

Massachusetts Farmland Action Plan

Requested local meeting with farmers and ag comms
Friday, June 27, 2025 at 11am. Online.

Katharine Otto, Farmland Action Plan Coordinator



Agenda and Today's Goals

Agenda

- ❖ Context for the Farmland Action Plan
- ❖ About the Farmland Action Plan
- ❖ Implementing the Farmland Action Plan
- ❖ Questions and Discussion

Goals

- ❖ Build on what you've already learned and discussed with Peter Westover, Winton Pitcoff and others
- ❖ Learn how Ag Comms could contribute towards implementation of the Farmland Action Plan

Context

Farming in Massachusetts today

According to the 2022 Census of Agriculture, Massachusetts has:

**7,083 farms on
464,451 acres**



of farmland (about 9% of MA land) with
land and buildings worth

\$6.4 billion

13,896 producers* and
14,032 hired farm workers

with a payroll of

\$204 million



**\$607
million**

of agricultural
products
sold



* A “producer” is a person who is involved in making decisions for the farm operation

Why are farms
and farmland
important to you?

Feeds
community

????

Contributes
to local
economy

Preserves
rural
heritage

????

Grow
foods from
my cultural
heritage

????

Helps
address
climate
change and
mitigate its
impacts

Sustains
family
businesses

Protects
vital
natural
resources

Contributes
to soil
health

???

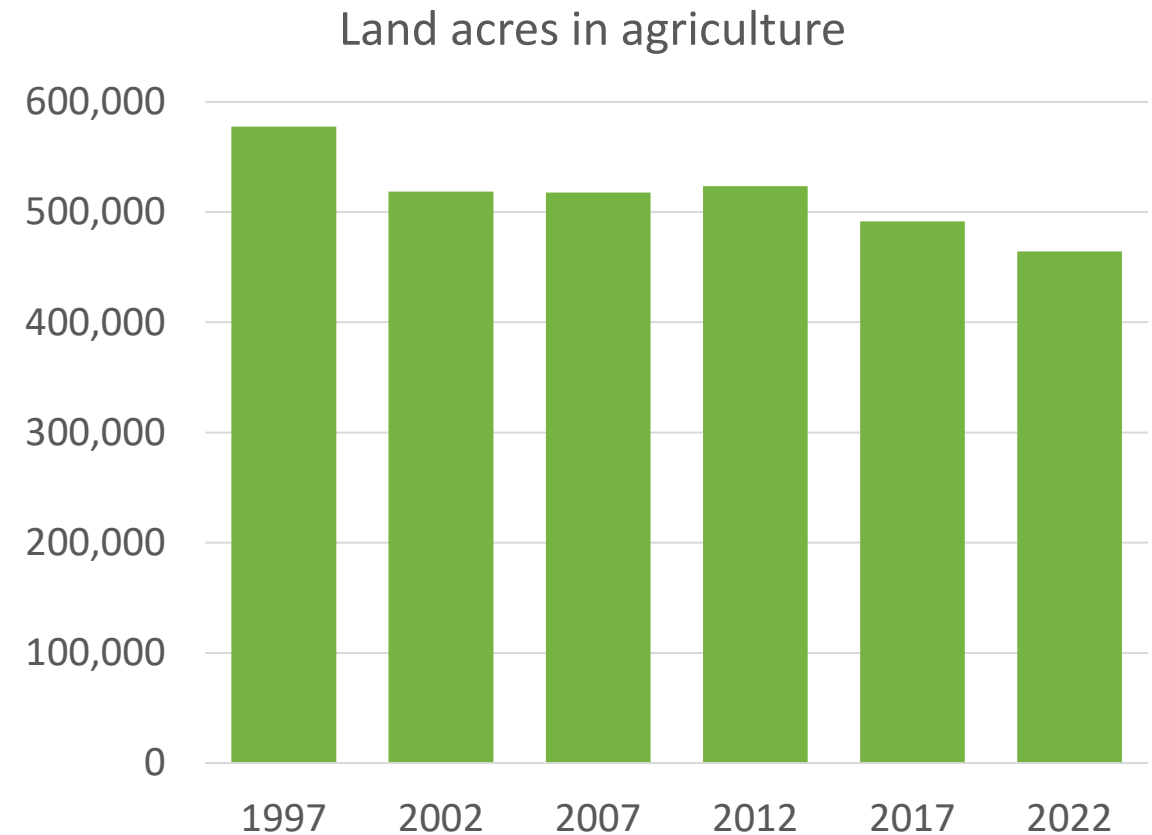
Why is the Farmland Action Plan important?

We are losing agricultural land fast!

Between 1997 and 2022

Massachusetts lost 113,000 acres

- 3.7 times the size of the land area of Boston
- 1.8 times the size of Martha's Vineyard
- 12.4 acres per day



Farms Under Threat

American Farmland Trust's "Farms Under Threat 2040" Report, between 2016 and 2040 Massachusetts, without additional investment and policy changes, is projected to lose

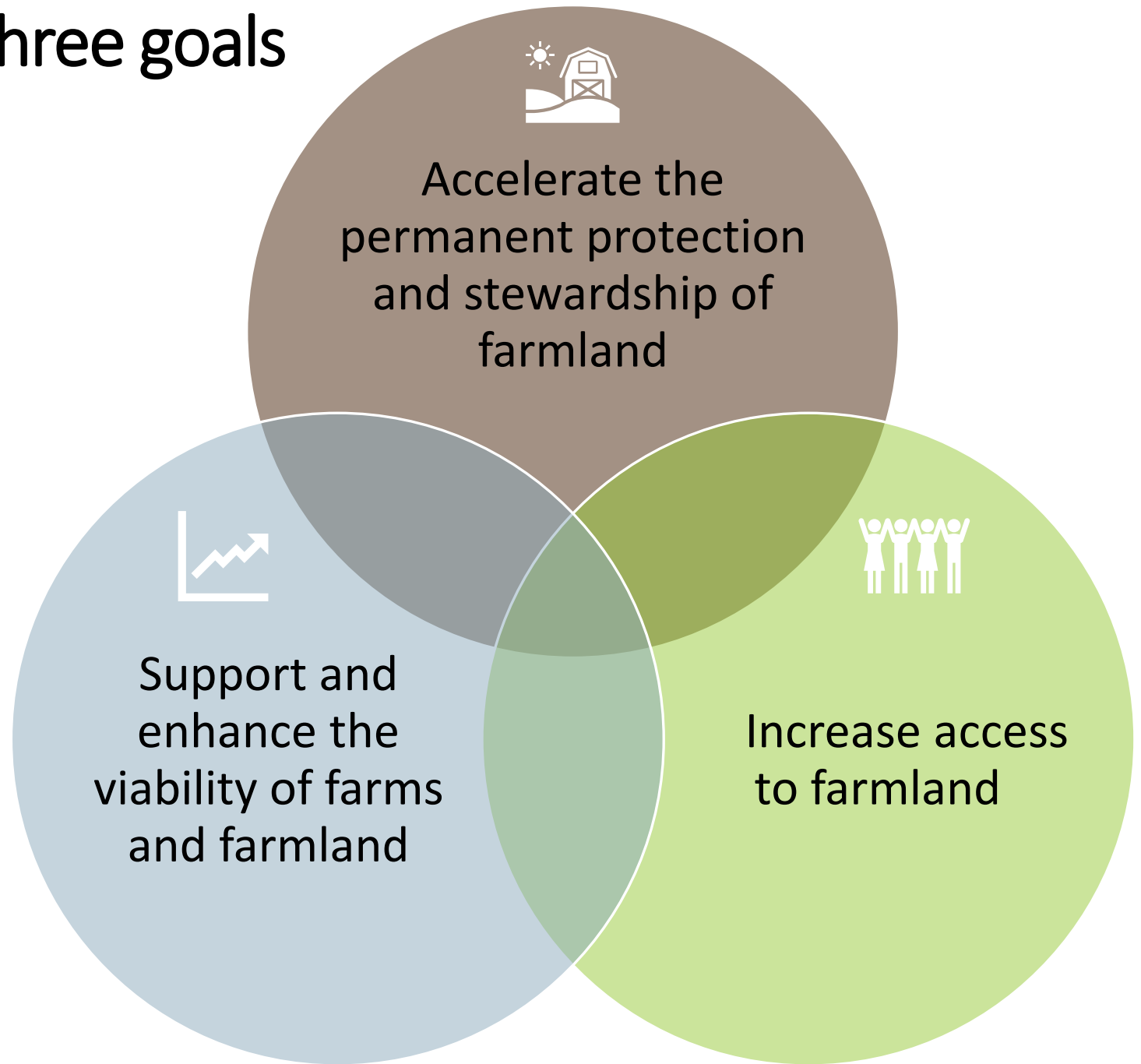


Farmland Action Plan

What is the Farmland Action Plan?

- State funded
- State coordinated
- Long range strategic initiative
- Statewide, not just for state government
- www.mass.gov/farmland-action-plan

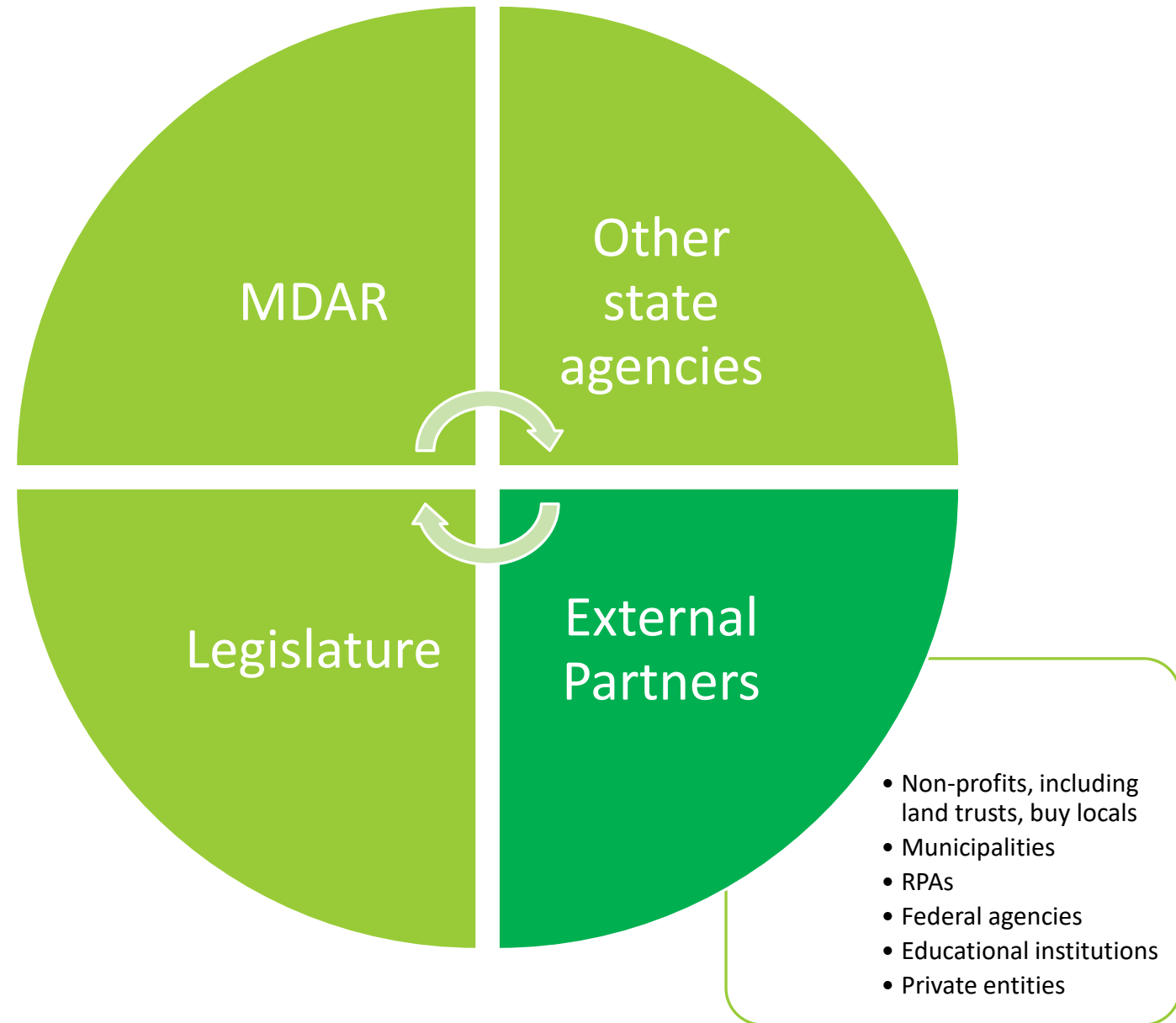
Three goals



Who will implement the Plan?

This is a plan for the Commonwealth of Massachusetts.

MDAR is promoting, monitoring and facilitating implementation of the Plan, building momentum from existing programs and initiatives.



How is it organized?

Plan is organized into:

- Goals
- Strategies
- Actions
- Tasks

For each task we are looking for a lead implementer and other potential implementers. When work starts on a task, that group will then reach out to other interested individuals.

Lead implementer

Other
potential
implementer

Other
potential
implementer

Other
potential
implementer

Other
interested
individuals

Other
interested
individuals

Other
interested
individuals

Other
interested
individuals

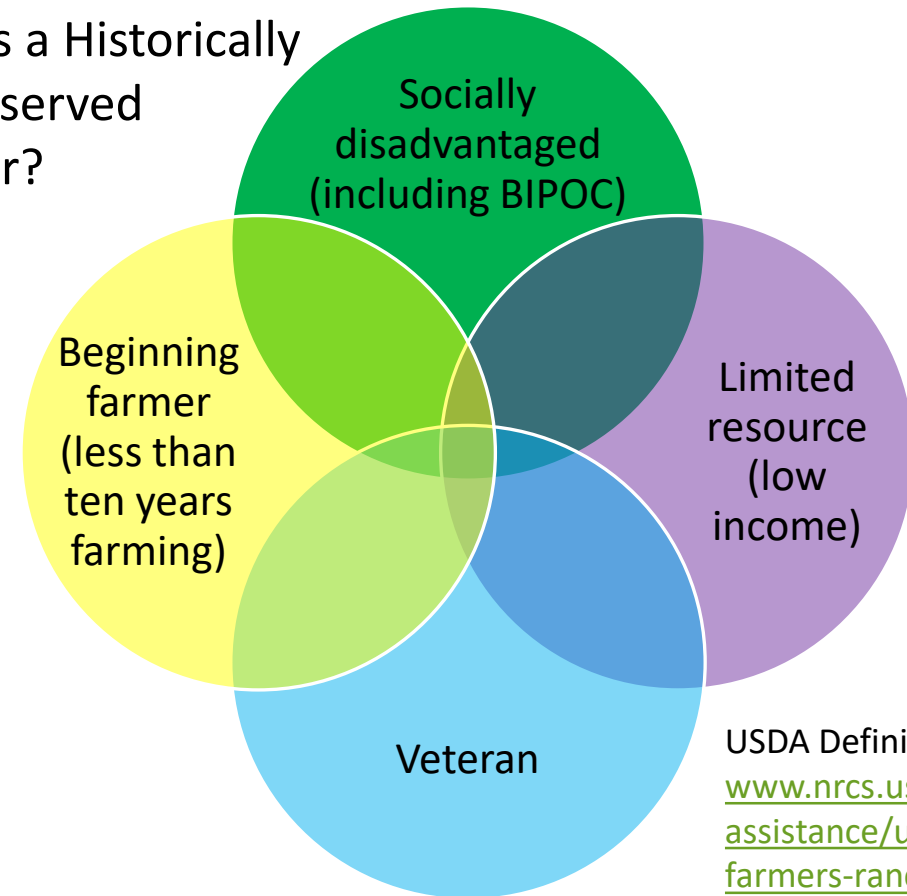
Other
interested
individuals

Other
interested
individuals

Implementing for all farmers

- All stages of farmer – beginning through retiring
- All areas of the state
- Variety of farm types – dairy, fruit, vegetables, nurseries, maple, etc.
- Urban and rural farming
- Historically Underserved Farmers (see graphic)
- Many other characteristics

Who is a Historically Underserved Farmer?



USDA Definition 2024
www.nrcs.usda.gov/getting-assistance/underserved-farmers-ranchers

Implementation

Key features for implementation

Already started

- Regular communication via newsletter and meetings
- Foster partnerships and collaboration
- Learn from feedback on previous processes, including plan creation
- Encourage wider engagement and implementation
- Refine the implementation matrix

Going forwards

- Focus on topics or specific tasks not the entire plan
- Better understanding of equitable engagement and feedback mechanisms
- Build trusted relationships
- Capacity building, including funding for partners to help with implementation

Sign up for the newsletter at www.mass.gov/farmland-action-plan

Refining the implementation matrix

The matrix is a living document that tracks

- what partners have done, and
- what partners plan to do.

Published online at
www.mass.gov/farmland-action-plan
with updates published as needed

Sort, filter and search for keywords – eg
“Ag comm”, “municipality”, “policy”

4-digit unique ID number



Implementation with Ag Comms

Ag Comms as “Other potential implementers”

- Current version (2/5/2025) has 6 tasks. For now, look for “Ag comm” and “muni” as a good place to start.
- Next version (Fall 2025) will likely have around 30
- Suggest places to add “Ag Comms” using the [matrix portal](#)!

MDAR funded Ag Comm Support

- Connect with Pete and Sarah - www.mass.gov/info-details/agricultural-commissions

Sampling of tasks from the matrix

1059	Create watchlists of important farmland properties that are not yet protected and prioritize them in terms of threat of loss and importance, and support municipalities and land trusts in doing the same.
1063	Develop and implement a program to train municipalities on the economic, food security, and other benefits of farmland, to help them understand the details of Chapter 61A Right of First Refusal (ROFR), and to encourage them to exercise their rights or assign them to nonprofits.
1066	For properties at risk of turnover or conversion, educate owners about APR opportunities.
1104	Explore mechanisms that would require towns with municipal agricultural commissions have those bodies review and provide a recommendation on ROFRs under Chapter 61A. Provide commissions with education to enable them to do so effectively.
1110	Encourage all municipalities to adopt the CPA, create conservation commission funds, and fund them for agricultural land protection projects as consistent with the CPA statute.
1458	Work with municipalities to identify and publicly list all publicly owned land that is either in current agricultural production or suitable for agricultural production. Consider each parcel for inclusion in the farmland licensing program.
1162	Support municipalities in developing their own farmland licensing agreements and plans.
1256	Provide a clearinghouse of all the Right to Farm bylaws municipalities have passed, along with the model the state created.
1442	Promote ag mediation services available to help when there are disputes between farmers and those they interact with.

Implementation with Farmers

Search the matrix for tasks that interest you.

- What small things can you do on your farm and/or with your community?
- What bigger tasks might you be interested in, to work with others to address?

Sign up for Farmland Action Plan Newsletter

“Lead implementers” will share information about how to get involved when the task gets started.

- Farmers as “Other potential implementers”
- Farmers as “Other interested individuals”

Some tasks have already started to be implemented!

Some new or updated resources in the last year:

- APR Project Scoresheet (Revised 2024) www.mass.gov/doc/apr-project-scoresheet/download
- “Farm-Pass” – Farm Transfer Planning Assistance - www.mass.gov/info-details/agricultural-business-assistance
- MDAR Grants www.mass.gov/guides/agricultural-grants-and-financial-assistance-programs
- MDAR Agricultural Grant Writing Assistance List- www.mass.gov/info-details/agricultural-grant-writing-assistance-list
- Resources for Historically Underserved Farmers and Producers - www.mass.gov/info-details/resources-for-historically-underserved-farmers-and-producers
- Opportunities to license state land - www.mass.gov/farmlandlicensing

Highlights from 2024 Progress Report



Protect and steward land

- Leverage federal funding
- Build capacity of entities to protect land
- Increase applications to protection programs
- Prioritize protection of whole farms



Access to farmland

- State and municipal land licensing programs
- Expand farmland transfer and succession education and technical assistance
- Increase use of public lands by Historically Underserved Farmers



Viability of farms and farmland

- Farmer access to grants and financing



General

- Hire Farmland Action Plan Coordinator
- Elevate BIPOC and other historically underserved farmer voices in implementation

Learning about implementation so far

www.mass.gov/farmland-action-plan

2024 Progress Report

- Released December 2024
- Explains how implementation is starting
- Shares more about what has happened so far
- 10 Highlights – Work in progress or starting soon

Newsletter

- Approximately monthly. Celebrate work done and share opportunities to get involved.
- Sign up on webpage

Other Resources by Topic

- Created for meetings with potential partners in 2024 – Presentations, meeting notes and other resources
- Short video introductions added in May 2025

New Farmland Partnership Program

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.

Learn more at www.mass.gov/info-details/farmland-partnership-program

- Two year grants
- Applications due May 2025
- Expect to start work around November 2025



Questions and discussion

Farmland Action Plan Webpage www.mass.gov/farmland-action-plan

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