

# Massachusetts Farmland Action Plan

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Massachusetts Food Policy Council  
January 17, 2025 at 9:30am online

Katharine Otto, Farmland Action Plan Coordinator



# Agenda and Goals

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## Agenda

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

## Goals for today's presentation

- ❖ Learn about importance of Farmland Action Plan
- ❖ Catch up on recent implementation
- ❖ Understand next steps for implementation and how to get involved

# Farmland Action 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

Community  
building

Helps  
address  
climate  
change and  
mitigate its  
impacts

Sustains  
family  
businesses

Protects  
vital  
natural  
resources

Contributes  
to soil  
health

???

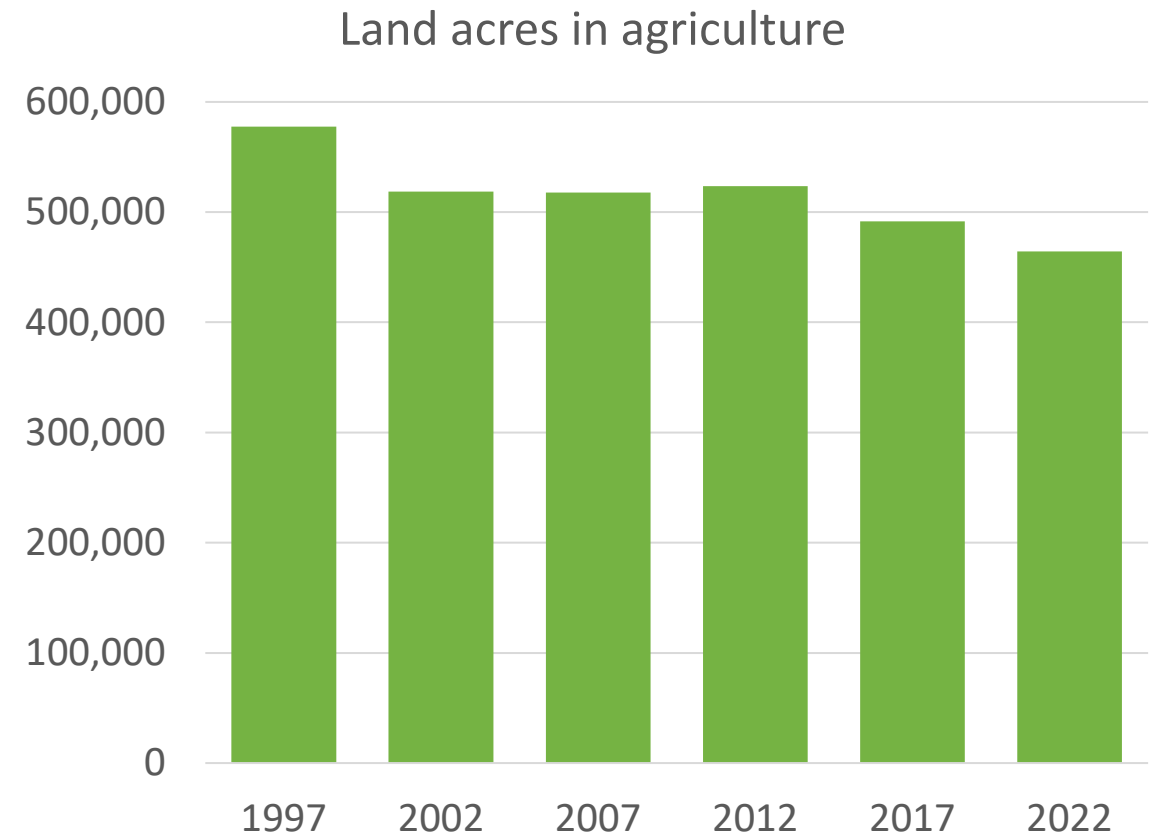
# Why is the Farmland Action Plan important?

**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

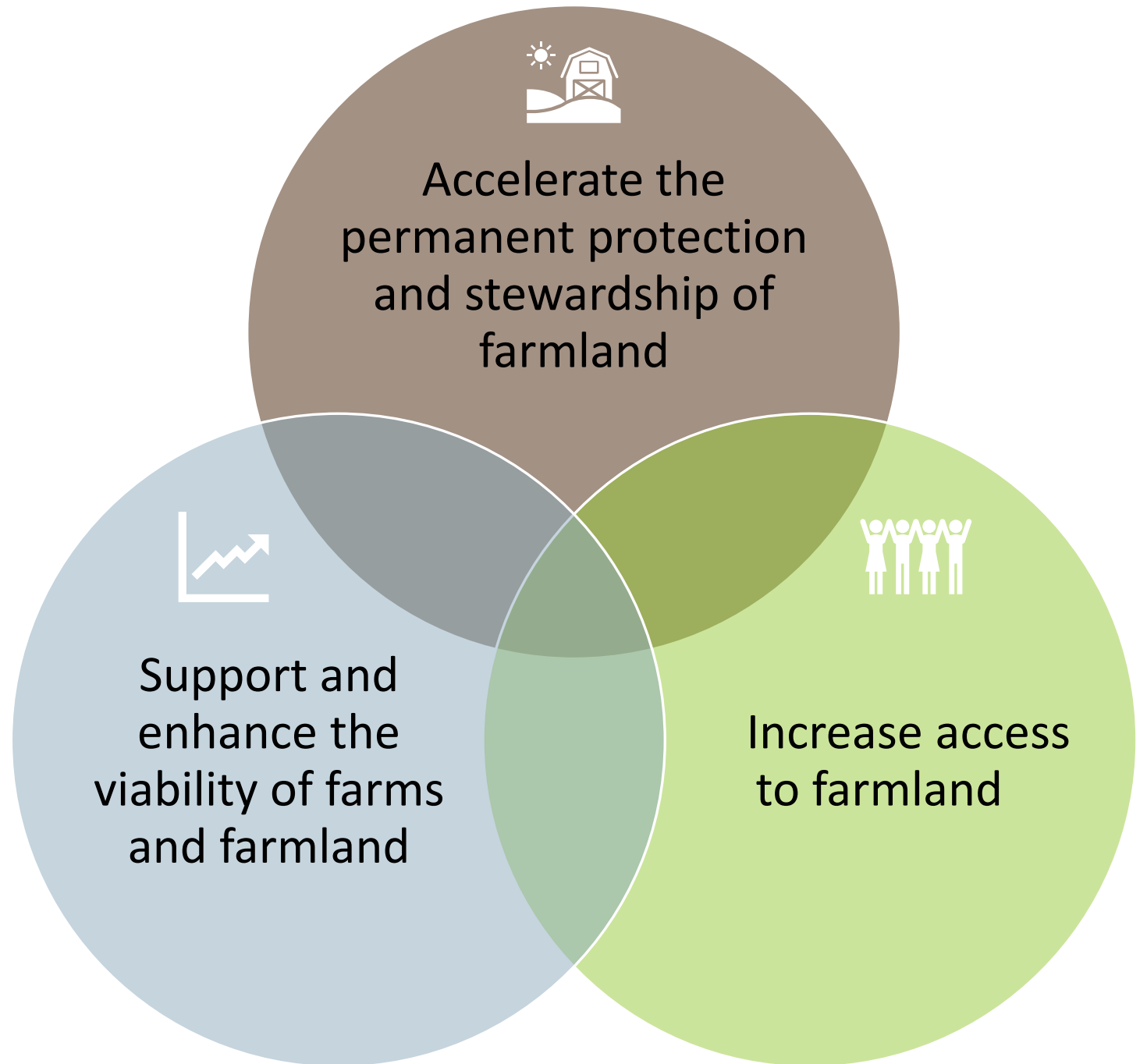


Sources: Census of Agriculture 2022 and earlier. Table 1

[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)



# Other related statewide plans

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- Local Food Action Plan (2015)
- Decarbonization Road Map (2018)
- Rural Policy Plan (2019)
- Clean Energy & Climate Plan (2022)
- ResilientMass (2023) (State Hazard Mitigation and Climate Adaptation Plan)
- Resilient Lands Initiative (2023)
- Healthy Soils Action Plan (2023)
- EEA Environmental Justice Strategy (2023)
- Special Commission on Agriculture in the Commonwealth in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century (forthcoming)
- And others!

# Moving into implementation

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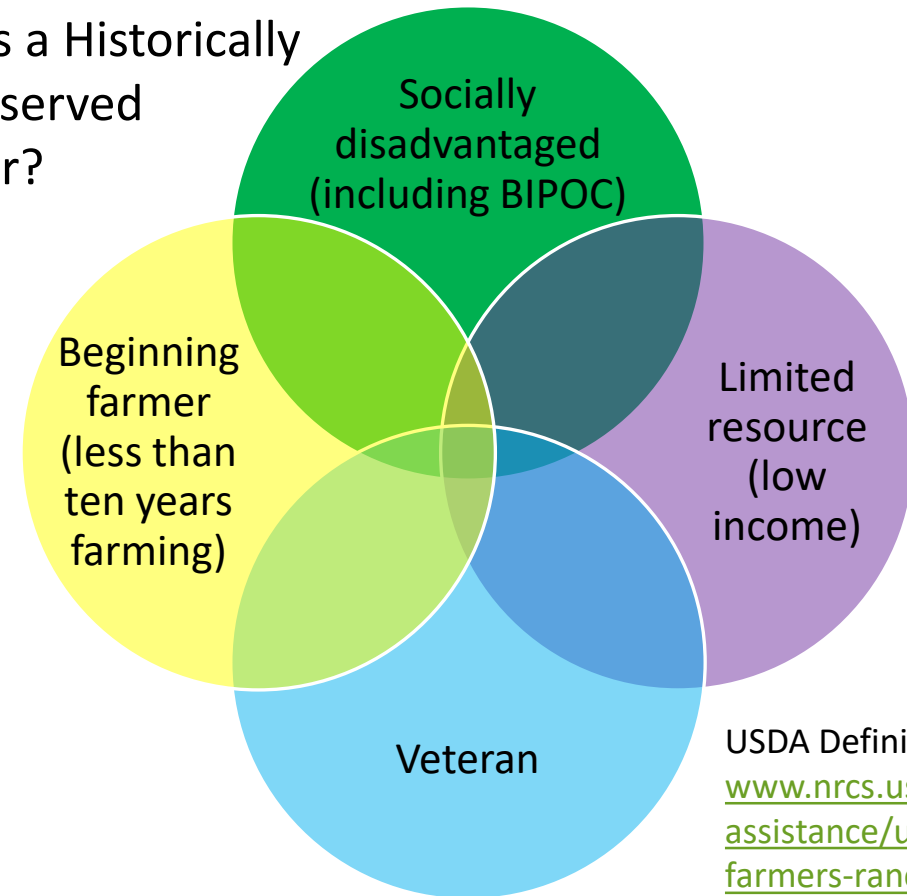


# Implementing for all farmers

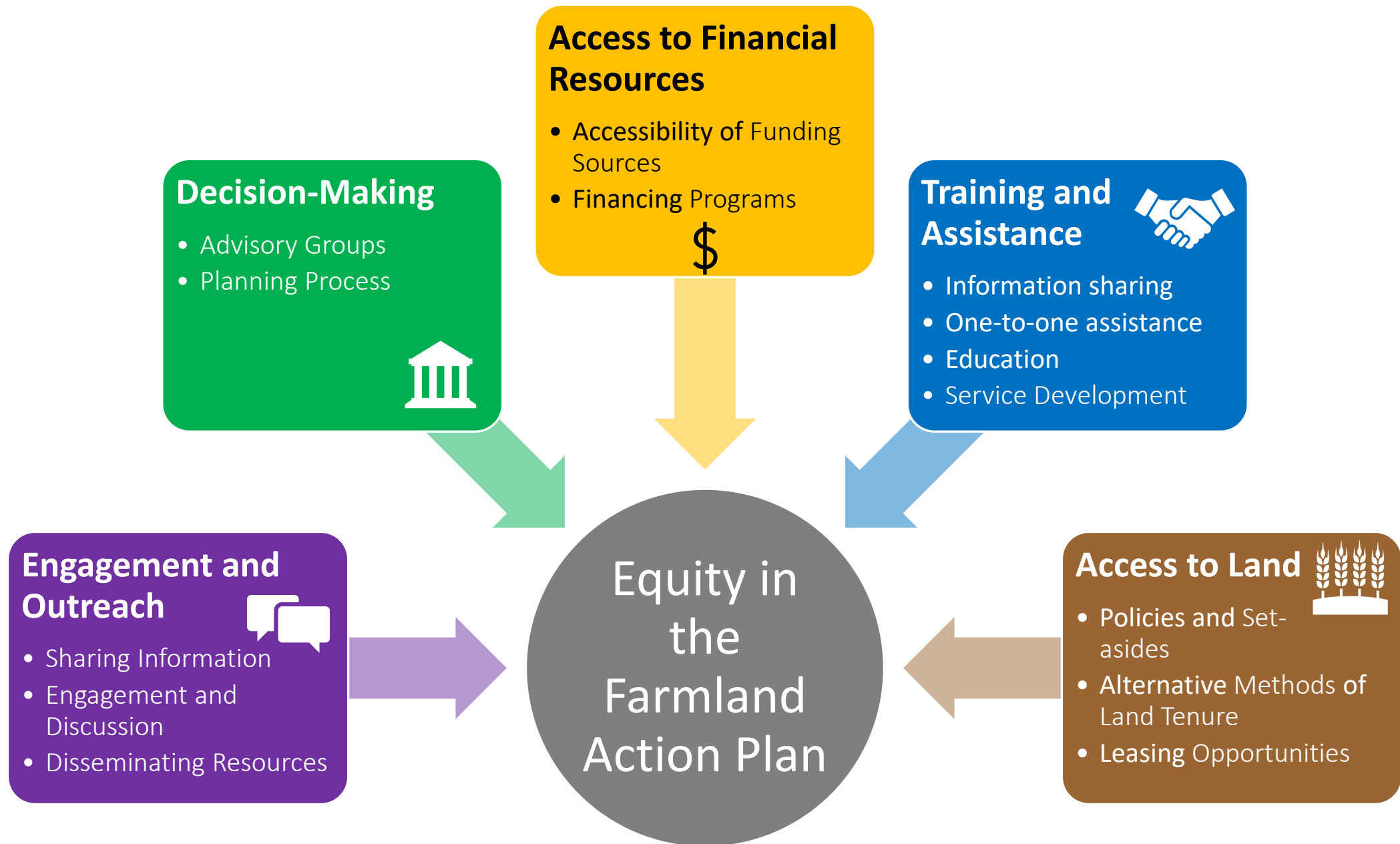
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- All stages of farmer – beginning through retiring
- All areas of the state
- Variety of farm types – dairy, fruit, vegetables, nurseries, maple, etc.
- Urban and rural farming
- Historically Underserved Farmers (see graphic)
- Many other characteristics

Who is a Historically Underserved Farmer?



USDA Definition  
[www.nrcs.usda.gov/getting-assistance/underserved-farmers-ranchers](https://www.nrcs.usda.gov/getting-assistance/underserved-farmers-ranchers)



# Overview of the matrix

**Goals** – what the plan hopes to achieve.

**Strategy** – clarify what aspects of each Goal will be addressed

**Action** – direct how each strategy will be advanced.

**Task** – details on how each action will be achieved

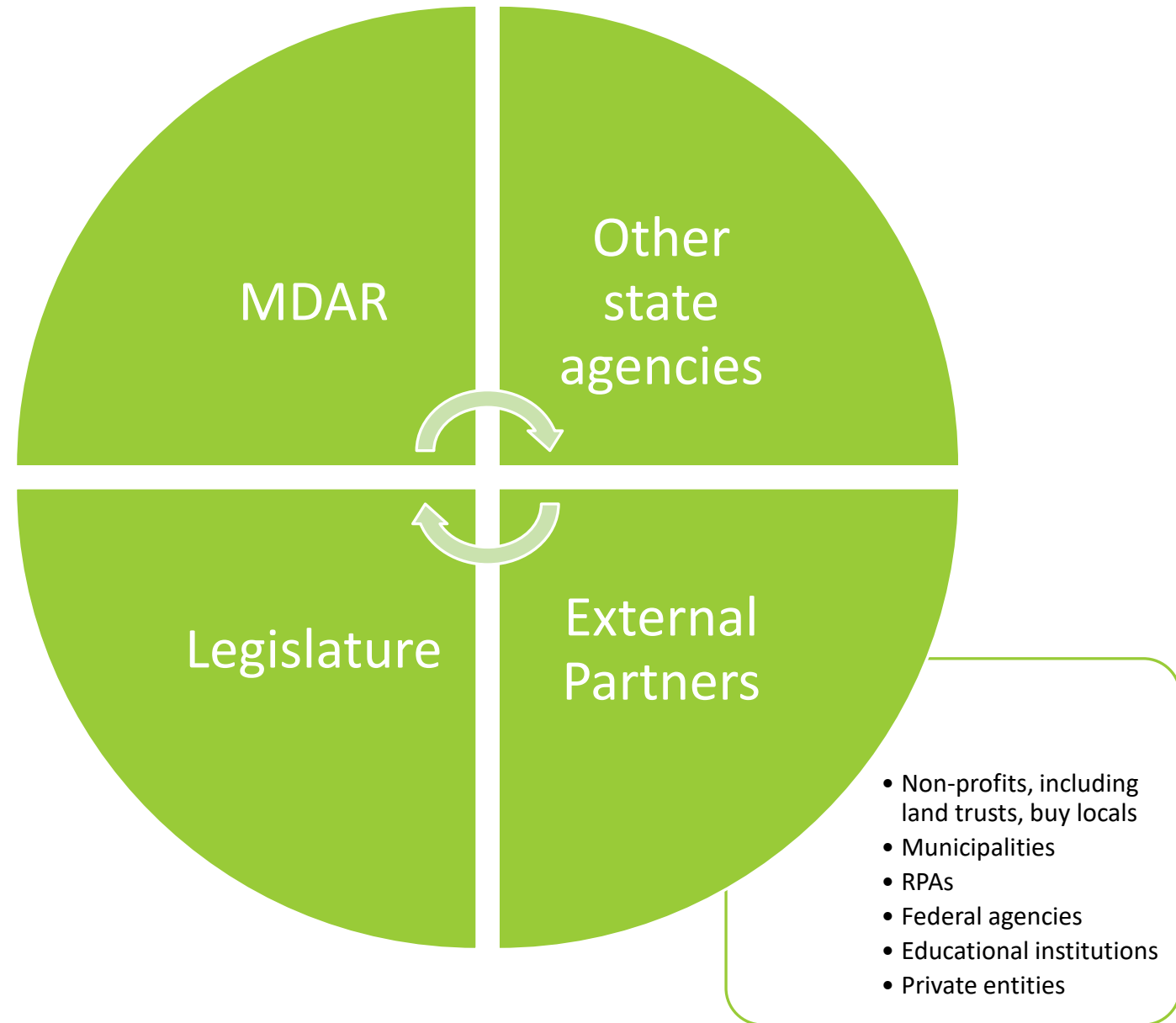
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# Who will implement the Plan?

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 can I get involved?

Depending on the task you could be:

- **Lead implementer** – Partner who is the champion/ energy behind implementing a task
- **Other potential implementer** – Other partners who could be key for implementing a task, bringing specific expertise or insights that may shape implementation
- **Other interested entities and individuals** who may have useful information to share to inform the task, may be part of the solution, or are interested in the task outcome.

# Lead implementer

Other  
potential  
implementer

Other  
potential  
implementer

Other  
potential  
implementer

Other  
interested  
individuals

Other  
interested  
individuals

Other  
interested  
individuals

Other  
interested  
individuals

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interested  
individuals

Other  
interested  
individuals

# What's being done now?

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# Key features for implementation

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## Already started

- Foster partnerships and collaboration
- Learn from feedback on previous processes, including plan creation
- Encourage wider engagement and implementation

## Going forwards

- Focus on topics or even specific tasks not the entire plan
  - Lead implementer role
  - Could involve meetings, listening sessions, working groups, etc
- Better understanding of equitable engagement and feedback mechanisms
- Build trusted relationships
- Capacity building, including funding for partners to help with implementation

# Refining the matrix

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The matrix is a living document that tracks

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

**Working draft matrix due to be published online soon!**

[www.mass.gov/farmland-action-plan](http://www.mass.gov/farmland-action-plan)

Search for keywords – eg “food”, “municipality”, “policy”



# 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

**December 2024 Progress Report has more details!**

**[www.mass.gov/farmland-action-plan](http://www.mass.gov/farmland-action-plan)**

# What comes next?

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# Continue to get people involved

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- Asking for preferences at events and meetings
  - 18 activities that we thought could start in the next 12-18 months
  - See next three slides for preferences from attendees at Food System Forum
- Potential partners help decide what to work on
  - What are they already working on?
  - MDAR staff working on funding opportunity so more potential partners can help
- Staying in the loop
  - Sign up for Farmland Action Plan Newsletter – Email [Katharine.s.otto@mass.gov](mailto:Katharine.s.otto@mass.gov)
  - Visit website for additional resources – [www.mass.gov/farmland-action-plan](http://www.mass.gov/farmland-action-plan)

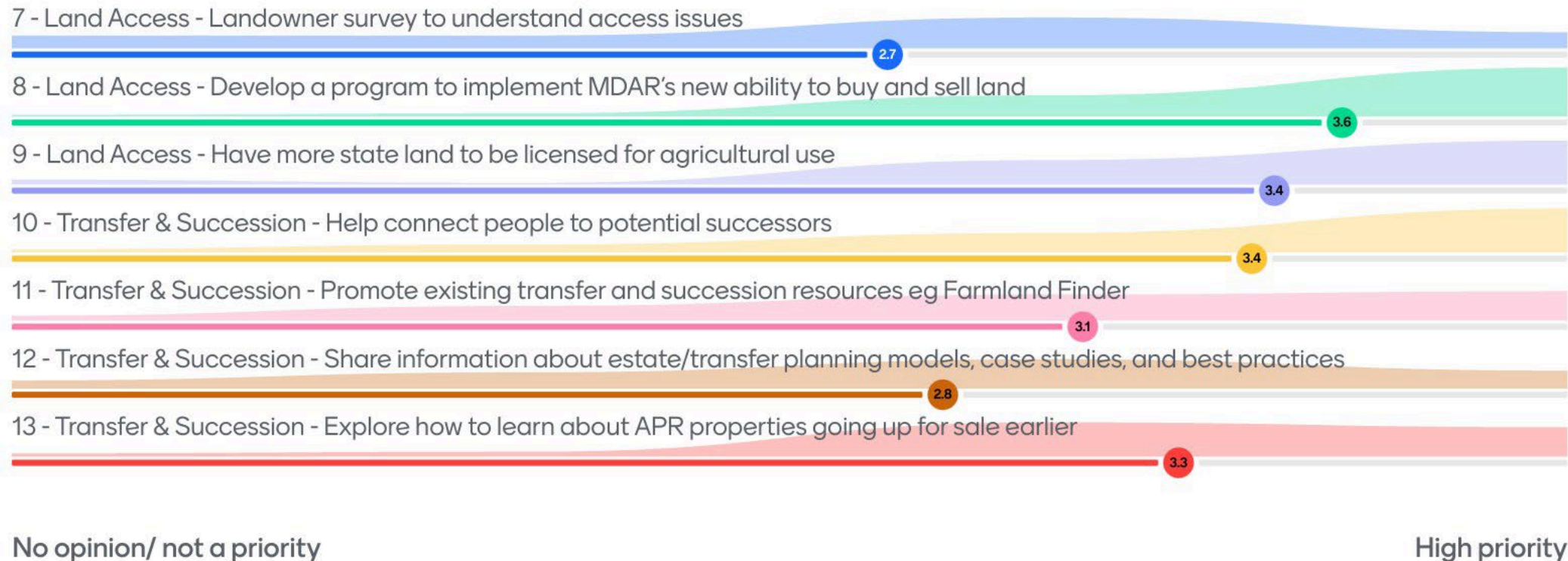
# Preferences from 2024 Food System Forum session attendees

**Municipal Support and Land Protection** - What would you like to be worked on next? Indicate the priority for you



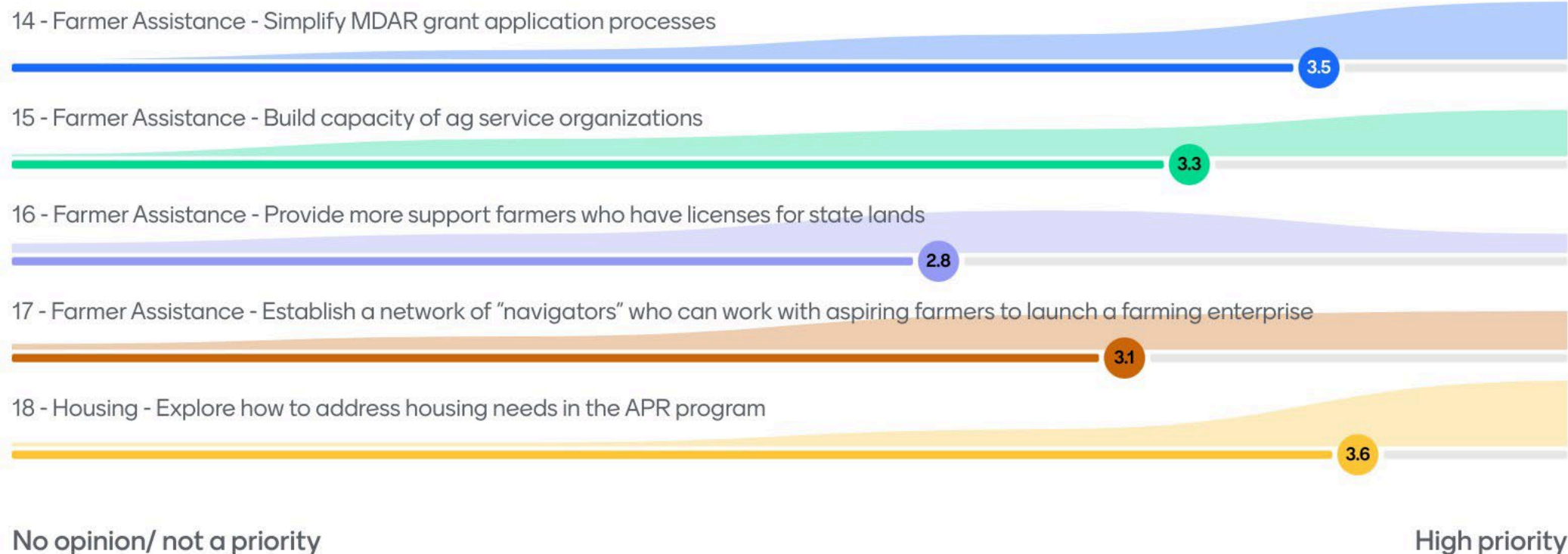
# Preferences from 2024 Food System Forum session attendees

**Land Access and Transfer/ Succession** - What would you like to be worked on next? Indicate the priority for you



# Preferences from 2024 Food System Forum session attendees

**Farmer Assistance and Housing** - What would you like to be worked on next? Indicate the priority for you





# Comments/ Questions?



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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# 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



# 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

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## 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