

# Massachusetts Farmland Action Plan and Potential Partners

## Meeting notes for online discussions 10/29/2024 thru 11/4/2024

### Invitation/ Context

Katharine Otto (Farmland Action Plan Coordinator) hosted some online meetings to explore the Plan with local and regional partners – and how they could get involved with implementation. This was an opportunity to discuss which tasks within the plan are already being worked on or might be good to get moving, as well as answer questions.

These meetings did not spend time on specific organization types who Katharine had already met with (eg land trusts, Buy Locals and others) or she was due to meet with soon (eg conservation districts, urban ag and RPAs).

Meetings were organized by area of the state. The following meetings were held:

- Berkshire County – 10/29/2024 at 10am
- Franklin/ Hampshire/ Hampden Counties – 10/30/2024 at 10am
- Worcester County – 10/31/2024 at 9am
- Cape Cod and Islands – 10/31/2024 at 2pm
- Norfolk/ Bristol/ Plymouth/ Suffolk Counties – 11/1/2024 at 1pm
- Middlesex and Essex Counties – 11/4/2024 at 1pm

***The following is a brief summary of some of the topics that were raised in discussion during the meetings.***

### Potential Partners Meeting (Berkshire County) – 10/29/2024 at 10am

Discussion topics during the meeting

- **Purchase and awareness of ag restrictions**
  - Importance of bringing people together and engaging – land trusts, RPAs, municipalities and others. Bring different skills and connections
  - Keep Berkshires Farming effort
- **Zoning reform and smart growth**
  - Mapping solar development potential as foundation for decision-making
  - Need real world examples to point municipalities towards and developers who are willing to do those types of projects.
  - Keep in mind how zoning and other regulations should avoid negative impacts
  - How is equity woven into the zoning reform section, particularly as relates to traditional development patterns and access inequities?
- **Solar development**
  - Need for clear policies
  - Diverse opinions about how solar and farmland interact. Need for sharing more information and discussion.
- **Equity and access**
  - Need for Regional Equity Advisory Council so that as new programs are implemented they do not overlook farmers who would be suitable.

- Chapter 61A
  - o Urban producers currently excluded from it (less than 5 acres)
  - o Current proposed to make it less than 5 acres, but would include legislation to be passed as well as a constitutional amendment
  - o Impacts to municipalities as more land is enrolled in Chapter 61A – and the shifting tax income
- Publicly held land
  - o Best practices for municipalities to walk them through the process of RFPs
  - o Important to cite people who are experts when talking with municipal officials so they respect what is offered.
- Land tenure and access
  - o How do entities with land get farmers onto their land?
  - o Equitable practices of access to land
  - o Expanding incubators
- Prioritize increase access for BIPOC and other historically underserved farmers in all farmland access programs and policies
  - o Tasks sound comprehensive and cover the breadth of what should be done to incorporate equity.
  - o Importance of farmer wellness
  - o How can advisory council be intentionally built into all spaces? Need for intentionality, training, repair
  - o DEI Capacity building needed
- Service-provider networks
  - o Need for competitive salaries to attract people
- Municipal support for farm viability
  - o Regulations get in the way of on-farm poultry processing
- Other comments
  - o Farm safety is also important, it is the second most hazardous industry
  - o Upcoming Environmental Bond – need to see what relates to the Farmland Action Plan

#### Links from the chatbox

- NRCS' Berkshire County Service Center - Ngo was hired recently - [Ngowari.Jaja@usda.gov](mailto:Ngowari.Jaja@usda.gov)
- Planning for Agriculture <https://farmland.org/project/planning-for-agriculture/>
- Planning for Agriculture Resources <https://farmland.org/planning-for-ag-resources/>
- Farmland Information Center - clearinghouse of farmland information <https://farmlandinfo.org/>
- Smart Solar <https://farmlandinfo.org/solar-siting/>

### Potential Partners Meeting (Franklin/ Hampshire/ Hampden Counties) – 10/30/2024 at 10am

#### Discussion topics during the meeting

- Questions during context section
  - o To what extent is the plan final, or is it open to amendment if new information arises?
  - o Importance of hearing all voices and equitable implementation of the plan.
- Build Public Support
  - o This is something we can all be doing. We have lots of people on our newsletter and would be happy to share messaging if someone creates it

- Capacity to do events and outreach is a challenge. Critical work, but need money to do it. Is there funding to implement the plan?
- Does Task 1372 about K-12 schools belong to Mass in the Classroom? Seems like an outlier for the plan
- Does “build public support” also include engaging with farmers who may not realize the importance? Hard to get farmers, because they are farming.
- Need to ensure there’s a good variety of means to reach the public, meeting people where they are at. Don’t have narrow definitions of what public support is.
- Task 1428. Indigenous understanding should be plural. Not a singular understanding. Edit language to add “s”. Honor the diversity of perspectives and opinions.
- **Creative funding for protection**
  - Lots of people in private sector who would like to invest in farmland.
  - Need more flexible funding sources with less restrictions - funds and loans.
  - What is the role of private philanthropy?
  - People can’t carry more debt than they already have.
- **MDAR buying and holding land**
  - Important for MDAR to be able to buy and hold land – as they can help address access issues for BIPOC farmers.
  - Important to separate ownership from secure tenureship. Not the same. We need secure tenureship and that can involve 99 year lease, ground lease and other mechanisms.
  - Importance of stewardship – often protect and then forget for integrated stewardship.
- **Registries**
  - What is meant by “registries”? Who holds these registries?
- **Land tenure and access**
  - Makes sense
  - Nonwhite farmers want long term tenure but because of history, wealth building and current political climate prefer ownership
- **Service provider networks**
  - Attorneys, appraisers, real estate agencies. Land for Good trainings in the past. Need funding and capacity issue to do this.
  - Regional food business center funds might be helpful in this area.
- **Non-market contributions**
  - What is meant by non-market contributions?
- **Resilience**
  - Should there be an equivalent action for soil on private land, not just public?
- **Technical and business assistance**
  - What is a network of navigators (Task 1353)?
  - NY has a navigator program that is working well, and Massachusetts need this. People don’t know where to go and can’t get the support they need. No one organization who can help farmers though everything.
- **Education**
  - How do we frame messaging on farming as a viable career path? How do we also adjust the career path so it is more financially stable?
  - Why is UMass not mentioned here?
  - A lot of this section is implying people who are not already in farmer. Technical and business assistance parts of the plan focus more on farm workers and farmers

- Big jump from farm worker to producer – how do we support that?
- **Farm financing**
  - Educating financial institutions already in progress and they don't like it, but we keep doing in.

Links from the chatbox

- [Massachusetts Farmland of Local Importance Screening Tool - FIC](#)
- Land Trusts & Farmland Action Plan – [meeting slides](#), [video](#) and/or [meeting notes](#).
- Land For Good resource - [https://landforgood.org/wp-content/uploads/2\\_COURSE-DESCRIPTION-Tools-and-Resources-for-Working-with-Farms-with-Commercial-Agricultural-Potential-MA.pdf](https://landforgood.org/wp-content/uploads/2_COURSE-DESCRIPTION-Tools-and-Resources-for-Working-with-Farms-with-Commercial-Agricultural-Potential-MA.pdf)
- AFT Piloting Rewards for Ecosystem Services (PRES) <https://farmland.org/pres/>
- AFT climate and agriculture team in New England. <https://farmland.org/ne-climate-and-agriculture/>

## Potential Partners Meeting (Worcester County) – 10/31/2024 at 9am

Discussion topics during the meeting

- **Why are farms and farmland important?**
  - Consider adding erosion control and carbon capture
- **Zoning Reform and smart growth**
  - Need to create a farmland protection mandate, like the solar mandate. Need a statewide policy. Had a big impact on what municipalities can and cannot do. Makes it simple.
  - Some parts of the state have done some good initiatives in the past, including by regional planning. It's long overdue to do more and really valuable
  - There is a real need for this type of reform.
  - As we educate and outreach we need it to be more accessible – eg more visual, maps, etc. Sometimes out of necessity and sometimes out of intent. Different types of learners.
  - Create the story which pull people in - means more than the data.
  - Farms are more than just their soils. Need to look beyond the official maps and the data. What's really on the ground should be considered before pursue protection.
- **Other municipally focused protection tasks**
  - Municipalities often don't have the money to protect. Budget of municipality is limited. How can we help underserved communities? Especially since the risk of development tends to be higher.
  - Creating watchlists (Task 1059) could have unintended consequences. Need to be aware. Tenderness and relationship important as much as lists
  - If we want to protect land and want it in food production, how do we work together? We are all eaters and all need food production. Farmers are good conservationists too. Farmers produce for underserved communities. And we have underserved farmers who don't have access to land
  - Does 1059 need refinements to the language because hard to understand when first read?
- **Non-market contributions**
  - Do we have any mechanism for measuring carbon capture? It is possible now – and is used in the UK and Europe. It's a benefit and a quantifiable improvement.
- **Publicly held lands**
- **Language of the plan**
  - Is there a way to get things in plain language, which can also help with translations and interpretations?
- **Farm and farmland transfer**

- Needed for local farmers
- **Service-provider networks**
  - Critical work!
- **Other access tasks**
  - Support for communications with land trusts and individuals who are leasing lands to farmers. Balancing the considerations of conservation and farming. Seeing farmers as conservation stewards. Encourage landowners to allow the less pretty things of farming eg equipment. Need templates, examples, shifting messaging.
- **Raising awareness of what's being done and what is available**
  - Do we have an idea of the current percentage of farmland that has been protected via APR and other programs?
  - Increase on cost cap on APR program because people articulated that it needed to happen.
  - Important to take interest and articulate needs. Outside raising awareness can give people on the inside do what they've wanted to do for a while.
  - How do we raise awareness of organizations doing particular work?
  - Need for toolbox and list of resources that can be shared as resources for farmers on every municipal page
- **Municipal support for farm viability**
- **Education and outreach**
- **Other thoughts and comments**
  - Where active producer and farmer input is needed, make sure time around farmer season for most – November thru February/ March
  - How aware is the Food Policy Council of this work?
  - Will there be an opportunity to meet with legislators to raise concerns?

#### Links from the chatbox

- Farmland Action Plan: <https://www.mass.gov/info-details/massachusetts-farmland-action-plan>
- Land Trusts & Farmland Action Plan – [meeting slides](#), [video](#) and/or [meeting notes](#).
- Buy Local organizations & Farmland Action Plan – [meeting slides](#).
- Urban agriculture organizations & Farmland Action Plan - [meeting slides](#).
- Virtual workshop series for northern New England municipalities, land trusts, and non-profits about planning for agriculture, land protection, land access, and land justice: <https://farmland.org/farms-for-the-future-workshop-recordings-and-resources/>

### Potential Partners Meeting (Cape Cod and Islands) – 10/31/2024 at 2pm

#### Discussion topics during the meeting

- **Why are farms and farmland important?**
  - Add community building potential
- **Build public support**
  - Farmers need expertise from others who've done it before so can apply for grants
  - Opportunity to add language about Farmland Action Plan and Healthy Soils Plan into Open Space Plans.
  - Right to Farm Bylaws important
  - How can organizations on the Cape come together to solve problems? Create a food policy council? People feel isolated, so how do we come together to help each other?

- **Protection options**
  - 1063 - Lots of need. AFT doing virtual trainings
- **Access**
  - Challenges of farms being snapped up by developers, because small non-profits don't have the resources to buy everything that comes on the market
- **Food production assessment and land access**
  - What does food production assessment really mean?
  - Is there any effort to standardize these kinds of assessments? How do we make it a useful tool to deploy in other places?
  - Think about working on school owned land also
- **Creative financing for protection and access**
  - Need creative financing for both protection and access. Need to bring people into these conversations and work on it. Our farmland is really expensive in Massachusetts
- **Education and workforce development**
- **Farmer outreach and support**
  - Technical assistance around grant writing is super important. And how can we make them simpler
  - MDAR list of grant support writers that is primarily for historically underserved farmers, but others can use it.
  - How do we use other alert systems about grant applications? eg texts. Things get lost in emails!
  - Broaden outreach to including municipalities and general public.
  - Southern New England Ag Conference and Trade Show coming up in February
- **Outreach**
  - 1344 needs to happen, but not clear who would do that
  - AFT is already working on 1345
- **Other comments**
  - "Viability" is a term that is being reconsidered in some areas, particularly as relates to native tribes. Making money off farmland and growing food is part of the Farmland Action Plan, but "viability" can mean different things.

#### Links from the chatbox

- Farmland Under Threat Report - [https://storage.googleapis.com/csp-fut2040.appspot.com/state-reports/FUT2040\\_MA.pdf](https://storage.googleapis.com/csp-fut2040.appspot.com/state-reports/FUT2040_MA.pdf)
- Farmland Action Plan - <https://www.mass.gov/info-details/massachusetts-farmland-action-plan>
- Healthy Soils Action Plan - <https://cms2.revize.com/revize/belchertown/Mass%20Healthy%20Soils%20Action%20Plan%202023.pdf>
- AFT/ SEMAP webinar municipalities in SE MA: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7FZML3oGunc>
- Guide - <https://landforgood.org/wp-content/uploads/LFG-Leasing-Land-To-Farmers-For-Land-Trusts-Municipalities-Handbook-1.pdf>
- Making Land Available Resources - <https://landforgood.org/resource/group/making-land-available/>
- Agricultural Grant Writing Assistance List <https://www.mass.gov/info-details/agricultural-grant-writing-assistance-list>
- Essex County is putting on an Open Space Conference on Dec. 7<sup>th</sup> - <https://www.ecga.org/es/events/conference>
- SENACT: Southeast New England Agriculture Conference & Trade Show --<https://semaponline.org/2024-agriculture-conference-and-trade-show/>

## Potential Partners Meeting (Norfolk/ Bristol/ Plymouth/ Suffolk Counties) – 11/1/2024 at 1pm

Discussion topics during the meeting

- General questions related to context and plan slides
  - o What are FLI criteria?
  - o Where is the food access plan?
- Build public support
  - o What resources do we have on indigenous practices informing Task 1428?
  - o We have county committees for FSA. Hard for urban ag organizations to get on them because don't own or lease land. How can we promote to come together to get urban producers onto these committees?
- Viability
  - o Big barrier for farmers is logistics – once you have the food where does it go.
  - o How do we help support farms as viable business so lose less farmers?.
- Ag restrictions
  - o Need direct relationships with farmers and municipalities to find the funding support needed. Need network of good relationships. Need funding to forge those relationships.
- Awareness of protection options
- Creative funding
  - o Some people sell their property so they can retire. What happens if the regulations change and it becomes protected land? Clarified what is meant by protection - it requires a legal document so doesn't happen accidentally.
- Whole Farms
- Zoning reform and smart growth
  - o RPAs work for municipalities, but they have limited funds to pay them – so grants are needed
  - o Farmland also important as an open space resource for communities
- CPA
- Inventories, watchlists and prioritization
- Solar development
  - o Agrivoltaics needs to be part of the solution.
  - o Add something about education and collaboration with UMass on current research. Role of research to inform the policies isn't really covered in the tasks.
- Farm and Farmland Transfer
  - o Need to provide support for the next generation after the transfer. Understand the transfer process, both before and after, particularly focus on the next generation is coming in.
  - o What funding support is there for transfer? Is it the same as protection?
- Service provider networks
- Resilience practices and sustainability
  - o Any update on funding for Healthy Soils Action Plan?
- Municipal support
  - o Add support for ag mediation task here, or elsewhere? Mediation between farmers and neighbors
- Outreach

No resource links shared in chatbox

## Potential Partners Meeting (Middlesex and Essex Counties) – 11/4/2024 at 1pm

### Discussion topics during the meeting

- **Build public support**
  - o Are there the same tasks in different goals?
  - o What are the ultimate goals of public engagement? Can be very broad. Increase public spending? What outcomes do we want? Knowing hoped for outcomes could then shape how we implement the task?
  - o Is there any funding attached to implementation of this plan? We are already doing some of these things, but really stretched capacity wise.
  - o Would the ultimate goal be for the lead implementer to find funding to implement the task?
- **Protection**
  - o Ag restriction purchasing – APR and CR don't need to be mutually exclusive. They can be compatible with a little work
  - o What options are available to municipality to help protect?
- **Transfer and Succession**
  - o Missing the focus on BIPOC farmers. Need specific outreach and accessibility baked into these task lists. Don't assume Strategy C spread to other strategies, especially if there are siloed working groups which aren't coordinating. Important to have representatives from BIPOC populations on all the groups.
  - o What is OPAV and ROFR? And how are they included in APRs?
  - o Importance of adding OPAV into older APRs which didn't have them written in
- **Service provider networks**
- **Incubators**
  - o Need to connect to non-commercial/ abundance-based production versus business and growth of commercial enterprise. People are interested to grow food for their community – may accept some payment, but commercial viability is not the goal.
  - o Need financial sustainability regardless of your goal, so you can keep pursuing the goal for the long term.
  - o Importance of having incubator reporting that is not just focused on commercial outcomes.
  - o Products can have a value, whether or not you are selling it.
  - o Cornell Small Farms Program – Ag for Planners Course includes some good language to help bridge between farmers and planners
- **Resilience and sustainability**
  - o Healthy soils EEA grant as entry into that topic. Can be work on private property.
- **Right to farm Bylaws and Ag Comms**
  - o Ag comms need connections and training. Need more assistance with planning. Challenge to navigate the competing interests in municipalities
- **Technical assistance and education**
  - o How can farming become a more viable career path? Are tasks are needed related to wages?
- **Using Peer-to-peer networks and navigators**

No resource links shared in chatbox