

Massachusetts Farmland Action Plan and Land Trusts

Meeting notes for online discussion 9/18/2024

Invitation/ Context

The Massachusetts Land Trust Coalition (MLTC) and the Massachusetts Department of Agricultural Resources (MDAR) are hosting an online discussion with land trusts about the [Massachusetts Farmland Action Plan](#). The 2023 Plan is a long-range strategic initiative intended to guide actions to ensure that farmland and farming are available and viable for current and future generations in Massachusetts. Implementation is shared among many partners across the Commonwealth, including many outside state government. Land trusts are a key partner! This event will have a short overview of the plan focusing on sections relevant for land trusts, and then have a facilitated discussion for land trusts to explore how they can be involved in implementing the plan.

Presenters, facilitators and hosts

- Katharine Otto, Farmland Action Plan Coordinator, MDAR. Katharine.s.otto@mass.gov
- Gerard Kennedy, Director of Division of Agricultural Conservation and Technical Assistance, MDAR Gerard.kennedy@mass.gov
- Dave Viale, Agricultural Lands Program Supervisor, MDAR David.viale@mass.gov
- Robb Johnson, MLTC Executive Director
- Barbara Chrenko, MLTC Programs Manager

Meeting notes

The following is a brief summary of some of the conversation that occurred in the chat box during the meeting as well as some of the oral comments. It includes links and resources shared with participants.

Context – Additional information shared during opening section

- Farmland Under Threat Report
 - o <https://farmlandinfo.org/publications/farms-under-threat-2040/>
 - o https://storage.googleapis.com/csp-fut2040.appspot.com/state-reports/FUT2040_MA.pdf
- Farmland of Local Importance
 - o <https://farmlandinfo.org/tools/ma-farmland-local-importance-screening-tool/>
- Farm Pass Program
 - o <https://www.mass.gov/info-details/agricultural-business-training-program-abtp#farm-pass:-farm-transfer-planning-assistance-program->

Barriers facing land trusts for getting involved in protecting farmland

- Price of farmland
- Little confidence in getting a CR reviewed in a timely manner!
- Farmers don't want to limit their options for later use or sale of the property.
- More tools for whole farm protection
- Price of Farmland not in line with farmers economics, especially farmland that includes housing options.
- The APR process is too slow

- Can't compete with solar offers and they should not be allowed on farmland
- Time and funding
- From a funding perspective, many private funders aren't interested in funding ag land acquisitions, their focus is more on food systems and security. So we really need the state support.

Protection goal – Additional information shared related to the discussion

- Dave Viale (MDAR) shared information about recent changes to APR process to address speed issues
- NRCS State Technical Committee Easements Sub-Committee
 - o Next meeting - October 23rd. To learn more, email Jamie: jpotters@farmland.org
- For an overview of farmland protection tools in MA, see recent MLTC webinar "Farmland Protection in Massachusetts: An Overview": <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3lQrQ9ntorY>
- Discussion about mechanisms to protect farmland, including zoning and Chapter 61A. Are there other mechanisms which can be explored, eg mandates, no-net-loss?
- Discussion about definition of agriculture and how it can be misused. There are two definitions of agriculture – Chapter 128.1A is a very broad definition, and Chapter 61A which is what we use for our land protection efforts.

Access Goal – Additional information shared related to the discussion

- Discussion about how to connect farmers to land – as a successor or to lease
 - o Land For Good – Particularly for succession planning and leasing - <https://landforgood.org/>
 - o New MDAR Farm Pass Program - <https://www.mass.gov/info-details/agricultural-business-training-program-abtp#farm-pass:-farm-transfer-planning-assistance-program->
 - o Farmland Finder – <https://farmlandinfo.org/find-farmland/>
- Discussion about need to help farmers with applications to use public lands and to negotiate good leases/licenses.
- Discussion about how municipalities have several barriers for licensing out their land, including staff capacity. Providing license/lease templates, application templates and other resources could be helpful. It could also be useful to provide technical assistance to municipalities to license their land.
- Discussion about Return on Investment (ROI) on Infrastructure and capital investment is an issue on leased and licensed farmland. State and municipalities are sometime limited by procurement requirements, including for length of license.
 - o State-owned farmland licensing program - <https://www.mass.gov/info-details/state-owned-farmland-licensing-program>
 - o Potential tool – Ground leases
- Land trust/land access (Buy Protect Sell) example: <https://www.nepm.org/regional-news/2024-05-29/as-massachusetts-farmland-gets-developed-state-and-non-profits-work-to-save-it>
- Planning for agriculture and ag resources – <https://farmland.org/project/planning-for-agriculture/> and <https://farmland.org/planning-for-ag-resources/>
- Leasing Land to farmers for land trusts and municipalities handbook - <https://landforgood.org/wp-content/uploads/LFG-Leasing-Land-To-Farmers-For-Land-Trusts-Municipalities-Handbook.pdf>

Viability Goal – Additional information shared related to the discussion

- Discussion about how developing capacity of service providers is important
- Many organizations provide support in viability area, including New Entry Sustainable Farming Program <https://nesfp.nutrition.tufts.edu/>

Equity and EJ discussion

- Discussion about importance of infrastructure and people to lead to make things happen and make connections between opportunities and use resources.
- Municipal Vulnerability Preparedness (MVP) grant is being used to rematriate tribal land
- Discussion about importance of making connections between smaller operations and different types of ag, with other landowners – facilitate good matches between farmers.
- Discussion about changing mindset so more open to protecting smaller farms that traditionally would have been seen as more “marginal”. Recognize different priorities of incoming farmers from previous generations.

Contact information for additional questions

- Katharine Otto – Farmland Action Plan Coordinator katharine.s.otto@mass.gov, 413-544-2400
- www.mass.gov/farmland-action-plan

Next Steps and other thoughts

- Discussion about other groups to partner with, such as RPAs, NOFA/Mass and municipalities.
- Discussion about need for mapped farmland
- Discussion about next steps, including conversations focusing on specific tasks as they get started, and upcoming Progress Report

Poll Results

Polls were carried out throughout the discussion. Polls were just answered by land trusts at the meeting. People representing organizations who were not land trusts did not participate in the polls, but did contribute to the discussions.

Slide 3 – Getting started – About the Land Trusts on this call

1. How big is your service area? (Missing data, but almost evenly split between the types)

- Statewide
- Regional
- A few towns
- One town

2. Where do you work? (Missing data, but relatively evenly split between the types)

- Statewide - Unknown
- Berkshires - Unknown
- CT River Valley – 7%
- Worcester County – 29%
- Northeast – 14%
- Southeast – 21%

3. How familiar are you with land protection (Single choice)

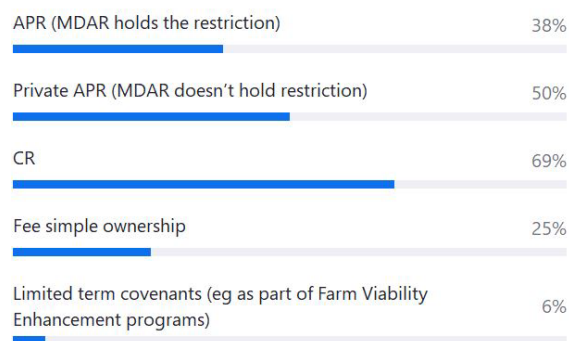


Slide 22 – Awareness of Protection Options

1. How comfortable are you with different protection options? (Single choice)



2. Which types of protection methods do you prefer for farmland?
(Choose all that apply) (Multiple choice)

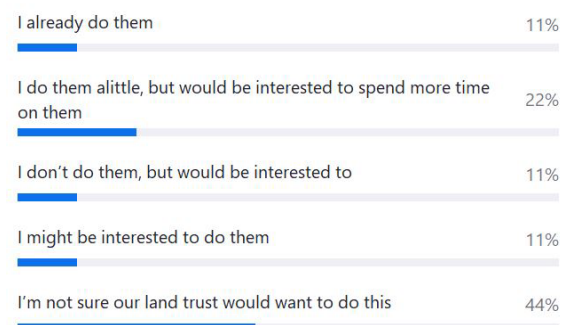


3. How comfortable would you be to share different protection options with others? (Single choice)



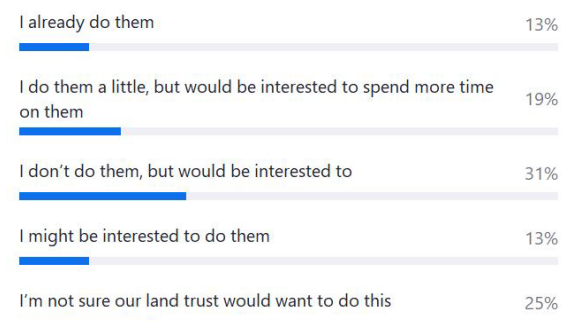
Slide 23 – Zoning Reform and Smart Growth

1. Would you be interested to get involved with these zoning and smart growth tasks? (Single choice)



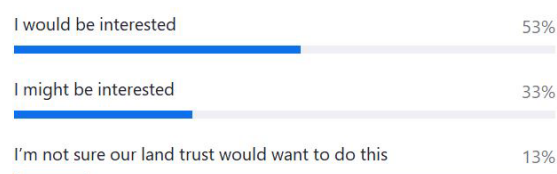
Slide 24 – CPA

1. What do you think about these CPA tasks? (Single choice)



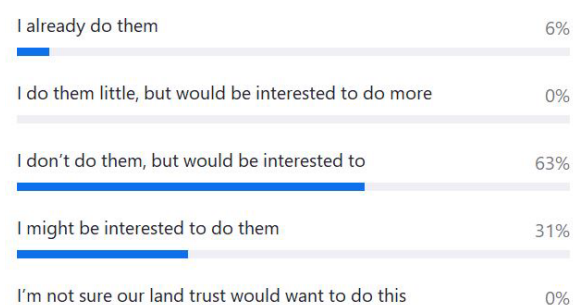
Slide 25 – Statewide Prioritization

1. Are interested to get involved with prioritizing farmland on a statewide level? (Single choice)

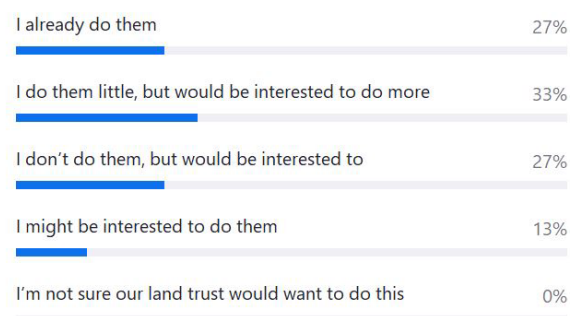


Slide 26 – Other protection related tasks

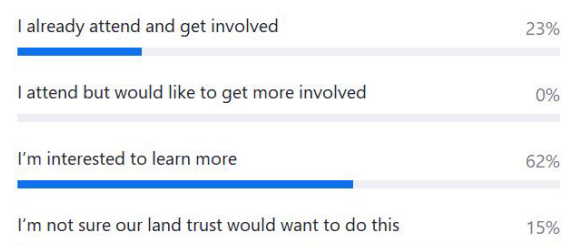
1. Would you be interested to explore installment or annuitized purchases of APRs? (Single choice)



2. Would you be interested to create watchlists of important farmland? (Single choice)

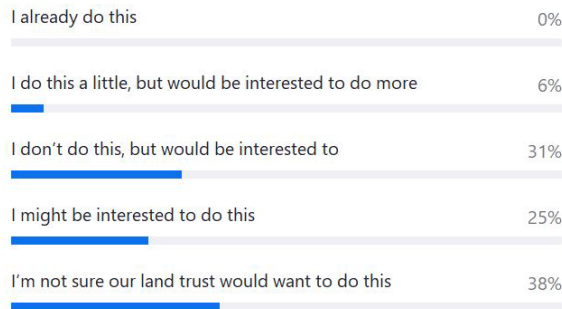


3. How aware are you of the NRCS State Technical Committee? (Single choice)



Slide 30 – Publicly held land

1. Would you be interested to help with assessing publicly held land for agriculture? (Single choice)



Slide 31 – Farm and farmland transfer

1. Would you be interested to help with farm and farmland transfer? (Single choice)

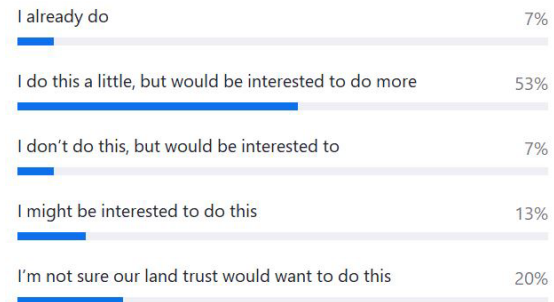


Slide 32 – Working with Historically Underserved Farmers

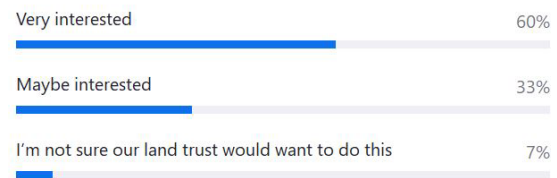
Would you be interested to help historically underserved farmers with applications related to access to land? (missing data)

- I already do – 21%
- I do them a little, but would be interested to do more – 23%
- I don't do them, but would be interested to – unknown
- I might be interested to do them – unknown
- I'm not sure our land trust would want to do this – unknown

2. Would you be interested to help with assessing needs and publicizing available farmland? (Single choice)

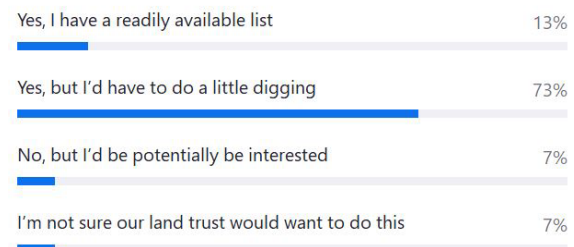


3. Would you be interested to explore novel land tenure models? (Single choice)

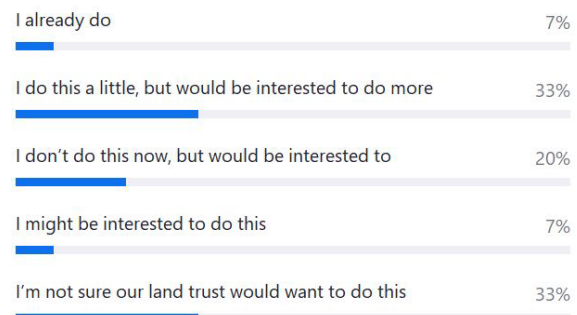


Slide 33 – Other access tasks

1. For your area, do you know where privately held CRs that allow agriculture are? (Single choice)

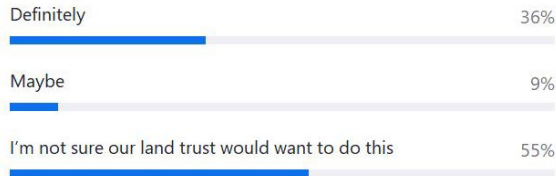


2. Would you be interested to develop capacity of service providers so they can better support farms? (Single choice)

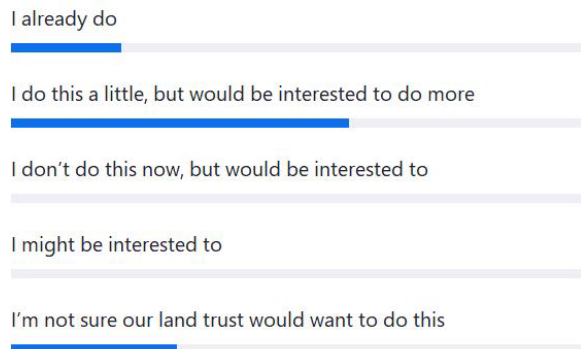


Slide 36 – Education and outreach

1. Would you be interested to get involved with developing outreach materials? (Single choice)

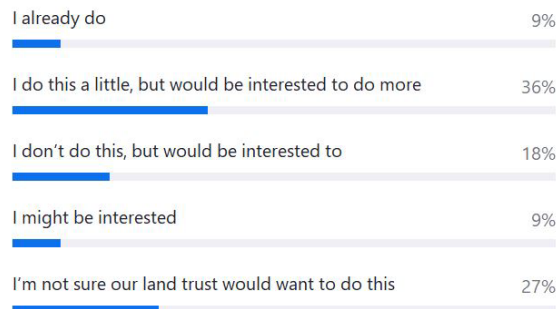


2. Would you be interested to help with educating farm sellers and buyers? (Single choice)

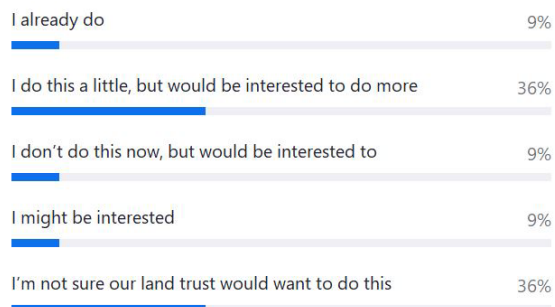


Slide 37 – Other viability tasks

1. Would you be interested to help with grant applications? (Single choice)



2. Would you be interested to get involved with encouraging farm-friendly zoning and tax policies? (Single choice)



Slide 40 – All goals task

1. Do you regularly submit updates to the statewide Protected and Recreational Open Space GIS layer? (Single choice)

