

Farmland Conservation, Access, & Succession

2025 NEW HAMPSHIRE FOOD AND AGRICULTURE STRATEGIC PLAN

Purpose: To underscore the importance of conserving and protecting farmland, the affordable and equitable access to farmland, and the transfer of farmland and farm businesses from one generation or owner to another.

What's at Stake?

New Hampshire's food system is dependent on the ability of farmers to access, protect, and transfer farmland and farm businesses. In this brief, farmland is defined as land with active or potential agricultural use. Access to farmland is a primary hurdle for new and established farmers alike. The average age of New Hampshire producers is 59, many without identified successors or succession plans. If farmland and farm businesses are not successfully transferred between generations, access is further inhibited and risk of loss to development increases. Protection of farmland and successful farm transfers prevent loss of farmland, support farmland access, and ensure the future of agriculture in New Hampshire.

Current Conditions: Farmland Conservation

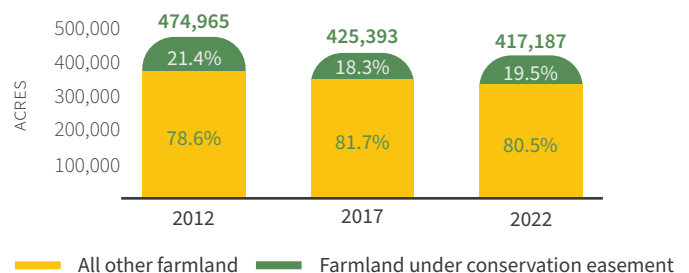
Farmland conservation is a critical part of New Hampshire's agricultural future. According to the 2022 USDA Census of Agriculture, 417,187 acres in New Hampshire are actively being farmed, a 12% decrease since 2012. New Hampshire's population continues to increase each year, adding to development pressures affecting farmland across the state. We see an urgent need to protect New Hampshire's remaining farmland.

Farmland is protected through state and federal programs with varying levels of permanence. The only permanent means of protecting farmland is through a Conservation Easement (CE), which protects farmland in perpetuity either through purchase or donation of development rights from a landowner. CE funding comes from a variety of sources including land trusts, the USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS), the state, local towns and communities. Obtaining a CE is a complicated process that typically requires the expertise of a land trust or other conservation organization to access USDA funding and any state or local funding match that may be required.

Although some state funding is available, it is often insufficient to match USDA funding or properly support land trusts in prioritizing farmland protection. Increased funding is needed to protect the future of farmland in New Hampshire.

NH AG LAND UNDER CONSERVATION EASEMENT

In 2022, New Hampshire had the highest percentage of farmland under conservation easement (19.5%, 81,398 acres) of all New England states by a considerable margin. The next closest state was Vermont at 12.2%.



SOURCE: USDA 2022 Census of Agriculture, Table 47: Land Use Practices.

Challenges and Opportunities: Farmland Conservation

CHALLENGES

- There is a lack of dedicated farmland conservation funding in New Hampshire.
- Some CE programs have restrictions that are not favorable to farmers or the entity holding the easement.
- Available funding may not keep pace with potential opportunities for farmland conservation as part of farmland transfers expected to take place over the next few years.
- Increasing housing needs add development pressure on vulnerable farmland, as it is the easiest to develop.
- CE's are a tool that can only be utilized once, which can deter farmers from using them.
- There is a shortage of land trust staff, appraisers, surveyors, and real estate attorneys familiar with agriculture specific conservation easements and transactions.

OPPORTUNITIES

- CE's can make the purchase of farmland more affordable for the incoming generation and support the retirement of the exiting generation
- There is funding available through USDA NRCS to cover a portion of the value of the development rights on farmland with a match from state or local funding sources.
- State and local programs exist through which to channel more funds dedicated for farmland conservation.
- With increased funding, land trusts will have the capacity to educate landowners regarding the opportunity to conserve farmland.

Current Conditions: Farmland Access & Succession

Farmland in New Hampshire is some of the most expensive in the nation, with prices at \$7,159 per acre. Many farmers lack the capital to purchase land at these prices, especially with current interest rates. Additionally, farmers can face difficulties with landowner relationships and systemic inequities when navigating the land access system. Farmers who are Black, Indigenous, and People of Color (BIPOC) struggle with land access barriers at higher rates than their white counterparts. Dedicated funding to support technical assistance providers working to help farmers navigate the land access system, along with research and support for collaborative and alternative models of land tenure, have the potential to help address these challenges.

Farmland access is also dependent on the successful transfer of farmland and farm businesses to the next generation. Farm succession planning is complicated, takes time, and requires money for legal fees and consulting services. Many farmers do not have the financial resources or support team needed, and don't know where to find help. Dedicated funding and program development is needed for on-the-ground outreach and support to help exiting and retiring farmers improve farm viability and overcome barriers to the completion of successful farm transfers.

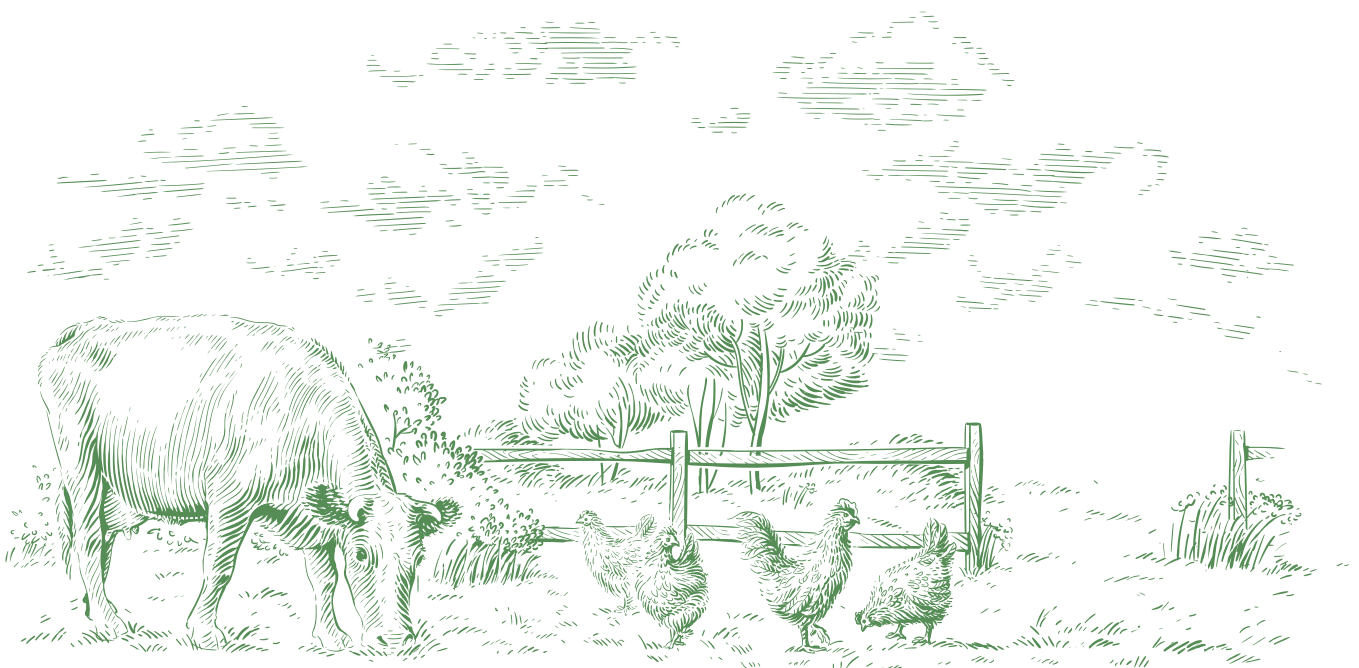
Challenges and Opportunities: Farmland Conservation

CHALLENGES

- Land in New Hampshire is unaffordable for many farmers.
- There is a lack of financial and legal service providers with farm specific knowledge available to help with succession planning, lease crafting, and other legal document preparation.
- Many non-farming landowners are unaware of options to lease their land to a farmer.
- Succession planning is complicated, changes frequently, and takes time.
- Communications, family dynamics, and emotions can inhibit a successful transfer.
- Not all farms are financially viable enough to pass on to future generations and/or support two families during the transition process.

OPPORTUNITIES

- Alternative farm tenure models (e.g., Bakie Farm in Kingston, NH; Iron Ox Farm in Hamilton, MA) can improve farm access and viability.
- Programs like the Organization for Refugee and Immigrant Success can support land access for minority farmers.
- Opportunities exist to educate non-farming landowners about the benefits of leasing their land to a farmer.
- Increasing financial support for programs like the NH Farm Future Fund, as well as development of farm succession programs separate from conservation easements, has the potential to increase successful completion of farm transfers.
- Mentorship programs, like New Agrarian and farmer mixers, can help foster relationships between exiting farmers and unrelated farm seekers.



Summary

New Hampshire faces a challenge: while the average age of farmers and development pressure on farm-land increases, a farmer's ability to access land is decreasing. Protecting farmland, improving farmland access, and supporting successful farm transfers to the next generation is of vital importance. Permanent conservation plays an important role in securing the future of New Hampshire's farmland and can be a valuable tool for farmland access and transfer. Increased funding for local and state conservation programs and land trusts will increase prioritization and outreach of farmland protection efforts.

Farmland access is a significant barrier for many farmers. Service providers need dedicated funding to investigate alternative methods of land access and tenure that improve a farmer's ability to access land, while breaking through systemic inequities in the land access system. There are opportunities to reach non-farming landowners and educate them about the possibility of leasing potential farmland to a farmer. Supporting successful farm transfers helps reduce the bottleneck in farm access caused by the inability of exiting farmers to transfer their farms to the next generation. With dedicated funding, there is opportunity to improve outreach and support for farmers to develop farm succession plans, thereby promoting secure retirement for the outgoing generation and the successful transfer of farmland to the next generation. All of these initiatives require dedicated funding for the programs that support them, as well as for the development of new programs that may be beneficial.

Recommendations

➤ **Provide dedicated state, federal, and private funding for agricultural conservation easement programs and land trusts. This can be done in the following ways:**

- Expand existing state and private funding programs to prioritize farmland protection projects.
- Secure adequate funding for the state's Agricultural Land Preservation Program, which can be used to match federal dollars.
- Develop programs similar to successful programs in other New England states, like Vermont's Housing and Conservation Board and the Connecticut Community Investment Act.
- Increase land trust staff capacity and training to prioritize farmland conservation.
- Increase education for land trusts and the general public about considerations and opportunities related to farmland conservation.

➤ **Provide dedicated state, federal, and private funding for technical assistance, mentorship, and capital for farmland access programs. Funding will support:**

- Research, expansion, and development of innovative models for cooperative and alternative land tenure.
- Increasing access to capital through alternative approaches like Community Development Financial Institutions and the NH Community Loan Fund, while continuing to decrease systemic barriers (e.g., recent changes to the FSA loan application process that improved accessibility).
- Incentivizing and educating landowners about leasing land to farmers.

➤ **Provide dedicated state, federal, and private funding for technical assistance, programming, and mediation for farm succession programs. Funding will:**

- Provide financial support for farmers to participate in succession planning programs.
- Develop more farm succession education opportunities throughout the state.
- Develop a mentorship program that provides opportunity for relationship building and skill/knowledge transfer between generations.
- Develop agriculture-specific training for service providers.
- Form more service provider networks, like the NH Food Alliance, to collaborate on farm succession programming specifically.

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For more information, including references and opportunities to get involved, visit the 2025 NH Food and Agriculture Strategic Plan web page on nhfoodalliance.org or scan the QR code on the inside front cover of the print version.