

Massachusetts Farmland Action Plan



2024 Progress Report Annual focus – Getting started

Last amended 12/19/2024

For more information:
Farmland Action Plan Webpage
www.mass.gov/farmland-action-plan

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Introduction

In December 2023 the Massachusetts Farmland Action Plan was released and implementation has started.

An initial draft for implementation

This first progress report is intended to share updates on first steps towards implementing the Plan. It reflects initial conversations with potential partners who may lead or assist with implementation of tasks within the Plan. Next steps are being shared so that potential partners and interested individuals can see how everything fits together, and then start to discuss.

Other Plans and Strategies

The Farmland Action Plan is part of a suite of plans and strategies that were released in the late 2010s and early 2020s. There is overlap between these plans, as well as areas of specialization. In some cases the Farmland Action Plan does not cover a topic in detail – instead relying on another Plan which goes into more detail. The following are some plans that may be helpful to reference:

- [Massachusetts Local Food Action Plan \(2015\)](#)
- [MDAR Environmental Justice \(EJ\) Strategy \(2024\)](#)
- [Resilient Lands Initiative \(2023\)](#)
- [ResilientMass Plan \(2023\)](#)
- [Massachusetts Healthy Soils Action Plan \(2023\)](#)
- [Massachusetts Clean Energy and Climate Plan for 2025 and 2030](#)

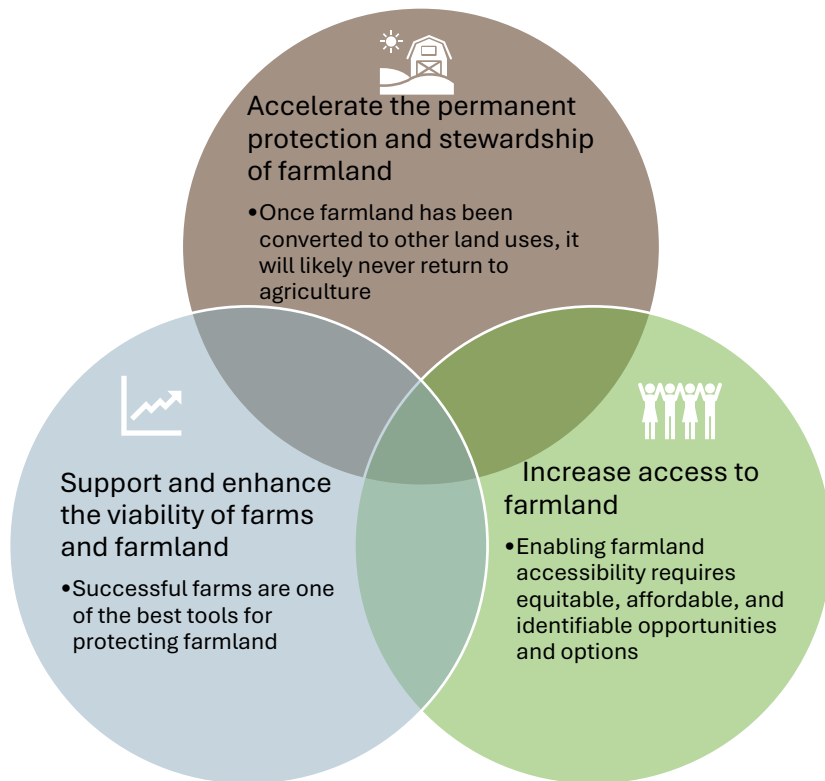
Implementation of the Farmland Action Plan is being undertaken in consultation with and in harmony with the environmental justice and equity work being conducted by MDAR.

Overview of the Plan

The state-funded and state-coordinated Massachusetts Farmland Action Plan 2023-2050 is a long-range strategic initiative intended to address the farmland needs and goals of the Commonwealth. It was released in December 2023.

What are the goals of the Plan?

There are three overlapping goals in the Plan: agricultural land Protection, Access, and Viability.



There is also a section for “all goals” – for strategies, actions and tasks that address all goals almost equally.

What are the strategies of the Plan?

Protection

- Permanently protect farmland through purchases of agricultural restrictions.
- Further develop and implement additional tools to avoid farmland loss and retain farmland.
- Prioritize protection of whole farms.
- Formalize and integrate decision-making processes regarding farmland protection.

Access

- Make more land available for agriculture.
- Support farm transfer and succession in ways that enhance access to farmland.
- Prioritize increased access for BIPOC and historically underserved farmers in all farmland access programs and policies.
- Support and expand service-provider networks to meet the needs of all farmers and potential farmers.

Viability

- Ensure that laws, regulations, programs, and investments support farm viability.
- Grow resilience and sustainability practices on farms.
- Increase use of services, programs, and other resources by farmers.

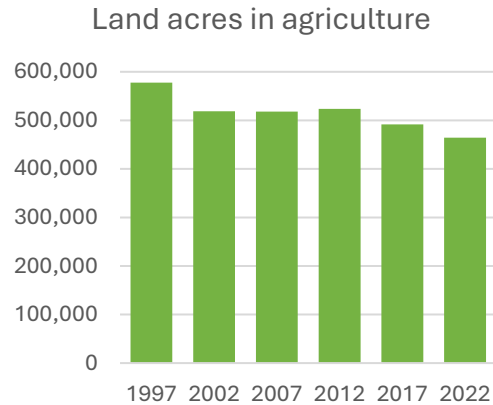
All goals

- Implement the Massachusetts Farmland Action Plan.
- Build public support for agriculture and for farmland protection, access and viability.





Why is the Plan important?

We are losing agricultural land fast.

Between 1997 and 2022 Massachusetts lost 113,000 acres (2022 Census of Agriculture). That's about 3.7 times the size of the land area of Boston or 1.8 times the size of Martha's Vineyard.



According to American Farmland Trust's "Farms Under Threat 2040" Report, between 2016 and 2040 Massachusetts, without additional investment and policy changes, is projected to lose:

<p>1,200 farms lost</p> 	<p>50,000 – 89,000 acres of farmland lost (that's about 1.6 – 2.9 times the size of Boston's land area!)</p> 
<p>with a loss of \$91 million in farm output</p> 	<p>and approximately 4,900 jobs lost</p> 

Farms and farmland are important for Massachusetts.

On the right are some of the reasons why farms and farmland were recognized as important within the Farmland Action Plan, and there are many other reasons shared by people across Massachusetts.



Crisis for agriculture

Massachusetts is experiencing several challenges at the same time, leading to a crisis for agriculture.

Land and climate	Economics	People and Systems
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Land prices rising significantly • Losing land to competing land uses • Climate change is exacerbating extreme weather impacts 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Food system economics favor larger scale farms in other areas • High production costs are greater than the value of goods produced 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Farmer population is aging and it is understood that many do not have a plan for after they step away • Lack comprehensive statewide land use planning with clear goals for farmland protection • Historic and current inequities in accessing farmland

Data Updates

Adding to the data that was shared within the MFAP, in early 2024 results of the 2022 Census of Agriculture were released. The following is a summary of some of the key trends and statistics for Massachusetts.

Our farms are an important part of the economy



* A “producer” is a person who is involved in making decisions for the farm operation

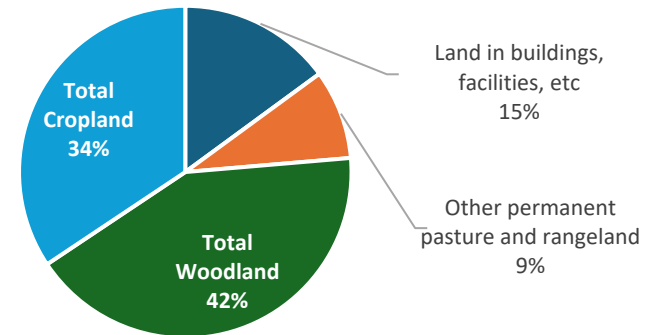
Production costs outweigh market value

Due to high input costs, the average cost of production is greater than the value of goods produced. The average farm earned 95 cents selling their crops for every dollar spent on production in 2022.

Our farmers are aging

40% of Massachusetts producers were 65 or older in 2022. It is understood that that many farms do not have plans in place for the next generation to continue farm operations.

Land Uses in 2022



Where can I find that data?

Census of Agriculture 2022 and earlier. Tables 1,2, 4, 5, 8 and 52 for Massachusetts

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

Implementing the Plan

Who is implementing the Plan?

This is a Plan for the Commonwealth of Massachusetts. It is being implemented through the collective action of many partners.

- **MDAR** is promoting, monitoring, and facilitating implementation of the Plan, building momentum from existing programs and initiatives.
- It is an integral part of the Commonwealth's climate and natural resources initiatives being implemented by **other state agencies**.
- **External partners** working on implementation include nonprofits, municipalities, RPAs, land trusts, federal agencies, educational institutions, private entities and others.
- The Plan also identifies opportunities for the **legislature** to make policy and fiscal choices to support farmland goals.

Within the implementation matrix and other parts of this report, we refer to the following people or groups:

- **Partner** – This is any person or group who is helping with implementation of the Plan.
- **Lead implementer** – The partner who is the energy behind and champion for leading implementation of an action or task. They often have expertise in the subject area.
- **Other potential implementer** – Other partners who could be key for implementing an action or task. This list does not include everyone who may get involved but focuses on key partners who have 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.

Implementation matrix

The MFAP implementation matrix contains all the goals, strategies, action items, implementation objectives, and tasks from the 2023 Plan.

The matrix represents a review of the items from the Plan in an effort to:

- 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

We anticipate some additional refinements into 2025. From 2026 onwards the matrix will continue to evolve to reflect implementation progress but at a slower pace. The matrix is a living document that tracks what partners have done and what partners plan to do.

For more information about the matrix and how to use it, please see [Appendix C](#). The first version of the matrix will be published online in early 2025.

How might a task be implemented?

Depending on the lead implementer and the parameters of the specific task, a task could be implemented in a variety of ways.

Sometimes a task is stated with a problem and solution, so there is clear language to guide what needs to be done. In other cases, some discussions may need to occur to better define the problem

and/or solution before a task can be refined and then implemented. In some cases, additional tasks being undertaken by partners could be added under an action if they further implementation.

Sometimes a task can be accomplished through the work of just a few partners. In other cases a task may need input from a wide variety of people to define the problem and/or solution before proceeding to implement the task, and/or a wide range of partners to implement the task together.

During conversations in 2024 partners and other interested individuals flagged some tasks which may need extra refinement or input before starting implementation.

The **Farmland Action Plan email newsletter** is the primary way the people can learn about opportunities to get involved as task implementation proceeds.

How can I get involved?

Please reach out to Katharine Otto, Farmland Action Plan Coordinator, if you'd like to get involved with implementing any of the actions or tasks of the MFAP. Implementation is just beginning and it is essential to the Plan's success that all communities and partners are engaged in making it a reality.

Highlights for 2024 – 2025

The following section gives a quick overview of some of the recent work by Farmland Action Plan partners that already had momentum and what is planned for the next year.

With more than 400 items within the MFAP it is not easy to prioritize what actions and tasks should come first! The focus of 2024 was to get an understanding of what actions and tasks already had momentum and what could be started within the next year.

For most tasks the matrix identifies lead implementers who are the champions that drive the task. In some cases, partners were already doing the work on this topic and the priorities of their own organization aligned with the Plan.

From 2025 onwards partners will start to implement other actions and tasks.

2024-2025 highlights are just a selection of actions and tasks that are being worked on. For 2026 we hope the highlights will better reflect the input of all partners and interested people. Please see the “Next Steps” page for more information.

Who will benefit from implementation?

The Farmland Action Plan recommends strategies to address urgent challenges experienced by existing, new, and historically underserved farmers.

The Plan recognizes the need for equitable access to all programs, policies, investments and actions for all farmers.

When writing the MFAP the authors aimed to reflect community input when noting which groups specific tasks are intended to

support – such as BIPOC, beginning, small parcel, and immigrant farmers. In many cases, recommendations raise in group discussions would have a broader impact, helping all farmers, regardless of their situation and history.

We are aware that there are several different ways to refer to people, with overlapping definitions – for example BIPOC farmers, socially disadvantaged, and historically underserved farmers. The language in the matrix matches the released Farmland Action Plan, unless there was specific reason to refine the language. Please see the abbreviations and definitions appendices for more information.

If you are aware of communities or cohorts who are not represented properly or would like to suggest alternative language, please reach out to Katharine Otto.

What are the opportunities for and barriers to implementation?

There are opportunities for and barriers to implementing most of the tasks outlined in the Plan – some which are already known and others which are not. We will explore these more when work starts on specific activities and tasks.

What is being done?

Future versions of this report and the matrix will share more information about what is being done or has already been done, as it becomes available.

Highlight 1 – Hire Farmland Action Plan Coordinator

Which goal and strategy does this contribute to?

- All three goals (Protection, Access, and Viability)

Why is this important?

The Plan outlines many tasks and several new initiatives. A dedicated coordinator can coordinate efforts and assist with implementation.

What notable tasks are being worked on, or will be soon?

With funding from the legislature and the Healey-Driscoll administration, in December 2023, MDAR shared a job advertisement for the Farmland Action Plan Coordinator position. Katharine Otto started as Coordinator in February 2024.

The Coordinator role focuses on various tasks to support Plan implementation:

- Create a plan for engaging with partners to build support, raise awareness, and foster a sense of ownership of the Plan.
- Facilitate communication, collaboration, and coordination among partners.
- Monitor and track progress of initiatives, identify potential challenges, and propose solutions to ensure successful implementation.
- Develop communication and outreach materials to share information about the Plan and its progress and achievements.
- Review the Plan on an ongoing basis to ensure that it is addressing needs, new issues, and challenges that may emerge in the agricultural sector.

Where can I learn more?

Reach out to Katharine – Katharine.s.otto@mass.gov 413-544-2400

Highlight 2 – Leverage federal funding

Full text – Leverage the maximum amount of federal funding available (Action I.A.3)

Which goal and strategy does this contribute to?

- Goal I: Accelerate the permanent protection and stewardship of farmland.
- Strategy I.A: Permanently protect farmland through purchases of agricultural restrictions.

Why is this important?

Federal funds through the USDA’s Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) can cover up to 50% of a farmland easement cost. Federal funding allocation for a state is partially based on how much funding was used in previous years. Using more federal funds shows a need so more funding can be allocated in future years. Using more federal funding reduces the amount of state and local funds that are needed.

What notable tasks are being worked on, or will be soon?

1010	Improve efforts to meet NRCS criteria, which will increase available federal resources from ACEP-ALE.
1015	Work with NRCS to enable the use of state-plans and policies as alternative pathways for eligibility for ACEP-ALE.
1020	Continue to implement and support the American Farmland Trust’s program to help municipalities identify locally important soils and encourage towns to petition NRCS for classification of farm soils of local importance (FLI).
1021	Educate municipalities about the ability to and then develop mechanisms to incentivize municipalities to classify farmland of local importance without

	completing an extensive farmland plan, which can be accomplished by identifying land that is locally important for crop production.
1419	Formalize a process for including FLI soils in the ranking criteria for APR projects, including creating written guidelines for MDAR staff and members of the public to understand how FLI soils are treated on APR applications.

Where can I learn more?

- APR Program www.mass.gov/agricultural-preservation-restriction-apr-program
- ACEP-ALE Land Eligibility: Projects that Further a State or Local Policy. [AFT and NRCS webinar 4/25/2024](https://www.nrcs.usda.gov/webinars/2024/04/25/acep-a-le-land-eligibility-projects-that-further-a-state-or-local-policy)
- Designating Farmland of Local Importance (FLI) <https://farmlandinfo.org/publications/designating-farmland-of-local-importance-in-massachusetts/>
- NRCS Agricultural Conservation Easement Program (ACEP) www.nrcs.usda.gov/programs-initiatives/acep-agricultural-conservation-easement-program/massachusetts/agricultural

Highlight 3 – Build capacity of entities to protect land

Full text – Ensure that interventions to prevent conversion are readily and quickly available (Action I.A.5) and Build capacity of state agencies, land trusts, municipalities, and other entities to protect land (Action I.A.6)

Which goal and strategy does this contribute to?

- Goal I: Accelerate the permanent protection and stewardship of farmland.
- Strategy I.A: Permanently protect farmland through purchases of agricultural restrictions.

Why is this important?

Many groups can protect agricultural land. Building capacity of state agencies, land trusts, municipalities and other entities will mean more staff are able to work on and complete agreements to protect land.

What notable tasks are being worked on, or will be soon?

Action I.A.5. Ensure that interventions to prevent conversion are readily and quickly available.

1042	Establish the authority for MDAR to purchase and hold land.
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Action I.A.6. Build capacity of state agencies, land trusts, municipalities, and other entities to protect land.

1096	Explore establishment of a state-funded grant program to provide resources to land trusts, municipalities, and other entities to purchase, hold, and steward agricultural
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	restrictions (APRs) and conservation restrictions (CRs) that allow agriculture.
1049	Educate land trusts and municipalities about the availability of the NRCS ACEP-ALE program for private APRs.
1056	Educate municipalities and nonprofits about the Option to Purchase Land at Agriculture Value (OPAV) as an example of a tool that could be incorporated into public and private CRs and APRs, and that language in state APRs may serve as a model.

Where can I learn more?

- Farmland Protection in Massachusetts Overview for Massachusetts Land Trust Coalition given by AFT and NRCS – www.youtube.com/watch?v=3IQrQ9ntorY
- Option to Purchase at Agricultural Value (OPAV) and Rights of First Refusal (ROFR) - www.mass.gov/info-details/apr-change-of-ownership

Highlight 4 – Increase applications to protection programs

Full text – Increase the number of applications to APR, ALE, and non-ALE protection programs. (Action I.A.7)

Which goal and strategy does this contribute to?

- Goal I: Accelerate the permanent protection and stewardship of farmland.
- Strategy I.A: Permanently protect farmland through purchases of agricultural restrictions.

Why is this important?

For each farm there can be different needs for the landowner and organization involved in protecting land for agriculture – so it is important to find funding sources and mechanisms that have features that match those needs. It is important to understand and communicate information about mechanisms such as short term and permanent agricultural conservation easements; buy/sell/protect initiatives; state and local government grants; federal programs like the Agricultural Conservation Easement Program (ACEP); tax credits; and private land trusts, often utilizing funding from foundations and donations.

What notable tasks are being worked on, or will be soon?

1071	Continue to regularly review and adjust the APR per-acre purchase price cap, which could include elimination if evidence suggests it poses a significant hinderance to participation.
1074	Develop process to help streamline the transition from short-term protection to permanent protection of farms for interested farmers, including Farm Viability Enhancement Program (FVEP) short-term covenants.

1075	Streamline and accelerate APR application and closing processes.
1078	Return to rolling votes throughout the year along with the rolling applications rather than any one deadline for either.

Where can I learn more?

- Agricultural Preservation Restriction (APR) Program - www.mass.gov/orgs/agricultural-preservation-restriction-apr-program
- APR Project Scoresheet - www.mass.gov/info-details/agricultural-lands-preservation-committee-alpc
- Agricultural Conservation Easement Programs – Massachusetts NRCS - www.nrcs.usda.gov/programs-initiatives/acep-agricultural-conservation-easement-program and <https://farmlandinfo.org/acep-ale-for-landowners/>
- Resources for Landowners - <https://massland.org/resources/landowner-resource-library>
- Deciding the future of my land - <https://masswoods.org/legacy>

Highlight 5 – Prioritize protection of whole farms

Full text – Prioritize protection of whole farms (Strategy I.C)

Which goal does this contribute to?

- Goal I: Accelerate the permanent protection and stewardship of farmland.

Why is this important?

The whole farm approach seeks to protect agricultural land and may also include farm family and farm worker housing, infrastructure, woodland, wildlife habitat and other uses. There are several benefits to this approach, including supporting the long-term viability of farming operations, supporting climate resilience, and recognizing ecosystem services.

What notable tasks are being worked on, or will be soon?

Action I.C.3. Explore revision to the APR Program’s approach to include whole farm conservation as relates to the full range of farm entities and operations, including woodland and other land types and uses.

1134	Develop whole farm policies and practices that recognize the importance of associated land (in forest, wetlands, water bodies, etc.) and uses (cord wood, irrigation, housing, buffering from surrounding residential or commercial uses, etc.) to a farm’s crop and pastureland and include those in protection and support of farms and farmland.
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Action I.C.5. Explore how additional federal and state programs might be further utilized to aid in funding whole farm protection.

1142	Explore how additional federal programs such as the Wetland Reserve Easement aspect of the Agricultural
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	Conservation Easement Program (ACEP-WRE) might be further utilized to aid in funding whole farm protection.
1403	Explore how additional state programs might be further utilized to aid in funding whole farm protection.

Where can I learn more?

- Resilient Lands Initiative - www.mass.gov/info-details/resilient-lands#the-resilient-lands-initiative and www.mass.gov/doc/the-resilient-lands-initiative-2023/download
- APR Program - www.mass.gov/info-details/apr-program-objectives-benefits

Highlight 6 – State and municipal land licensing programs

Full text – Assess all existing, publicly held land for its suitability for agriculture and make more of it available for agriculture (Action II.A.1) and Strengthen the state land licensing program (Action II.A.2)

Which goal and strategy does this contribute to?

- Goal II: Increase access to farmland.
- Strategy II.A: Make more land available for agriculture.

Why is this important?

Land licenses are a useful, low-cost mechanism for farmers to access land. The State-Owned Farmland Licensing Program makes publicly-owned agricultural land available to farmers and others through agricultural licenses. There are currently around 1,000 acres available for licensing through this program.

What’s the difference between licensing and leasing?

A license is a non-exclusive right to use the property for a particular purpose, while a lease is an exclusive right to use the property for all purposes except what is excluded by the agreement¹. Leases can run longer than licenses, allowing for additional capital investment. State and local governments generally issue licenses. Land trusts, non-profits and private landowners can lease agricultural land.

Where can I learn more?

State-Owned Farmland Licensing Program
www.mass.gov/farmlandlicensing

¹ Farmland Action Plan (Page 31) and Letter Ruling 84-56 www.mass.gov/letter-ruling/letter-ruling-84-56-lease-and-license-distinguished

What notable tasks are being worked on, or will be soon?

Action II.A.2 - Strengthen the state land licensing program

1174	Refine criteria that prioritize applications that come from BIPOC, beginning, and historically underserved farmers for state farmland licensing programs.
1175	Update application process to consider plans to sell into local markets, soil management practices, and other factors.
1176	Fund infrastructure development to support agriculture on publicly held land (e.g., irrigation, high tunnels, etc.).
1178	Support farm incubators and aspiring and beginning farmers through the state land-licensing program.
1179	Connect licensees with services and support organizations, such as Buy Locals, UMass Extension, NRCS, business and succession planning technical assistance providers, lenders, and others.
1180	Better monitor properties under the program for performance and physical condition.

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

1157	Work with state agencies and departments, 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.
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Highlight 7 – Expand farmland transfer and succession education and technical assistance

Full text – Support and expand farmland transfer and farmland succession education and one-to-one technical assistance (II.B.2)

Which goal and strategy does this contribute to?

- Goal II: Increase access to farmland.
- Strategy II.B. Support farm transfer and succession in ways that enhance access to farmland.

Why is this important?

Timely farm succession planning is an important step for ensuring that farmland stays in active farming as the existing farmer passes their business and land to the next generation of farmers. In Massachusetts as of 2022 40% of producers were over the age of 65² so significant amounts of farmland and farm businesses will be undergoing changes in the next two decades.

What's the difference between transfer, estate, and succession planning?

There are several different ways to define these terms and sometimes they are used interchangeably and incorrectly.

A farm transfer plan can include estate planning and business succession planning tasks for the farmland and farm business owner(s) to accomplish to achieve their farm transfer plan goals.

If estate planning is part of a farm transfer plan it is the farmland and farm business owner(s) responsibility to obtain the necessary estate planning documents, which typically requires the drafting of will(s) and/or trust(s) by qualified estate planning professionals.

If a farm transfer plan includes a business succession plan, it is the farm business owner's responsibility to identify and secure the successor(s) to critical positions in the farm business and properly transfer ownership of the farm business assets as intended.

What notable tasks are being worked on, or will be soon?

1203	Disseminate information to farmers on transfer planning models, case studies, and best practices.
1205	Include outreach to farmer and non-farmer landowners around farmland transfer strategies as part of APR Program stewardship.
1206	Include farm transfer or transitions planning in farm business planning, training, and outreach at all stages of farm business life cycle.
1208	Increase awareness and promotion of farmland linking and listing tools such as New England Farmland Finder.
1209	Make funding available to support farmers in developing transfer plans, with follow-up support.

Where can I learn more?

- Farm Transfer Planning Resources <https://landforgood.org/resource/group/transferring-a-farm/>
- New England Farmland Finder <https://newenglandfarmlandfinder.org/>
- Farm Transfer Planning in Massachusetts www.mass.gov/doc/farm-succession-planning-brochure/download
- Farm-Pass: Farm Transfer Planning Assistance Planning Assistance Program - www.mass.gov/info-details/agricultural-business-training-program-abtp

² Census of Agriculture 2022. Table 51 for Massachusetts

Highlight 8 – Increase use of public lands by Historically Underserved Farmers

Full text – Increase access to public lands for agriculture, while prioritizing Historically Underserved Farmers (Action II.C.2)

Which goal and strategy does this contribute to?

- Goal II: Increase access to farmland.
- Strategy II.C: Prioritize increased access for BIPOC and historically underserved farmers in all farmland access programs and policies.

Why is this important?

Historically underserved farmers, which include socially disadvantaged, veteran, limited resource, beginning, and Tribal Nations and Entities, Indigenous farmers, often face disproportionate challenges, including longstanding inequities in land ownership, land loss, and access to financial resources. Access to farmland, and to associated benefits of agriculture, must be equitably distributed amongst all farmers.

What notable tasks are being worked on, or will be soon?

1230	Conduct outreach to historically underserved communities to discuss land access opportunities and measures put in place to remedy past injustice and inequity.
1231	Work with non-profits and community groups focused on equity and diversity to strengthen and amplify outreach.
1232	Refine criteria and a transparent and manageable/equitable application and reporting process.
1233	Create and make accessible materials that address language barriers and other accessibility issues.

1234	Provide technical assistance (TA) to applicants in completing program applications through non-profits and other TA organizations.
1235	Conduct ample and strategic outreach for all Requests for Responses (RFRs), coordinating with organizations serving and based in historically underserved communities.

Where can I learn more?

- State-Owned Farmland Licensing Program
www.mass.gov/farmlandlicensing
- MDAR Office of Environmental Justice and Equity
www.mass.gov/orgs/office-of-environmental-justice-equity-oeje

Highlight 9 – Farmer access to grants and financing

Full text – Make it easier for farmers to seek and obtain grants and financing (Action III.A.3)

Which goal and strategy does this contribute to?

- Goal III: Support and enhance the viability of farms and farmland.
- Strategy III.A: Ensure that laws, regulations, programs, and investments support farm viability.

Why is this important?

While there are many grant programs from public agencies and private organizations available for farmers, some may experience barriers to applying. Understanding, acknowledging, and reducing these barriers is necessary to enable more farmers to access these resources.

What notable tasks are being worked on, or will be soon?

1262	Provide more technical assistance to assist farmers with compiling grant applications and increase interest in grants from a broader range of farmers.
1268	Affirmatively further racial equity in grant programs by tracking demographic data of applicants and recipients. Publish reports on progress regularly.
1270	Make farmer program grant deadlines coincide with less busy times of the growing season for farmers.

Where can I learn more?

- MDAR Grants www.mass.gov/guides/agricultural-grants-and-financial-assistance-programs
- Many other partners also provide grants

- MDAR Office of Environmental Justice and Equity www.mass.gov/orgs/office-of-environmental-justice-equity-oeje
- Resources for Historically Underserved Farmers and Producers - www.mass.gov/info-details/resources-for-historically-underserved-farmers-and-producers
- MDAR Agricultural Grant Writing Assistance List- www.mass.gov/info-details/agricultural-grant-writing-assistance-list

Highlight 10 – Elevate BIPOC and other historically underserved farmer voices in implementation

Full text – Support organizing, engagement, and participation in implementation by BIPOC and other historically underserved farmers and organizations that represent them and are led by them. (Action All.A.2)

Which goal and strategy does this contribute to?

- All three goals (Protection, Access and Viability)
- Strategy All.A: Implement the Massachusetts Farmland Action Plan.

Why is this important?

BIPOC and other historically underserved farmers face disproportionate challenges in agriculture and have often been excluded from planning and implementing change. All farmer voices should be encouraged to inform next steps for implementing the Farmland Action Plan.

What notable tasks are being worked on, or will be soon?

1379	Explore a method to reimburse subject matter experts and people for their participation within the MFAP and other MDAR projects
1413	Refine the language of sections related to BIPOC access

Also see [Highlight 8](#) for additional equity related tasks.

Where can I learn more?

- EEA Environmental Justice Strategy
www.mass.gov/doc/february-2024-environmental-justice-strategy-english/download

- MDAR Office of Environmental Justice and Equity
www.mass.gov/orgs/office-of-environmental-justice-equity-oeje

Other Actions and Next Steps

The highlights outlined above are not the only actions and tasks being worked on in 2024 and 2025. Please visit the implementation matrix for the status of all actions and tasks (See [Appendix C](#) for more info).

Thoughtful decision-making is needed so actions and tasks can move forward in a reasonable timeframe given the following considerations:

- Capacity of staff and partners involved in implementation
- Clear next steps for implementation
- Potential impact of the task once completed
- Opportunities that may boost implementation
- Challenges that may hinder implementation
- And other factors

What highlights could be added?

Any actions or tasks from the 2023 Farmland Action Plan could be added to the highlights list.

In 2025 we will be seeking input on which actions and tasks partners could start in late 2025/early 2026. This will be shaped by conversations with partners and interested individuals at meetings and events.

How can I find out about meetings and events?

Some Farmland Action Plan focused meetings will be hosted by MDAR in the coming months. Invitations will be shared via email lists, the Plan newsletter and the Farmland Action Plan webpage.

Where possible, Katharine will attend meetings and gatherings of partners and interested individuals across the state. This includes

committee meetings, informal gatherings, and annual meetings of various groups. Please reach out if you have a meeting you would like Katharine to attend.

Email Newsletter

We are updating our contact lists for the Plan as we embark on the implementation phase. A newsletter is being published to share more information about the Plan and opportunities to get involved with implementation

Please email Katharine to let her know of your interest –

Katharine.S.Otto@mass.gov

Where can I learn more?

A library of resources is being built on the Farmland Action Plan webpage – general resources, as well as ones for particular audiences and on specific topics. www.mass.gov/farmland-action-plan

Appendix A – Abbreviations

ACEP	Agricultural Conservation Easement Program
AFT	American Farmland Trust
ALE	Agricultural Land Easements (part of ACEP)
APR	Agricultural Preservation Restriction
BIPOC	Black, Indigenous, and People of Color
CR	Conservation Restriction
CPA	Community Preservation Act
EEA	Executive Office of Energy and Environmental Affairs
FLI	Farm soils of Local Importance
HUF	Historically Underserved Farmer
MDAR	Massachusetts Department of Agricultural Resources
MFAP	Massachusetts Farmland Action Plan
NRCS	Natural Resources Conservation Service
NWL	Natural and Working Lands
OPAV	Option to Purchase at Agricultural Value
RLI	Resilient Lands Initiative
ROFR	Right of First Refusal
RPA	Regional Planning Agency
USDA	United States Department of Agriculture
WRE	Wetland Reserve Easements (part of ACEP)

Appendix B – Definitions

For more definitions, see the Farmland Action Plan.

Beginning Farmers³: Individuals who have operated a farm or ranch for ten years or less.

Historically Underserved Farmers⁴ include the following groups according to the USDA:

- Socially Disadvantaged Farmers
- Veteran Farmers
- Limited Resource Farmers
- Beginning Farmers

Limited Resource Farmers⁵: Individuals who have limited financial resources and face challenges in accessing land, capital, and other resources necessary for farming.

Socially Disadvantaged Farmers⁶: Individuals who belong to groups that have been subjected to racial or ethnic prejudice. This includes African Americans, American Indians, Alaskan Natives, Asians, Hispanics, and Pacific Islanders.

Veteran Farmers⁷: Individuals who have served in the U.S. Armed Forces and have not operated a farm for more than ten years.

Whole farm planning and protection seeks to protect agricultural land and may also include farm family and farm worker housing, infrastructure, woodland, wildlife habitat and other uses.

³ USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service. Historically Underserved Farmers and Ranchers. 6/19/2024 www.nrcs.usda.gov/getting-assistance/underserved-farmers-ranchers

⁴ USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service. Historically Underserved Farmers and Ranchers. 6/19/2024 www.nrcs.usda.gov/getting-assistance/underserved-farmers-ranchers

⁵ USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service. Historically Underserved Farmers and Ranchers. 6/19/2024 www.nrcs.usda.gov/getting-assistance/underserved-farmers-ranchers

⁶ USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service. Historically Underserved Farmers and Ranchers. 6/19/2024 www.nrcs.usda.gov/getting-assistance/underserved-farmers-ranchers

⁷ USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service. Historically Underserved Farmers and Ranchers. 6/19/2024 www.nrcs.usda.gov/getting-assistance/underserved-farmers-ranchers

Appendix C – About the matrix

What types of items are in the matrix?

As of summer 2024 there are more than 400 items in the matrix, representing items from the Farmland Action Plan. The matrix has four types of items:

- **Goal** – Broad statements of what the Plan hopes to achieve. There are three goals. Some items address multiple goals.
- **Strategy** – Clarify what aspects of each goal will be addressed. There are 12 strategies and one related to implementation.
- **Action** – Direct how each strategy will be implemented. There are over 60 actions.
- **Task** – Specific activities that are proposed to implement the action. There are more than 340 tasks. (This is a combination of the implementation objectives and tasks from the MFAP.)

What is the ID number?

Within the Plan every item had an ID number that was derived from where it was nested. For example I.A.7.g.a

Every item within the implementation matrix has been assigned a unique 4-digit ID number. This number is unique to each item so that implementation can be tracked over time.

Like the Plan, the matrix continues to reference Goals, Strategies, and Actions by ID numbers. Tasks are only referenced by their 4-digit ID. There is a column that preserves the Plan ID for reference.

- In some cases an item may be divided into more than one task – whereupon a new ID is assigned to one of them and a note is added about how the two items are related. This may occur if

the original item contained more than one task that have distinct implementation steps.

- In some cases two or more items may be combined into one, whereupon one of the IDs is discontinued and a note is added.
- Over time new items may be added (especially tasks!) as implementation proceeds and new tasks are identified. They are assigned a new ID number.

Who are the partners in the matrix?

To simplify the matrix, unless a specific organization is involved as a partner, the matrix identifies partners by the function they provide – such as land trust, regional planning agency, incubator organization, Buy Local organization, etc.

Tips for exploring the matrix spreadsheet

The matrix is a searchable spreadsheet.

Where possible we have included keywords to help find areas which are similar. This includes 2-3 word summaries for all strategies and actions. It also includes the partners listed by function so, for example, if you are interested in policy related things, you may want to search for “Policy” in the “Lead implementer” and “Potential other implementers” columns.

You can either use the “Find” function for the document as a whole, or click on the down arrow at the top of a column to open the “Filter” and then look for the topic or “search” for a word.