

Protecting Maine's Working Farmland

Keeping Maine farms and farmland working and profitable requires active, local participation from citizen planners, town officials, conservationists and neighbors – like you.



Fifty years ago Cape Elizabeth had fifty operating farms. Today, the William H. Jordan Farm is one of a handful that remain in operation. In 2004, forty-seven acres of the farm were permanently protected by the Jordan family, the Town of Cape Elizabeth, the Cape Elizabeth Land Trust, the Land for Maine's Future Program and the USDA Farm and Ranch Lands Protection Program.

Farmers need affordable productive land to survive. Whether your community includes small farms, large farms or both, find ways to support these important local family businesses. Meet with the farmers in your community. Learn what they will need to compete with and adapt to regional, national and international changes affecting their industry. While traditional dairy and crop farms require large tracts of land to remain viable, many smaller-scale farms are emerging that serve specialty markets such as flowers and seedlings, wines, fiber, organic produce and meats. These specialty farms have different land needs and require different infrastructure. Farms of *all* types are vitally important to maintaining a healthy and diverse farm economy and working landscape in Maine.

Strong, Healthy Agriculture Means:

A Vital Local Economy...

- Maine's farms and food processors provide over 65,000 jobs and contribute \$1.2 billion annually to Maine's economy.
- Farms support a broad base of local businesses, from local merchants to suppliers to mechanics, creating a diverse economic base for the region.
- Maine farms are a tourist attraction. They offer visitors opportunities to hunt, fish, hike, ski, snowmobile, pick apples and enjoy nature and the rural countryside.

.....and a Healthy Environment

- Farm fields and forested wetlands are important areas for groundwater recharge. Farm hedgerows filter rain and surface water runoff helping to protect water quality.
- Farms provide essential habitat for fish, birds and other important wildlife species.

...to Preserve Maine's Heritage.

- Farms provide lush green natural areas and pastoral vistas that are welcome refuge from our hectic, crowded everyday lives.
- Maine's farms are a historic and cultural legacy.

The Challenge

People relocating to the countryside seek affordable, accessible land with ample sun and clean air. These are the same qualities that farmers need to grow good crops. Housing construction may bring new jobs while building is underway, but once house lots replace farmland, there is no going back. The challenge is how to provide for and protect agricultural land use while also accommodating growth. Planning for agriculture helps to ensure that farming will have a place as your community grows.

MAINE'S GOAL *

To permanently conserve 250,000 acres of working farmland by 2025

In the last 10 years, 160,000 acres of Maine's best farmland was converted to residential and commercial use.

If the tillable portion of Maine's currently active farmland is developed at the same rate as it was during the past decade, most of Maine's productive farmland will disappear in the next 45 years.

*Maine Dept. of Agriculture, Food and Rural Resources

Preserving Agriculture and Farmland

The first and most important step is to engage your community's farmers at the beginning of preserving agriculture discussions. Then farmers, farm groups, related organizations, town officials and neighbors work together to envision the community's farming future.

Some of the next steps your community can take include:

Support farmers

- Create a supportive business environment for farming.
- Encourage farmers' markets and farmstands.
- Recognize the farm families in your community for their long-term land tenure and stewardship.

Strengthen farming

- Adopt farm-friendly policies that enable farms to diversify and expand their businesses.
- Help existing and new farmers access good farmland so they can thrive in your community.

Save farmland

- Work with farmers to identify and prioritize farmland.
- Support landowners' enrollment in Maine's current use tax programs.
- Support landowners' efforts to permanently preserve their land for agriculture.

The Farm Protection Toolbox

The good news is that Maine has public policies, programs and organizations to help towns protect their farmland. There are also a variety of tools at the local level.

Statewide Policies, Programs and Organizations

- **Maine's Farm, Open Space and Tree Growth Tax Programs** allows eligible properties to be assessed at current, rather than "highest and best" use.
- Local land trusts and the Maine Department of Agriculture can apply for funds from the **Land for Maine's Future Program** and the **USDA Farm and Ranch Lands Protection Program** to purchase development rights on working farms. In exchange for cash, farmland owners grant a Conservation Easement to protect the farm's use of the property forever.
- The Maine Department of Agriculture's **Farms for the Future Program** grants farmers assistance with developing business plans and conducting market research. Farmers with complete plans are eligible to compete for additional grants to implement their plan.
- **Maine Farmland Trust** helps landowners explore a variety of strategies to protect the future of their farm.
- **Maine FarmLink**, a program of Maine Farmland Trust, connects new farmers seeking land with retiring Maine farmers and farm owners who wish to see their land remain active farmland.

- **Maine's Right-to-Farm Law** protects farmers from nuisance lawsuits from neighbors moving into a farming area.

Local options citizens can explore

- **Agricultural Advisory Committees** are farm-focused local boards that develop strategies to protect and promote agriculture in their communities. They are liaisons between farmers, residents and local government.
- **Agricultural Overlay Districts** identify areas where farming is the primary and preferred land use, and discourage or prohibit incompatible development and land speculation. The overlay zone helps to ease neighbor conflicts while encouraging agriculture and compatible uses such as farm-support businesses and on-farm processing facilities.
- **Subdivision Regulations** can be used to review the division of land and prevent the creation of lots that are too small or unsuited for agricultural use and which can fragment the rural land base.
- **Conservation Subdivision policies** can provide incentives for developers and landowners to build new structures on smaller clustered lots to protect important farmland soils for continued agricultural use.
- **Transfer of Development Rights policies** can permanently protect farmland by allowing developers to purchase development rights from farmland owners and transfer the rights to other designated town areas.
- **Dedicated Land Conservation Funding** gives communities the flexibility to respond strategically to opportunities to save farmland. Local farmland protection funding encourages farmers to reinvest in agriculture. Local conservation dollars can often be used to leverage available State and federal funding.
- **Collaboration with Land Trusts** can help towns complete farmland protection deals or even establish local farm preservation strategies. Nonprofit land trusts can often provide valuable technical, and sometimes financial, assistance with these efforts.

It's not farmland without farmers.™

The greatest investment you can make to protect working farmland is to help your community plan for the future of agriculture. **START TODAY!**

Additional Resources

- Maine Dept of Agriculture, Farmland Protection Program <http://www.state.me.us/agriculture/mpd/farmland/>
- Maine Farmland Trust www.maineFarmlandtrust.org
- American Farmland Trust www.farmland.org
- Land for Maine's Future www.state.me.us/spo/lmf/
- Maine Land Trust Network mltn.org
- Eat Local Foods Coalition of Maine www.eatlocalfoods.org/