

# Supporting Future & Beginning Farmers

## 2025 NEW HAMPSHIRE FOOD AND AGRICULTURE STRATEGIC PLAN

**Purpose:** To understand the programs, policies, and other efforts that support and encourage future and beginning farmers in New Hampshire.

### What's at Stake?

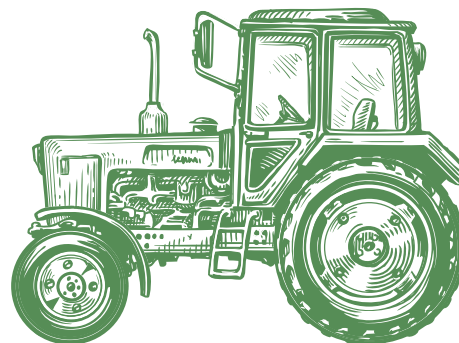
New Hampshire's agricultural future hinges on the success of its next generation of farmers. With aging farm owners and farmland under production decreasing, the need to support future and beginning farmers is urgent. Without robust policies and programs, the state risks losing its agricultural heritage, local food systems, and the economic benefits linked to farming. Access to affordable land, resources, and training are essential for ensuring farm viability. Advocates, legislators, and funders must act now to create pathways for future and beginning farmers, ensuring sustainable food production, and resilient communities. Failing to invest in them could mean a decline in the state's agricultural industry, continued farmland loss, and long-term food insecurity.

### Current Conditions

New Hampshire's agricultural landscape is at a critical juncture, as the farming population ages and barriers to entry for new farmers increase. The average New Hampshire farmer is 59, and much of the state's farmland is at risk of transitioning without guaranteed successors. Beginning farmers— those operating for 10 years or less— face significant challenges, including high land prices, limited access to capital, and steep learning curves. Currently, 45% of the state's new farmers have been farming for five years or less and the average entry age for new farmers is continuing to rise.

Additionally, systemic issues including affordable housing, healthcare, and regulations further complicate farm viability, factors that traditional agricultural education programs focused solely on knowledge development, fail to address.

While New Hampshire's small, diversified farms are well positioned to serve local markets, they face challenges in accessing competitive markets and scaling up. Concerns of discrimination also discourage many queer and BIPOC farmers from starting farms, particularly when they lack an established community, further limiting the pool of new and beginning farmers. The state's agricultural viability depends on the continued development of programs to address these needs, with an eye to equity, particularly for underrepresented and low-income groups.



# Challenges and Opportunities

## CHALLENGES

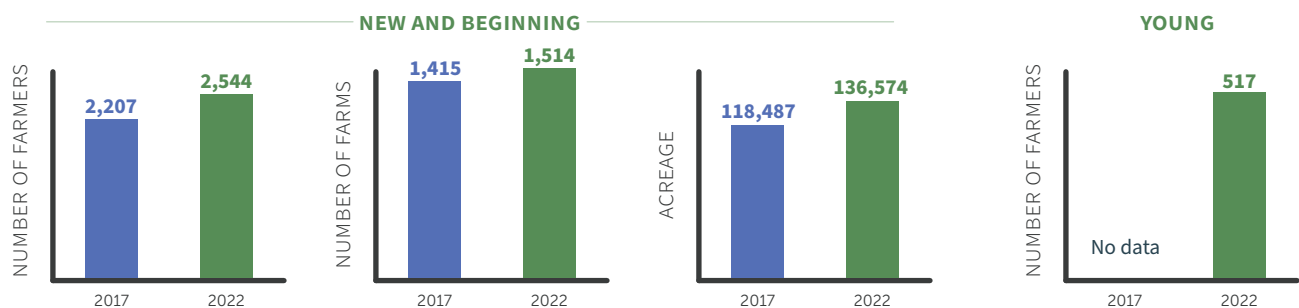
- High real estate prices make it difficult for beginning farmers to secure affordable farmland.
- Small farms struggle to compete in large markets due to volume requirements and resource restraints. Often, they are also unable to maintain sufficient sales through direct-to-consumer markets.
- New and beginning farmers often lack the business management skills needed to manage debt responsibly, calculate production costs, maintain effective record-keeping systems, and thoroughly evaluate business opportunities.
- Hiring and managing labor presents significant challenges for new farmers. Many lack the necessary management skills, creating obstacles to farm expansion and diversification. Additionally, rising labor costs often outpace food prices, making it difficult to balance fair wages for workers with consumer price expectations.

## OPPORTUNITIES

- Investing in existing training programs and mentorship initiatives will help guide new farmers through the complex realities of farm management and sustainability.
- Town- and county-owned agricultural land provides a unique opportunity to serve as incubator farmland for new and beginning farmers.
- Platforms like the NH Food Alliance's grants web page provides critical information to farmers and service providers about funding opportunities and can be further publicized and expanded upon to identify funding gaps.

### NEW HAMPSHIRE NEW, BEGINNING, AND YOUNG FARMERS, 2017-2022

In 2022, new and beginning farmers—defined as having 10 or fewer years of experience—made up 35.3% of all farmers and worked on 38.3% of all farms, representing 32.7% of farmland acres. Young farmers—under the age of 35—made up 7.2% of all farmers and worked on 10.5% of all farms, representing 11.4% of farmland acres.



SOURCE: USDA 2022 Census of Agriculture, Table 70: New and Beginning Producers, Table 68: Young Producers.

## Recommendations

- **Support land transition for new and beginning with tax relief or other incentive programs.** Incentivize retention of land currently in farm use through tax relief or programs designed to support land transition to new and beginning farmers.

- **Transition existing county and town farmland into beginning farmer incubator sites.** Expand affordable land leasing programs and explore the potential of programs that transition existing county and town farmland into beginning farmer incubator sites.
- **Expand opportunities for business education and support for new and beginning farmers.**
  - Through groups, such as the New Hampshire Ag Financiers, expand training and technical assistance opportunities.
  - Assist growers in calculating healthy debt management, making informed decisions based on costs of production, building and strengthening financial and production record-keeping systems, and modeling proposed enterprises and marketing channels.
  - Conduct a comprehensive and regularly updated analysis of grants available to farms and food businesses to help producers access capital and identify gaps where funding and financing are limited.
- **Develop a coordinated pipeline for beginning farmers that deepens existing agricultural training opportunities and communities.** Those including UNH Extension’s New Farmer School, the Transition to Organic Partnership Program offered by NOFA-NH, and the Hannah Grimes Center’s Beginning Farmer Program, and introduces advanced programs that offer hands-on apprenticeships and/or incubator opportunities.
- **Collaborate with local governments to support zoning changes to allow affordable housing on farm properties.** Zoning changes to increase affordable housing would include housing for employees to address both housing and labor needs, while introducing a potential revenue stream during shoulder seasons.

## Authors

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**New Hampshire**  
*Department of Agriculture,  
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This brief was developed through a participatory process led by the NH Food Alliance, a program of the University of New Hampshire. The brief content is comprised of the opinions, perspectives, and information gathered by the authors and participants, and does not necessarily represent those of the NH Department of Agriculture, Markets, and Food or the NH Food Alliance.

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