
PLOWING AHEAD
Farmland Preservation in 2010 and Beyond

March 2010



Working Lands Alliance
A Project of American Farmland Trust

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Working Lands Alliance
A Project of American Farmland Trust

Your Voice for Farmland Preservation in Connecticut!

A project of AFT, the WLA is a coalition of Connecticut organizations, citizens and businesses working to raise awareness of the need to save Connecticut's valuable and vanishing farmland. WLA members reflect the diversity of people who share a concern about farmland preservation in Connecticut—farmers, planners, conservationists, anti-hunger advocates, historic preservationists, chefs and food retailers. WLA encourages anyone who cares about the future of Connecticut's family farms to join its efforts to educate policy leaders about the importance and benefits of farmland protection. Sign up online to receive updates and alerts about farmland preservation policy in Connecticut.

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**PLOWING AHEAD:
Farmland Preservation in 2010 and Beyond**

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Connecticut's Farmland Facts

- Approximately 85% of Connecticut's farmland remains unprotected.¹
- Connecticut's 4,916 farms steward 321,393 acres of cropland, pasture and woodland.² An additional 77,000 acres of aquaculture beds are farmed in Long Island Sound.³
- The state has 163,686 acres of cropland, 32,832 acres of pasture and 124,875 acres of farm woodland.⁴
- The state has 862,822 acres of 'prime and important soils', representing 27% of all state land.⁵
- Twenty percent of the state's 'prime and important' soils are covered by agricultural fields and 38% are covered by forest.⁶
- Sixty-four percent of Connecticut's farms are less than 50 acres.⁷
- The state's average farm size is 83 acres.⁸

¹ Given the conservative estimate of 47,804 acres of farmland protected as of March 2010 and the total of 321,393 acres of combined cropland, pasture, and on-farm woodlands statewide, approximately 85% of Connecticut's farmland remains unprotected. See Section 3.

² USDA NASS, *2007 Census of Agriculture*, 2007.

³ Connecticut Sea Grant and Cooperative Extension, University of Connecticut, *Aquaculture Situation and Outlook Report 2009: Connecticut*, 2009.

⁴ USDA NASS, *2007 Census of Agriculture*, 2007.

⁵ University of Connecticut, Center for Land Use Education and Research, *Agricultural Fields and Soils in Connecticut*, 2010.

⁶ Ibid.

⁷ USDA NASS, *2007 Census of Agriculture*, 2007.

⁸ Ibid.

PLOWING AHEAD: Farmland Preservation in 2010 and Beyond

Section 1

Trends in Connecticut Agriculture

Over the past decade, public interest in local farms and foods has skyrocketed. Support for policies that encourage the sustainability of Connecticut's working farms and farmland has been rising among state and federal lawmakers, as has consumer interest in expanded access to local foods and farm products through a variety of venues, including schools, institutions, Community Supported Agriculture farms, and year-round farmers markets. Local farmers, the chefs that feature their products, and the authors that write about both have become the focus of enormous media attention and popularity.

These trends are evident in the changing face of Connecticut agriculture. Between 2002 and 2007, the number of farms increased by 17% to 4,916, with a slightly higher rise (20%) in the number of smaller farms (under 50 acres). Of these, 2,643 are operated by part-time farmers.⁹ Over the same period, farms engaged in direct marketing increased by 29% to 1,099, and the number of farms that reported agritourism activities increased by 237% to 101 farms.¹⁰ The CT Farm Link program has a growing list of 'farm seekers' that outnumbers 'farm owners' looking to sell or lease farmland. Applications by farmers to the CT Dept. of Agriculture for grants to expand into new markets or diversify their crops and products far exceed available funds.¹¹ And while the state's 152 remaining dairy farms continue to face severe low milk prices and a volatile market, Connecticut lawmakers responded last year with a strong show of support for the industry in the form of temporary price support payments.¹²

In 1999, the formation of the Working Lands Alliance coalition sought to mobilize a variety of constituent groups—conservationists and environmentalists, farmers, town officials, open space and wildlife advocates, developers—to more effectively preserve the state's farmland. At the time, WLA's organizers saw a critical need to protect the agricultural land base in the face of dramatic farm and farmland loss statistics (losing roughly 80 farms per year between 1982 and 1997) attributed to development pressure, poor land use planning, and a dim view of the future of farming in the state.^{13,14} Spearheaded by the CT Food Policy Council and Hartford Food

⁹ USDA National Agricultural Statistics Service (NASS), *2007 Census of Agriculture*, 2007.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*

¹¹ In 2010, Federal Specialty Crop Block Grant proposals from Connecticut producers requested a total of \$900,000 whereas less than \$400,000 is available. In November 2009, producers requested \$1.5 million in grants through the CT Farm Transition matching grants program when only \$500,000 was available.

¹² In 2009, Governor Rell and the CT General Assembly passed legislation authorizing \$10 million in bonding for immediate relief to dairy producers and an additional \$6 to \$8 million in dairy support payments over two fiscal years via the Community Investment Act Account.

¹³ Working Lands Alliance, *Preserving Connecticut Farmland for Generations to Come*, Feb 2000.

System, the formation of WLA coincided with the early stages of growing public concern about access to nutritious, healthy food. WLA organizers readily acknowledged the connection between in-state production of food and community food security.¹⁵

A steady increase in funding for the state's Farmland Preservation Program (also known as the Purchase of Development Rights, or PDR, program) followed between 1999 and 2009. In 1999 the state protected four farms, totaling 475 acres, through the program. However, the \$1.3 million used for these purchases drained what remained of the program's bond authorization, and no new bonding was authorized.¹⁶ The WLA coalition set a legislative goal of reaching \$10 million/year over five years for the PDR program.¹⁷ After 10 years of advocacy and several key shifts in policy, in 2009 the state protected 10 farms, totaling 1,370 acres, at a cost of \$7,179,659, with another \$10 million remaining in bond authorization.¹⁸ The availability of federal funding for farmland protection has also increased over this time. In the 1999 federal fiscal year, there was no funding available to Connecticut through the federal Farm and Ranch Lands Protection Program (FRPP); in FY09, Connecticut received \$5.9 million in FRPP funding. This sharp increase in state and federal funding has spurred both municipalities and land trusts to raise public and private funds to leverage these new resources for farmland protection.

In the earlier part of the past decade, the public's willingness to support farmland preservation was initially strengthened by a concern about food security, intensified by the events of September 11, 2001, and a response to unchecked sprawl that was rapidly converting scenic farm fields into new housing and big box retail stores. Between 1985 and 2006, Connecticut lost 14.5% of its agriculture fields (or approximately 61.8 square miles).¹⁹

In recent years the public's growing interest in food safety, quality, and access has turned a welcome spotlight on local farms. It has also fueled significant policy shifts at all levels of government towards revitalization of local and regional food systems. The 2008 federal Farm Bill increased emphasis on the production and consumption of local, seasonal, and organic foods, and provided new resources for direct marketing, specialty crops, value added

¹⁴ As reported in *Preserving Connecticut Farmland for Generations to Come*, between 1982 and 1997, USDA Natural Resources Inventory (NRI) data indicated that Connecticut was among the 10 states that have lost the highest percentage of their remaining rural land to development. During the same period, data from the USDA, *NASS 1997 Census of Agriculture* indicated that Connecticut was losing an average of 8,000 acres per year of farmland to other uses.

¹⁵ Working Lands Alliance, *Preserving Connecticut's Farmland for Generations to Come*, 2000.

¹⁶ In 1999 the CT Farmland Preservation Program completed three farm projects for a total cost to the state of \$853,000 and leveraging another \$418,000 through the Federal Farm and Ranch Lands Protection Program.

¹⁷ Nov 19, 1999, Minutes of the Farmland Preservation Working Group: "The coalition will advocate for a legislative package containing the following components: (1) an authorization \$50 million over the next five years at a rate of \$10 million per year for the PDR program; (2) a "lump sum" authority to the Commissioner of Agriculture to expedite the application process; (3) the release of \$7 million currently bonded."

¹⁸ In 2009 the CT Farmland Preservation Program completed 10 farm projects for a total cost to the state of \$7,179,659 and leveraging another \$1,092,192 [closings in 2009 with FRPP money] through the Federal Farm and Ranch Lands Protection Program.

¹⁹ University of Connecticut, Center for Land Use Education and Research (CLEAR), *Connecticut's Changing Landscape, Version 2*, 2006.

production, and conservation programs. Similarly, the State of Connecticut launched a number of new programs over the past five years, including its Farm-Link, Farm-to-Chef, and Farm-to-School programs, and has sought to increase the use of local and seasonal products in schools, hospitals, restaurants, and homes. The state's Agriculture Viability Grants program, established in 2005, has invested \$1 million annually in matching grants to farms, towns and non-profits for projects that help support and sustain local farms. The state's Farm-to-School Program, which started as a pilot program in 1996 with only three participating schools, has expanded to serve 88 schools or school systems. There has also been a sharp rise in the number of towns taking steps to reconnect with farming, including establishing local farmers markets and creating community farms and gardens that offer local residents increased access to local food and its production. The 115% increase in farmers markets since 1999 (from 58 to 125)—a trend that has been mirrored nationally—illustrates the leap in support for local farms and food in Connecticut.²⁰ Community Supported Agriculture farms (CSAs) have also multiplied, growing from fewer than 10 in 1999 to 42 in 2010²¹; many CSAs have long waiting lists for new members, demonstrating the extent of unmet demand in this category of local food.

There has also been a growing interest in addressing state regulatory barriers to increased local food production and sales. Recent state legislative proposals have included efforts to lift limitations on what can be sold in a farmers market, encourage more small-scale poultry farms, authorize pickle processing in farm kitchens, and create uniform public health standards for growers participating in multiple farmers markets.

Tempering some of these positive trends have been rising farm input costs and, for the dairy sector, volatile milk prices that are currently lower than the cost of production. Additionally, regulatory burdens and local land use conflicts continue to challenge the economic sustainability of many local farms. In response, there has been an increase in municipal efforts to form town agricultural commissions, adopt farm-friendly regulations and right-to-farm bylaws, enact local tax abatements for agriculture operations, and raise local funds for farmland protection efforts. In the past three years there have been at least nine towns that have created or proposed the creation of a town level agricultural commission and at least five towns that have adopted a right-to-farm bylaw.²²

Current concern over the state's significant budget deficit has focused decision-makers on the savings potential of more regional planning and smart growth strategies. Farmland protection is now explicitly recognized as a tool in the state's smart growth toolbox; the Principles of Smart

²⁰ The number of farmers markets nationwide continues to grow: according to USDA's Agricultural Marketing Service, there were 5,274 markets in 2009, up 13% from 4,685 in 2008. When the USDA began tracking farmers markets in 1994, there were only 1,755 in the U.S.

²¹ Connecticut Chapter of the Northeast Organic Farming Association (NOFA), *Connecticut's Community Supported Agriculture*, 2010.

²² At the time of this publication, to the best of our knowledge, towns with agricultural commissions created proposed include: Brooklyn, Durham, Granby, North Branford, and Sterling; proposed agricultural commissions include: Ashford, Canterbury, East Lyme, and Franklin. Towns that have adopted a right-to-farm law are: Columbia, Lebanon, New Milford, North Stonington, and Pomfret.

Growth, defined and adopted by the state in 2009, includes “conservation and protection of natural resources by (i) preserving open space, water resources, farmland, environmentally sensitive areas and historic properties, and (ii) furthering energy efficiency.”²³

Deepening public concern over both climate change and continued reliance on foreign oil suggests that support for local agriculture will continue, with a growing emphasis on renewable energy production and farming practices that can sequester carbon. In a climate-changed future, pressure on Connecticut farmland to produce food and energy products will only intensify in the presence of greater unpredictability, and a strengthened state agricultural sector may help absorb potential food or energy supply shocks ahead.

²³ Public Act 09-230, *An Act Concerning Smart Growth And The State Plan Of Conservation And Development Policies Plan*.

Section 2

Why Save Farmland?

Farmland is an integral part of Connecticut's living landscape. The state's 321,000 acres of cropland, pasture, and farm woodlands constitute the foundation for the state's agricultural sector and provide the visual backdrop for Connecticut's rural towns that attracts tourists and businesses and contributes to Connecticut's high quality of life.²⁴ Well-managed farms provide habitat for wildlife, filter drinking water, help reduce flooding, and sequester carbon. Local farms enhance community food security. The state's 125 farmers markets and estimated 318 farm stands ensure the availability of fresh-picked fruits, summer vegetables, squash, eggs, meat, winter roots, and greens. Farmland owners frequently open their land to neighbors and community residents for hunting, walking, hiking, or snowmobiling.

Generating Jobs and Revenue

Connecticut's agricultural industry represents a vital primary tier business sector that supports food manufacturers and processors, garden centers, veterinarians, farm equipment wholesalers, farm supply stores, machinery repair shops, and wholesale fuel suppliers. The USDA estimates that in 2008, farm businesses in Connecticut generated \$600 million in cash receipts—third highest in New England—with greenhouse, nursery, and dairy contributing the highest percentage of receipts.²⁵ Connecticut farms reported production expenses of over \$469 million in 2007, much of which was spent locally, including \$23 million in property taxes.²⁶

Connecticut agriculture represents a major jobs sector. According to USDA, there are almost 21,000 workers employed on farms in the state.²⁷ Independent economic impact studies of the green industry and dairy industry have found a workforce of 48,000 and up to 2,500 respectively.²⁸

Connecticut farms also generate significant revenue from their woodlands—producing maple syrup, Christmas trees, firewood, lumber, and other wood products. According to the 2007 Census of Agriculture, over 30 percent of the state's total land in farms is woodland.²⁹ Woodlands on Connecticut's farms cannot be easily separated from total estimates of state woodlands that have a significant impact on the state's economy.³⁰ Farm woodlands produce

²⁴ USDA NASS, *2007 Census of Agriculture*, 2007.

²⁵ Income is measured in terms of cash receipts. USDA NASS, *New England Cash Receipts*, 2009.

²⁶ USDA NASS, *2007 Census of Agriculture*, 2007.

²⁷ Ibid.

²⁸ 39% of all businesses in the green industry are classified as wholesale production/sales; CT Green Industries, *Statistics on Connecticut's Green Industry*, 2009; CT Dept. of Community & Economic Development and CT Dept. of Agriculture, *The Economic and Fiscal Impacts of Connecticut's Dairy Industry*, 2009.

²⁹ USDA NASS, *2007 Census of Agriculture*, 2007.

³⁰ 90% of forests in Connecticut are privately owned and remain a thriving sector of the state's economy.

Connecticut's forests produce up to 80 million board feet of timber annually, providing over \$14 million in direct income to forest landowners and raw material for some 350 Connecticut processing and manufacturing firms who

two agricultural products closely tied to New England's heritage. Approximately 350 Connecticut Christmas tree growers, with over 6,000 acres of trees, sell over \$10 million in trees each holiday season.³¹ Connecticut also has over 300 maple producers who produce an average of 12,000 gallons of maple syrup per year, with a retail value of almost \$500,000.³²

Agriculture relies on many support services, including feed suppliers, veterinary services, equipment manufacturers and repair, and financial services. Growing farm businesses also support additional short-term contractual jobs in engineering, construction, plumbing, electrical work, and inspection. For example, although the dairy industry reports a sales volume of nearly \$497 million, its total economic impact is estimated to be in the range of \$832 million to \$1.1 billion.³³

By maintaining the rural and historical New England landscape that visitors to Connecticut find so attractive, working farms are integral to the state's \$9 billion travel and tourism industry and its 110,000 jobs. Working farms help define the scenery that people enjoy on country drives and visits to communities around the state. Destinations such as wineries, pick-your-own orchards, pumpkin patches, and corn mazes help attract tourists. Additionally, farmers markets, farm stands, pick-your-own farms, farm-to-table events, and agri-tourism can have a direct impact on local businesses.

Balancing Municipal Budgets

Farmland plays an important role in balancing local town budgets. While an acre of land with a new house may generate more revenue for a town than an acre of hay or corn, an acre of farmland and other open space typically requires few municipal services. As a result, farmland tends to generate surplus property tax revenue that is used to offset the costs associated with residential development.

Cost of Community Services (COCS) studies use municipal data to determine the fiscal contribution of various local land uses. These case studies compare the cost of municipal services needed for farm and forestland, residential, and commercial and industrial property to the revenues generated from these lands. Over 20 years of COCS studies around the country have shown that farmland and other open space consistently generate more public revenue than they require in municipal services, even when farmland is assessed at its agricultural use

convert the timber into products such as cabinets, doors, and flooring. This sector contributes over \$500 million annually and employs over 3,500 people. Residents and visitors enjoy Connecticut's forests for various recreational opportunities including hunting, hiking, and bird watching. State agencies and municipalities collect an average of \$4 million in fees each year from the sale of hunting and fishing licenses, permits and tags. (From Connecticut Department of Environmental Protection, prepared by Helene Flounders, *Connecticut Statewide Forest Resource Plan 2004-2013*).

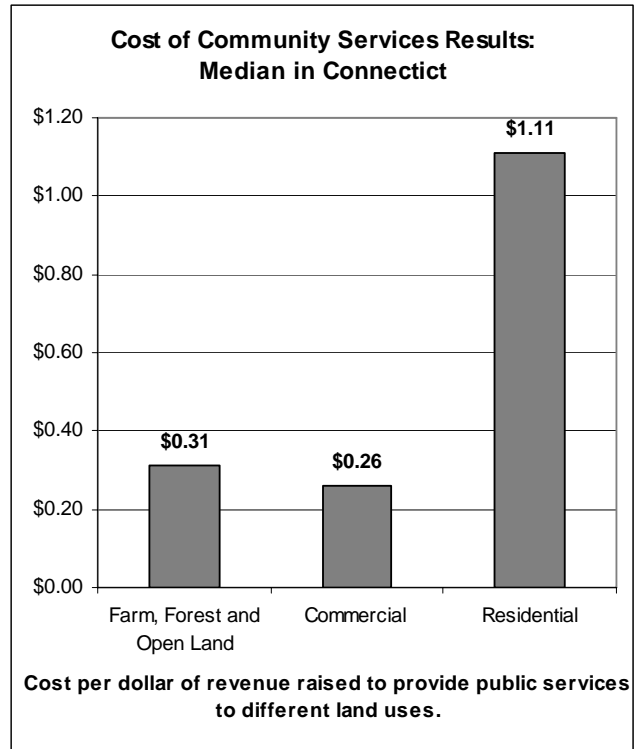
³¹ Ibid.

³² Ibid.

³³ CT Dept. of Economic and Community Development and the CT Dept. of Agriculture, *The Economic and Fiscal Impacts of Connecticut's Dairy Industry*, 2009.

value.³⁴ A review of COCS research in eight Connecticut towns shows that for each dollar of property tax revenue generated by working lands, on average only 31 cents is required in municipal services. Conversely, for each dollar generated by residential properties, \$1.11 is required to pay for municipal services associated with those properties.

In 2007 Lebanon undertook a build-out analysis to understand the impacts of development based on current land use regulations, including the fiscal impact of this development. The study determined that in 20 years, with a 10% growth rate, the town would need to increase taxes to cover an additional \$2.2 million in community services required by the new growth.³⁵



Protecting the Environment

As a resource-based industry, agriculture depends on an adequate land base, good soils, favorable climate conditions, and clean water. In turn, farmers and the land they steward provide a variety of ecosystem services and environmental benefits. A typical Connecticut farm’s cropland, pasture, wetlands, and woodlands act as a natural filter for surface and subsurface water and provide not just aquifer recharge areas but habitat for many land and aquatic species, feeding and breeding areas for local bird populations, and stopovers for migrating birds. Farmland helps to minimize flooding, and woodlands, pasture, hay fields, and cropland not tilled annually also act as a carbon “sink,” sequestering carbon and helping to curtail global warming.

In its 2003 publication *Losing Ground: At What Cost?*, the Massachusetts Audubon Society estimated the economic value of non-market ecosystem services that farmland provides—such as climate and nutrient regulation, habitat, soil retention and formation, pollination, recreation, and aesthetics. While generally considered “free,” these services would be extremely costly to replace should the land that provides them be converted to development. The Audubon study concluded that the annual value of these services from cropland and pasture is \$1,381 per acre and from forestland, \$984 per acre. Using these figures, Connecticut’s 321,000 acres of

³⁴ American Farmland Trust, Farmland Information Center, *Fact Sheet: Cost of Community Services, 2007*; Town of Lebanon and Green Valley Institute, *Build-Out Analysis and Cost of Community Services, 2007*.

³⁵ Town of Lebanon and Green Valley Institute, *Build-Out Analysis and Cost of Community Services, 2007*.

cropland, pasture, and farm woodlands provide an estimated \$394 million annually in non-market ecosystem services.

While some farms and farming practices can have adverse environmental impacts, Connecticut farms are increasingly well-managed. Recognizing the importance of farmers as stewards of the environment, the federal and state governments have developed programs to assist farmers' efforts to minimize environmental concerns, enhance the habitat value of their land, and preserve their land. The state Environmental Assistance Program, for example, cost shares with dairy and other livestock farmers on some of the costs of implementing an agricultural waste management plan, and is used, along with the federal Environmental Quality Incentives Program, to help farmers address agricultural water quality concerns. The state Farmland Preservation Program requires that farmland protected through the program be farmed in accordance with an approved conservation plan. Other state and federal programs provide technical and financial assistance to farmers who manage their land for wildlife habitat, improve their energy efficiency, reduce water usage, and adopt forest stewardship plans. These programs help ensure that farming results in net gains for environmental quality.

Improving Quality of Life

Perhaps the most valued attribute of Connecticut farms and farmland is the hardest to quantify—their contribution to local “quality of life.” When faced with the potential loss of a local farm, community residents often rally in support. For some people, farms and farming represent an important link to an agrarian past. Many archeological sites—some dating back as much as 11,000 years—are located on agricultural land. For others, local farms and farmland are valued for their tranquility and natural beauty. This connection to nature via farmland scenery encourages well-being and social health, as well.³⁶

Recent studies conducted by Professor R. Johnston at the University of Connecticut suggest the importance that local residents place on farms and the quality of life they provide. Results from a 2005 Willingness-to-Pay study in Mansfield, CT, found that town residents were collectively willing to pay over \$26,000 per acre to purchase an easement on active dairy farmland that was at high risk for development.³⁷ A 2007 Willingness-to-Pay survey of Brooklyn, CT, residents found that residents were collectively willing to pay \$4,000-\$11,000 per acre to purchase a similar easement on dairy farmland.³⁸

Providing Local, Nutritional Food

Connecticut consumers are not only demanding more locally grown food, but are changing the way they shop for it. According to the 2007 Census of Agriculture, direct sales of food from

³⁶ K. Wolf, Master Gardener, *With Plants in Mind: Social Benefits of Civic Nature*, Winter 2008.

³⁷ R. Johnston, University of Connecticut, *The Value of Farm and Forest Preservation to Residents of Mansfield*, 2007.

³⁸ R. Johnston, University of Connecticut, *Public Preferences and Willingness to Pay for Farmland Preservation in Four Connecticut Communities*, 2007.

farmers to consumers increased by 68% from 2002 to 2007. Interest in eating locally year-round has also increased demand for CT-grown root vegetables, greens, grains, dairy, and meat products, causing a dramatic rise in winter farmers markets, from the one operated by CitySeed in New Haven in 2005 to 16 winter markets by 2009.

Connecticut farmers are playing an important role in improving nutritional health. Farmers markets located in inner city neighborhoods provide access to fresh fruits and vegetables at affordable prices where access is otherwise severely limited. For example, the City of Hartford has only one major supermarket, making it difficult for residents who are dependent on public transportation or unable to travel regularly to the supermarket to purchase fresh fruits and vegetables. Similarly, with the announced closure of Shaw's grocery stores in Connecticut, the City of New Haven will lose its only major supermarket in April of 2010. Through several state and federal farmers market coupon and voucher programs, low-income seniors and participants in the federal Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) and Women, Infants, and Children Program (WIC) are able to purchase fresh CT-grown foods. In 2009, farmers in Connecticut redeemed \$364,469 in Senior Farmers Market Coupons, \$414,487 in WIC Farmers Market Coupons, and \$6,994 in SNAP benefits.

Connecticut farmers also donate a significant amount of food to local food banks. In 2009, Foodshare, the food bank serving Hartford and Tolland Counties, received over 248,427 pounds of fruits and vegetables from Connecticut farmers.³⁹ The Connecticut Food Bank in New Haven received 48,478 pounds of produce from local farmers in 2009.⁴⁰ This food is helping meet the growing demand for emergency food in Connecticut. Recent data indicate that 11% of Connecticut households are food insecure, including 4.1% which are categorized as 'very low food security'.⁴¹

Harvesting Renewable Energy

While current gas prices have suppressed concerns about energy dependency, Connecticut farmland is likely to become increasingly important to improving the state's energy self-reliance. In the long term, cellulosic ethanol production may offer a new and significant market for Connecticut farmers growing switchgrass and woody biomass. In the near term, opportunities are expanding for on-farm generation of solar, wind, and methane digesters.

In response to federal initiatives to both produce more renewable energy and reduce nutrient loads to threatened water bodies, several agricultural operations are exploring manure-to-energy projects. The largest egg producer in the state and several of the largest dairy farms are exploring manure incinerators or anaerobic digesters to generate electricity and usable waste heat, converting a waste product to a potentially sustainable profit center. Both the

³⁹ Stephen Slipchinsky, Regional Market Supervisor at Foodshare, personal communication, March 12, 2010.

⁴⁰ Russell, Carolyn, Product Donation Coordinator for the Connecticut Food Bank. Personal communication, March 12, 2010.

⁴¹ USDA Economic Research Service, *Household Food Security in the United States, 2008*.

Connecticut Department of Environmental Protection (DEP) and USDA-Rural Development have invested substantial resources in assisting agricultural producers in these undertakings. Currently, there are at least 55 farms in Connecticut that are generating energy or electricity.⁴²

Ensuring Opportunities for Future Generations of Farmers

Similar to the national trend, farmers in Connecticut are aging. The average age of the principal farm operator in Connecticut has increased from 55 to 57.6 in the last 10 years and is slightly higher than the national average of 57.1.⁴³ With its high farm real estate values (the state ranks third in the country), younger CT farmers are typically unable to afford the purchase of meaningful farmland acreage.⁴⁴ Indeed, less than 4% of principal operators in the state are under the age of 35, and less than 15% are under the age of 45.⁴⁵

For younger farmers, leasing farmland and purchasing already protected farmland are the primary means of gaining access to land. A 2006 survey of owners of farmland in the CT Farmland Preservation Program found that 29% of the owners had purchased their farmland after it had been protected through the program.⁴⁶ These respondents were very clear that the state program is providing farmers with access to affordable farmland. More than three-fourths of respondents (78%) who purchased land already enrolled in the program said that having the land already protected made the land affordable.⁴⁷

⁴² USDA NASS, *2007 Census of Agriculture*, 2007.

⁴³ USDA NASS, *2007 Census of Agriculture*, 2007.

⁴⁴ USDA NASS, *2009 Farm Real Estate Value by State*, 2009.

⁴⁵ USDA NASS, *2007 Census of Agriculture*, 2007.

⁴⁶ CT Dept. of Agriculture and American Farmland Trust, *Connecticut Farmland Preservation Program Survey: Highlighted Findings*, June 2008.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*

Section 3

Status of Farmland Protection in Connecticut

Acres Protected

As of March 2010, the State of Connecticut, its municipalities, and state and local land trusts have protected an estimated 47,804 acres of farmland. The lion’s share of that—over 35,000 acres— has been protected through the CT Farmland Preservation Program (also known as the state’s Purchase of Development Rights, or “PDR,” program). The federal Farm and Ranch Lands Protection Program has protected 8,388 farmland acres with various partners, most in direct partnership with the PDR program. The state has protected an additional 8,795 acres of active or formerly active farmland through its Open Space & Watershed Acquisition Program, through the purchase of conservation easements on the land or purchase of the farmland outright. Unfortunately, it is unknown how much of this land remains in agricultural use since the primary purpose of this program is not long-term preservation of active farmland.

Currently, there is no statewide data that track farmland that has been protected by towns and land trusts without the use of state or federal funding. There are some notable towns, such as Pomfret, Ashford, Woodstock, Shelton, Suffield, and Lebanon, which have aggressively protected farmland using a number of different resources. Some local and regional land trusts, such as Simsbury Land Trust, Southbury Land Trust, and Roxbury Land Trust, have focused strategically on farmland preservation. Connecticut Farmland Trust (CFT), the only state land trust dedicated to the preservation of farmland, has helped to protect 1,764 acres of farmland on 20 farms since it was established in 2002. Using estimates from practitioners, there may be approximately 10,000 acres that have been protected by towns and land trusts without the use of federal or state funding.⁴⁸

Program	Acres	Farms
CT Farmland Preservation Program	35,617	269
Federal Farm and Ranch Lands Protection Program†	1,078	19
Connecticut Farmland Trust‡	1,109	13
Towns & Land Trusts (estimate)	10,000	n/a
TOTAL	47,804	

† Excluding projects done in conjunction with CT Farmland Preservation Program

‡ Excluding projects done in conjunction with CT Farmland Preservation or the federal Farm and Ranch Lands Protection Program

⁴⁸ This is a conservative estimate based on discussion with expert practitioners in Connecticut.

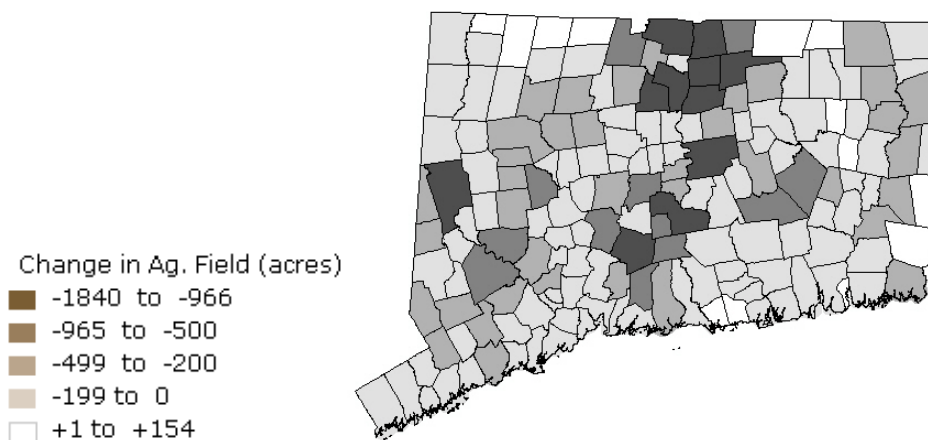
Rate of Protection vs. Loss

Given the conservative estimate of 47,804 acres of farmland protected as of March 2010, and the total of 321,393 acres of combined cropland, pasture, and on-farm woodlands statewide,⁴⁹ **approximately 85% of Connecticut's farmland remains unprotected.** While the state's recent real estate slump has slowed conversion of farmland to non-agricultural uses, competing demands for land will continue to jeopardize the long-term availability of farmland for agricultural production.

The rate of farmland loss in Connecticut has consistently outpaced the rate of protection through the state's PDR program. Since the PDR program's first acquisition, the program has protected an average of 1,045 acres per year. By contrast, over the same general time frame, depending on the data source, the yearly decline in farm acreage has been at a rate of 1,883 – 9,567 acres per year.⁵⁰ (See Chart on Next Page – Measuring Farmland Loss)

Recent research by the University of Connecticut using remote sensing technology to detect land use changes between 1985 and 2006 has helped to identify how much and where some of the greatest changes in agricultural land use have occurred.⁵¹ By 2006, the state had lost 39,522 acres of agricultural fields present in 1985—a 14.5% decrease. Many of the towns that lost the greatest amount of acreage are in the Connecticut River Valley corridor, where the state's most fertile farmland is located.⁵² Indeed, nearly three-fourths of the agricultural fields lost during this time period consisted of prime and important farmland soils.⁵³

Loss of Agricultural Fields during 1985 – 2006⁵⁴



⁴⁹ USDA NASS, *2007 Census of Agriculture*, 2007.

⁵⁰ Compiled sources cover the time period of 1982 to 2007. USDA NRCS, *1997 Five-Year Natural Resources Inventory*, 1997, and *Natural Resources Inventory: 2003 Annual NRI*, 2003; USDA NASS, *2007 Census of Agriculture*; University of Connecticut, Center for Land Use Education and Research, *Agricultural Fields and Soils in Connecticut*, 2010.

⁵¹ 'Agriculture Field' in University of Connecticut CLEAR's study, *Connecticut's Changing Landscape v2*, means areas that are under agricultural uses such as crop production and/or active pasture. Also likely to include some abandoned agricultural areas that have not undergone conversion to woody vegetation.

⁵² University of Connecticut, CLEAR, *Agriculture Fields and Soils in Connecticut*, 2010.

⁵³ *Ibid.*

⁵⁴ University of Connecticut, CLEAR, *Connecticut's Changing Landscape*.

	University of Connecticut Center for Land Use Education and Research	USDA Natural Resources Inventory	USDA Census of Agriculture
What we have now	As of 2006: 232,576 acres of "agricultural fields"	As of 2003: 300,900 acres of agricultural land (crop and pasture)	As of 2007: 321,393 acres of cropland, pasture, and farm woodland
What we have lost	1,883 acres of agricultural fields per year (1985-2006)	1,620-9,567 acres of agricultural land per year (1992-2003)	4,155 acres of cropland, pasture, and farm woodland per year (1997-2007)
Explanation of decline	Between 1985 and 2006 approximately 39,552 acres of "agricultural fields" were converted to other uses, equivalent to a decrease of 14.5% since 1985.	Between 1992 and 1997: 8,100 acres of agricultural land (crop and pasture) were converted to developed uses, for an average of 1,620 per year. Data between 1997 and 2003 reflect conversion to 8 possible land cover categories, not just 'developed uses'; during this period cropland decreased by 57,400 acres, for an average of 9,567 per year.	From 1997 to 2007, cropland, pasture, and farm woodland decreased by 41,548 acres.
Interpretation of data	The University of Connecticut Center for Land Use Education and Research (CLEAR) conducts an ongoing project, "Connecticut's Changing Landscape" (CCL). CCL uses remote sensing technology to chart changes in major land cover categories from 1985 to 2006. "Agricultural fields" are those identified as in active agricultural use and do not include other land owned by farmers such as woodland, wetlands, and stream corridors.	The National Resources Inventory (NRI), conducted by the USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS), is the most comprehensive natural resource database in the United States and the best source for agricultural land conversion data. Historically, the NRCS conducted the NRI every five years beginning in 1982. No new state-level NRI data has been available since 2003.	The Census of Agriculture, conducted every five years by the National Agricultural Statistics Service (NASS), is the most comprehensive source of national agricultural data. Data from the 2007 Census is not comparable to data from pre-1997 due to adjustments for missed farms. Decreases in cropland, pasture, and farm woodland do not necessarily indicate conversion; they mean that land has been taken out of production.

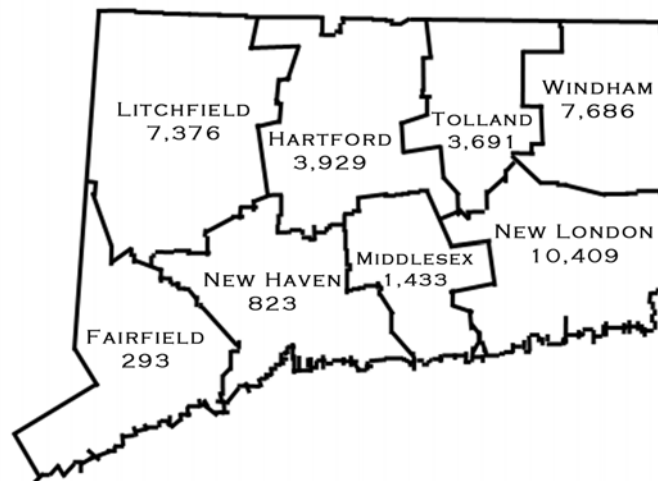
CT Farmland Preservation Program

In 1978 state leaders enacted landmark legislation with passage of Public Act 78-232, making the historical assertion that:

“The growing population and expanding economy of the state have had a profound impact on the ability of public and private sectors of the state to maintain and preserve agricultural land for farming and food production purposes; that unless there is a sound, state-wide program for its preservation, remaining agricultural land will be lost to succeeding generations and that the conservation of certain arable agricultural land and adjacent pastures, woods, natural drainage areas and open space areas is vital for the well-being of people of Connecticut.”

With its passage, this legislation laid the groundwork for Connecticut’s Farmland Preservation Program (also known as the state’s Purchase of Development Rights, or “PDR” program). After more than three decades the PDR program has protected 35,617 acres of high quality soils on 269 farms.⁵⁵ Approximately 70% of the farmland protected through the PDR program is located in three counties: New London, Litchfield, and Windham.

Farmland Acres Protected by PDR Program – as of March 2010



The PDR program preserves farmland by purchasing agricultural conservation easements, or “development rights,” on farm parcels from willing landowners. The farms remain in private ownership and continue to pay local property taxes. A permanent restriction on non-agricultural uses is placed on the property. Parcels are ranked for priority based on soil quality,

⁵⁵ CT Dept. of Agriculture, *Farmland Preservation Program Summary*, February 22, 2010.

size, and proximity to other agricultural and protected lands. Municipalities may also apply jointly with farmland owners (to date, eight towns have participated in this joint program).⁵⁶

Program Funding

The PDR program has experienced significant funding fluctuations since its first acquisition in 1979. Between fiscal years 1983 and 1991, the program saw a remarkable infusion of funds, totaling \$53 million in bond authorizations. By contrast, between FY91 and FY01, during a period of steep real estate market growth and suburban sprawl, the program received only \$21 million in bond authorizations. Fortunately, the program is enjoying a new period of robust funding; between FY05 and FY11, the program has received \$35.5 million in bond authorization and another \$11 million through the state's Community Investment Act.

In 2005, and again in 2007, funding for the program was dramatically strengthened thanks to two landmark policy victories. Leaders in the CT General Assembly, including Senate President Don Williams and Rep. Richard Belden, and Governor M. Jodi Rell, provided critical leadership that has fueled the new emphasis on protecting Connecticut's remaining farmland.

First, through the Community Investment Act (CIA)—legislation that enacted a statewide deed recording fee to finance state investments in historic preservation, affordable housing, and land protection—the PDR program received approximately \$2.5 million per year between FY05-FY09.⁵⁷ CIA funding has made possible the critical addition of three program staff positions. CIA funds are more flexible and can be used to pay for surveys and appraisals, as well as the purchase of development rights. Unlike bonding authorizations that require vigilant advocacy, the CIA is a dedicated revenue stream with predictable, quarterly disbursements to the CT Dept. of Agriculture. The redirection of CIA funds from farmland preservation to temporary price supports for dairy farmers from FY09 to FY11 could adversely impact the program in the event of bonding shortfalls.

Second, after years of unpredictable bonding commitments and lengthy delays waiting for farm projects to be placed on bond commission agendas, legislation was passed setting up a system of biannual "lump sum" bond payments of \$5 million to the program, so long as sufficient bond authorization is available.⁵⁸ The lump sums are scheduled for each February and August meeting of the State Bond Commission; in the event of a cancelled meeting the lump sum is allocated at the next regularly scheduled meeting of the Commission. At the March 16, 2010, State Bond Commission meeting, Governor Rell announced the "lump sum" payment of the remaining balance of authorized bond funds of \$5,075,288.

⁵⁶ The towns that have partnered with farmers include: Ashford, Ellington, Granby, New Milford, Pomfret, Shelton, Suffield, and Woodstock.

⁵⁷ State of Connecticut Public Act 05-228.

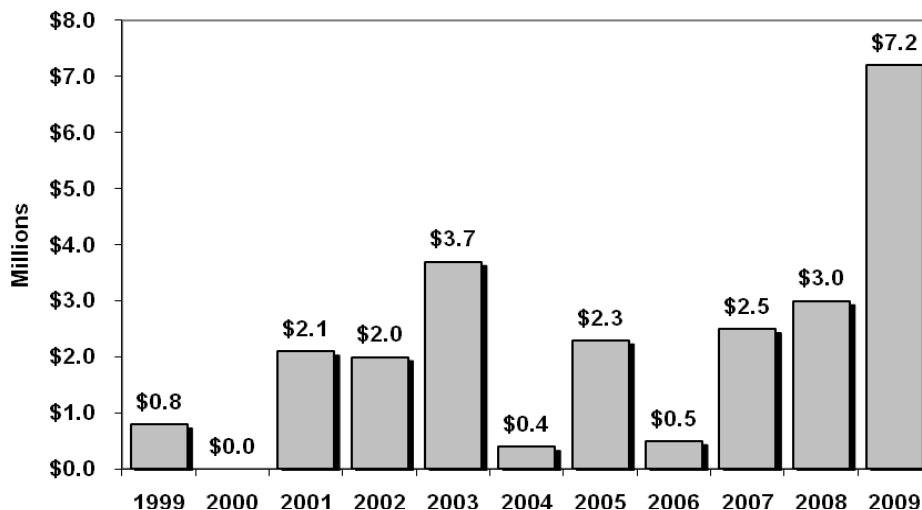
⁵⁸ State of Connecticut Public Act 07-162.

History of Lump Sum Bonding (effective July 1, 2007)

Due	Aug-2007	Feb-2008	Aug-2008	Feb-2009	Aug-2009	Feb-2010	Aug-2010	Feb-2011
Allocated	Dec-2007	Feb-2008	Dec-2008	Apr-2009	Sep-2009	Mar-2010		
Amount	\$5,000,000	\$5,000,000	\$5,000,000	\$5,000,000	\$5,000,000	\$5,075,288		

An important aspect of the state PDR program is its ability to leverage federal, local, and private resources. For example, from 1999 to 2009 the PDR program partnered with towns on 12 farmland protection projects that also received funding through the federal Farm and Ranch Lands Protection Program. The state's \$3 million investment in these 12 projects leveraged an additional \$3 million in federal and \$1.9 million in town investments. During the same period, the state leveraged a total of \$10.8 million through the federal Farm and Ranch Lands Protection Program (this includes the \$3 million contribution to the 12 joint state-town projects). This leveraging has helped minimize the impact of rising real estate values that have driven up the cost of protecting farmland. The average price paid per acre over the past decade through the PDR program was \$3,472 per acre; in 2009, the average was \$5,241.

**Connecticut Farmland Preservation Program:
Spending on Completed Projects by Calendar Year**



Program Demand

In the 1990s, erratic funding commitments led to long application delays, which caused many landowners to abandon their applications to the program or avoid it altogether. In the past few years, the program has reported an increase in both quality and quantity of applications due to more funding stability and shorter waiting periods. Because the application process typically

takes 18 months to 2 years to complete, the boost in funding that the program received in FY05-FY07 is now beginning to be reflected in project closings.

As of February 2010, the program is close to finalizing 24 farm projects, representing 2,282 acres, at a cost of \$13.6 million. An additional 15 farms are being appraised and are under negotiation, and another eight priority applications are now being processed. As a result of the March 16th lump sum bonding approval, there is currently sufficient funding allocated for these 47 projects. Any additional farm projects will require additional bonding; currently there is \$10 million in outstanding capital bonding authorized for FY11.

PDR PIPELINE – as of March 2010	Cost to State	Qty	Acres
Farms pending closing (completing final survey, title, Attorney General approval)	\$13,638,876	24	2,282
Farms waiting for State Property Review	\$1,537,625	2	340
Farms with negotiated offers from state	\$3,029,250	4	326
Farms being appraised	\$5,120,000	6	920
Farms ready for configuration and appraisal requests	\$3,350,000	3	695
New farm applications prioritized	\$5,000,000	8	900
Total	\$31,675,751	47	5,463
FUNDING AVAILABLE			
Farmland Preservation Bond Account	\$30,075,288		
Farmland Preservation - Community Investment Act Account	\$6,463,000		
Total	\$36,538,288		

Program Results - Promoting Financial Stability and Reinvestment in Agriculture

Selling a farm’s development rights offers landowners an important alternative to development as a way to fund retirement, family expenses, or an expansion of the farm business. A 2006 survey of owners of farmland in the PDR Program found that 62% of respondents used the proceeds from the sale of development rights to improve their financial stability; 36% paid down debt, and 26% used proceeds for general savings or investment.⁵⁹ In the same survey, 80% of respondents said owning protected farmland had a very or somewhat positive impact on their family’s ability to stay in farming, and 76% reported that owning a protected farm made it likely or somewhat likely that the farm would be passed on their children or another family member.⁶⁰

⁵⁹ CT Dept. of Agriculture and American Farmland Trust, *Connecticut Farmland Preservation Program Survey: Highlighted Findings*, 2008.

⁶⁰ Ibid.

American Farmland Trust has found that farmers who participate in state PDR programs feel more secure about investing in the agricultural potential of the land.⁶¹ The 2006 survey of the state PDR program participants underscores this point. Many farmers had made recent changes to their farm businesses as a result of having their land protected: 17% constructed or improved farm buildings; 16% bought new farm equipment; 10% increased tillable acreage. In the prior five-year period, 25% of respondents branched out into new crops or different livestock or created new products from current crops. Seventy-seven percent of respondents stated they would be very likely to continue farming over the next 5 to 10 years.

Benefits of the CT Farmland Preservation Program

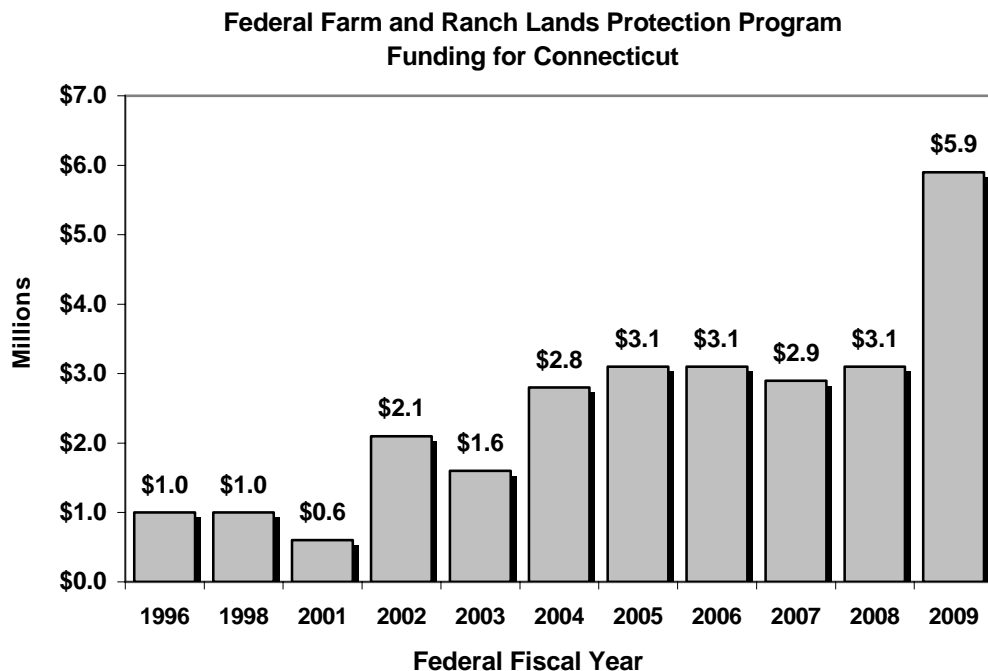
- It gives farmers access to capital to strengthen their farming operations and invest in farm infrastructure that continue to provide jobs, income, and stimulate local economies.
- It gives farmers an option from having to sell their land for development to fund their retirement or address health care issues.
- It can assist farmland owners with estate planning and successful transfer to farming heirs.
- It helps farmers become more financially stable.
- It is the principal method of securing affordable farmland for the next generation of farmers.
- It is the only policy tool that will permanently protect prime agricultural soils in order to boost long-term food security.
- It is a vital investment in maintaining our stream corridors, woodlands, wetlands, groundwater recharge systems, flood control, wildlife habitats, biodiversity, and carbon sequestration.
- It is an indirect investment in the secondary tier of food manufacturers and processors, farm equipment wholesalers, farm supply stores, produce distributors, machinery repair shops, fuel suppliers, and garden centers that helps create viable local economies.
- Protected farmland remains privately owned, allowing farmers to steward the land while paying taxes on it.
- It directs resources toward prime and important soils as opposed to marginal lands. Farming prime and important soils requires the fewest inputs and has a lower risk of environmental impacts.

⁶¹ American Farmland Trust, Investing in the Future of Agriculture: *The Massachusetts Farmland Protection Program and the Permanence Syndrome*, 1998; American Farmland Trust, *The Impact of Vermont's Farmland Conservation Program on Program Participants*, 1999.

Federal Farm and Ranch Lands Protection Program

Since 1996 the federal Farm and Ranch Lands Protection Program (FRPP), administered by USDA's Natural Resources Conservation Service, has partnered with eligible entities in Connecticut to purchase development rights on farmland. Funding allocated to Connecticut for the program since 1996 has totaled \$28.5 million, with most of that funding received since 2003. Of that amount, over \$17 million has been used in conjunction with the PDR Program to help finance the purchase of easements through that program. The remaining funds have been used in conjunction with partnering land trusts and towns.

FRPP has been an extremely important partner in farmland protection efforts in Connecticut since 2003. The program has provided a valuable impetus for continued state funding for the PDR program and has helped to accelerate municipal and private fundraising around the state. The program has also provided technical staff to promote and educate the public, elected officials, and potential partners about farmland preservation tools and funding. Importantly, the program provides a potential source of matching funds for farmland protection projects that may not qualify for the state PDR program because of size or location; a number of FRPP projects have involved farm parcels that the state considers too small.



Thanks in large part to the efforts of Rep. Rosa DeLauro, the 2008 Farm Bill provides a significant increase in FRPP funding over the next five years, ratcheting up from \$97 million nationally in FY08 to \$200 million in FY12. Equally important for Connecticut is the 2008 Farm Bill's increase in the "regional equity" provision—a provision that recognizes the value of federal conservation programs to every state and stipulates that each state receive a minimum

annual allocation of Farm Bill conservation program funding provided there is sufficient program demand in the state. Given strong demand for FRPP funds in Connecticut, the \$15 million minimum allocation (up from \$12 million) that the state is likely to receive each year should translate into additional FRPP funding for the state over the next few years.

CT Open Space & Watershed Acquisition Program

The Open Space & Watershed Acquisition Program of the CT Dept. of Environmental Protection (DEP) is another source of funding for the purchase of development rights on farmland. In the 14 Open Space Grant rounds that have taken place since the fall of 1998, the DEP has provided funding to protect a total of 8,795 acres of active or formerly active farmland (total of 99 projects) through the purchase of a conservation easement or acquisition of the property through a purchase of land in fee simple. Only 8% of all Open Space Grant projects have provided funding for conservation easements; the remainder is for fee-simple purchases. Since this program is designed for open space preservation, it would be useful to determine how much of the farmland protected through this program continues to be used for agricultural production.

Municipal Farmland Protection Efforts

Connecticut's 169 municipalities rely heavily on property taxes to pay for schools and services, making town residents highly sensitive toward any changes in their municipal taxes. Nevertheless, there has been a steady record of successful municipal bonding referendums for the preservation of farmland. The overwhelming success of municipal bond issues for farmland preservation appears to be driven by a growing interest in local food, as well as an appreciation for non-market goods, such as scenic views, outdoor recreation, wildlife habitats, and insulation from urban noise and suburban sprawl.

Recently, more and more towns are conducting inventories of their local farmland. In addition to identifying prime and important farmland soils, some towns have also identified 'locally important' soils in consultation with USDA-NRCS. These soils have slightly more limitations for agriculture, such as surface stones, but may nonetheless be vital to local farm operations. So far, the following towns have identified their locally important soils: Ashford, Canterbury, Chaplin, Eastford, Lebanon, and New Milford. Although the state PDR program scores applications based on the quantity of prime and important soils, the FRPP program considers prime, important, as well as some 'locally important' soils as eligible for funding.

Recent Municipal Farmland Protection Efforts⁶²

Town (year)	Purpose	Funding
Ashford (2007)	Conservation easement on 141 acres (partners with CT Dept of Ag, land trust and NRCS FRPP)	\$120,607
East Haddam (2009)	Share of fee acquisition on 262 acres	\$500,000
Ellington (2007)	Bond referendum to create dedicated fund for conservation easements for farmland	\$2,000,000
Glastonbury (2004)	Bond referendum to create dedicated fund for conservation easements and land acquisition	\$4,000,000
Glastonbury (2006)	Conservation easement on 26 acres (partners with land trust)	\$675,000
Glastonbury (2007)	Bond referendum to create dedicated fund for conservation easements and land acquisition	\$4,000,000
Granby (2009)	Conservation easement on 65 acres (partners with CT Dept of Ag and land trust)	\$120,000
Lebanon (2007)	Dedicated open space and farmland protection fund (annual contribution from budget)	\$100,000
Mansfield (2006)	Bond referendum for dedicated fund for open space, farmland, and recreational lands	\$1,000,000
Middletown (2009)	Conservation easement on 24 acres	\$250,000
Middletown (2008)	Conservation easement on 45 acres	\$250,000
New Hartford (2009)	Conservation easement on 59 acres (partners with CT DEP and land trust)	\$365,000
Newington (2005)	Conservation easement on 61 acres (partners with CT Dept of Ag and land trust)	\$2,700,000
Newtown (2007)	Conservation easement on 74 acres (partners with CT DEP and land trust)	\$1,500,000
Pomfret (2007)	Conservation easement on 100 acres (partners with CT Dept of Ag and NRCS FRPP)	\$125,000
Pomfret (2009)	Conservation easement on 93 acres (partners with CT Dept of Ag)	\$103,106
Shelton (2006)	Dedicated fund to protect open space and farmland (annual contribution from budget)	\$250,000
Shelton (2006)	Conservation easement on 140 acres (partners with NRCS FRPP)	\$3,400,000
Simsbury (2005)	Conservation easement on 164 acres (partners with land trust and NRCS FRPP)	\$100,000
Southbury (2004)	Conservation easement on 96 acres (partners with two land trusts and NRCS FRPP)	\$250,000
Southbury (2005)	Conservation easement on 36 acres (partners with land trust and NRCS FRPP)	\$250,000
Southbury (2007)	Conservation easement on 43 acres (partners with land trust and NRCS FRPP)	\$240,000
Southbury (2007)	Conservation easement on 46 acres (partners with land trust and NRCS FRPP)	\$205,000
Suffield (2004)	Conservation easement on 67 acres (partners with CT Dept of Ag and NRCS FRPP)	\$148,500
Suffield (2005)	Conservation easement on 109 acres (partners with CT Dept of Ag and NRCS FRPP)	\$207,500
Suffield (2005)	Conservation easement on 43 acres (partners with NRCS FRPP)	\$215,730
Suffield (2006)	Conservation easement on 88 acres (partners with CT Dept of Ag and USDA – FPP)	\$171,250
Suffield (2007)	Conservation easement on 91 acres (partners with CT Dept of Ag and NRCS FRPP)	\$240,000
Suffield (2007)	Conservation easement on 88 acres (partners with CT Dept of Ag and NRCS FRPP)	\$173,451
Suffield (2008)	Conservation easement on 36 acres (partners with CT Dept of Ag)	\$144,400
Tolland (2005)	Conservation easement on 155 acres (partners with NRCS FRPP)	\$365,000
Tolland (2006)	Bond referendum to create dedicated fund for open space, farmland and recreational lands	\$2,000,000
Wethersfield (2006)	Bond referendum to create dedicated fund for open space, farmland and recreational lands	\$4,000,000
Woodstock (2005)	Conservation easement on 90 acres (partners with CT Dept of Ag, land trust and NRCS FRPP)	\$164,000
Woodstock (2006)	Conservation easement on 109 acres (partners with CT Dept of Ag and NRCS FRPP)	\$163,500

⁶² To the best of our knowledge, the chart illustrates municipal farmland protection efforts since 2004, although some town expenditures may not be captured. In many cases landowners may have donated a portion of the easement value, or land trusts may have raised money locally for projects; these essential contributions are not captured here. “Funding” may not include all associated costs with land acquisition or conservation easements such as appraisals, surveys, title searches, professional and attorney fees.

State Goal for Farmland Protection

The State of Connecticut currently has a goal of permanently preserving 130,000 acres of farmland. This goal was developed in two steps. The first step involved a report in 1980 by Irving Fellows and Patrick Cody, *A Food Production Plan for Connecticut, 1980-2000*. That report recommended the purchase of development rights on approximately 85,000 acres of superior cropland by 2000 in order to feed a projected population of 3.5 million residents with an improved supply of local food products relative to 1976 production-consumption levels of locally grown food products.⁶³ The second step involved a determination by the CT Department of Agriculture that a typical farm in the PDR program consisted of 65% prime farmland soils (referred to as 'superior land' by Fellows and Cody). In order to protect 85,000 acres of prime farmland soils, the agency's staff recommended that the state preserve approximately 130,000 acres of farmland.⁶⁴

Setting a New Goal for Farmland Protection?

After 30 years, the PDR program has reached only 27% of the state goal. At this rate, the program will reach its goal around 2090, by which time continued farmland loss might have made the goal obsolete. A new goal that is ambitious but also within reach would focus state leaders and advocates on a clear agenda and timeline. Below is a list of new goals that are intended to serve as a starting point for discussion.

Possible New Farmland Protection Goals

(Underlined numbers are for illustrative purpose only)

- No net loss of farmland.
- Between 2010 and 2020, protect 25,000 acres of farmland.
- Double the rate of farmland preservation to 3,000 acres per year
- Permanently protect 25% of the agricultural land base by 2030.
- Reduce the loss of farmland to development by 50%.
- Protect enough agricultural land in order to meet 30% of caloric and 30% of energy needs for future demand in 2050.
- By 2030, 30% of the agricultural land base – including field and forest – will be protected in the 5 targeted zones with highest density of prime and important soils.
- By 2030, every municipality in the State of Connecticut will have adopted policies in order to meet its own local food production, local food access and, if relevant, farmland protection goals.

⁶³ Fellows, I. and Cody, P., University of Connecticut, *A Food Production Plan for Connecticut, 1980 – 2000*, 1980.

⁶⁴ In 1974, the Report of the Governor's Task Force for the Preservation of Agricultural Land, recommended reserving at least 325,000 acres of farmland to provide about a third of its food (including milk, eggs, vegetables, potatoes, and apples). The land should be reserved for growing food. At the time, there was about 500,000 acres under farmer management (163,000 acres of crop land, 125,000 acres of pasture, and the rest 'ties the farm together').

Ideally, a new goal would help practitioners and advocates measure their collective success. Just as the original goal was shaped by public anxiety about rising food prices and dependency on outside food sources, a new goal should also make use of current public concerns over climate change, food and energy security, and public health. For example, a new goal could emphasize energy needs, local food or caloric needs, rates of farmland protection versus loss to development, or simply a revised acreage goal in keeping with realistic expectations.

Many of these goals would require new research and data collection methodologies. Some work currently underway to measure the capacity of New England states to increase their production and consumption of regionally produced foods may provide some useful data. There has also been some discussion of identifying targeted regions in the state for increased farmland preservation as part of a smart growth strategy. Current legislation to create a state registry of protected open space and farmland could also help. If stakeholders choose to embrace a new goal, it could facilitate a more efficient marshalling of resources toward developing a practical baseline of information and new tracking methodologies.

Gaps in Farmland Data

- What is the total number of protected farmland acres in Connecticut?
- How is protected farmland currently being used?
- What are current public attitudes toward farmland preservation?
- How much farmland would be needed to improve the diets of Connecticut residents?
- What is the average price farmers pay per acre for protected farmland (vs. unprotected farmland)?