

Massachusetts Farmland Action Plan

Massachusetts Food Policy Council Advisory Committee
January 13, 2025 at 1pm - Online

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Agenda and Goals

Agenda

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

Goals

- ❖ Share basic information about Farmland Action Plan, but not duplicate what I'll share on Friday at Food Policy Council!
- ❖ Understand next steps for implementation and how to get involved

Farmland Action Plan

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

???

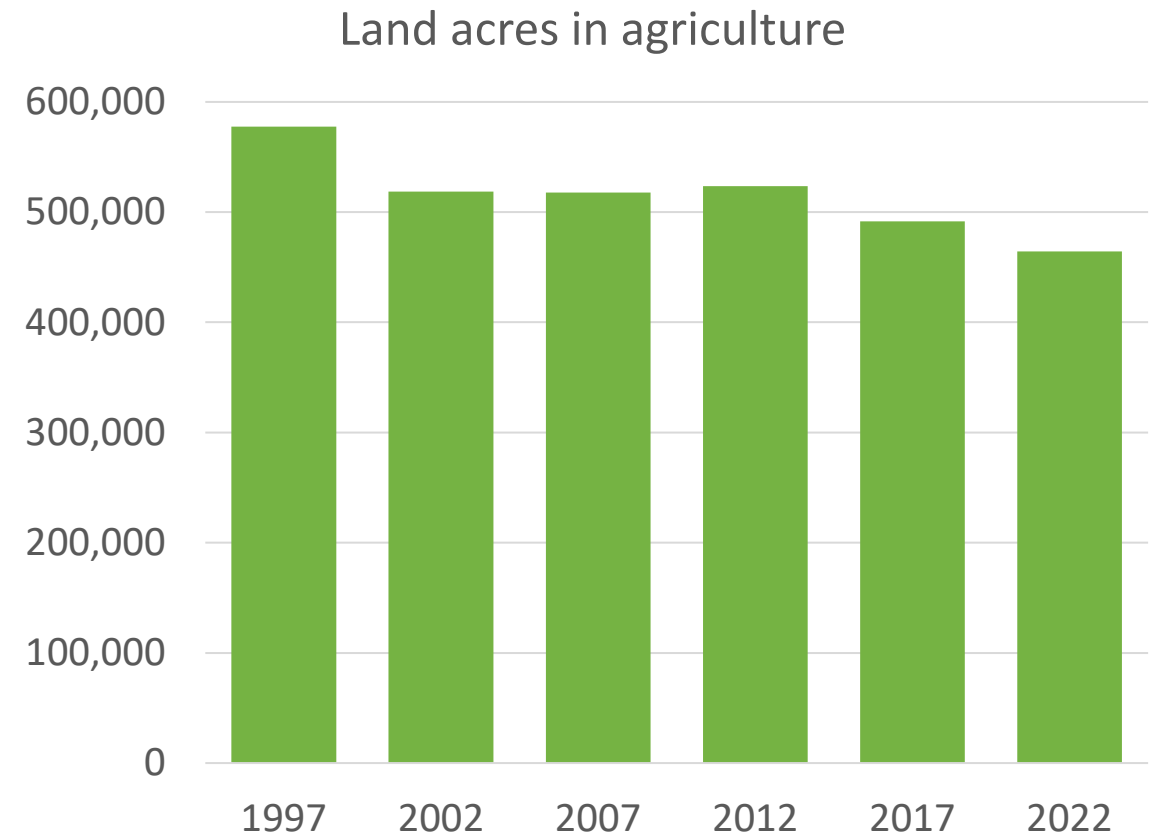
Why is the Farmland Action Plan important?

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

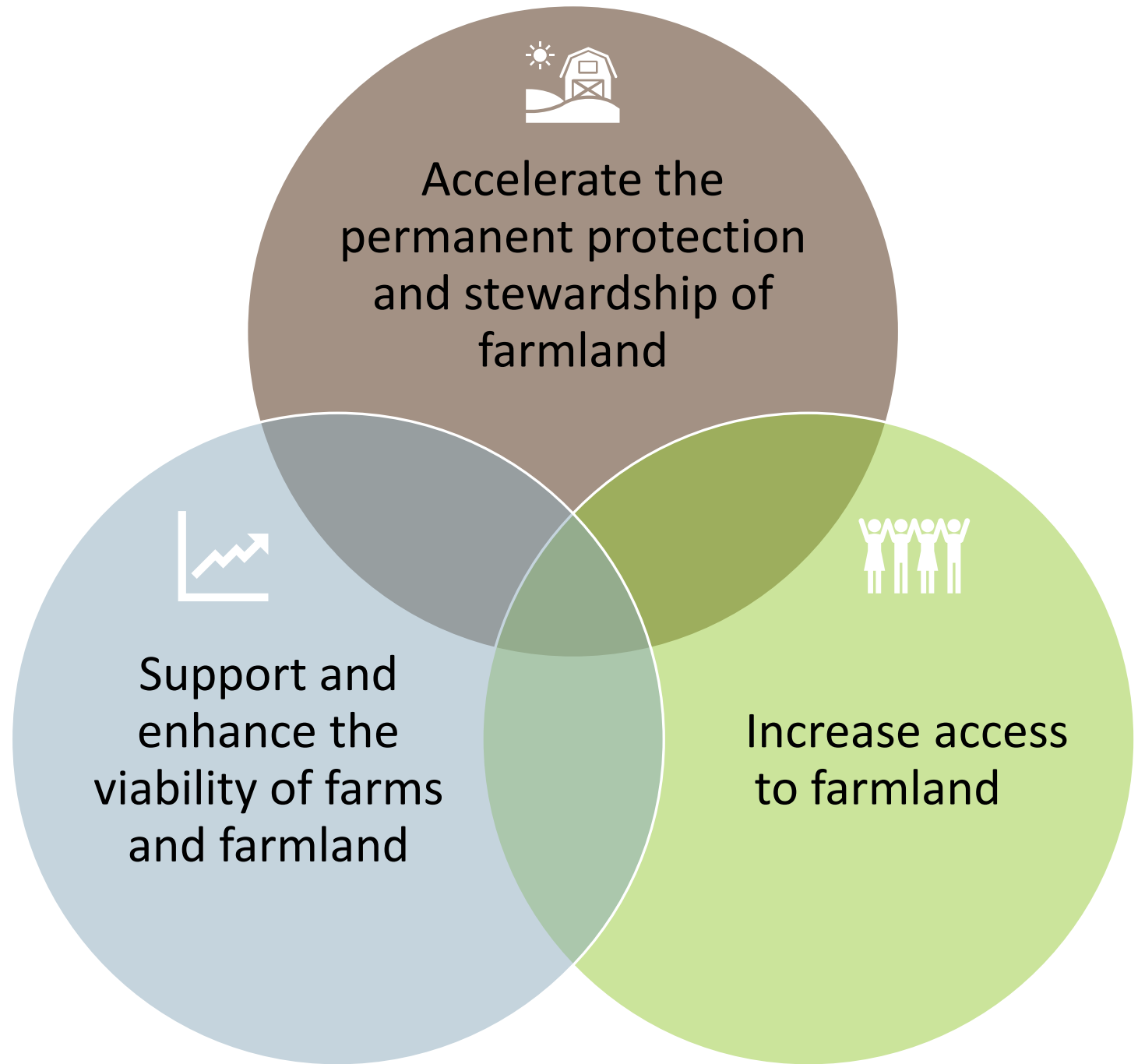


Sources: Census of Agriculture 2022 and earlier. Table 1

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

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



Other related statewide plans

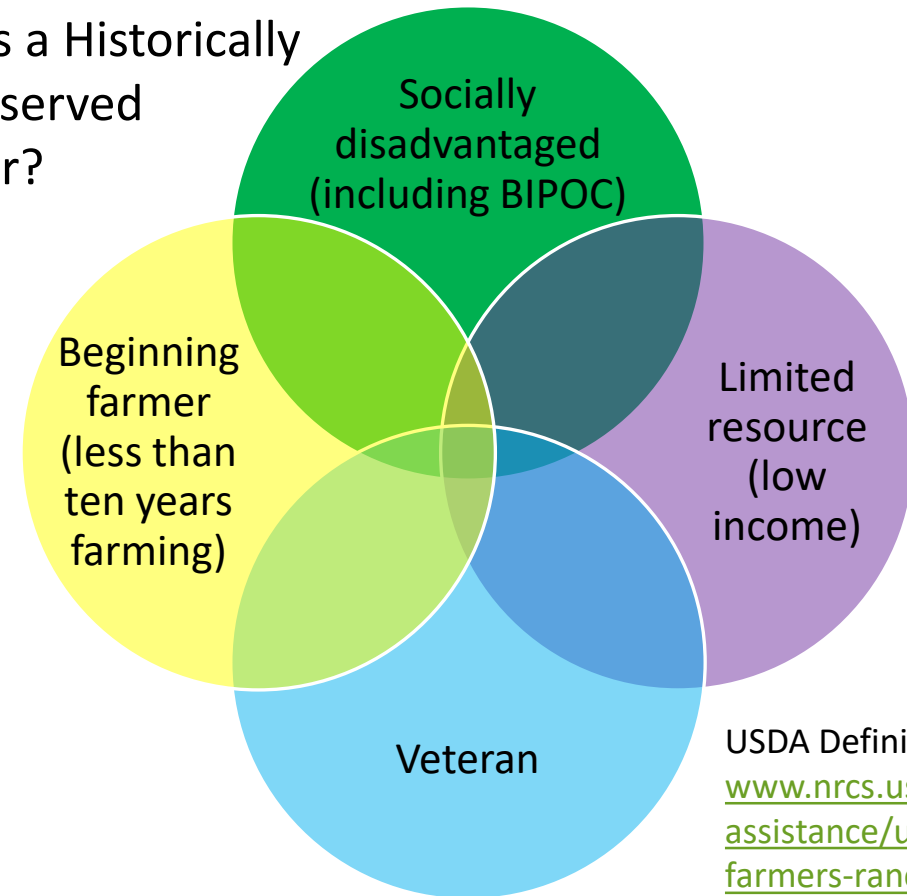
- Local Food Action Plan (2015)
- Decarbonization Road Map (2018)
- Rural Policy Plan (2019)
- Clean Energy & Climate Plan (2022)
- ResilientMass (2023) (State Hazard Mitigation and Climate Adaptation Plan)
- Resilient Lands Initiative (2023)
- Healthy Soils Action Plan (2023)
- EEA Environmental Justice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

Moving into implementation

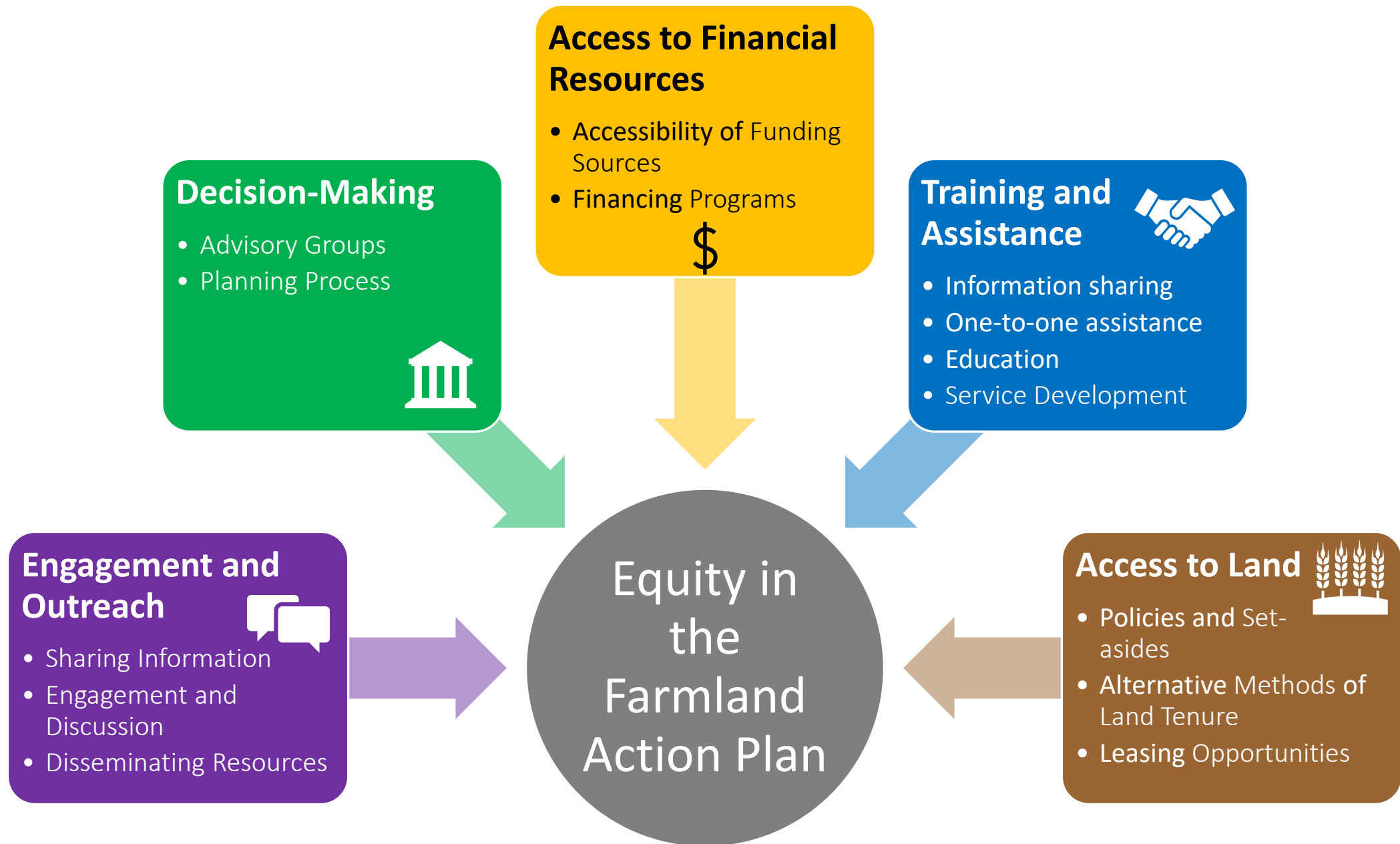
Implementing for all farmers

- 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?



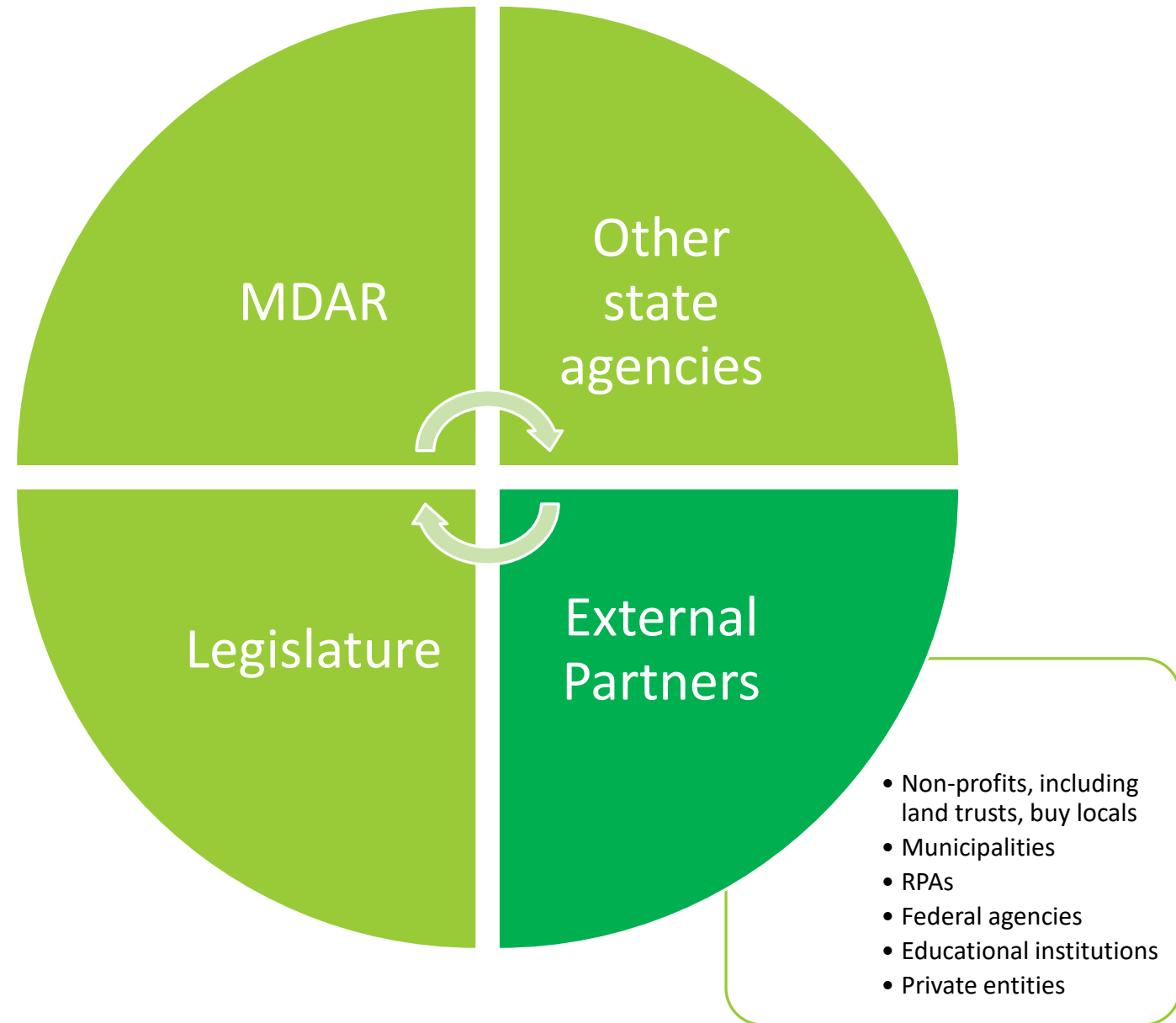
USDA Definition
www.nrcs.usda.gov/getting-assistance/underserved-farmers-ranchers



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

Other
interested
individuals

Other
interested
individuals

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



What's being done now?

Turning plan into reality

The Plan was finalized in December 2023

- Steering Committee
- Subject Matter Expert (SME) Group
- Listening sessions
- Vision planning sessions
- Action planning sessions
- Survey
- BIPOC-led community engagement

Our opportunity now

- Shape the future implementation
- Engaging with wider audience and potential partners
- Refine tasks as they get started

Key features for implementation

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 implementation matrix

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

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

How has the matrix been reviewed so far?

- Identify a potential timeline for implementation
- Identify lead and other potential implementers
- Clarify language to ensure clear understanding of item
- Check whether additional tasks are needed to assist with implementation of actions

Food system in the plan



Land access

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

- Educate city and town decision-makers about the benefits of hyper local food production and its connection with climate change and food access. Include information about tools to encourage it, including community gardens and land licensing. (Task 1395)
- Provide technical assistance to municipalities to identify all municipally owned land, including parks, schools, and open land, that is suitable for food production. (Task 1159)
- Food production assessment and planning (Tasks 1161, 1163, 1164)

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)



Zoning and regulations

Advance zoning reform and smart growth policies that encourage density and development that do not result in the loss of farmland. (Action I.B.7)

- Enable and incentivize communities to take actions to retain farmland and promote infill and compact development without adversely impacting farmers' equity and asset value in their land. (Task 1149)

Explore opportunities to modify local taxation, policy and regulations to support farming. (Action III.A.4)

- Discourage local zoning regulations, nuisance bylaws, and other regulations from unnecessarily hampering the expansion of urban agriculture. (Task 1284)

Explore implementation of mechanisms that would increase the number of municipalities instituting Right to Farm bylaws and agricultural commissions. (Action III.A.2)

- Provide a clearinghouse of all the Right to Farm bylaws municipalities have passed, along with the model the state created. (Task 1156)
- Explore opportunities to support adoption of Right to Farm bylaw and local farmland planning. (Task 1157)
- Support stakeholders in Right to Farm communities to act as ambassadors to educate and encourage other municipalities to pass Right to Farm bylaws. (Task 1158)



Education and public awareness

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)
- Integrate lessons concerning Indigenous understandings of practices that support biodiversity and framing of sustainable that is not centered on market but on productivity and abundance for food as a human right. (Task 1428)
- Recommend agriculture, nutrition, and the local food system standards in K-12 classrooms. (Task 1371)
- Evaluate and strengthen state programs that support purchases of local foods, including processes like procurement, as well as funding. (Task 1372)

Tasks from other actions

- 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)
- Provide more public education on urban food production techniques in community gardens and home gardens, such as growing vegetables, composting, keeping bees, chickens, and other animals. (Task 1304)

Other places to potentially get involved

Develop a comprehensive plan to support and sustain the state's agricultural sector, including urban agriculture, integrating both public and private resources. (Action All.B.2)

- Build upon the 2015 Massachusetts Local Food Action Plan and other efforts that look more broadly at agriculture to set goals and recommendations for ensuring long-term viability for the state's agricultural sector. (Task 1375)

Tasks from other actions

- Encourage all municipalities to adopt the CPA, create conservation commission funds, and fund them for agricultural land protection projects as consistent with the CPA statute. (Task 1110)
- Establish a working group to develop priorities for land to be protected, such as considerations for geographic equity; soils; crop diversity; forest cover; parcel size; emerging agricultural practices such as silvopasture, nut tree operations, permaculture, etc.; proximity to environmental justice communities, markets, other protected land; etc. The working group should include farmers, MDAR, NRCS, planners, and others. (Task 1149)

Looking for other tasks you might be interested in

Resources created for other meetings

- ❖ Breaking the plan into pieces for specific audiences
- ❖ Powerpoints, meeting notes and sometimes videos are available for many meetings at www.mass.gov/farmland-action-plan

Implementation Matrix

- ❖ Working draft matrix due to be published online soon!
www.mass.gov/farmland-action-plan
- ❖ Search for keywords – eg “food”, “municipality”, “policy”

Next steps

- **Sign up for Plan Newsletter updates**
 - Meetings focused on specific topics
 - New grants and programs
- New resource - www.mass.gov/info-details/resources-for-historically-underserved-farmers-and-producers

Any questions or comments?

More information and questions

- katharine.s.otto@mass.gov 413-544-2400
- www.mass.gov/farmland-action-plan

What comes next?

- Take the information back to your team/organization and other places
- Think what tasks you'd like to get involved with implementing, and who you might work with
- Reach out with questions

Comments/ Questions?



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

Sign up for newsletter - Katharine Otto, MDAR. katharine.s.otto@mass.gov 413-544-2400

Reference slides

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

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

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

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