

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

Notes from online discussion on 8/25/2025

Context

On Monday, August 25, 2025 at 1pm Katharine Otto hosted a drop-in session for potential partners (people who may help with implementation of the plan). The meeting had no presentation – instead the content was guided by questions and comments from attendees. While still open to general conversation, through the invitations Katharine encouraged discussion about edits to the matrix at the drop in sessions. The drop in sessions are 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.

Matrix tasks

- Many tasks seemed intertwined
- Importance of “why” – not just jump to a solution – when looking at tasks. May sometimes need to adjust the task in the matrix to more accurately reflect what can be done to address the issue
- Some tasks are very specific, others are a lot broader
- Need to have more tasks related to landowners (farmland or could be farmland).
 - o Look for tasks relating to identifying lands and making land available for agriculture
 - o Look at tasks under actions related to publicly held lands, as well as actions for private lands. There may be some tasks that would be good to replicate and adapt to other situations
 - o Consider the breadth of what “private” landowners could be – not just individuals, but also non-profits and other organizations.
- There was no discussion of particular tasks.

Working on Open Space and Recreation Plans (OSRPs)

- OSRPs include assessing lands you have – soils, level of protection
- Even communities who identify as agrarian are struggling to connect with farmers. Need to hear farmers voices to add them in.
- Noticing trend of municipalities preferring to purchase land, including through Right of First Refusal (ROFR), as Conservation Restriction (CR) used in a way that can’t be used for farming

- OSRPs often led by Conservation Commissions
- AgComs may exist, but may not be active, so limited ability to add their voice (see AgCom section below)
- What types of connections can help reach more farmers? Organizations, partners, etc.
- Idea – bring together people to share how they engage with farmers, share best practices, and also foster relationships that can be helpful to facilitate additional connections (eg organizations in the same area with slightly different audiences).
- [Engaging with Farmers Handbook](#), created by MACD, could be a helpful resource. Written for conservation planners at NRCS and for similar roles at other technical service providers.
- Very limited funding for OSRP development. Maximum grant award has not gone up in years. How can we maximize connections and outreach with limited funds?
- Seeing support for Community Gardens in OSRP discussions

Protecting farmland using CRs and Agricultural Restrictions

- Seeing a trend of Conservation Restrictions and protection by Land Trusts that is not farm friendly, even if they think they are
- Need more education to Land Trusts on what farm friendly protection, Buy-Protect-Sell and land leasing looks like
- Mapping as an important tool to help focus attention on which farms would be better for Agricultural Restrictions rather than Conservation Restrictions

Supporting AgComs

- MDAR has hired consultants to work with AgComs – Pete Westover and Sarah Garden.
www.mass.gov/info-details/agricultural-commissions
- Learn about recent and future roundtables at <https://www.mass.gov/info-details/agricultural-commission-roundtable-meeting-notes-july-20-2025>

Farmland Partnership Program

- Eager to hear results of awards in September