](#), with an update in the [September 2025 newsletter](#). It relates to the implementation of Task 1259¹⁶ and others.

Agricultural Commissions (“AgComs”), established through legislatively-authorized action taken by a municipality, serve as a local voice advocating for farmers and agriculturally-related interests. They provide visibility for farming and forestry activities within a municipality and work to implement Right-to-Farm bylaws, which may be adopted by the municipality. Commissions may also work with other municipal officials, board, and/or committees on issues facing the individual farmers and/or the municipality as they relate to agriculture and natural resource management. AgComs are recognized in the Farmland Action Plan for their potential to partner on the implementation of several tasks at the local and municipal level as well as the need to build their capacity (Tasks 1104, 1114, 1452, 1259, and others).

MDAR has contracted with Conservation Works (Pete Westover and Sarah Gardner) to manage Agricultural Commission outreach, educational and technical assistance to municipalities and existing commissions throughout the Commonwealth. In addition, they will be developing a plan to support agricultural commissions on an ongoing basis, based on the needs and concerns they encounter.

¹⁶ Task 1259 - Re-establish state investment and programming by which MDAR helped municipalities craft and pass Right to Farm bylaws and provided guidance to agricultural commissions.

For more information and contact information visit the [Ag Comm webpage](#).

2025 Progress – Planning for farmland

This project was initially shared in the [November 2025 newsletter](#) and relates to implementation of Task 1017¹⁷.

In Spring 2025 an updated [Open Space and Recreation Planner’s Workbook \(OSRP Workbook\)](#) was released by the Massachusetts Division of Conservation Services (DCS) and included several updates related to planning to farmland.

In 2025 MDAR drafted a resource to help improving planning for farmland protection at the municipal level, as an initial step to address Tasks 1017 and 1018 of the MFAP. In late 2025 MDAR sought volunteers to review a draft of this document. The final document will be released in 2026.

Contact [Katharine Otto](#) at MDAR for more information.

¹⁷ Task 1017 - Add guidance to the Open Space and Recreation Plan's Workbook and other EEA program and funding guidance that would meet NRCS requirements related to agriculture to allow local and regional OSRPs to be used for ACEP-ALE eligibility.



Highlight 6 – Increase awareness of farmland protection programs

How did this highlight change since 2024?

This is a new highlight for 2025, recognizing the need to raise awareness of protection programs in order to increase applications ([Highlight 4](#)).

Which parts of the plan does this contribute to?

- Goal I: Accelerate the permanent protection and stewardship of farmland.
- Strategy I.A: Permanently protect farmland through purchases of agricultural restrictions.
- Several actions including Action I.A.11: Increase awareness and understanding of permanent protection options including APR, ALE, and non-ALE protection programs.

Why is this important?

For each farm there can be different needs for the landowner and organization involved in protecting land for agriculture – so it is important to find funding sources and mechanisms that have features that match those needs. It is important to understand and communicate information about mechanisms such as short term and permanent agricultural conservation easements; buy/sell/protect initiatives; state and local government grants; federal programs like the Agricultural Conservation Easement Program (ACEP); tax credits; and private land trusts, often utilizing funding from foundations and donations.

Where can I learn more?

- [Massachusetts Farmland Protection Options: A Guide for Landowners, Land Trusts, and Municipalities](#) by AFT
- [Agricultural Preservation Restriction \(APR\) Program Webpage](#)
- [MDAR Private APR webpage and resources](#)
- [Farm Viability Enhancement Program \(FVEP\)](#)
- Agricultural Conservation Easement Programs – Massachusetts NRCS – [USDA webpage](#) and [Farmland Information Center resource](#)
- [Resources for Landowners webpage](#) by MLTC
- [Deciding the future of my land webpage](#) by MassWoods
- [Massachusetts Farmland Protection Options: A Guide for Landowners, Land Trusts, and Municipalities](#) by AFT

2025 Progress – Encouraging more Private APRs with new guidance

This story was initially shared in the [late March 2025](#) and [October 2025 newsletters](#) and relates to implementation of Task 1064¹⁸.

Private APRs are an important tool towards achieving the land protection goals of the Farmland Action Plan. A Private APR is an Agricultural Preservation Restriction where the easement/restriction is held by (or co-held by) an entity other than MDAR. MDAR has updated its guidance on Private APRs

¹⁸ Task 1064 - Better educate partners about the APR Program's policy on approving private APRs—restrictions acquired without use of APR funding and held by a non-state entity such as a land trust or municipality.

which helps to implement Task 1064 and several other tasks within the Farmland Action Plan.

What is an APR and Private APR?

As defined in Sections 31-33 of Chapter 184 of the Massachusetts General Laws, APRs are permanent restrictions on the use of land to protect agricultural uses. They require the approval “in the public interest” of the Commissioner of MDAR. MDAR manages all reviews for APRs that will be held by charitable corporations/trusts, or municipalities.

The following are a few important considerations relative to Private APRs:

- Private APRs may be granted by public or private landowners to qualified organizations. Organizations qualified to hold Private APRs include governmental units (e.g., Conservation Commissions, Conservation Districts, or Water Supply Divisions) and non-profit organizations whose purposes include the conservation of land or water (e.g., a land trust/conservancy or similar organization).
- Amendments to existing Private APRs must go through a review process.
- The land is currently actively devoted to commercial agricultural or horticultural uses and has the ability to maintain a commercial agricultural business.
- There is no minimum size required for eligibility.
- There is a minimum size of 10 acres for a commercial forestry operation.

¹⁹ Task 1062 - Create guidance documents, websites, webinars, and other materials targeted at specific audiences on programs such as Chapter 61A, APR, and others.

New Private APR guidance

The [new private APR guidance](#) has been developed to better educate partners about MDAR’s policy on approving private APRs. The March 2025 update adds details on minimum size required for eligibility, clarifies that commercial forestry operations are eligible for protection and other information to address needs raised by MDAR staff and partners over the last few years.

In November 2025 MDAR hosted a webinar introduction to the new Private APR Guidance and related process.

Learn more on the [Private APR webpage](#).

Contact [Ron Hall](#) at MDAR for more information.

2025 Progress – New Massachusetts Farmland Guide

This story was initially shared in the [October 2025 newsletter](#) and relates to implementation of Tasks 1062¹⁹ and 1345²⁰.

In September the American Farmland Trust released a new guide that aims to help landowners, land trusts, and municipalities navigate the array of public programs and tools available to protect and steward farmland in Massachusetts. Several MFAP partners contributed to this document including MDAR, NRCS, DCS, MLTC and several land trusts.

Visit the [Massachusetts Farmland Protection Options: A Guide for Landowners, Land Trusts, and Municipalities](#).

²⁰ Task 1345 - Develop online and print materials for outreach to landowners. Ensure that publications like Land Conservation Options: A Guide for Massachusetts Landowners and Your Land, Your Legacy are kept up to date and easily available digitally and in hardcopy.



Highlight 7 – Increase applications to farmland protection programs

Why is this important?

Protecting farmland is a process that takes time and resources. To increase the number and quality of farmland being protected there needs to be more applications to protection programs, since not all applications result in protection. There are many factors that may affect whether farmland becomes protected, including the quality of the property, the amount of time available to make the deal and the cost of the transaction. This highlight focuses on reducing some of the barriers to completing protection.

Which parts of the plan does this contribute to?

- Goal I: Accelerate the permanent protection and stewardship of farmland.
- Strategy I.A: Permanently protect farmland through purchases of agricultural restrictions.
- Action 1.A.7: Increase the number of applications to APR, ALE, and non-ALE protection programs.

Where can I learn more?

- [Agricultural Preservation Restriction \(APR\) Program Webpage](#)
- [APR Project Scoresheet](#)
- Agricultural Conservation Easement Programs – Massachusetts NRCS – [USDA webpage](#) and [Farmland Information Center resource](#)
- [Resources for Landowners webpage](#) by MLTC

²¹ Task 1447 - Revise the APR scoring and review sheet to continue to align with NRCS ranking, community land protection priorities, recognize farmland of local importance soils and include broader criteria for evaluation, such as

- [Deciding the future of my land webpage](#) by MassWoods

2024 Progress – Update to APR Project Evaluation Form

This story was initially released in the [December 2024 newsletter](#) and relates to implementation of Task 1447²¹.

MDAR's Agricultural Preservation Restriction (APR) Program evaluates and provides recommendations for all APR applications to the Agricultural Lands Preservation Committee (ALPC) on a quarterly basis. These recommendations are based in part on an expanded project evaluation form that was approved by the ALPC in September 2024. This expanded evaluation places additional emphasis on projects that may advance principles outlined by the Farmland Action Plan. While the evaluation form still primarily considers traditional farmland resources like soil quality and farm business viability, the form now also includes priorities that further state priorities like farmland of local importance, environmental justice neighborhoods, whole farm elements (infrastructure, wetlands, woodlands), and other conservation resource benefits.

Learn more on the [MDAR Prospective APR owners webpage](#).

infrastructure, succession planning, and farmland viability program involvement.

Contact a [member of MDAR's Acquisition team](#) for more information.

APR Parcel Scoresheet for Applications Received		Date:	Prepared By:			
Landowner's Name:		Total Acres:				
Property Address:		Proposed APR Acres:				
Eligibility Thresholds - State ⁽¹⁾						
Products raised on APR Area are sold in the normal course of business (i.e. commercial operation)						Yes
APR Area in active agricultural production for at least previous two years						<input type="checkbox"/>
APR Area contains at least 5 contiguous acres of active agricultural land						<input type="checkbox"/>
APR Area includes site access (both legal & practical)						<input type="checkbox"/>
Eligibility Thresholds - Federal ⁽²⁾						
ACEP-ALE Area is contiguous (although road and utility easement can bisect)						<input type="checkbox"/>
ACEP-ALE Area contains ≥ 33% open farmland						<input type="checkbox"/>
ACEP-ALE Area contains ≥ 50% of a combination of prime/state/farmland of local importance or;						<input type="checkbox"/>
ACEP-ALE Area meets any alternate eligibility criteria (historic/archaeological resource, grazing uses, furthers state or local policy)						<input type="checkbox"/>
ACEP-ALE Area is privately owned or tribal agricultural land						<input type="checkbox"/>
ACEP-ALE Area owner(s) meets adjusted gross income (AGI) limitations as set forth in 7 CFR Part 1400						<input type="checkbox"/>
If sod/nursery operation, ACEP-ALE Area meets NRCS tolerance for soil loss ⁽³⁾						<input type="checkbox"/>
State & Federal Eligibility Comments:						
Proposed APR Area Attributes						
Soils	Acres	Percent %				
Prime Farmland ⁴			85-100%	68-84%	51-67%	≤ 50%
Farmland of Statewide Importance ⁵			<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Farmland of Local Importance ⁽⁴⁾						
Soil Description/Comments:						Score (0-75)
<small>NRCS Qualifier: In some local areas there is concern for certain additional farmlands for the production of food, feed, fiber, forage, and oilseed crops, even though these lands are not identified as having national or statewide importance. Where appropriate, these lands are to be identified by the local agency or agencies concerned. In places, additional farmlands for local importance may include tracts of land that have been designated for agriculture by local ordinance. 7 CFR s. 657.5</small>						
Size	Acres					
Total APR Land Area			50+ <input type="checkbox"/>	26-50 <input type="checkbox"/>	11-25 <input type="checkbox"/>	5-10 <input type="checkbox"/>
APR Area Size Comments:						Score (0-50)
Open Agriculture	Acres	Percent %				
Land in Open Ag Use			50+ % <input type="checkbox"/>	26-50% <input type="checkbox"/>	11-25% <input type="checkbox"/>	5-10% <input type="checkbox"/>

Figure 4: First page of the APR Scoresheet revised in September 2024. View the full scoresheet online on the [MDAR Prospective APR owners webpage](#)

2022 Progress – Accept applications on rolling basis for the APR Program

This story is original to this Progress Report and relates to implementation of Task 1078²².

The APR Program accepts applications to the program on a rolling basis. Evaluations are conducted on a quarterly basis with the goal of submitting favorably reviewed applications to the federal

²² Task 1078 - Return to rolling votes throughout the year along with the rolling applications rather than any one deadline for either.

ACEP/ ALE program for consideration of funding. MDAR returned to rolling applications in Fall 2022.

Learn more on the [MDAR Prospective APR owners webpage](#).

Contact [Ron Hall](#) at MDAR for more information.

2024 Progress – Increasing the price per acre for APRs

This story is original to this Progress Report and relates to implementation of Task 1071²³.

In January 2024 the Agricultural Lands Preservation Committee approved and adopted their most recent amendment to the APR Purchase Private Limitations Policy. This policy provides a clear and transparent methodology on how to consider fair market value when evaluating APR projects.

The APR Program clarified that the application of the Purchase Price Limitation policy (“Spending Cap policy”) applied only to state funds and not to funds that originate from sources external to the Commonwealth in order to help the acquisition of APRs.

The portion of the purchase price allocated to ARPA funds, or any non-MDAR funding sources such as ALE, funds from a municipality, land trust, or grant would not be limited by the ALPC cap policy. This would align with the Farmland Action Plan recommendation by allowing maximal use of these funds. In addition, it would bring the purchase offers for “over the cap” projects closer to the full Fair Market Value (FMV), making the

²³ Task 1071 - Continue to regularly review and adjust the APR per-acre purchase price cap, which could include elimination if evidence suggests it poses a significant hinderance to participation.

APR offer more competitive and hopefully lead to more APRs acquired. Lastly, it would not take away funds from other projects because it would not increase the amount of funds we already accept from these sources. For example, when using ALE, MDAR receive 50% of the FMV back in the form of reimbursement – even if they spend less than that at closing due to the cap. Under either scenario MDAR use the same amount from ALE.

Learn more in the [APR Purchase Price Limitations Policy](#) and on the [MDAR Prospective APR owners webpage](#).

Contact a [member of MDAR's Acquisition team](#) for more information.

2024 Progress – Simplifying transition from short term covenants to permanent protection

This story is original to this Progress Report and relates to implementation of Task 1074²⁴.

At the end of 2022, the Farm Viability Enhancement Program (FVEP) and APR staff initiated a working group to eliminate gaps in the protection status of FVEP covenant holders applying for permanent protection through APR.

Previously, FVEP covenant properties had been prohibited from applying to ACEP-ALE because their short term covenant status had prevented appraisers from determining their market value, and thus had to wait until covenant expiration to apply. Because APR and ACEP-ALE applications can take multiple years to

approve, this left properties without protection status in the interim.

MDAR became a certified entity with NRCS in 2023, at which time NRCS clarified that appraisals can be completed on a farmland parcel with an FVEP covenant that will expire prior to an ALE closing. FVEP and APR staff then worked to create a collaborative process to assess FVEP covenant properties for APR potential and conduct outreach to potentially suitable farms. Since then, staff have assessed dozens of FVEP covenant farms for APR potential and have opened channels of communication for landowners to learn more about the permanent protection process.

Learn more at [Farm Viability Enhancement Program \(FVEP\)](#) and in the [APR Application Instructions](#).

Contact [Melissa Adams](#) at MDAR for more information.

²⁴ Task 1074 - Develop process to help streamline the transition from short-term protection to permanent protection of farms for interested farmers, including Farm Viability Enhancement Program (FVEP) short-term covenants.



Highlight 8 – Prioritize protection of whole farms

Why is this important?

The whole farm approach is important as it seeks to protect agricultural land and may also include infrastructure, woodland, wildlife habitat and other uses. There are several benefits to this approach, including supporting the long-term viability of farming operations, supporting climate resilience, and recognizing ecosystem services.

Which part of the plan does this contribute to?

- Goal I: Accelerate the permanent protection and stewardship of farmland.
- Strategy I.C: Prioritize protection of whole farms
- Several actions including Action I.C.5: Explore how additional federal and state programs might be further utilized to aid in funding whole farm protection.

What new tasks are likely to be added soon?

We recognized that the matrix did not cover the full breadth of protection options in the actions and tasks listed. As such, MDAR have drafted an additional action, with associated tasks, to fill this gap. Some of the “new” tasks are parallels to what was suggested for the APR Program.

The following is the draft text²⁵:

Action I.C.7. Explore revision to additional protection approaches (e.g. Private APR, CR) to include whole farm conservation as relates to, including but not limited to farm family and farm worker housing, infrastructure, and the full range of farm entities

and operations, including woodland, wetlands and other land types and uses.

ID	Task language
1476	Explore Private APR process updates that would allow farm-related housing, with requirements for that home to remain connected to that or another farm.
1481	Increase awareness of how APRs, Private APRs and CRs differ for accomplishing goals of farmland protection, and their relative benefits.

Where can I learn more?

- [APR Program webpage](#)
- [Private APR webpage](#)
- [Agricultural Conservation Easement Program – Wetland Reserve Easement Program \(ACEP-WRE\)](#) by NRCS

²⁵ Likely to be included in the winter 2026 version of the matrix

2025 Progress – Whole farms protected through the APR Program

This story was initially shared in the [May 2025 newsletter](#) and relates to Task 1134.²⁶

In early 2025 MDAR's Agricultural Preservation Restriction (APR) Programs permanently protected 633 acres across three farms (Cooper Hill, Galenski and Herrick) as whole farms. These collaborative efforts included local and federal funding, as well as coordination with several partners.

Learn more from the [5/22/2025 MDAR Press Release](#) about 2 of the 3 farms.



²⁶ Task 1134 - Explore whole farm policies and practices that recognize the importance of associated land (in forest, wetlands, water bodies, etc.) and uses (cord wood, irrigation, housing, buffering from surrounding residential or

commercial uses, etc.) to a farm's crop and pastureland and include those in protection and support of farms and farmland.



Highlight 9 – Build state farmland licensing program

Why is this important?

Land licenses are a useful, low-cost mechanism for farmers to access land. The State-Owned Farmland Licensing Program makes publicly-owned agricultural land available to farmers and others through agricultural licenses. There are currently around 1,055 acres of state land actively licensed through this program, mostly former state hospital farmland. The Program added 10 new agricultural licenses in FY25 and has added 120 acres since the beginning of FY24.

The program currently serves over 30 different tenants, some with multiple farming operations, operating a variety of vegetable and forage growing on their licensed area. This includes a license for an organization that subleases the land to Historically Underserved Farmers.

What's the difference between licensing and leasing?

A license is a non-exclusive right to use the property for a particular purpose, while a lease is an exclusive right to use the property for all purposes except what is excluded by the agreement²⁷. State and local governments generally issue licenses. Land trusts, non-profits and private landowners can lease land.

²⁷ Farmland Action Plan (Page 31) and Letter Ruling 84-56 www.mass.gov/letter-ruling/letter-ruling-84-56-lease-and-license-distinguished

²⁸ Task 1174 - Refine criteria that prioritize applications that come from BIPOC, beginning, and historically underserved farmers for state farmland licensing programs.

Which part of the plan does this contribute to?

- Goal II: Increase access to farmland.
- Strategy II.A: Make more land available for agriculture.
 - o Several actions including Action II.A.2: Strengthen the State land licensing program
- Strategy II.C: Prioritize increased access for BIPOC and historically underserved farmers in all farmland access programs and policies.
 - o Several actions including Action II.C.2: Increase access to public lands for agriculture, while prioritizing Historically Underserved Farmers

Where can I learn more?

[State-Owned Farmland Licensing Program webpage](#)

2024 Progress – Updates to applications for licensing state owned land

This story is original to this Progress Report and relates to implementation of Task 1174²⁸ and 1175²⁹. Also see the [Progress Story about improving historically underserved farmer access under Highlight 8](#).

Since the program began around 44 years ago, the State-Owned Land Licensing program has been predominantly utilized by large,

²⁹ Task 1175 - Update application process to consider plans to sell into local markets, soil management practices, and other factors.

established hay or corn growers. As these operations transitioned away from the land, MDAR saw an opportunity to address the need for land accessibility for a diverse range of farmers.

The program implemented changes to ensure that the MDAR licensed properties are accessible to more farmers, by reducing the acreage of agricultural parcels available to farmers and thereby increasing the number of plots available. The application process was adjusted to request more detail about the experience and capacity of the farmer applicants. A priority was established for applicants identifying as Historically Underserved Farmers (HUFs).

Today, more than half of the program's licensees are from historically underserved communities, as part of the department's commitment to supporting individuals who have systemically been excluded from the industry. Licensees tend to be small and beginning farmers who might otherwise be unable to afford land to get started in farming.

Contact [Ryan Burke](#) at MDAR for more information.

2025 Progress – Providing technical assistance for licensees

This story is original to this Progress Report and relates to implementation of Task 1178³⁰ and 1179³¹.

³⁰ Task 1178 - Support farm incubators and aspiring and beginning farmers through the state land-licensing program.

³¹ Task 1179 - Connect licensees with services and support organizations, such as Buy Locals, UMass Extension, NRCS, business and succession planning technical assistance providers, lenders, and others.

MDAR's State Owned Land Licensing Program has identified a need for technical assistance support at many land licensing properties. Technical assistance needs range from business assistance, soil health conservation practices, marketing assistance, and crop planning assistance. So far, the program has primarily leveraged relationships with existing buy locals and support organizations to encourage support for licensing tenants. The program utilizes internal resources with MDAR's Markets team, Environmental Justice team, Food Safety team, and MACD providers to support specific TA needs that have recently arose.

The program is identifying the increasing need for support programs of new and beginning farmers and farmers farming public land. The department is exploring other TA opportunities and resource opportunities for coming seasons.

Contact [Ryan Burke](#) at MDAR for more information.

2025 Progress – Infrastructure upgrades for farming on state owned land

This story is original to this Progress Report and relates to implementation of Task 1176³².

MDAR identified a need for infrastructure at multiple MDAR land licensing sites to improve the viability of current and future operations licensing the land.

³² Task 1176 - Fund infrastructure development to support agriculture on publicly held land (e.g., irrigation, high tunnels, etc.).

In Fiscal Year 2025 (July 2024 through June 2025), MDAR utilized over one million dollars to field restorations, sign installation, road maintenance, new irrigation and utility infrastructure. This included:

- 102 acres of state property across four sites restored for agricultural use and placed back into licenses with farmers.
- Eight properties receiving new well or irrigation infrastructure to accommodate the needs of 17 different agricultural operations.
- Multiple land licensing sites including renewable energy to power irrigation infrastructure.

Contact [Ryan Burke](#) at MDAR for more information.



Figure 5: Solar irrigation improvements at MDAR Templeton agricultural fields

³³ Task 1232 - Refine criteria and a transparent and manageable/equitable application and reporting process for state held lands.

2024 Progress – Improving Historically Underserved Farmer access to the state land licensing program

This story is original to this Progress Report and relates to implementation of Tasks 1232³³ and 1235³⁴. Also see the [Progress Story about more general updates to applications under Highlight 9](#).

As the price of land continues to increase, public lands provide an opportunity for Historically Underserved Farmers to gain access to agricultural land at a nominal cost. Entering Fiscal Year 2026 (FY26, starting July 2025), over 50% of agricultural licenses held with MDAR are with Historically Underserved Farmers. Over 60% of land placed back into agricultural use in the last year was through licenses with HUFs.

Improvements to land conditions and infrastructure has helped to make the program more appealing to all farmers (see [Highlight 9](#)).

Contact [Ryan Burke](#) and [Dimple Rana](#) at MDAR for more information.

³⁴ Task 1235 - Conduct ample and strategic outreach for all Requests for Responses (RFRs), coordinating with organizations serving and based in historically underserved communities.



Highlight 10 – Expand farmland transfer and succession education and technical assistance

Why is this important?

Timely farm succession planning is an important step for ensuring that farmland stays in active farming as the existing farmer passes their business and land to the next generation of farmers. In Massachusetts, as of 2022, 40% of producers were over the age of 65³⁵ so significant amounts of farmland and farm businesses will be undergoing changes in the next two decades.

What's the difference between transfer, estate, and succession planning?

There are several different ways to define these terms and sometimes they are used interchangeably and incorrectly.

A farm transfer plan can include estate planning and business succession planning tasks for the farmland and farm business owner(s) to accomplish to achieve their farm transfer plan goals.

If estate planning is part of a farm transfer plan it is the farmland and farm business owner(s) responsibility to obtain the necessary estate planning documents, which typically requires the drafting of will(s) and/or trust(s) by qualified estate planning professionals.

If a farm transfer plan includes a business succession plan, it is the farm business owner's responsibility to identify and secure the successor(s) to critical positions in the farm business and properly transfer ownership of the farm business assets as intended.

³⁵ [Census of Agriculture 2022. Table 51 for Massachusetts.](#)

Which part of the plan does this contribute to?

- Goal II: Increase access to farmland.
- Strategy II.B. Support farm transfer and succession in ways that enhance access to farmland.
- Action II.B.1: Support and expand farmland transfer and farmland succession education and one-to-one technical assistance

Where can I learn more?

- [Farm Transfer Planning Resources from Land For Good](#)
- [New England Farmland Finder](#)
- [Farm Transfer Planning in Massachusetts Brochure by MDAR](#)
- [Farm-Pass](#): Farm Transfer Planning Assistance Planning Assistance Program from MDAR

2025 Workshops – Planning for the future of your farm

This story was initially released in the [April 2025 newsletter](#) and relates to Task 1203³⁶ and other tasks.

In late March and early April 2025 MDAR allocated resources and provided funding for the coordination of three public workshops for farmers across the state to discuss a range of farm planning resources. These “Planning for the Future of Your Farm” sessions

³⁶ Task 1203 - Disseminate information to farmers on transfer planning models, case studies, and best practices.

were hosted in northern Berkshire, Franklin, and Worcester counties in partnership with American Farmland Trust (AFT), Land for Good, local land trusts, and other farm service providers. Over 120 farmers attended with specific programs and topics discussed including land protection tools, succession, business planning, funding opportunities, and conflict resolution. Participants were also given the opportunity to provide direct feedback regarding how these resources may be improved or expanded to best meet the changing needs of local farmers.

These sessions were deliberately designed to attract a wide audience encouraging conversations between multiple service providers and amongst farmers themselves.

MDAR will continue to support similar information sessions in other counties over the coming years in an effort to promote permanent farmland protection opportunities and enhance the viability of farms in alignment with the Massachusetts Farmland Action Plan.



³⁷ Task 1209 - Make funding available to support farmers in developing transfer plans, with follow-up support.

2025 Progress – New Farm-Pass Program

This story is original to this progress report and relates to Task 1209³⁷.

In late 2024 MDAR launched the new Farm-Pass Program which provides direct assistance to help Massachusetts farm owners pass their farm on to the next generation. This is a no-cost opportunity for farm owners, family members, and the identified successor to work one-on-one with an experienced, dedicated Planner to create a customized written farm transfer plan.

This opportunity helps farm owners get the planning help they need to figure out the complexities of their farm transfer situation before they pay for a professional, such as an attorney or accountant, to make the transfer happen.

Through the pilot round of the Farm Pass program, three Massachusetts farms have successfully completed farm transfer plans in June 2025 and eight more farms have planning processes underway to be completed in 2026.

For farms with identified successors that are interested in participating, the program is open for another round with applications due on a rolling basis in early 2026.

Learn more on MDAR's [Agricultural Business Assistance webpage](#).

Contact [Laura Barley](#) at MDAR for more information.

Other Stories

Resilient Lands Farmland

This story was initially released in the [November newsletter](#) and relates to several tasks including, but not limited to, Tasks 1432³⁸ and 1095³⁹.

[The Resilient Lands Initiative \(RLI\)](#) is a vision and strategy document, released in early 2023, by the Massachusetts Executive Office of Energy and Environmental Affairs (EEA) in partnership with partners from across the Commonwealth. The RLI seeks to set goals for land conservation and stewardship in ways that maximize benefits for people, particularly in environmental justice communities, and that mitigate the impacts of climate change.

In 2024 a group of public agencies and private organizations started working together to advance the strategies of the RLI and related initiatives. This group is known as the Resilient Lands Conservation Coalition (RLCC). There are four focus areas: Coastal, Farmland, Forests and Landscapes, and Urban.

For farmland the work will focus on the intersection of the Massachusetts Farmland Action Plan (MFAP) and RLI. The MFAP was designed to intentionally complement the goals of the RLI and some of the projects being suggested. The RLI proposes several strategies for farmland protection, which overlap with some tasks

for land protection in the MFAP. In the near term the farmland part of the RLCC will be focusing on:

Farmland protection is more than just about the land, it is also about the people, the business, the food system and more. How do we support protection of farmland that also considers the long term viability and resiliency of sustaining a farm business on that land?

Specific tasks from the MFAP matrix which have overlap with this vision have been identified and are shared on the [Resilient Lands Farmland webpage](#).

Learn more on the [Resilient Lands Farmland webpage](#).

Contact [Katharine Otto](#) at MDAR for more information.

Coming soon – 2026 APR Listening Sessions

This story is original to this Progress Report and relates to implementation of Task 1251.⁴⁰

Every three years MDAR conducts a series of regional public listening sessions to assess the effectiveness of the APR Program. The Program reviews all existing guidance, policies, procedures and regulations relative to the management and oversight of the

³⁸ Task 1432 - Build the capacity of restriction-holding entities to effectively identify, review, and acquire restrictions that allow agriculture

³⁹ Task 1095 - Build the capacity of restriction-holding entities to effectively hold and steward restrictions that allow agriculture.

⁴⁰ Task 1251 - As part of the triennial reviews of the APR program solicit input on APR program policies including but not limited to, those related to housing,

farm infrastructure, the impervious surface limit, special permits, building envelopes, public access, and renewable energy policy. Under Action III.A.1 - Explore increasing APR Program flexibility to support farm viability.

Program and proposes any updates to the guidance, policies, procedures or regulations that are necessary to improve and modernize the management of the Program.

In March 2026, listening sessions are scheduled to take place in person in Hadley, Shrewsbury and Lakeville. Two virtual sessions are also scheduled.

Learn more on [APR Program Review webpage](#).

Contact [Gerard Kennedy](#) at MDAR for more information.

Coming soon – 2026 Urban Farming Symposium

This story is original to this Progress Report and relates to implementation of several tasks (to be determined based on agenda).

MDAR's commitment to urban agriculture has made significant impacts in cities across the Commonwealth, with over \$3.5 million invested in over 110 projects that increase access to fresh nutritious food, marketing, and distribution in low to moderate income communities. To learn more about the program and the 30+ farming organizations, please visit the [Urban Agriculture page](#).

The Urban Agriculture program, now going into its 13th year, has also supported urban farmers with opportunities to network and obtain technical assistance through workshops with practitioners at several state-wide urban farming conferences and symposiums.

On March 28, 2026, MDAR and The Urban Farming Institute will partner to bring robust learning opportunities, specialists and networking opportunities at the MA Urban Farming Symposium.

Learn more on the [MDAR Urban Agriculture Webpage](#).

Contact [Rose Arruda](#) at MDAR for more information.



Save the Date • Save the Date

Massachusetts Urban Farming Symposium

An urban approach, leading with action.

March 28, 2026 | UMASS Boston
Boston, MA

The 2026 Symposium focuses on **strengthening resilience** from within the urban farming community. In a changing landscape of reduced funding, participants will gather to explore strategies for building durable, farmer-led solutions through collaboration, innovation, and community-based support.

Featuring talks, workshops, demos, and networking, this event is designed to equip growers to take action, develop partnerships, diversify approaches, and shape a thriving future for urban farming.

Registration will open in February, 2026.
For more information, contact Rose.Arruda@Mass.gov
For sponsor/vendor opportunities, contact jtretina@urbanfarminginstitute.org



Other Tasks and Next Steps

The highlights outlined above are not the only tasks being worked on in 2025. Please visit the implementation matrix for the status of all tasks on the [Farmland Action Plan webpage](#).

Thoughtful decision-making is needed so tasks can move forward in a reasonable timeframe given the following considerations:

- Capacity of staff and partners involved in implementation
- Clear next steps for implementation
- Potential impact of the task once completed
- Opportunities that may boost implementation
- Challenges that may hinder implementation
- And other factors

What highlights could be added in future?

Any tasks from the 2023 Farmland Action Plan could be added to the highlights list in future Progress Reports.

This will be shaped by conversations with partners and interested individuals at meetings and events.

What tasks can be added to the MFAP?

The implementation matrix is a living document that tracks what partners have done and plan to do. For more information about the matrix, how to use it and how to make suggestions for edits, please visit the [matrix portion of the MFAP webpage](#).

Email Newsletter

A regular newsletter is being published to share more information about the Plan, opportunities to get involved with implementation, and upcoming meetings and events. Sign up on the [Farmland Action Plan webpage](#).

Where can I learn more?

The [Farmland Action Plan webpage](#) has a growing library of resources – general resources, as well as ones for particular audiences and on specific topics.

Drop In Sessions are being hosted by Katharine for partners and interested individuals to ask questions and make comments. These are scheduled approximately monthly with dates advertised in the MFAP newsletter and on the MFAP webpage.

Appendix A – Abbreviations

ACEP	Agricultural Conservation Easement Program
AFT	American Farmland Trust
ALE	Agricultural Land Easements (part of ACEP)
APR	Agricultural Preservation Restriction
BIPOC	Black, Indigenous, and People of Color
CR	Conservation Restriction
CPA	Community Preservation Act
DCS	Massachusetts Division of Conservation Services
EEA	Executive Office of Energy and Environmental Affairs
FMV	Fair Market Value
FLI	Farm soils of Local Importance
FVEP	Farm Viability Enhancement Program
FY	Fiscal Year
HUF	Historically Underserved Farmer
MDAR	Massachusetts Department of Agricultural Resources
MFAP	Massachusetts Farmland Action Plan
NRCS	Natural Resources Conservation Service
NWL	Natural and Working Lands
OPAV	Option to Purchase at Agricultural Value
PAPR	Private Agricultural Preservation Restriction
RLI	Resilient Lands Initiative
ROFR	Right of First Refusal
RPA	Regional Planning Agency
USDA	United States Department of Agriculture
WRE	Wetland Reserve Easements (part of ACEP)

