

# Urban Agriculture in the Massachusetts Farmland Action Plan

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Urban Agriculture Potential Partner Conversations  
December 2024

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Rose Arruda, Urban Agriculture, Food Venture Program and  
Food Trust Program Coordinator



# Getting started

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## Agenda

- ❖ Introductions (5 minutes)
- ❖ Context and Farmland Action Plan (15 mins)
- ❖ How to get involved (5 mins)
- ❖ Urban ag in the Plan
  - ❖ Overview of actions and tasks from the Plan (10 mins)
  - ❖ Discuss priority and capacity (25-50 mins)
  - ❖ Actionable next steps (10-15 mins)
- ❖ Additional questions (if time!)
- ❖ Next steps (2 minutes)

## Today's Goals

- ❖ How do we take the plan and translate it into reality, specifically for urban ag?
- ❖ What are some actionable next steps that make sense to move forward the tasks identified within the Plan which are important to urban ag?

# Discussion Guidelines

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- ❖ Balance your participation – speak and listen
- ❖ Be open minded
- ❖ Ask questions for clarification
- ❖ Be constructive
- ❖ Be aware of potential bias
- ❖ Consider what other people are seeing and working with
- ❖ Avoid silent dissent

*Anything to add? Or modify?*

# Introductions

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## MDAR staff

- Katharine Otto – MDAR Farmland Action Plan Coordinator
- Rose Arruda, Urban Agriculture, Food Venture Program and Food Trust Program Coordinator

## Everyone

- Name
- Organization

# Context and the Plan

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Why are farms  
and farmland  
important to you?

Feeds  
community

????

Contributes  
to local  
economy

Preserves  
rural  
heritage

????

Grow  
foods from  
my cultural  
heritage

????

Helps  
address  
climate  
change and  
mitigate its  
impacts

Sustains  
family  
businesses

Protects  
vital  
natural  
resources

Contributes  
to soil  
health

???

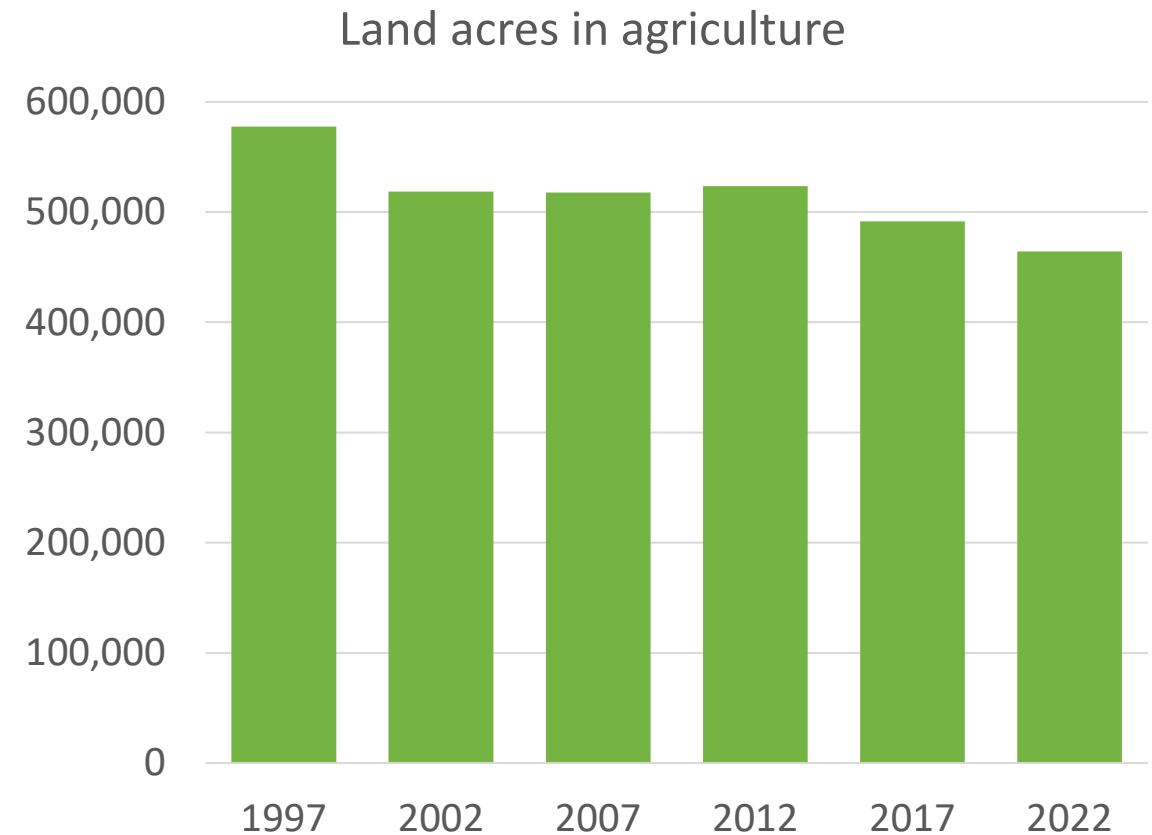
# Why is the Farmland Action Plan important?

**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 without additional investment and policy changes



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/](https://www.nass.usda.gov/Publications/AgCensus/2022/Full_Report/Volume_1,_Chapter_1_State_Level/Massachusetts/)

# 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 it is understood that many 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



# 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](http://www.mass.gov/farmland-action-plan)



# 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 (2023)
- Special Commission on Agriculture in the Commonwealth in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century (forthcoming)
- And others!

# Turning plan into reality

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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

# 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*



# 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

**Bolded text are areas of particular interest related to urban agriculture**

# 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

How could you get  
involved?

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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

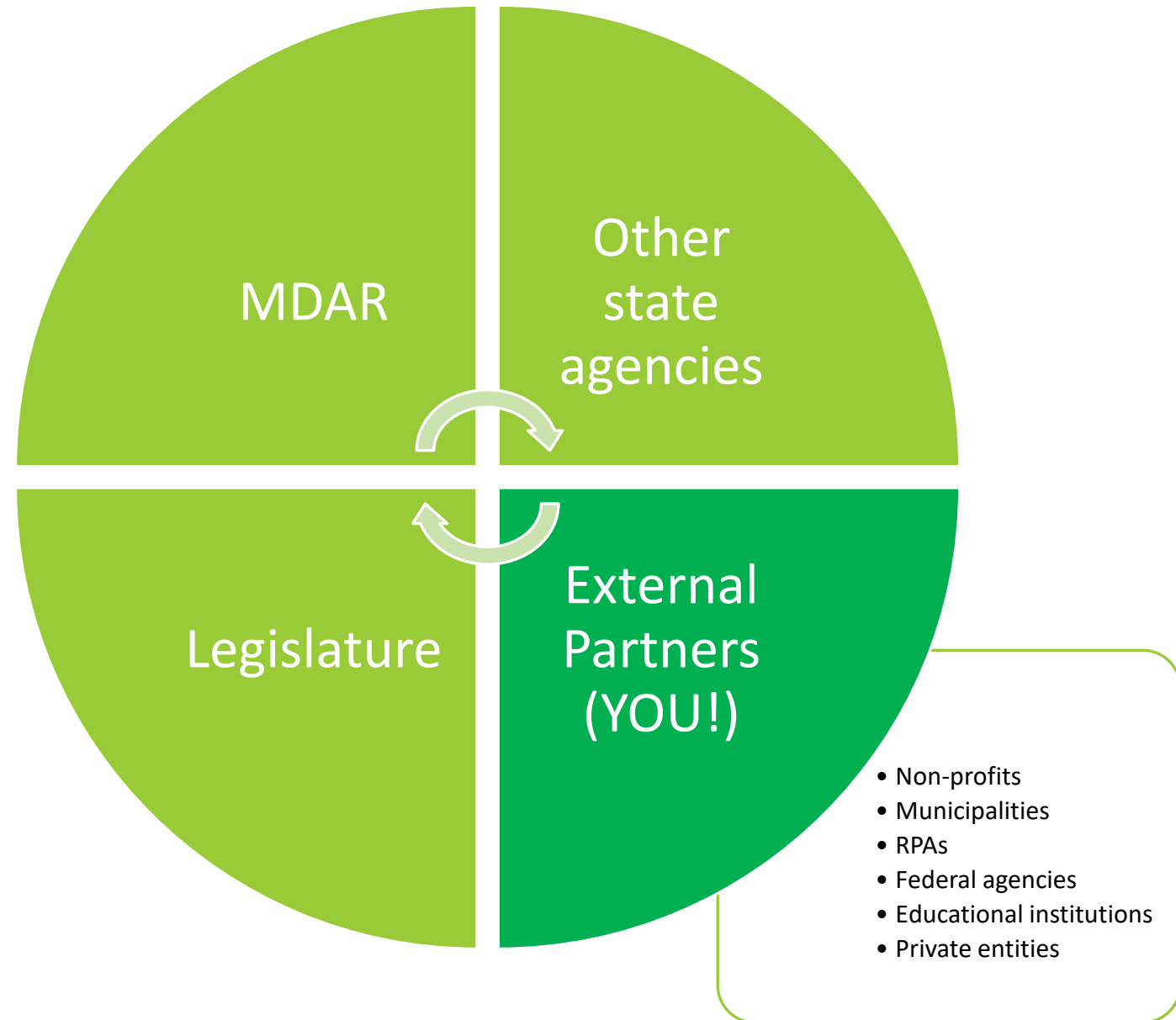
## **Support and funding for partners**



# 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

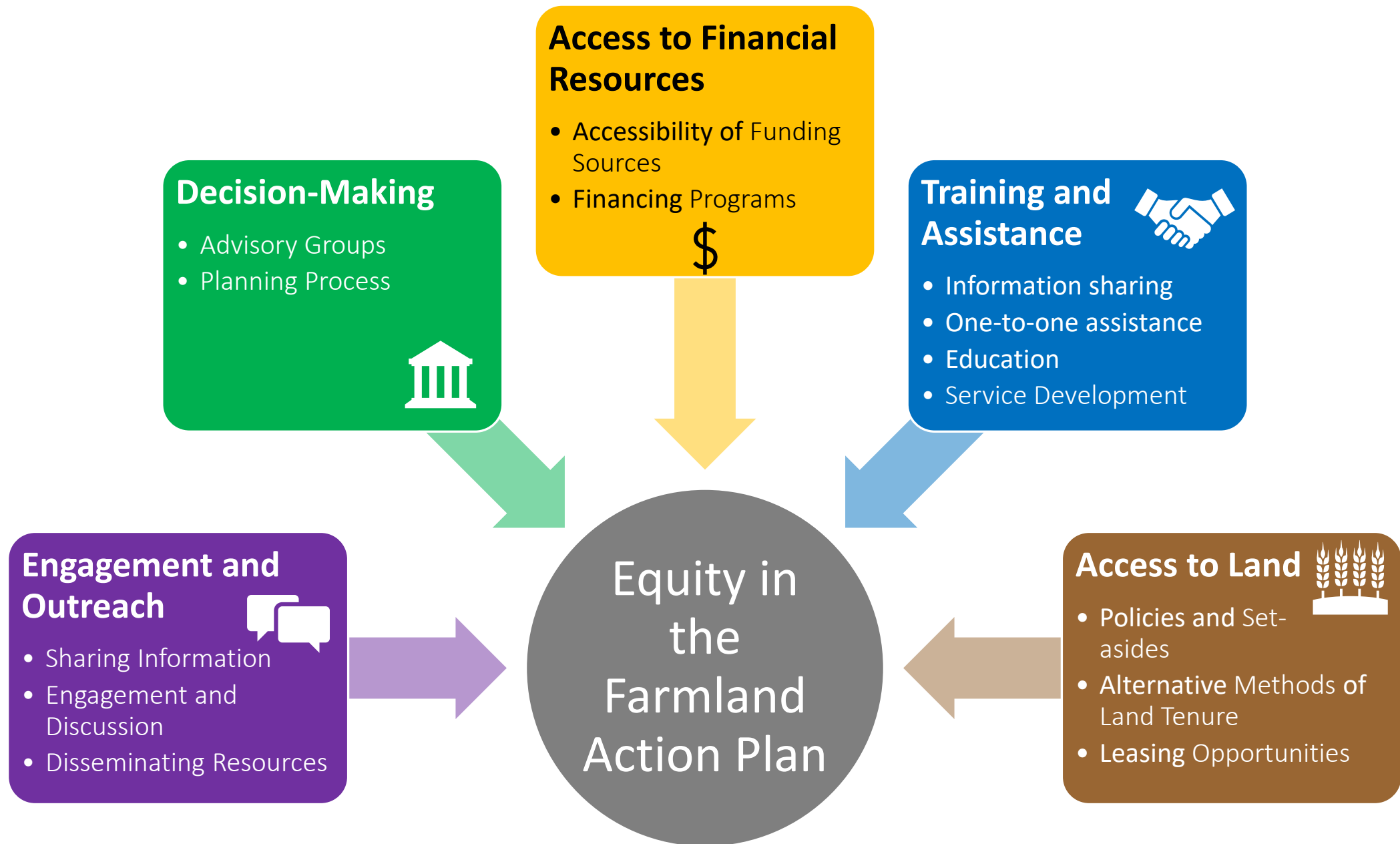
Other  
interested  
individuals

Other  
interested  
individuals

Other  
interested  
individuals

# Where is equity?

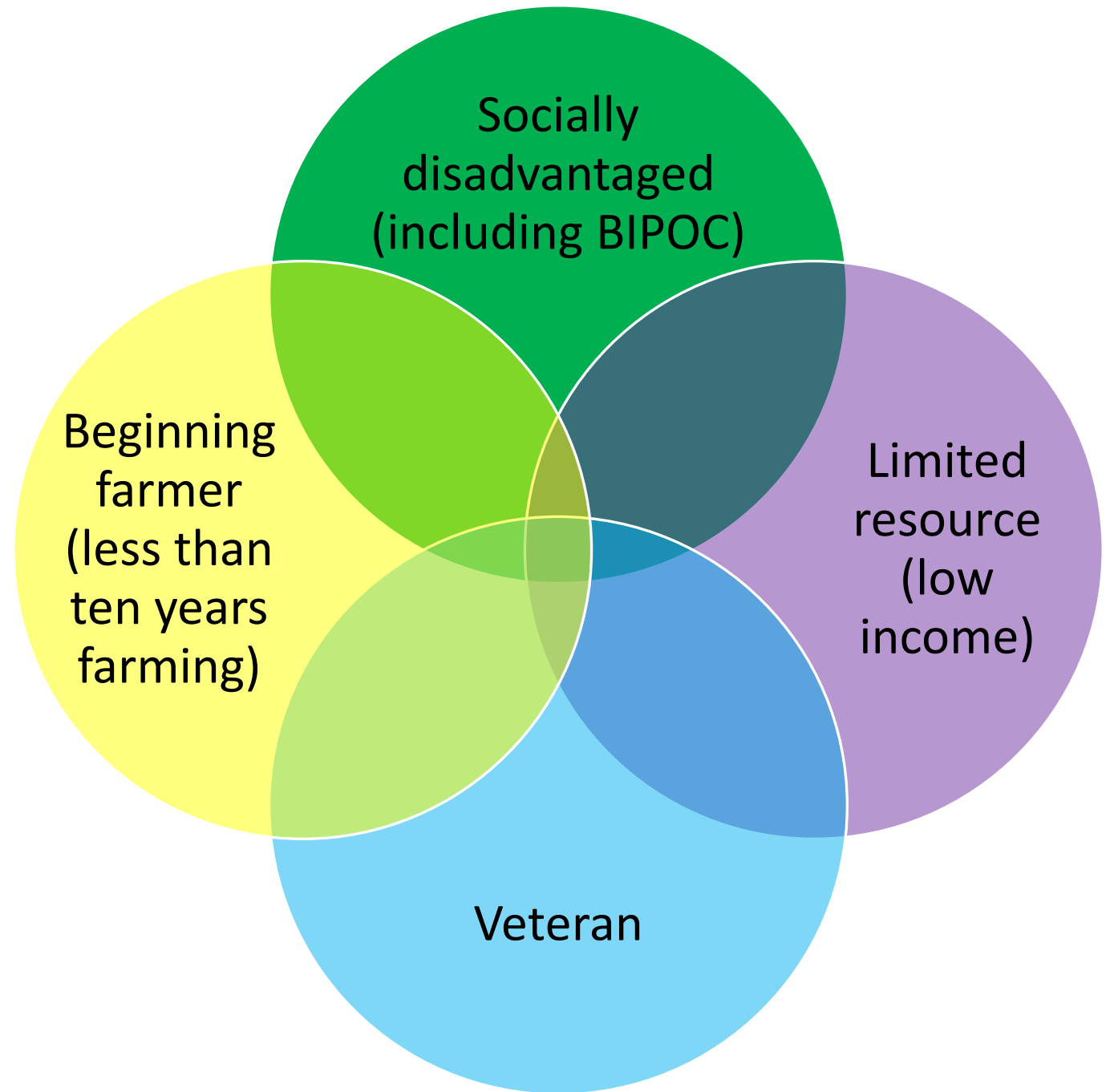
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# Who is a Historically Underserved Farmer?

USDA Definition

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



# Where is Urban Ag?

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# Three steps

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- 1) Overview of actions and tasks from the Plan
- 2) Discuss priority and capacity, with questions and comments
- 3) Discuss actionable next steps



# Zooming into the one of the Goals - Increase access to farmland

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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.





# Food production and needs

## **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 TA 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)

## **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)**

- Engage with local organizations to determine the farmland needs of a community and when conducting outreach and publicizing availability of farmland. (Task 1237)

## **Raise hands**

- Which of these tasks are high priority to you?
- Do you have capacity to lead this?
- Do you have capacity to assist with this?

## **Response sheet**

More detailed priority and capacity

**Additional thoughts and questions?**

**Other partners?**



# 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)**

- 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)

## **Strengthen the state land licensing program (Action II.A.2)**

- Pilot 'lease-to-own' opportunities to catalyze the development of permanent urban farming properties in historically underserved communities. (Task 1184)

## **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)

## **Raise hands**

- Which of these tasks are high priority to you?
- Do you have capacity to lead this?
- Do you have capacity to assist with this?

## **Response sheet**

More detailed priority and capacity

## **Additional thoughts and questions?**

## **Other partners?**



# Zoning and regulations

## **Create preferential zoning and ordinances to support urban ag (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 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)

## **Raise hands**

- Which of these tasks are high priority to you?
- Do you have capacity to lead this?
- Do you have capacity to assist with this?

## **Response sheet**

More detailed priority and capacity

## **Additional thoughts and questions?**

## **Other partners?**



# 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

B. Grow resilience and sustainability practices on farms

C. Increase use of services, programs, and other resources by farmers



# Support Urban Agriculture (Action III.A.7)

## General

- 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)
- Ensure that financial and business service providers that serve the agricultural industry serve the particular needs of urban farmers. (Task 1309)

## Soil and related technical assistance

- Support technical training for urban growers regarding soil health and fertility, integrated pest management, and related topics. (Task 1305)
- Conduct soil testing and provide education on options and practices to import or remediate soil on land prioritized for growing food in cities. (Task 1306)
- Provide more public education on best management practices for urban gardening in locations with known or suspected soil contamination. (Task 1307)

## Raise hands

- Which of these tasks are high priority to you?
- Do you have capacity to lead this?
- Do you have capacity to assist with this?

## Response sheet

More detailed priority and capacity

**Additional thoughts and questions?**

**Other partners?**

# Additional tasks for MDAR staff

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## **Strengthen the state land licensing program. (Action II.A.2)**

- Inventory and license more public farmland through the state land-licensing program, including long-term and rolling terms. (Task 1170)

## **Support Urban Agriculture (Action III.A.7)**

- Seek development of a separate small-parcel grant and support program at MDAR that recognizes the different benefits and requirements of urban farms, and includes resources beyond protection, including infrastructure development. (Task 1308)

## **Ensure that investments, programs, and policies promote equity for farmers from historically underserved communities. (Action II.C.1.)**

- Direct MDAR staff to develop resources and programs, and to undertake outreach to BIPOC, historically underserved, and immigrant farmers. (Task 1224)

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

- Support municipalities in developing their own farmland licensing agreements and plans. (Task 1162)

## **Raise hands**

- Which of these tasks are high priority to you?
- Do you have capacity to assist with this?

## **Response sheet**

More detailed priority and capacity

## **Additional thoughts and questions?**

## **Other partners?**

# Digging in abit more

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**Slides again (5 slides, 5-10 minutes discussion per slide)**

- What's the priority of these tasks?
- What's your capacity for implementing them?
- Questions and comments?

**Then general discussion**

- What are some actionable next steps that make sense to move forward the tasks identified within the Plan which are important to urban ag?

# Next steps

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# Next steps

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- **Keep eye open 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](http://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](mailto:katharine.s.otto@mass.gov) 413-544-2400
- [www.mass.gov/farmland-action-plan](http://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

# Actionable next steps

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What are some actionable next steps that make sense to move forward the tasks identified within the Plan which are important to urban ag?

10 - 15 minutes discussion

# Slides for reference

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Use as needed



# 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



# 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



# 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



# 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