

MA Farmland Action Plan – Drop-In Session for Potential Partners

Notes from online discussion on 7/22/2025

Context

On Tuesday, July 22, 2025 at 10am Katharine Otto hosted a drop-in session for potential partners (people who may help with implementation of the plan) of the Massachusetts Farmland Action Plan (MFAP). The meeting had no presentation – instead the content was guided by questions and comments from attendees. It was organized as an easy way to connect in, anticipating that recent discussions and new resources may have sparked additional thoughts. The primary audience was potential partners.

Facilitator – Katharine Otto, Farmland Action Plan Coordinator, MDAR. Katharine.s.otto@mass.gov

The following is a brief summary of the conversation that occurred during the drop-in session.

Some notes regarding the comments and questions:

- Some have been edited or combined.
- Comments have been collated by topics, in no particular order
- These comments are from voluntary participants in open discussion. These comments may or may not align with positions of MDAR or the Commonwealth of Massachusetts.

Discussion 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.

Big picture on how to get involved with Farmland Action Plan Implementation

- What are the opportunities and intention for implementing the plan long term beyond the grant round?
- The [Farmland Partnership Program](#) just part of the strategy to implement the plan. What work can be done by partners using existing and other funding sources? Reach out to Katharine if you are interested to get involved.
- Does MDAR have changed priorities given the changed realities of the last few months? The Farmland Action Plan remains an important initiative for MDAR. MDAR values transparency, sharing information as it becomes available through press releases and other means (eg MFAP newsletter).

Farmland Partnership Program

- Are there any updates on the timeline? As shared in the RFR, the goal is to announce the awards in September with projects starting in November.
- Cannot share or discuss anything else related to the program at this time.

Buy-Protect-Sell (BPS)

- Are there any updates on the Buy-Protect-Sell (BPS) Program?
- MDAR gained the ability to acquire land late last fall (see [January 2025 MFAP newsletter](#))
- MDAR has been working on the new BPS Program internally.
- A new person has just started working for MDAR whose role will partially be to work on the BPS program
- Katharine will request a MFAP newsletter article to share news about this program in the coming months

Farmland Protection Projects

- Are there any plans to expediate the process? It's off-putting to farmers that it takes time
- Several MFAP tasks recognize need to streamline processes
- NRCS has lost staff that would impact the speed for processing ACEP-ALE

Private APR funding update

- Is there an update about the rumors of potential Private APR funding? Katharine to ask MDAR staff who run it
- This funding is even more important given all the other uncertainties.
- Importance of the funding for its flexibility and to protect farms as farms, rather than trying to fit them into other boxes not designed for them

Potential environmental contamination on farmland to be protected

- One land trust is wondering about how people are approaching potential environmental contamination on land they might be protecting. For example some commodities have a legacy of high pesticide use. How can a board manage the risk of these potential contamination?
- MFAP talks about soil contamination a little as relates to urban agriculture.
- It could be useful to add a task(s) related to this consideration for protection section of the plan, as fits within the scope. Also should coordinate with the healthy soils program and the Healthy Soils Action Plan since that would be a good place to recognize the elements of the need that is not within the scope of the MFAP. Cross-disciplinary conversation needed to create the task(s).
- Soil experts and innovations. What can be learned from urban ag experience?

Municipal involvement, including Ag Comms and Conservation Commissions

- MDAR has historically not been as involved with municipalities. Working on a strategy to engage with them more in the coming months and years. Stay tuned for future opportunities
- MDAR contract to support Ag Comms www.mass.gov/info-details/agricultural-commissions
- Several partners could be good resources and work alongside municipalities, including Regional Planning Agencies (RPAs), land trusts and conservation districts
- Conservation commissions and balancing the needs of water quality/wetlands with farming and farmers. Complicated relationships and frustrations.

Farmland of Local Importance

- Almost half the towns have certified FLI now
- Contact NRCS early if you think your ACEP-ALE application will include FLI – it takes time for NRCS to verify and they have reduced staff capacity
- FLI is including in the [revised APR scoresheet](#) (finalized September 2025) alongside prime and statewide soils. Learn more from the [December 2024 MFAP newsletter](#), [APR Program webpage](#) and [Agricultural Lands Preservation Committee \(ALPC\) webpage](#).

Future meetings

- Any plans to resume meetings and discussions like last fall?
- Suggestion to do open roundtables by each Plan Goal to bring people together
- Not planning to focus on the entire plan going forwards, but instead start doing discussions that focus on a task or a few related tasks – ie focusing on specific topics.
- Do a short survey to find out what topics people would like to chat about?
- Provide updates on general picture and prospects
- Next drop-in session likely late August – look for announcement in newsletter

Other

- How does MDAR feel about the Mass Ready Act and how does it interact with the MFAP? The Mass Ready Act was presented by the administration, and therefore is supported by its agencies, including MDAR.
- Resources about Farmers Markets - www.mass.gov/farmers-market-program
- Grant writing tasks and how to move forward. Align with farmland partnership awarded projects?
- What is the status of the EEA RCPP grants? MDAR is not leading this effort and so does not have an update. Will share a contact who may have information.