

Massachusetts Farmland Action Plan

For Conservation Districts (MACD)

12/16/2024 at 12:45pm

Katharine Otto, Farmland Action Plan Coordinator



Context

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

???

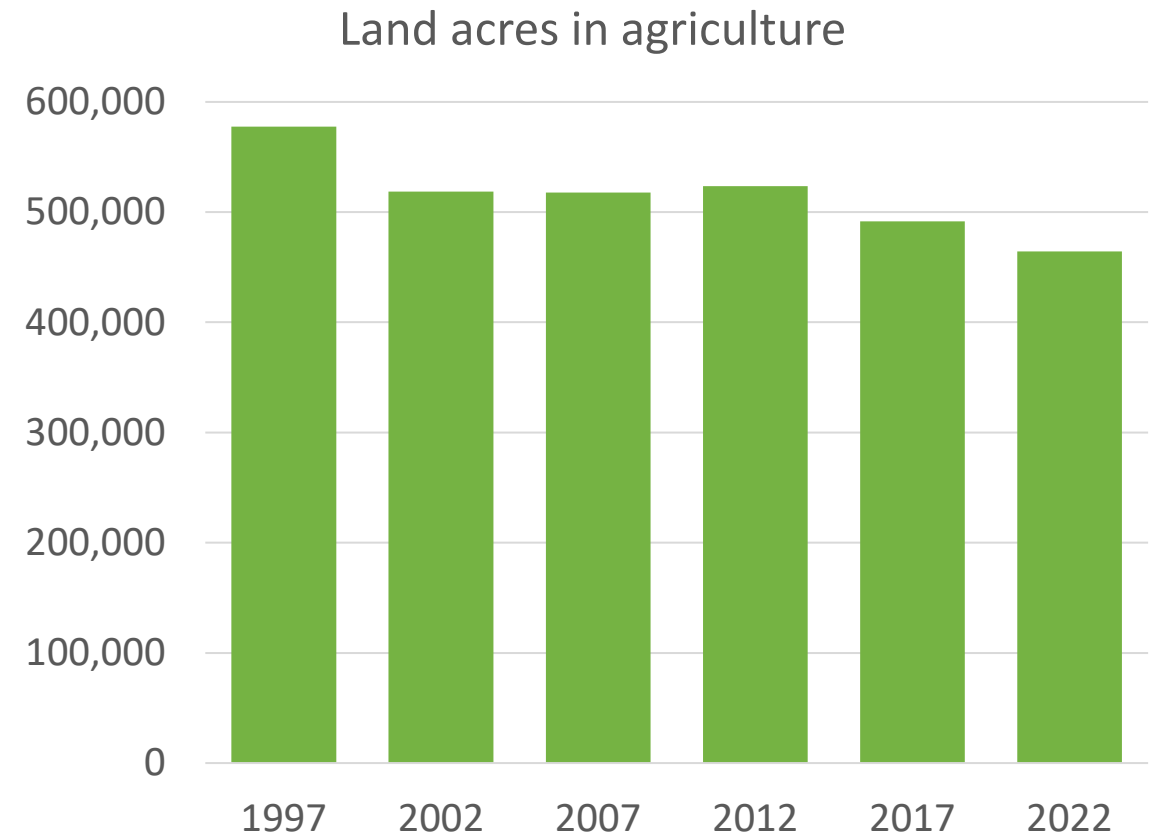
Why is the Farmland Action Plan important?

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

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



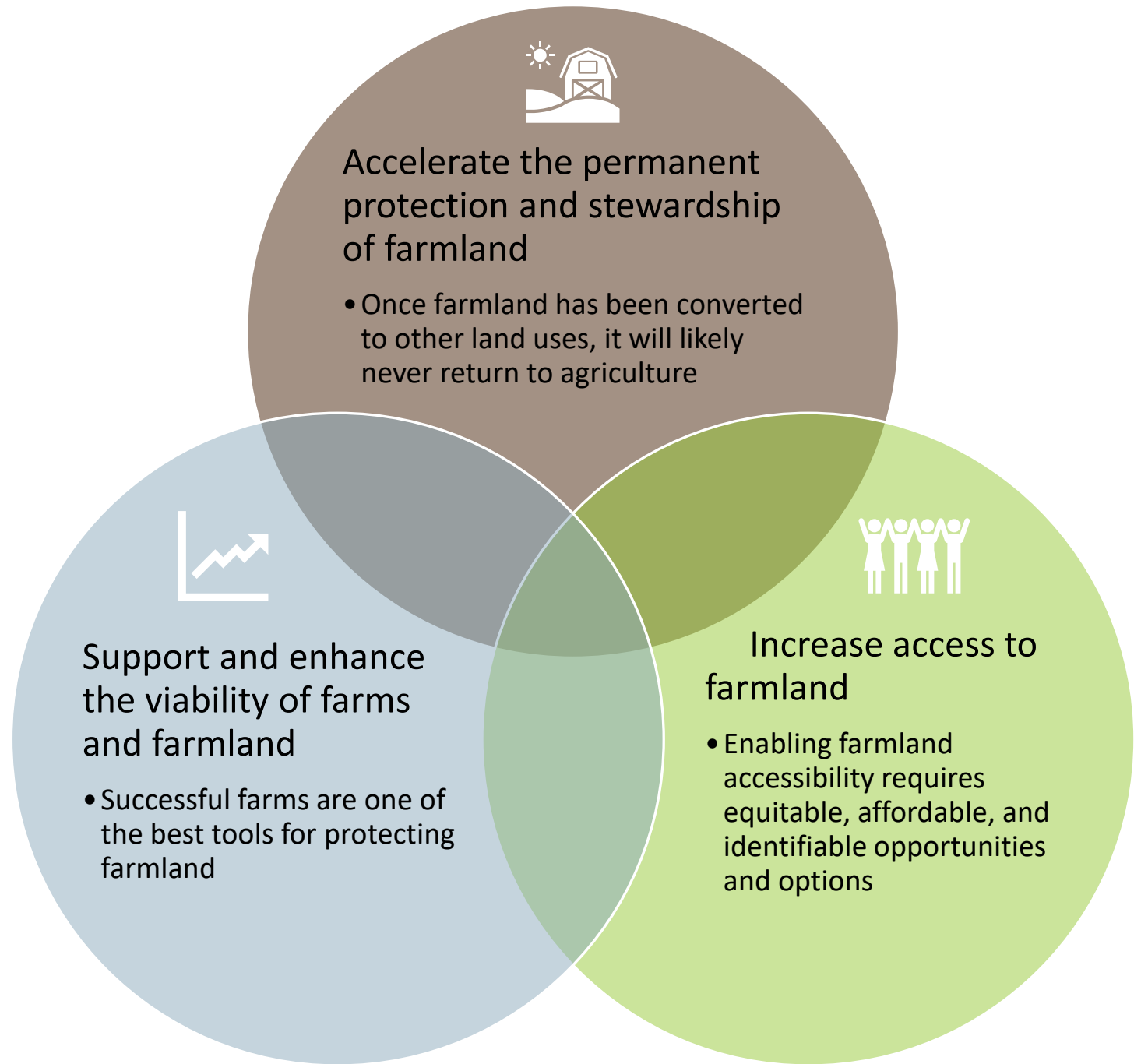
Sources: Census of Agriculture 2022 and earlier. Table 1

www.nass.usda.gov/Publications/AgCensus/2022/Full_Report/Volume_1,_Chapter_1_State_Level/Massachusetts/

Farmland Action Plan

What is the Farmland Action Plan?

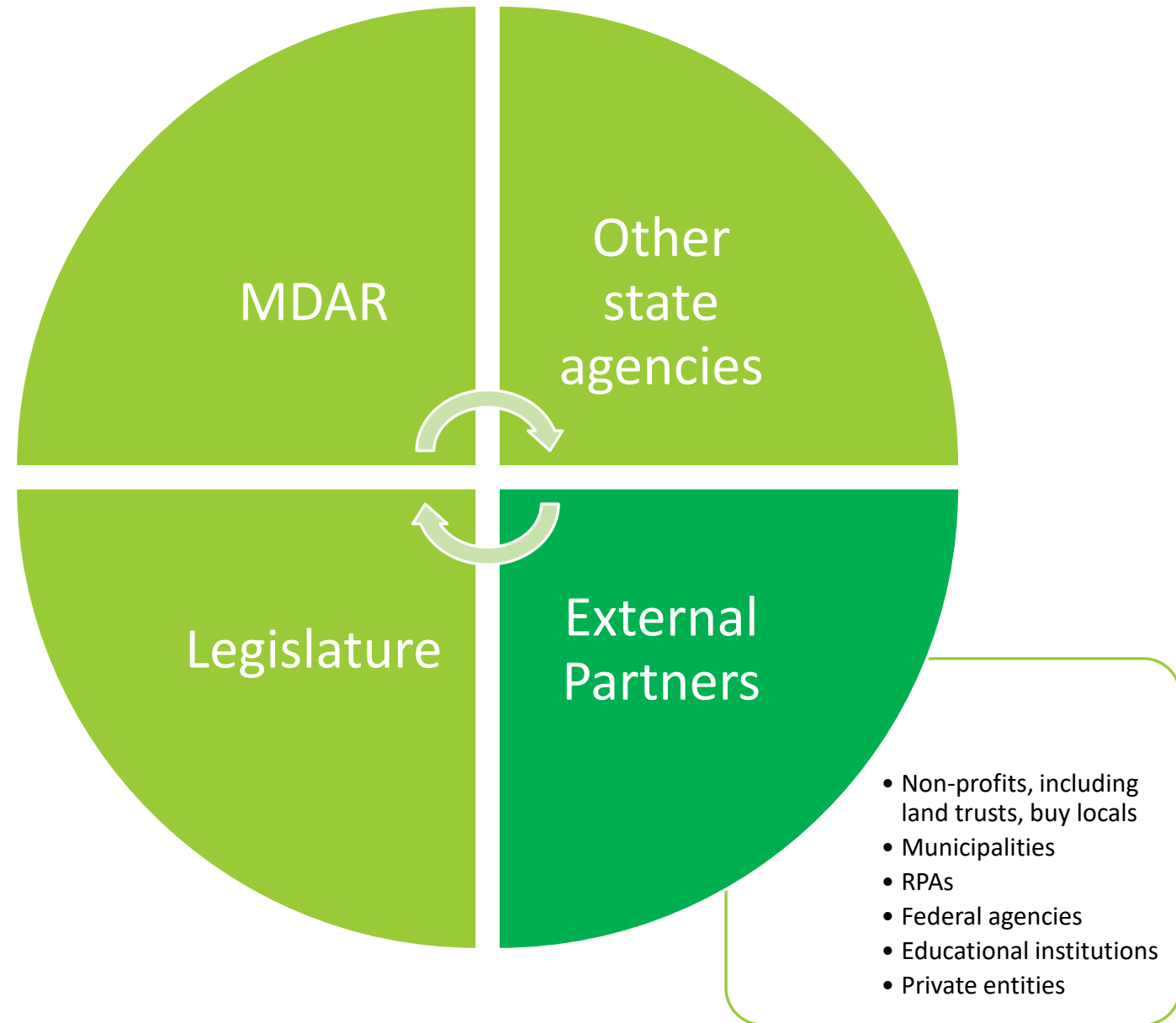
- State funded
- State coordinated
- Long range strategic initiative
- Statewide, not just for state government
- www.mass.gov/farmland-action-plan



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

Many actions for each strategy



Protection

- Funding mechanisms
- Build capacity and coordinate
- Long term protection
- Short term covenants
- Stewardship
- Education and engagement
- No net loss of farmland
- Chapter 61A
- Solar development
- Zoning & Smart Growth
- Whole farm approach – Housing, infrastructure and other land
- And more!



Access

- Agricultural suitability
- State land licensing
- Urban agriculture
- Private leases
- Tribal lands
- Farmland Restoration
- Farm Incubators
- Education and technical assistance
- Diversification
- DEI training
- Resource toolbox
- Land search
- And more!



Viability

- Right to Farm Bylaws and Ag Comms
- Grants and financing
- Local taxation, policy and regulations
- **Urban agriculture**
- Farm infrastructure
- Service providers
- Climate change technical assistance
- **Soils on public lands**
- **Non-market contributions**
- Technical assistance and education
- And more!



All goals

- Partners and partnerships for implementation
- Historically underserved farmer involvement.
- Map, track monitor and report
- Build public support
- And more!

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

4-digit unique ID number



Getting involved with implementation

How can I get involved?

Depending on the lead implementer and the parameters of the specific task:

- Public meetings and listening sessions to understand the problems or potential solutions
- Committee meetings
- Working groups
- Research report
- Other methods

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

How could Conservation Districts get involved?

The many roles of conservation districts

Some which could be useful as relates to the Farmland Action Plan:

- Technical assistance and education
- Assist with stewardship of protected lands
- Acquire land
- License land



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



Protection tasks

Purchase ag land

- Purchase agricultural restrictions to permanently protect farmland, help increase affordability, and keep it in production. (Action I.A.1)
 - *Build the capacity of restriction-holding entities to effectively identify, review, and acquire restrictions that allow agriculture. (Task 1432)*
- And other Actions/Tasks

Steward ag land

- Build capacity to manage APR stewardship effectively and efficiently. (Action I.A.9)
 - *Build the capacity of restriction-holding entities to hold, and steward restrictions that allow agriculture. (Task 1095)*
- And other Actions/ Tasks

Also consider - role on NRCS State Technical Committee

NRCS State Technical Committee



Goal – Increase access to farmland

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



Publicly held land

Assess all existing, publicly held land for its suitability for agriculture and make more of it available for agriculture. (Action II.A.1)

- Work with state agencies and departments, counties, and 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 (Task 1157)
- Support municipalities in developing their own farmland licensing agreements and plans. (Task 1162)
- Establish a process for negotiating agreements for agricultural use on parcels with public landholding agencies and jurisdictions. (Task 1165)



Education and Technical Assistance

Support and expand farmland transfer and farmland succession education and one-to-one technical assistance (TA) (Action II.B.1)

- Disseminate information to farmers on estate/transfer planning models, case studies, and best practices. (Task 1203)
- Include farm transfer planning in farm business planning, training, and outreach at all stages of farm business life cycle. (Task 1206)
- Provide technical assistance (TA) to applicants in completing program applications through NGOs non-profits and other TA organizations. (Task 1234)

Create a comprehensive toolbox of resources for farm business, succession, transfer planning, and implementation that is maintained and kept up to date, and provide these resources to farmers, which may require additional staff resources. (Action II.D.5)

- No tasks currently identified

Strengthen the state land licensing program (Action II.A.2)

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



Other access related actions and tasks

Explore options to expand and strengthen equity and diversity criteria for applications for agricultural use of public land, and prioritize access for historically underserved, new, aspiring, and low-income farmers. (Action II.C.2)

- Provide technical assistance (TA) to applicants in completing program applications through non-profits and other TA organizations. (Task 1234)
- Engage with local organizations to determine the farmland needs of a community and when conducting outreach and publicizing availability of farmland. (Task 1237)

Increase the amount of privately leased farmland, coupled with agreements designed to meet the needs of farmers. (Action II.A.4)

- Explore novel, alternative methods of land tenure to meet the needs of beginning, BIPOC, and other historically underserved communities with limited equity or credit. (Task 1192)
- Establish novel, alternative methods of land tenure to meet the needs of beginning, BIPOC, and other historically underserved communities with limited equity or credit. (Task 1193)



Goal - Support and enhance the viability of farms and farmland

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



Farmer outreach and support

Prompt further development of industries supportive of agriculture to ensure they serve farmer, farm and farmland issues fully. (Action III.A.6)

- Support workforce development, networking, and coordination of a next generation of farm succession and farm business advisors. (Task 1298)
- Develop program to engage with aspiring/beginning farmers, through NGOs non-profits, USDA, Extension, MDAR, UMass Student Farm, K-12 programs, and other stakeholders. (Task 1302)
- Support and encourage organizations and programs that support the health and welfare of farmers and farm workers, including mental health and physical health. (Task 1407)

Make it easier for farmers to seek and obtain grants and financing. (Action II.A.3)

- Provide more technical assistance to assist farmers with compiling grant applications and increase interest in grants from a broader range of farmers (Task 1262)



More farmer outreach and support

Develop and implement a strategic outreach and education communications plan to promote public and private resources available to farmers. (Action III.C.1)

- Work with the Massachusetts Land Trust Coalition, municipal organizations, regional planning agencies, Buy Local organizations, and state agencies to develop outreach material with uniform messaging that can be utilized by all entities. (Task 1344)
- 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. (Task 1345)

III.B.1 - Increase TA technical assistance to farmers around crop- and livestock-specific climate change adaptation strategies.



More viability related tasks

Improve soils on publicly held land being used for agriculture (Action III.B.2)

- Implement the Massachusetts Healthy Soils Program. (Action 1326)
- Prompt healthy soil practices on Chapter 61A, APR and FVEP properties. (Action 1327)

Other opportunities

- Soil assistance for urban agriculture (Tasks within Action III.A.7)
- Technical assistance to farmers around crop- and livestock-specific climate change adaptation strategies (Action III.B.1)
- Identify opportunities to support farmers for their non-market service contributions, including ecological enhancements and services provided by management practices, potentially via new funding. (eg Payment for Eco-system Services) (Action III.B.3)



Supporting all the goals

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



Educate public and local officials

Develop programming to educate all Massachusetts residents and elected officials about the importance of local agriculture. (Action All.B.1)

- Through media and other public outreach, educate the public about the value of local agriculture and how they can support it through consumer spending and advocacy. Highlight local agriculture's connections to food security, public health, the economy, the environment, equity, culture, and other sectors. (Task 1370)

Next steps

- **Plan implementation updates/ newsletter**

- Follow up discussions focusing on specific tasks or groups of tasks
- Progress Report shared later this week
- Implementation Matrix to be shared by the end of the year
- Sign up for email updates – Katharine.s.otto@mass.gov

- **Resources online at**

www.mass.gov/farmland-action-plan

- **Things to think about**

- How does the Farmland Action Plan align with your organization's work?
- How can we partner and collaborate more between organizations?



Comments and Questions?

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

Farmland Action Plan Coordinator. Katharine Otto, MDAR. katharine.s.otto@mass.gov 413-544-2400

