

# Massachusetts Farmland Action Plan

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Massachusetts Farm Bureau Federation Annual Meeting  
December 5, 2024 at UMass Amherst

Katharine Otto, Farmland Action Plan Coordinator



# Agenda and Goals

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- ❖ Farmland Action Plan
- ❖ What's being done now?
- ❖ What could come next?
- ❖ Next steps and getting involved
- ❖ Comments and Questions

## MDAR Staff Introductions

- Katharine Otto, Farmland Action Plan Coordinator
- Melissa Adams, Farm Viability and Agricultural Business Training Programs Manager

# The Plan

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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

???

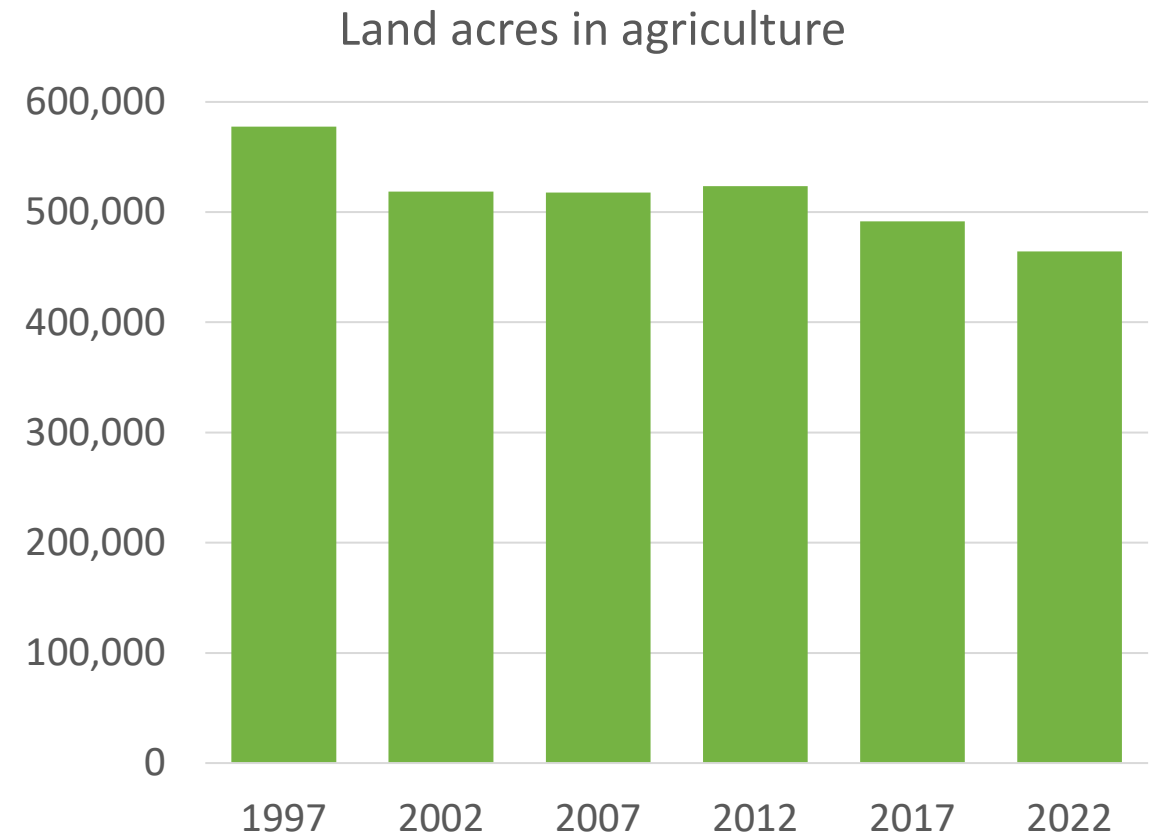
# Why is the Farmland Action Plan important?

**We are losing agricultural land fast!**

**Between 1997 and 2022**

**Massachusetts lost 113,000 acres**

Additional 50,000 – 89,000 acres projected to be lost by 2040



Sources: Census of Agriculture 2022 and earlier. Table 1

[www.nass.usda.gov/Publications/AgCensus/2022/Full\\_Report/Volume\\_1,\\_Chapter\\_1\\_State\\_Level/Massachusetts/](https://www.nass.usda.gov/Publications/AgCensus/2022/Full_Report/Volume_1,_Chapter_1_State_Level/Massachusetts/)

# What is the Farmland Action Plan?

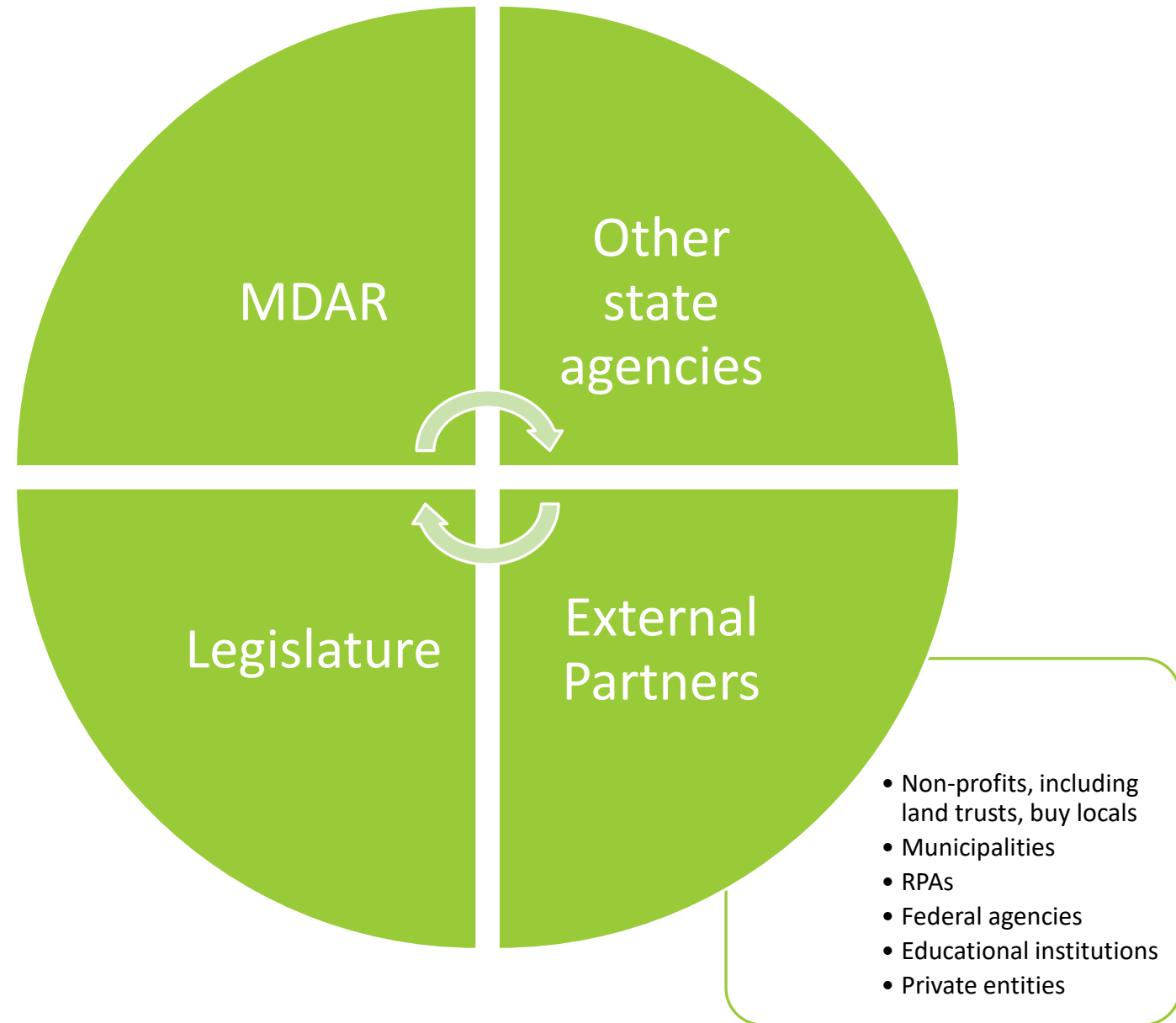
- State funded
- State coordinated
- Long range strategic initiative
- Statewide, not just for state government
- [www.mass.gov/farmland-action-plan](http://www.mass.gov/farmland-action-plan)



# 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.



# Strategies for each goal



## Protection

- A. Permanently protect farmland through purchases of agricultural restrictions
- B. Further develop and implement additional tools to avoid farmland loss and retain farmland
- C. Prioritize protection of whole farms
- D. Formalize and integrate decision-making processes regarding farmland protection



## Access

- A. Make more land available for agriculture
- B. Support farm transfer and succession in ways that enhance access to farmland
- C. Prioritize increased access for BIPOC and historically underserved farmers in all farmland access programs and policies
- D. Support and expand service-provider networks to meet the needs of all farmers and potential farmers.



## Viability

- A. Ensure that laws, regulations, programs, and investments support farm viability
- B. Grow resilience and sustainability practices on farms
- C. Increase use of services, programs, and other resources by farmers



## All goals

- A. Implement the Massachusetts Farmland Action Plan
- B. Build public support for agriculture and for farmland protection, access and viability

# What's being done now?

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# 2024 Highlights

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- 1) Hire Farmland Action Plan Coordinator
- 2) Leverage federal funding
- 3) Build capacity of entities to protect land
- 4) Increase applications to protection programs
- 5) Prioritize protection of whole farms
- 6) State and municipal land licensing programs
- 7) Expand farmland transfer and succession education and technical assistance
- 8) Increase use of public lands by Historically Underserved Farmers
- 9) Farmer access to grants and financing
- 10) Elevate BIPOC and other historically underserved farmer voices in implementation

**Progress Report coming soon! [www.mass.gov/farmland-action-plan](https://www.mass.gov/farmland-action-plan)**



# Farmland Protection

## What's been happening?

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### Action I.A.7

**Increase the number of applications to APR, ALE and non-ALE protection programs**

#### Where can I learn more?

- APR Program [www.mass.gov/agricultural-preservation-restriction-apr-program](https://www.mass.gov/agricultural-preservation-restriction-apr-program)
- APR Project Scoresheet (Revised 2024) [www.mass.gov/doc/apr-project-scoresheet/download](https://www.mass.gov/doc/apr-project-scoresheet/download)
- Agricultural Conservation Easement Programs – Massachusetts NRCS - [www.nrcs.usda.gov/programs-initiatives/acep-agricultural-conservation-easement-program](https://www.nrcs.usda.gov/programs-initiatives/acep-agricultural-conservation-easement-program) and <https://farmlandinfo.org/acep-ale-for-landowners/>



# Farmland Protection at MDAR

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## **APR Acquisition related changes**

- APR accepts applications at any time
- APR ranking now quarterly (previously annually)
- Raised the APR price per acre cap to \$34k/acre (and it only applies to MDAR funds spent, not appraised value)
- Updated the APR scoring sheet
- MDAR is now a certified ACEP ALE entity, so can close faster on ACEP projects

## **APR Acquisition reminders**

- No soils requirements for APR
  - Confusion with NRCS ACEP ALE that does
- No maximum forest limitation
  - Confusion with NRCS ACEP ALE that does
- Not required to use ACEP ALE in conjunction with APR.

## **APR Stewardship related changes**

- Hired more APR Stewardship staff and have a system in place to have contact with all APR owners annually

## **Other changes**

- MDAR now has authority to buy land (not just restrict)



# Farmland Access

## What's been happening?

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### Action II.B.2

**Support and expand farmland transfer and farmland succession education and one-to-one technical assistance**

#### Where can I learn more?

- Farm Transfer Planning Resources  
<https://landforgood.org/resource/group/transferring-a-farm/>
- New England Farmland Finder  
<https://newenglandfarmlandfinder.org>
- Farm Transfer Planning in Massachusetts  
[www.mass.gov/doc/farm-succession-planning-brochure/download](http://www.mass.gov/doc/farm-succession-planning-brochure/download)
- Farm Transfer Planning Assistance Planning Assistance - <https://www.mass.gov/info-details/agricultural-business-training-program-abtp>



# New Farm Transfer Planning Assistance = Farm-Pass!

- One-on-one farm transfer planning with owners, family members, and identified successor(s) resulting in a written action plan
- NO COST to participate, meetings at your farm over course of a year
- Applications accepted on rolling basis, to be reviewed January 15, 2025 for next round to start in the spring
- **Informational webinar** on Farm Pass **next Wed Dec 11<sup>th</sup>, 2024 @12:00pm**

MDAR hosts Land for Good's Succession School 2025 – Taunton Library  
9:30am - 3:00pm on Jan 27, Feb 24 & March 17 – for senior operators

For more info - visit MDAR's Agricultural Business Assistance website or contact Melissa at 857-276-2377 or Laura at 857-507-5548

## Farm Transfer Planning

A guide to programs and resources that support farm transfer planning in Massachusetts



**MDAR**



# Farm Viability

## What's been happening?

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### Action III.A.3

**Make it easier for farmers to seek and obtain grants and financing**

#### Where can I learn more?

- MDAR Grants  
[www.mass.gov/guides/agricultural-grants-and-financial-assistance-programs](http://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](http://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](http://www.mass.gov/info-details/resources-for-historically-underserved-farmers-and-producers)
- Many other partners also provide grants

# Other updates

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## Solar

- Department of Energy Resources (DOER) is proposing changes to the SMART solar program including Agri-Voltaics and ground mounted solar.
- December 10th DOER host a virtual technical session to share their revisions and take feedback.
- Contact [DOER.SMART@mass.gov](mailto:DOER.SMART@mass.gov) for information

## Climate Smart Agriculture Program

- Online application available
- Application deadline is January 7 at 4PM.
- \$50,000 matching grant.
- Examples of eligible items for funding are efficient irrigation systems, reduced tillage equipment, silvo-pasture fencing, energy efficient equipment.
- [www.mass.gov/how-to/how-to-apply-to-the-climate-smart-agriculture-program](http://www.mass.gov/how-to/how-to-apply-to-the-climate-smart-agriculture-program)

## Opportunities to license state lands

- MDAR licenses out over 1000 acres of farmland including properties in Templeton, Danvers, Westborough and Agawam
- MDAR is actively working to increase its land holdings through the State Land Licensing program.
- Recently acquired control of properties in Templeton and Monson.
- When existing licenses expire land is offered through a bidding process at very low rates for 5 year periods with the opportunity to extend by another 5 years.
- Look out for new licenses in the next few years as there will be land going out for bid
- [www.mass.gov/farmlandlicensing](http://www.mass.gov/farmlandlicensing)

# What could come next?

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# What would you like to see worked on next?

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**Help MDAR prioritize what to work on next (late 2025 into 2026)**

## **Topic areas**

- Municipal support
- Land protection
- Land Access
- Transfer and succession
- Farmer assistance
- Housing
- Other suggestions

## **In the Room**

For each slide I will ask people to raise hands if this is high priority from your perspective

## **Handout**

Assign a priority from your perspective

- High priority to do more on this
- Medium priority
- Low priority
- Don't have an opinion

# Municipal Support



**Raise hand if this is a high priority**

1. Build up Ag Comms
2. Strengthen ag sections of municipal plans

# Land Protection



**Raise hand if this is a high priority**

3. Landowner survey to understand protection issues
4. Increase funding for private APRs
5. Create prioritization system for farmland protection
6. Add additional funding sources for protecting farmland

# Land Access



## **Raise hand if this is a high priority**

7. Landowner survey to understand access issues
8. Develop a program to implement MDAR's new ability to buy and sell land
9. Have more state land to be licensed for agricultural use

# Transfer and succession



## Raise hand if this is a high priority

10. Help connect people to potential successors
11. Promote existing transfer and succession resources eg Farmland Finder
12. Share information about estate/transfer planning models, case studies, and best practices
13. Explore how to learn about APR properties going up for sale earlier

# Farmer assistance



**Raise hand if this is a high priority**

14. Simplify MDAR grant application processes
15. Build capacity of ag service organizations
16. Provide more support farmers who have licenses for state lands
17. Establish a network of “navigators” who can work with aspiring farmers to launch a farming enterprise

# Housing



**Raise hand if this is a high priority**

18. Explore how to address housing needs in the APR program

Other  
priorities



**Do you have any other  
suggestions of what to work on  
next?**

5 minutes

Please keep answers brief

Use handout for more detailed answers

# Next steps and getting involved

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How can I get involved?

Email  
[Katharine.s.otto@mass.gov](mailto:Katharine.s.otto@mass.gov)

Or put your contact info on  
the response sheet

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

# Organizations, committees and groups that work with farmers

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## Raise hand if you are involved with this group

- ☐ Farm Bureau
- ☐ Buy Local
- ☐ Commodity Group
- ☐ Town Selectboard
- ☐ Town Planning Commission
- ☐ Town Ag Comm
- ☐ Town Conservation Commission
- ☐ Land Trust
- ☐ Statewide committee
- ☐ Other?

## Discussion

- **What do these groups understand about farmland?**
- **What more do they need to learn?**

10-15 minutes

Please keep answers brief

Use handout for more detailed answers

# Next steps

## Comments/ Questions?



# Return your handout!!



Farmland Action Plan Webpage [www.mass.gov/farmland-action-plan](http://www.mass.gov/farmland-action-plan)

Sign up for newsletter - Katharine Otto, MDAR. [katharine.s.otto@mass.gov](mailto:katharine.s.otto@mass.gov) 413-544-2400

# Reference slides

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# Goal - Accelerate the permanent protection and stewardship of farmland

## A. Permanently protect farmland through purchases of agricultural restrictions

- Creative financing mechanisms and strategies
- Federal funding
- Additional financial resources
- Prevent conversion
- Build capacity and coordinate
- Long term protection
- Short term covenants
- Stewardship
- Education and engagement

## B. Further develop and implement additional tools to avoid farmland loss and retain farmland

- No net loss of farmland
- Chapter 61A
- CPA
- Underserved farmer access
- State lands
- Solar development
- Zoning & Smart Growth

## C. Prioritize protection of whole farms

- Housing
- Infrastructure
- Other land
- Other tenure models
- Funding
- Ecosystem services

## D. Formalize and integrate decision-making processes regarding farmland protection

- Agricultural suitability



# Goal – Increase access to farmland

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## A. Make more land available for agriculture

- Agricultural suitability
- State land licensing
- Urban agriculture
- Private leases
- Tribal lands
- Farmland Restoration
- Conservation Restrictions
- Farm Incubators

## B. Support farm transfer and succession in ways that enhance access to farmland

- Education and technical assistance
- Protected lands
- Registries

## C. Prioritize increased access for BIPOC and historically underserved farmers in all farmland access programs and policies

- Programs and policies
- Prioritization and accessibility

## D. Support and expand service-provider networks to meet the needs of all farmers and potential farmers.

- Diversification
- DEI training
- Business technical assistance
- Capacity building
- Resource toolbox
- Land search



# Goal - Support and enhance the viability of farms and farmland

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## A. Ensure that laws, regulations, programs, and investments support farm viability

- APR Program flexibility
- Right to Farm Bylaws and Ag Comms
- Grants and financing
- Local taxation, policy and regulations
- Decision making
- Support industries
- Urban agriculture
- Farm infrastructure
- Service providers
- Financial facilitation

## B. Grow resilience and sustainability practices on farms

- Climate change technical assistance
- Soils on public lands
- Non-market contributions
- UMass Extension

## C. Increase use of services, programs, and other resources by farmers

- Strategic outreach
- Technical assistance
- MDAR programs
- Education



# Supporting all the goals

Hire Farmland Action Plan Coordinator

Implement the Farmland Action Plan

- Encourage partners and partnerships that can implement the plan.
- Support BIPOC and other historically underserved farmers and organizations involvement.
- Monitor and report on the impact of farmland programs to demonstrate the success, inform changes, and identify needs.
- Map and track farmland (APRs, CRs, Chapter 61A, and more).
- Research and report on agricultural incentive models used in other states and countries.

Build public support for agriculture and for farmland protection, access and viability

- Education and outreach for residents and elected officials
- Comprehensive plan

# What would you like to see worked on next?

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- Municipal support
  - Build up Ag Comms
  - Strengthen agricultural sections of municipal plans
- Land protection
  - Landowner survey to understand protection issues
  - Increase funding for private APRs
  - Create prioritization system for farmland protection
  - Add additional funding sources for protecting farmland
- Land Access
  - Landowner survey to understand access issues
  - Develop a program to implement MDAR's new ability to buy and sell land
  - Have more state land to be licensed for agricultural use
- Transfer and succession
  - Help connect people to potential successors
  - Promote existing transfer and succession resources eg Farmland Finder
  - Share information about estate/transfer planning models, case studies, and best practices
  - Explore how to learn about APR properties going up for sale earlier
- Farmer assistance
  - Simplify MDAR grant application processes
  - Build capacity of ag service organizations
  - Provide more support farmers who have licenses for state lands
  - Establish a network of "navigators" who can work with aspiring farmers to launch a farming enterprise
- Housing
  - Explore how to address housing needs in the APR program
- Other suggestions