

# Massachusetts Farmland Action Plan and RPAs

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Conversation with RPA staff

Wednesday, November 20, 2024. Online

Katharine Otto, Farmland Action Plan Coordinator

This meeting will be recorded and posted online at [www.mass.gov/farmland-action-plan](https://www.mass.gov/farmland-action-plan). It will be subject to a Public Records Request.

**Do I have permission to record?**



# Agenda and Today's Goals

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## Agenda

- ❖ Context (20 minutes)
- ❖ RPA involvement in Farmland Action Plan
  - ❖ 9 discussion slides, 5-10 minutes per topic/slide
- ❖ Next steps

## Today's Goals

- ❖ Explore how MDAR and RPAs can collaborate and coordinate
- ❖ Farmland Action Plan Matrix
  - ❖ Check tasks where RPAs are flagged make sense
  - ❖ A few specific questions for some actions
- ❖ Discuss next steps

# Context

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# Why are farms and farmland important?



# Farming in Massachusetts today

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According to the 2022 Census of Agriculture, Massachusetts has:

**7,083 farms on  
464,451 acres**



of farmland (about 9% of MA land) with  
land and buildings worth

**\$6.4 billion**

**13,896** producers\* and  
**14,032** hired farm workers

with a payroll of

**\$204 million**



**\$607  
million**

of agricultural  
products  
sold



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

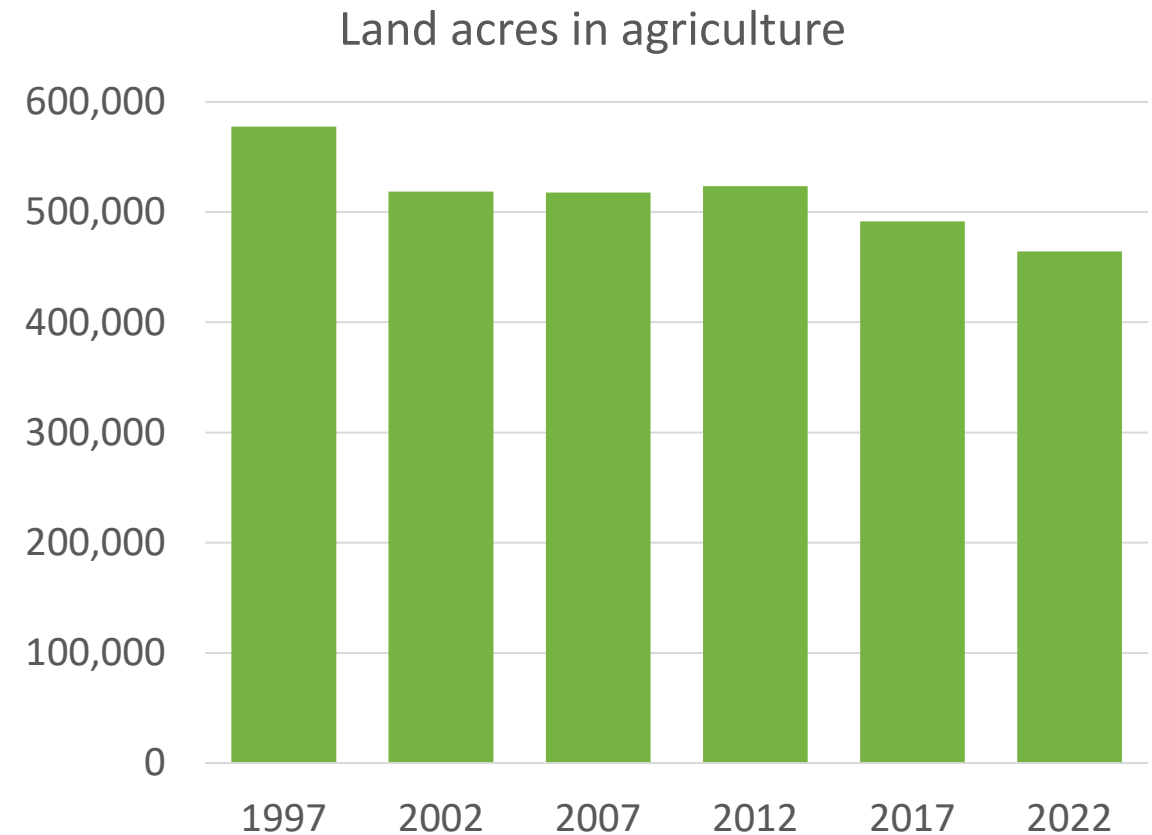
# Why is the Farmland Action Plan important?

**We are losing agricultural land fast!**

**Between 1997 and 2022**

**Massachusetts lost 113,000 acres**

- 3.7 times the size of the land area of Boston
- 1.8 times the size of Martha's Vineyard
- 12.4 acres per day



Source: Census of Agriculture 2022 and earlier. Table 1

[www.nass.usda.gov/Publications/AgCensus/2022/Full\\_Report/Volume\\_1,\\_Chapter\\_1\\_State\\_Level/Massachusetts/](https://www.nass.usda.gov/Publications/AgCensus/2022/Full_Report/Volume_1,_Chapter_1_State_Level/Massachusetts/)

# Farms Under Threat

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



# Crisis for agriculture in Massachusetts

## Land and climate

- Land prices have risen significantly
- Losing land to competing land uses
- Climate change is exacerbating extreme weather impacts

## Economics

- Food system economics favor larger scale farms in other areas
- High input costs so average cost of production is greater than the value of goods produced
  - Average farm earned 95 cents for every dollar spent on production in 2022

## People and systems

- Farmer population is aging and many do not have plan for after they step away
  - 40% of MA producers are 65 or older in 2022. It is understood that many farms do not have plans in place for the next generation to continue farm operations.
- Lack of comprehensive statewide land-use planning with clear goals for farmland protection
- Historic and current inequities in accessing farmland



# Funding available to farmers

Division of Agricultural Conservation  
and Technical Assistance

Land Use Programs



**Agricultural Land  
Protection**



**Farm Viability  
Programs**



**Renewable Energy/  
Energy Efficiency**



**Environmental  
Protection and  
Climate Resiliency**



**Food Safety**



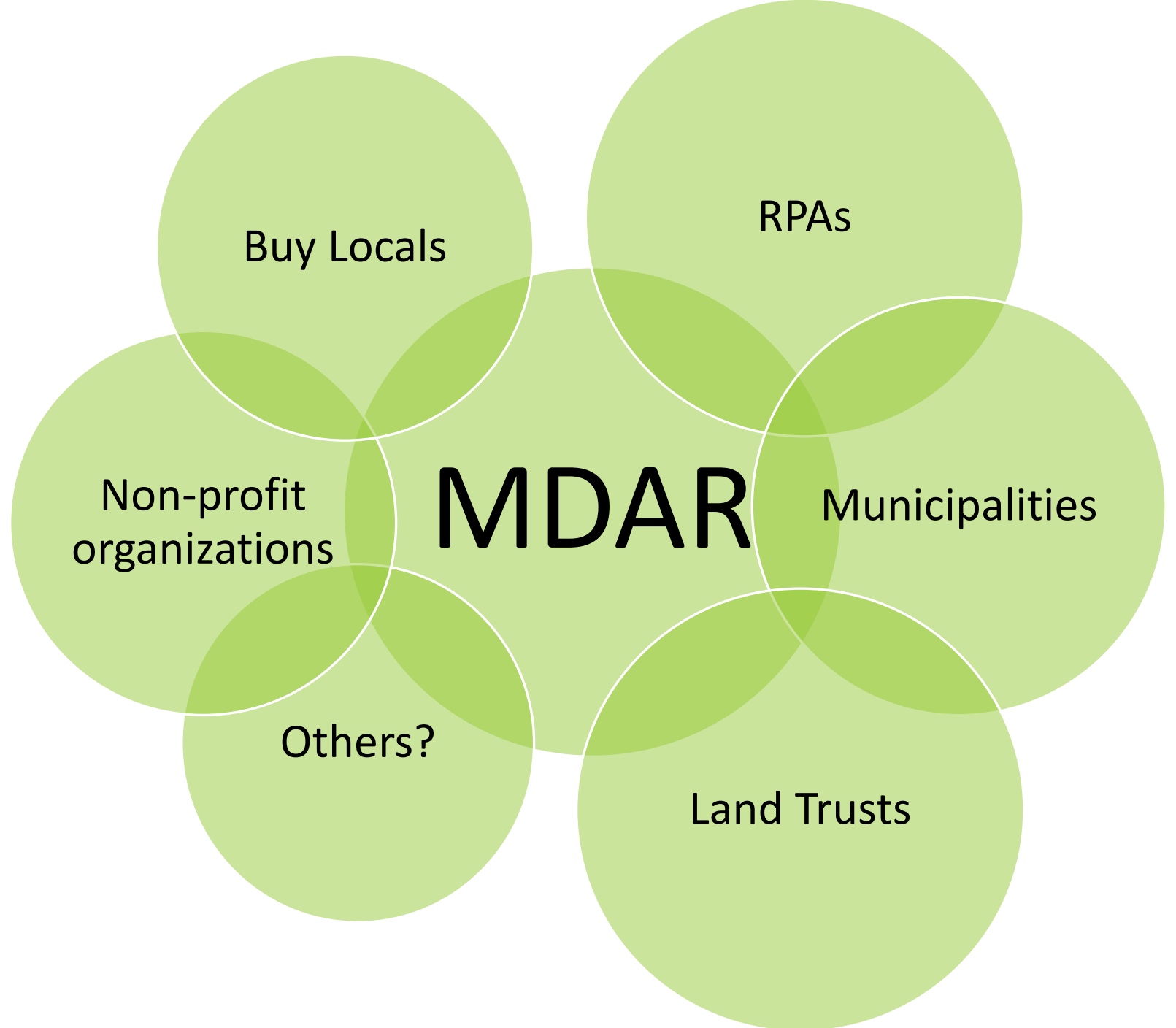
**Urban Agriculture/  
Food Systems**

# How can MDAR work more with local partners?

Important for implementing the Farmland Action Plan!

Some existing relationships

Some relationships need to be built



# The Plan

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# What is the Plan?

- State funded
- State coordinated
- Long range strategic initiative
- Statewide, not just for state government
- [www.mass.gov/info-details/massachusetts-farmland-action-plan](https://www.mass.gov/info-details/massachusetts-farmland-action-plan)



## MASSACHUSETTS FARMLAND ACTION PLAN 2023–2050

# Other related statewide plans

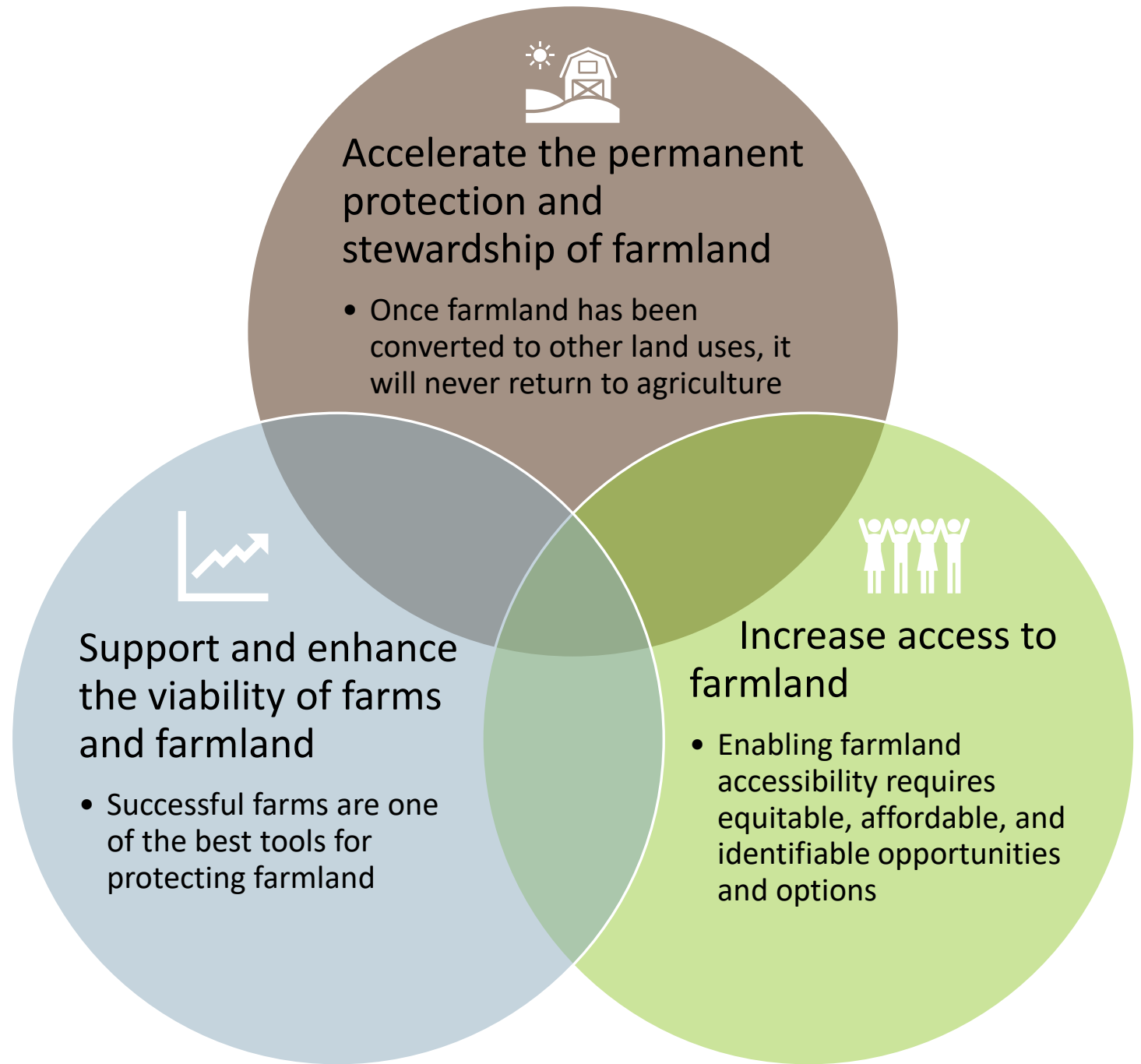
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- Local Food Action Plan (2015)
- Decarbonization Road Map (2018)
- Rural Policy Plan (2019)
- Clean Energy & Climate Plan (2022)
- ResilientMass (2023) (State Hazard Mitigation and Climate Adaptation Plan)
- Resilient Lands Initiative (2023)
- Healthy Soils Action Plan (2033)
- Special Commission on Agriculture in the Commonwealth in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century (forthcoming)
- And others!

# What are the goals of the Farmland Action Plan?

Three overlapping goals:

- Protection
- Access
- Viability





# 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*



# Refining the Implementation Matrix

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

In 2024 the items have started to be reviewed:

- To identify a potential timeline for implementation
- To identify lead and other implementers
- To clarify language to ensure clear understanding of item
- To check whether additional tasks are needed to assist with implementation of actions

The Matrix is a living document that tracks what we have done and what we plan to do.



# 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

# Starting to implement the Farmland Action Plan

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## Protect and steward land

- Modify how farms are evaluated for protection
- Encourage municipalities to adopt Farmlands of Local Importance (FLI)



## Access to farmland

- New state land licenses adjusted to prioritize use by historically underserved farmers (beginning, BIPOC, veterans, limited resource)



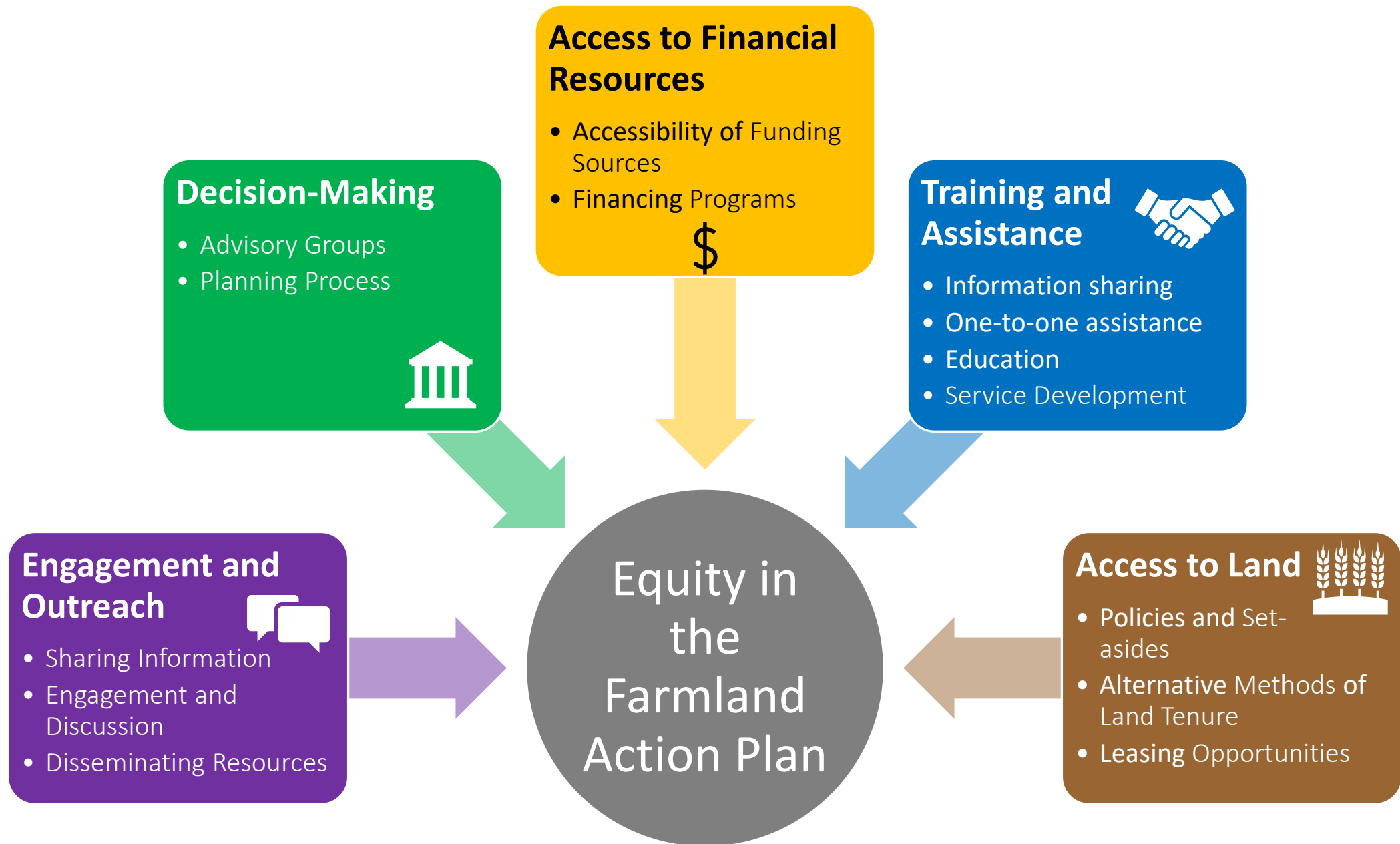
## Viability of farms and farmland

- New Farm-Pass program to assist farmers to plan on how to pass their farm to the next generation, that results in a farm transfer plan.



## General

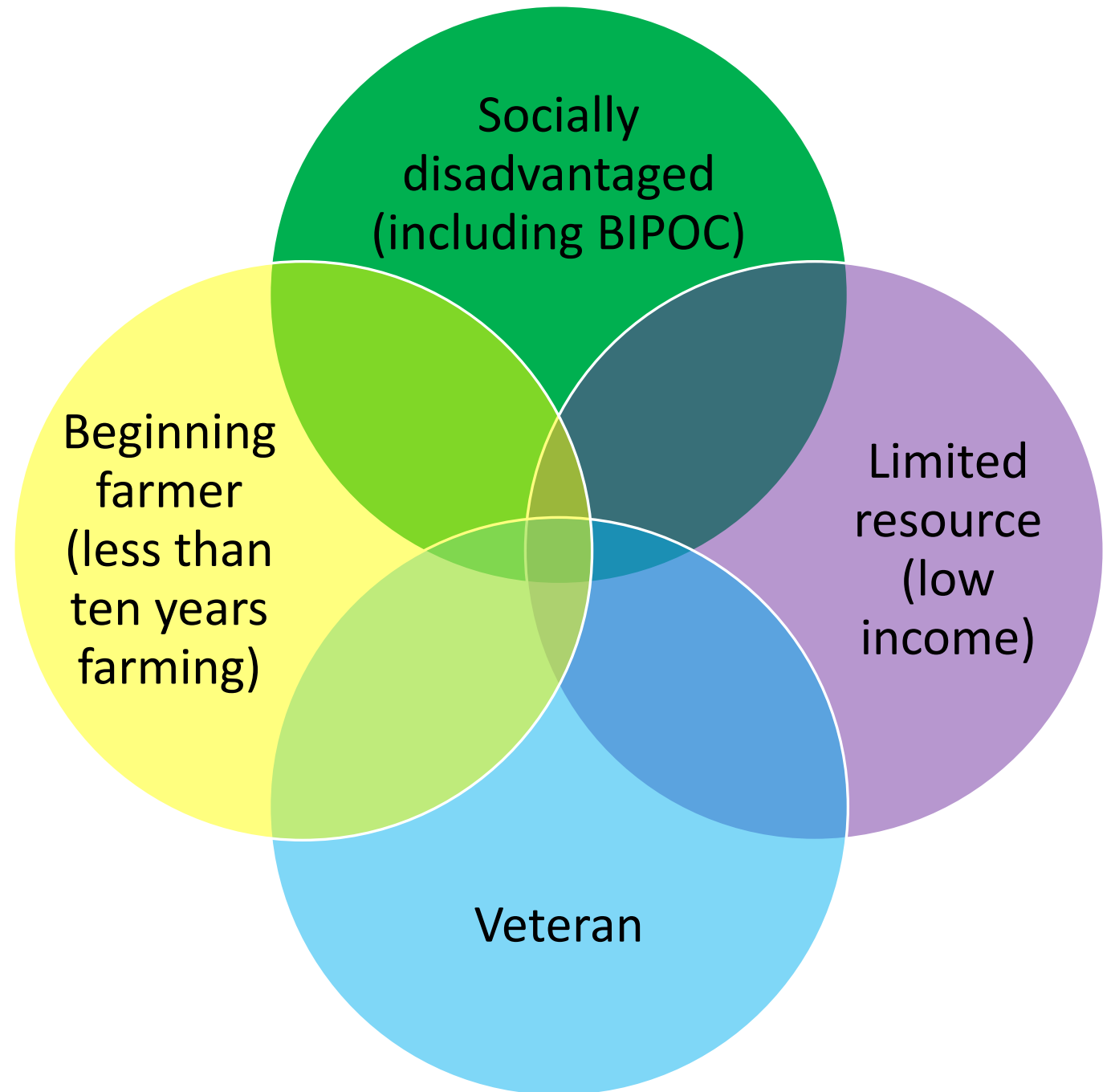
- Hire Farmland Action Plan Coordinator
- Refine Implementation Matrix



# Who is a Historically Underserved Farmer?

USDA Definition

[www.nrcs.usda.gov/getting-assistance/underserved-farmers-ranchers](http://www.nrcs.usda.gov/getting-assistance/underserved-farmers-ranchers)



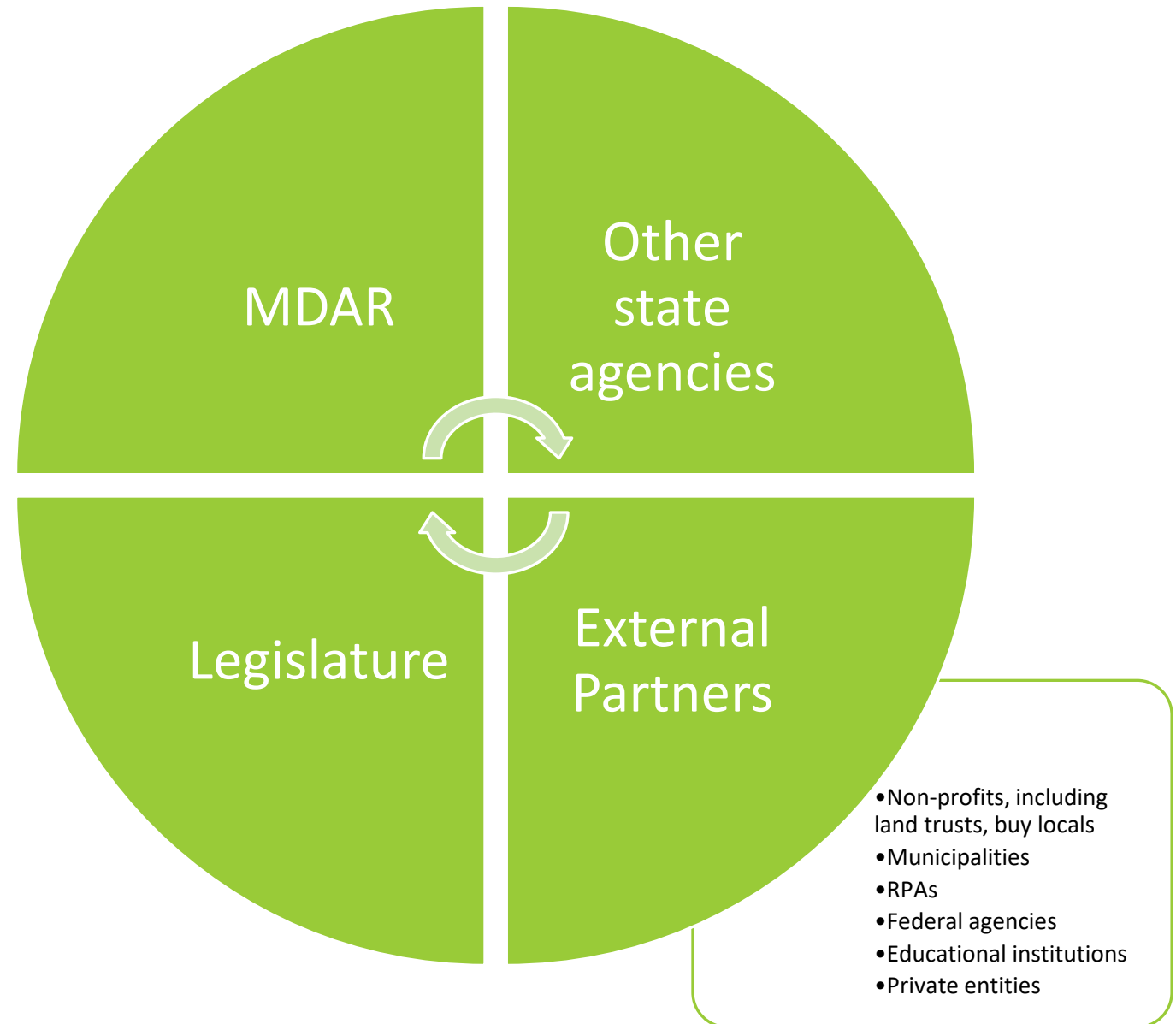
How is the Plan being  
implemented?

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# 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

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# How might a task be implemented?

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## **Depending on the lead implementer and the parameters of the specific task:**

- Public meetings and listening sessions to understand the problem or potential solutions
- Committee meetings
- Working groups
- Research report
- Other methods

## **Types of people involved**

- Partner
  - Lead implementer
  - Other potential implementer
- Other interested individuals



# How do we involve municipalities?

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## Tasks where municipalities are flagged

- Planning, zoning and regulations that support agriculture
- License municipal lands for agricultural uses
- Support protection of farmland
- Get involved with Chapter 61A Right of First Refusal (ROFR) when properties are transferred

## Current strategy

- MDAR does limited work directly with Towns, although will foster those relationships
- Primarily focus on two existing relationships
  - RPAs for planning related and engagement tasks
  - Land Trusts for acquisition and stewardship related tasks
- For some tasks there are other relationships which can be used – eg Buy Locals, Food Policy Councils, EEA grant programs, MDAR Land licensing team. Others?

## Homework

- Share any municipal contacts who could be good to get involved in providing a municipal perspective

How could RPAs get involved?

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# 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
- Chapter 61A
- CPA
- Underserved 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



# Increasing access to funding through planning

MA often uses NRCS funding for Agricultural Land Easements (ACEP-ALE)

*Opportunity - Local (and maybe Regional) Plans can be used as justification to preserve farms that otherwise don't meet NRCS eligibility (eg soils and land use)*

- **Permanently protect farmland through purchases of agricultural restrictions (Strategy I.A.)**

- **Leverage the maximum amount of federal funding available (Action I.A.3)**

- Add guidance to the Open Space and Recreation Planner's Workbook and other EEA program and funding guidance that would meet NRCS specifications related to agriculture to allow local and regional OSRPs to be used for ACEP-ALE eligibility. (Task 1017)
    - Develop a communications plan to reach out to municipalities and RPAs (Task 1019)
    - Incentivize municipalities and regional planning agencies (RPAs) to develop local farmland protection plans reflecting local farming opportunities and priorities. (Task 1018)
    - Explore measures to ensure that local plans are consistent with state farmland protection goals as eligibility for state support. (Task 1018)

## Things to keep in mind

- Seems reasonable to add to OSRPs but need to be careful not to add too much to make them unwieldy
- Using other plans – eg Climate Action Plans

## Additional thoughts and questions?



# Zoning reform and smart growth policies

Advance zoning reform and smart growth policies that encourage density and development that do not result in the loss of farmland

*Opportunity – Work with municipalities and on regional level on education, planning and zoning*

- **Further develop and implement additional tools to avoid farmland loss and retain farmland. (Strategy I.B.)**
  - **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 1123)
    - Encourage communities to adopt zoning regulations for Transfer of Development Rights (TDR) as a farmland protection tool. (Task 1124)
    - Educate municipalities about the use of conservation subdivision/natural resources protection zoning and accessory apartment bylaws as tools to promote compact development and provide technical support to communities seeking to adopt and use these zoning tools. (Task 1125)

## Things to keep in mind

- How feasible and useful is TDR?
- To what extent can this build off other existing RPA initiatives?

## Additional thoughts and questions?



# Ecosystem services

- **Prioritize protection of whole farms. (Strategy I.C)**
  - **Include the value of ecosystem services when valuing land for protection (Action I.C.6)**
    - Work with the Mass Land Trust Coalition and regional planning agencies to develop model considerations that value ecosystem services for land trusts and municipalities purchasing restrictions. (Task 1141)

Local farms provide a myriad of ecosystem services - eg support wildlife and pollinators, buffer against flooding and recharge groundwater supplies, store carbon, and improve soil health.

*Opportunity – Explore how to we assign fiscal value to these services*

## Things to keep in mind

- River Corridor Easements

## Additional thoughts and questions?



# Goal – Increase access to farmland

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## 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



# Food Production and Licensing Municipal Land

MDAR licenses (like a lease) state lands for agricultural purposes to farmers. Some municipalities also do this, or could.

*Opportunity – How do we identify municipally held land that could be used for agriculture?*

- **Make more land available for agriculture (Strategy II.A)**
  - **Assess all existing, publicly held land for its suitability for agriculture and make more of it available for agriculture (Action II.A.1)**
    - 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. (Task 1157)
    - 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)
    - Explore case studies to share best practices for food production assessment/ planning (Task 1161)
    - Create a pilot to test and refine how to roll out food production assessment/ planning in urban environments (Task 1163)
    - Create a pilot to test and refine how to roll out food production assessment/ planning in rural environments (Task 1164)

## Things to keep in mind

- Inventories of working landscapes
- Existing food assessments?

## Additional thoughts and questions?





# Urban Agriculture

- **Make more land available for agriculture (Strategy II.A)**
  - **Create preferential zoning and ordinances to support urban agriculture. (Action II.A.3)**
    - Provide technical assistance and model zoning bylaws and ordinances to encourage municipalities to support the use of land, rooftops, and other infrastructure for urban agriculture. (Task 1186)
    - Explore the possibility of zoning and ordinances to allow for small-scale poultry and other protein-producing livestock in some urban areas. (Task 1187)

*Opportunities – How do we increase the production, processing, and marketing of produce grown and sold in urban centers?*

*How do we increase access to healthy, affordable food options and improve economic opportunities for low to moderate income communities?*

## Things to keep in mind

- Licensing municipal land for agricultural uses can be easier than implementing urban ag zoning

## Additional thoughts and questions?



# Goal - Support and enhance the viability of farms and farmland

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## 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



# Zoning and regulations support farm viability

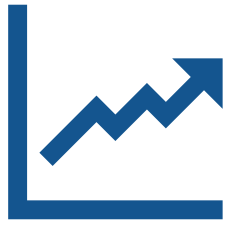
Local zoning and regulations can support farms and farmland in various ways, including workforce housing, ancillary commercial enterprises in agricultural areas, urban agriculture and compact development patterns  
*Opportunity – Work with municipalities to encourage zoning that supports farms and farmland*

- **Ensure that laws, regulations, programs, and investments support farm viability. (Strategy III.A)**
  - **Explore opportunities to modify local taxation, policy and regulations to support farming. (Action III.A.4)**
    - Explore provision of incentives to communities that enact farm-friendly zoning and tax policies. (Task 1281)
    - Ensure and promote local zoning that allows for multi-family housing near farms for farmworkers. (Task 1282)
    - Encourage communities to enact zoning bylaws that permit ancillary commercial enterprises in areas zoned for agriculture. (Task 1283)
    - Discourage local zoning regulations, nuisance bylaws, and other regulations from unnecessarily hampering the expansion of urban agriculture. (Task 1284)
  - **Include farmers and representatives of the full range of the industry in planning and policy-setting processes that impact land-use, environmental, and other public policy. (Action III.A.5)**
    - Develop and implement policies and practices to ensure that other state, local, and regional planning efforts related to transportation, housing, energy, wildlife habitat, etc.—understand the Farmland Action Plan, minimize conflicts with it, and maximize ways to complement it. (Task 1288)

## Things to keep in mind

- Farm Overlay Model Bylaws

## Additional thoughts and questions?



# Other Outreach and Education

Reaching audiences is harder in today's world where there is a decentralized network of information  
*Opportunity – Share information and engage with municipalities and other RPA contacts as relevant*

- **Ensure that laws, regulations, programs, and investments support farm viability. (Strategy III.A)**
  - **Explore implementation of mechanisms that would increase the number of municipalities instituting Right to Farm bylaws and agricultural commissions. (Action III.A.2)**
    - Explore opportunities to support adoption of Right to Farm bylaw and local farmland planning. (Task 1257)
- **Increase use of services, programs, and other resources by farmers. (Strategy III.C)**
  - **Develop and implement a strategic outreach and education communications plan to promote public and private resources available to farmers. (Action III.C.1)**
    - Work with the Massachusetts Land Trust Coalition, municipal organizations, regional planning agencies, Buy Local organizations, and state agencies to develop outreach material with uniform messaging that can be utilized by all entities. (Task 1344)

## Things to keep in mind

- Many other education and outreach tasks that will likely be lead by other partners

## Additional thoughts and questions?



# Supporting all the goals

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## 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



# Equity and EJ

- **Prioritize increased access for BIPOC and historically underserved farmers in all farmland access programs and policies. (Strategy II.C)**
  - **Explore options to expand and strengthen equity and diversity criteria for applications for agricultural use of public land, and prioritize access for historically underserved, new, aspiring, and low-income farmers. (Action II.C.2.)**
    - 1237 - Engage with local organizations to determine the farmland needs of a community and when conducting outreach and publicizing availability of farmland.

## Many other tasks – What areas are you interested in?

- Go to the matrix for other equity and EJ related tasks

Historically underserved farmers include those who are BIPOC, beginning, veterans and limited resource.

*Opportunity – How do we build relationships and bring more voices to the tables?*

## Things to keep in mind

- Working with groups that focus on underserved populations
- Do RPAs have Equity and EJ initiatives that could be adapted to also include farming and farmland?

## Additional thoughts and questions?

# Other potential areas of overlapping interest

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- ❖ **Increased integration with other EEA grants** – eg Planning Assistance, Mass in Motion, MVP (Action I.A.6)
- ❖ **Farm worker housing and affordable housing for farmers** (Action I.C.1)?
- ❖ **Climate adaptation and resiliency**
  - ❖ River Corridor Work
  - ❖ Climate Action Plans
  - ❖ Climate Resilience Playbook
  - ❖ Multi-jurisdictional ditch and drainage issues
  - ❖ Strategize on how to reduce and mitigate GHG on working lands
- ❖ **Workforce and career development** (Actions III.A.6 & III.C.4)
  - ❖ CEDS Plans
  - ❖ Career and workforce development
- ❖ **Solar development policies** (Action I.B.6)
  - ❖ Solar Siting overlap with RPA work

- ❖ **Prioritization**
  - ❖ RPAs involved with some OS prioritization
- ❖ **Anything else?**

## Other functions RPAs could play

- Incubator for setting up new organization (eg Buy Local)
- Grant application assistance
- Ag Comm Support
- Interaction with other partners – eg Buy Locals, Conservation Districts, Food Policy Councils
- Connection to other fields – eg transportation

# Next steps

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# Next steps

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- ❖ Re-read slides from today and other resources on [www.mass.gov/farmland-action-plan](http://www.mass.gov/farmland-action-plan)
- ❖ Things to think about
  - ❖ How does the Farmland Action Plan align with your RPA's work?
  - ❖ How can we partner and collaborate more between organizations?
- ❖ Plan implementation updates/ newsletter
  - ❖ Follow up discussions focusing on specific tasks or groups of tasks
  - ❖ Progress Report and Implementation Matrix to be shared by the end of the year
- ❖ Reach out to Katharine with questions

## Existing programs and initiatives

- How can MDAR help RPAs? Eg MDAR staff review and/or involvement
- What can be done with existing funding sources? eg MVP, Capacity, OSRP

## New initiatives

- How can existing funding sources be used in new ways? eg MVP, Capacity, OSRP
- Upcoming funding opportunities
- What might be needed for new partnerships and initiatives?



For more more information or questions

Farmland Action Plan Webpage [www.mass.gov/farmland-action-plan](http://www.mass.gov/farmland-action-plan)

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