



Conservation Options for Connecticut Farmland

A Guide for Landowners, Land Trusts and Municipalities

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griculture is deeply rooted in Connecticut. For generations, farms and farmers have been a cornerstone of communities throughout the state, supplying a bounty of fresh food and produce and providing local jobs and tax revenues, pastoral views and recreational opportunities, wildlife habitat and flood control. Yet increasingly, Connecticut's agriculture is being uprooted, as farms give way to subdivisions and suburban sprawl has made farming a logistical and economic challenge. The escalating loss of farmland is threatening not just the viability of an industry but also the state's rural legacy and landscape.

Conservation Options for Connecticut Farmland describes farmland protection options and programs available in Connecticut and answers some frequently asked questions about agricultural conservation easements. This guide also identifies land conservation and stewardship programs that provide technical and financial assistance to farmers and landowners for a variety of natural resource concerns and objectives. Contact information for the agencies referenced in the guide can be found on the back cover along with information about local nonprofit organizations that are working to build public support for farmland protection, help landowners find ways to protect their farmland and provide assistance to towns and organizations interested in sustaining agriculture in their communities.

Farmland Protection Options

In Connecticut, the most common farmland protection tool is the *agricultural conservation easement*. A conservation easement is a deed restriction that landowners voluntarily place on part or all of their land. The easement limits development in order to protect the land's natural resources. An agricultural conservation easement is an easement specifically designed for agricultural land.

Agricultural conservation easements can be *donated*, usually to a nonprofit land trust, or *sold* to a public agency or qualified conservation organization through a "purchase of development rights" (PDR) program. PDR programs go by many different names, including "purchase of agricultural conservation easement" (PACE) programs. Connecticut's primary PDR program, administered by the Department of Agriculture, is called the *Farmland Preservation Program* (state PDR program). The federal program that provides cost-share assistance to states, towns and land trusts to help fund the purchase of development rights is known as the *Farm and Ranch Lands Protection Program* (FRPP).

Landowners also can combine the sale and donation of an agricultural conservation easement through a

bargain sale. In a bargain sale, a landowner sells an easement at less than its fair market value, taking a charitable deduction on the donated portion of the easement.

Whether to donate or to sell an easement, or how much of a donation to make as part of a bargain sale, is often a complex decision that is influenced by a landowner's income level, tax bracket, basis in the property, business and/or personal objectives and the availability of town, state or federal funding for the purchase of development rights.

Facts About Agricultural Conservation Easements

Are you a landowner contemplating the sale or donation of an agricultural conservation easement? The following answers to frequently asked questions about easements should help you understand some of the legal, financial and practical implications of placing an easement on your property.

What is an agricultural conservation easement?

An agricultural conservation easement is a deed restriction that landowners donate or are paid to place on their property. Typically, an easement permanently restricts residential and non-farm commercial development of the property. The landowner retains ownership of the land, and the easement is held by the entity to which the easement has been donated or sold. The entity that holds the easement is responsible for ensuring that the terms of the easement are upheld. Most easements are perpetual; those that are not are generally referred to as “term” easements.

Why should I donate or sell an agricultural conservation easement?

For many farmers and landowners who own farmland, their land is their primary asset. The sale of development rights provides landowners with a significant source of capital to improve or diversify a farm operation, purchase additional land, pay off debt, offer an inheritance to non-farming children or meet family financial needs without having to sell some or all of their land. For some landowners, donating an easement—or selling an easement at less than its appraised value—provides certain tax advantages, since the donated value of the easement can be taken as a charitable deduction from federal income taxes.

Does my land qualify?

Eligibility depends on whether you are donating or selling an easement, and to whom.

Most land trusts have criteria they use to decide whether or not to accept the donation of a conservation easement on farmland. Typically, these criteria consider the type and extent of a property’s agricultural and other natural resources. Most land trusts do not require a minimum acreage of farmland or that the property be in active agricultural use.

To qualify for the state’s PDR program, the property must be actively farmed, include at least 30 acres of cropland and have a high percentage of prime or important agricultural soils. To qualify for the federal FRPP, land must be actively farmed and have either prime or important agricultural soils or historic or archeological resources. The Connecticut *Open Space and Watershed Land Acquisition Grant Program* (state Open Space Grant Program), which can be used by towns and land trusts to help finance the purchase of farmland and agricultural conservation easements, has no minimum acreage requirement but gives preference to land with a diversity of natural resources.

Landowners generally can negotiate how much of their land to place under easement. While easements can be written to exclude farm residences and buildings entirely, most easements include the farm’s existing houses and farm buildings. Wetlands and forested land that are part of a farm can be included in the easement but may be excluded at the landowner’s choosing.

Graywall Farm Using PDR Funding to Expand an Operation

Robin Chesmer didn’t grow up thinking he would be a dairy farmer, but now he and his son Lincoln run an impressive 300-cow dairy on 700 acres in Lebanon, Conn. A key component to their success: the Connecticut Farmland Preservation Program (state PDR program).

Chesmer’s first farmland purchase was possible because of the state PDR program. A local dairy farmer who owned 185 acres of farmland wanted to retire; Chesmer wanted to buy the farm but couldn’t afford it at its full market value.

After three years of leasing the farm to Chesmer, the farmer sold the development rights through the state PDR program, and Chesmer bought the property at its agricultural value. Graywall Farm was born.

Since then, the Chesmers have used the PDR program two more times to expand their farm—buying through an estate settlement 135 acres of support farmland, which they enrolled in the PDR program, and purchasing an additional 200 acres of cropland that was already protected through the program. In all, 525 acres of their 700-acre farm are protected with agricultural conservation easements.

“People who want to see their farm remain in agriculture need to take the steps to make that happen,” says Robin, who now sits on the board of the Connecticut Farmland Trust. “Selling your development rights is one way of doing that.” Adds Lincoln: “We definitely wouldn’t be farming in Connecticut without the state PDR program.”



Courtesy of Connecticut Farmland Trust

Will an easement require a change in how I farm?

Probably not. Most agricultural conservation easements are flexible and written to allow farmers to farm as they see fit. For example, the state PDR program easements allow landowners to install agriculture-related improvements such as fencing, irrigation systems and manure storage facilities, some of which may require approval. Farmers may also plant or raise any type of agricultural commodity. The federal FRPP requires landowners to develop and implement farm conservation plans; other easements require landowners to farm according to best agricultural management practices. Because it limits the construction of agricultural-related structures, the state Open Space Grant Program is more restrictive in its easements than the state PDR program or the federal FRPP.

What improvements can I make to my property?

Easements limit subdivision, residential and non-agricultural commercial development and other uses that would adversely affect the property's agricultural resources. Most permit development related to the farm operation and allow construction of farm buildings, retail farm stands and farm labor housing, though some easements may limit new construction to a designated "farmstead area" or limit the total amount of new construction. When existing houses and buildings are included in an easement, most easements allow for improvements to or reconstruction of those buildings. Some easements also allow a landowner to reserve one or more future residential building lots. When an easement provides for a future house lot, the location of the lot(s) is usually designated at the time the easement is drafted and size or other restrictions may apply.

Is public access required?

Most agricultural conservation easements do *not* require public access. The exception is the state Open Space Grant Program, which requires some public access on land protected through its program. Most easements do not either require or prohibit such non-commercial recreational uses of the property as hunting, fishing, horseback riding and snowmobiling. The landowner retains the right to allow or restrict those uses.

Can I sell my property to whomever I choose?

Yes. Landowners can transfer or sell their property to anyone they choose, at any price they can get. However, all future owners of the property are required to abide by the terms of the easement. A small number of easements require that landowners who sell their property give a right of first refusal to the entity that holds the easement.

Who pays the property taxes?

The landowner remains responsible for all property taxes and must still apply to the local tax assessor to be eligible for Public Act 490, Connecticut's use value assessment law. However, once enrolled in Public Act 490, land protected with a permanent conservation easement is not subject to a tax penalty when sold or transferred.

Public Act 490: Saving Farmland Saves Money

In Connecticut, Public Act 490 is helping to keep working farms and forest lands part of the state's landscape. By allowing farm and forest land to be assessed at its current use value rather than its "highest and best use" value for purposes of local property taxes, it reduces the sizeable tax burden that many farmers and owners of working lands would otherwise face. Without use value assessment, most landowners would be unable to afford the property taxes on farms and forest land.

Use value assessment is not a subsidy for farmers and large landowners, since farm and forest land require far less in municipal services than does land devoted to residential use. In fact, even when taxed at its current use value, farmland generates a fiscal surplus that towns use to offset the high costs of residential services. For example, a Cost of Community Services study done by American Farmland Trust for Hebron, Conn., found that working and open lands cost the town \$.43 in services for every tax dollar generated, while the residential sector cost \$1.06.

To qualify for Public Act 490, landowners must apply to the local tax assessor. Once land has been classified as eligible, it remains eligible until the use of the land changes or the land is sold. If land enrolled in Public Act 490 is sold or taken out of agricultural production, landowners may face a tax penalty.

What if I can no longer farm my land?

An agricultural conservation easement generally does not *require* that the land subject to the easement be actively farmed. An easement can only ensure that the land is protected from incompatible uses, so it will always remain available for agricultural use.

Will a conservation easement affect my mortgage?

It may, because an easement limits the future uses of the property. Depending on the amount of the mortgage or other monetary lien on the property, the mortgage or lien will need to be discharged prior to the easement or subordinated to the easement.

Donating an Agricultural Conservation Easement

Many land trusts in Connecticut accept donations of easements on farmland, including Connecticut Farmland Trust, a statewide land trust dedicated specifically to farmland protection. Landowners may also donate an easement to a municipality or to the state through the state PDR program, provided the land qualifies for the program.

Tax Considerations

The donation of an agricultural conservation easement generally qualifies as a tax-deductible charitable gift. This means a landowner can claim the value of the easement as a federal income tax deduction. The value of an agricultural conservation easement is the difference between the property's fair market value (the "before" value) and its value as restricted by the easement (the "after" value), as determined by a qualified appraiser within one year of the donation. While the entire value of the easement is deductible, the federal tax code limits the amount a landowner can deduct in a single year to 30 percent of his or her adjusted gross income. Any remaining deduction can be "carried forward" each year for an additional five years.

For corporate landowners, there is an additional state business tax credit available for the donation of an agricultural conservation easement. Corporations that donate an easement can take a tax credit equal to 50 percent of the value of the easement and may carry forward any unused credit for 10 years.

Since federal and state tax law changes frequently, landowners considering a donation should consult with a tax advisor regarding current applicable federal and state conservation tax provisions.

Stewardship Endowments

Some land trusts request that a landowner who donates an agricultural conservation easement also make a cash contribution to offset the land trust's cost of stewardship. Many land trusts ask for a "stewardship endowment" because the land trust is obligated to

monitor and enforce the terms of the easement in perpetuity. While the landowner who has donated the easement is likely to understand and abide by the easement's terms, issues may arise when the property is sold to a landowner who was not involved in the easement negotiation and may not understand or may choose to ignore its terms. Stewardship endowments make it possible for land trusts to ensure that the easement's terms are enforced in perpetuity. A contribution to a land trust for stewardship purposes is also deductible as a charitable donation.

Selling an Agricultural Conservation Easement

Selling a farm's development rights can provide landowners with an important source of capital to expand or diversify a farm operation, provide for retirement, buy out non-farming members of the family or address other financial needs while ensuring that the farm is protected for future generations. Since demand for the state and federal PDR programs far exceeds available funds, the process can be slow and frustrating. There is room for optimism, however. In 2002, Congress significantly increased funding for the federal FRPP. This should increase the cost-share money available from the federal government in 2003 through 2007 to help buy development rights. Towns and land trusts are also becoming more active partners in farmland protection projects, mounting successful fundraising campaigns and contributing a greater percentage of project costs.

Tax Considerations

The value of a property's development rights is determined by a qualified appraiser and is the difference between the property's fair market value and its value as restricted by the easement. The proceeds from a sale of development rights are subject to federal and state capital gains taxes. Depending on the source of the funding, landowners may be able to spread out the capital gain over a period of years by taking the proceeds from the sale in *installments*. Some landowners may find it advantageous to do a *bargain sale* and/or a *like-kind exchange* to reduce their capital gains exposure.



Aerial from www.GISvetnam.com

Jones Family Farms

Using Bargain Sales and Like-Kind Exchanges

Terry Jones and his wife, Jean, are the fifth generation of Joneses to farm the family land in Shelton, Conn. So when they decided to sell the development rights on part of the farm that had been passed down through several generations, they realized that, with no cost basis, the capital gain would be significant. They also realized that, given the estimated \$14,000 per acre cost of the development rights, they would need to agree to a bargain sale to make the deal happen.

The deal did happen, with Terry and Jean making use of both a bargain sale and an innovative like-kind exchange. A like-kind exchange is essentially a tax-free swap of similar or “like-kind” property. In this case, the Joneses used the proceeds from the sale of development rights to purchase additional nearby farmland of almost identical value. By “swapping” property rather than receiving cash from the sale, the Joneses avoided paying any capital gains tax on the sale (though, should they ever sell the land they received in the swap, they would be required to pay capital gains tax on it). They also made use of a charitable tax deduction from the bargain sale.

“We need to be innovative in protecting our productive land base for sustainable farming operations,” says Terry, who successfully encouraged the Town of Shelton to establish a local purchase of development rights program. “A bargain sale and like-kind exchange made it possible for us to gain needed cropland and buffer our farm from urban housing sprawl.”



Purchase of Development Rights Programs

The following programs are available in Connecticut as a source of funding for the purchase of development rights. The amount of money available in each of these programs fluctuates every year, depending on how much the state legislature or Congress, in the case of the federal program, allocates to the programs. To find out how much money is currently available, it is best to contact each program directly.

Connecticut Farmland Preservation Program (state PDR program)

Connecticut Department of Agriculture

The state’s PDR program, established in 1978, is working toward its goal of protecting 130,000 acres of Connecticut’s most productive farmland. As of September 2003, the program had protected over 29,000 acres on more than 200 farms, including

more than 18,000 acres of farmland with prime or important agricultural soils. Only landowners may apply to the program, and the program may pay up to 100 percent of the appraised fair market value of the development rights.

In 1986, the Connecticut legislature established the *Joint State-Town Farmland Preservation Program* to encourage towns to establish local farmland preservation programs. Administered in conjunction with the state PDR program, the Joint State-Town Farmland Preservation Program provides for the joint purchase of development rights by the state and a town, provided the town has a policy in support of farmland and has an agricultural land preservation fund. Towns may solicit applications to the state PDR program from willing landowners; once a landowner in an eligible town applies to the state PDR program, the state and town work together with the landowner to purchase the property’s development rights.

Connecticut Open Space and Watershed Land Acquisition Grant Program (Open Space Grant Program)

Connecticut Department of Environmental Protection

This program was established in 1998 to help towns, nonprofit conservation organizations and water companies permanently protect important community lands, including local farmland. It can be used to fund the purchase of farmland outright or the purchase of development rights on farmland. Landowners cannot apply directly to the program but must work with a sponsoring town, water company or land conservation organization. The program provides a maximum of 50 percent of a project's cost.

Farm and Ranch Lands Protection Program (FRPP)

U.S. Department of Agriculture/Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS)

The FRPP is a federal cost-share program that helps fund the purchase of development rights on productive farmland. Landowners cannot apply directly to the program but must work with a sponsoring entity, which can be the state of Connecticut, a municipality or a land conservation organization. The FRPP provides a maximum of 50 percent of a project's cost.

Additional information—including eligibility requirements, selection criteria and application information—for each program can be found on page 8.

Other Potential Sources of Funding

There are a few other potential sources of PDR funding in Connecticut. The primary purpose of the following programs is not farmland protection; however, funds from these programs can be used for that purpose, with certain limitations.

Forest Legacy Program

U.S. Department of Agriculture, in cooperation with Connecticut Department of Environmental Protection/Division of Forestry

This is a U.S. Forest Service program administered by the Division of Forestry in the state Department of Environmental Protection. The program funds the purchase of conservation easements on working forestland that is threatened by development. Forest Legacy funds may be used to purchase development rights on farmland, provided the farmland is part of a parcel that contains a minimum of 75 percent forestland. The program funds up to 75 percent of the cost of the development rights, and participating landowners must prepare a multiple resource management plan. Applications are accepted at any time.

Grassland Reserve Program (GRP)

U.S. Department of Agriculture/NRCS and Farm Services Agency (FSA)

A new program established in the 2002 Farm Bill, the GRP is designed to protect and restore grasslands through the use of permanent easements, long-term easements and short-term rental agreements. Eligible lands are parcels historically dominated by grasses or shrubs that are generally greater than 40 acres. Landowners with eligible property can choose to sell their development rights, sell a 30-year easement (for which they would be paid 30 percent of the value of the easement) or enter into a 10-, 15-, 20- or 30-year contract and receive annual rental payments. Cost-share payments for eligible restoration practices are also available. Enrolled land may be hayed or grazed; some management restrictions may apply. Applications are accepted continuously.

Scenic Byways Program

U.S. Department of Transportation, in cooperation with Connecticut Department of Transportation

Administered by the state Department of Transportation, this federal program is a potential source of funding for the purchase of easements on farmland along designated scenic roads in Connecticut. Grant applications are submitted to the state Department of Transportation, which prioritizes applications and forwards them on to the Federal Highway Administration. A list of designated scenic roads is available from the state Scenic Highways Coordinator at the state Department of Transportation.



Courtesy of USDA NRCS, Connecticut

Comparison of PDR Programs in Connecticut

	Farmland Preservation Program Connecticut Department of Agriculture	Open Space and Watershed Land Acquisition Grant Program Connecticut Department of Environmental Protection (DEP)	Farm and Ranch Lands Protection Program USDA/NRCS
Who may apply?	Landowners	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Municipalities • Water companies • Nonprofit conservation organizations 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Municipalities • States • Nonprofit conservation organizations
Eligibility requirements	<p>Property must</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • be part of an active farm operation; • include a minimum of 30 acres of cropland or be adjacent to a larger parcel; and • have some prime or important agricultural soils. 	<p>Program can be used to purchase development rights on farmland or farmland in fee.</p> <p>No minimum acreage or prime agricultural soils required.</p>	<p>Property must</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • be part of active farm operation; and • have prime or important agricultural soils <i>or</i> have historic or archeological resources. <p>Applicant must have pending written offer with landowner.</p>
Selection criteria	<p>Priority given to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • land with high % of prime and important agricultural soils; and • land in proximity to other farmland, protected lands and farm services. 	<p>Priority given to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • land vulnerable to development; • projects that comply with local and/or regional open space plans or plans of conservation and development; • land with diverse categories of natural resources; and • projects with pending written offer with landowner. 	<p>Priority given to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • land vulnerable to development; • land with high % of prime and important agricultural soils; • projects with high % of non-federal matching funds; and • projects with some non-federal matching funds in hand.
Cost-share requirements	State may pay up to 100% of fair market value (FMV) of development rights.	State will pay up to 50% of either FMV of development rights or purchase price, whichever is less.	The FRPP will pay up to 50% of FMV of development rights. Applicant must provide cash match of either 25% of development rights value or 50% of purchase price. Landowner donations of up to 25% of development rights value may be considered part of applicant's match.
Easement requirements	Only agricultural and compatible uses permitted. Property may never be subdivided or converted to non-agricultural use. No public access required.	Public access required. Limited agriculture-related structures permitted on protected land.	USDA farm conservation plan required. USDA easement language required.
Application period	Applications accepted continuously. Applications must be approved by State Properties Review Board and State Bond Commission.	Applications accepted during announced grant rounds. DEP approves applications with input from Conn. Dept. of Ag., Conn. Dept. of Health and relevant DEP divisions.	Applications accepted during annual announced Request For Proposals periods. The USDA/NRCS approves applications.

Putting It All Together—Suffield Sets an Example

Suffield's goal is an ambitious one; its Plan of Conservation and Development calls for protecting 50 percent of the town as open space, including farmland. The town is using all the tools available to make good on that goal.

In 2001, the town launched a successful farmers' market held Saturdays during the summer on the town green. The market provides a direct outlet for local farmers and helps raise public awareness of Suffield's farm community. The town has also conducted an education workshop to inform farmers and other large-property owners about various land preservation options.

In 2002, the town applied to both the state Farmland Preservation Program and the federal Farm and Ranch Lands Protection Program to purchase the development rights to two farms, at a total cost of \$1,000,000. The applications were approved in 2003. The federal and state programs each paid 37.5 percent, or \$375,000, of the cost. Suffield contributed \$250,000, or 25 percent, of the cost.

The town also recently used the state Open Space Grant Program to help fund the purchase of a 125-acre farm along the Connecticut River. The town contributed half the cost of the project, or \$600,000, and now owns the farm outright. It plans to lease much of the farm to local farmers and will use some of the farmland for passive recreation and bald eagle nesting habitat.

How has Suffield come up with the funding to match these programs? From a variety of sources, according to Phil Chester, the Town Planner. Since the late 1990s, Suffield has set aside \$65,000 to \$125,000 annually in its budget for open space and farmland preservation. It has collected approximately \$100,000 from developers in fees-in-lieu of open space. It has also sought funding from local and regional foundations.



Courtesy of Patrick McManon

Suffield Farmers' Market

Suffield is also protecting farmland through its land use regulations. It recently adopted a conservation subdivision regulation that requires the permanent protection of one-third of the land in any subdivision over 30 acres. Under this regulation the town has already conserved several parcels of productive farmland that it is leasing to local farmers. In addition, Suffield requires developers to provide an agricultural buffer or green space between their development and an abutting farm. This ensures that farmers can continue to operate without fear of becoming a "nuisance" to nearby residents.



Courtesy of Patrick McManon

Suffield farm preserved through the town, the state and the FRPP

Land Conservation and Stewardship Programs

Many Connecticut landowners—including towns and land trusts—are unaware of the variety of programs that provide technical and/or financial assistance to help improve stewardship and conservation on private working lands. For example, landowners can get help developing a forest management plan for their farm's woodlot and then financial assistance to help carry out the plan. They can also get help with the cost of fencing to keep livestock out of streams and other water bodies. There also is funding available to help landowners offset the costs of managing farmland for wildlife habitat.

Below are programs available to farmers and landowners in Connecticut that can be used to plan, develop and implement a variety of farm conservation and stewardship practices.

Agricultural Management Assistance (AMA) *USDA/NRCS*

AMA is a relatively new program available in 15 states where participation in the Federal Crop Insurance Program typically has been low. The program is designed to help farmers reduce risk by funding up to 75 percent of the cost of conservation practices that help increase operation diversification (such as practices used to transition to organic production) or improve water management (such as conversion to drip irrigation) or water quality (such as manure storage structures). The 2002 Farm Bill doubled the amount of funding available through this program. Applications are accepted at any time.

Conservation Reserve Program (CRP) *USDA/Farm Services Agency (FSA)*

The CRP encourages farmers to convert highly erodible cropland and other environmentally sensitive land to vegetative cover such as tame or native grasses, wildlife plantings, trees, filterstrips or riparian buffers. Participating farmers receive annual rental payments for the term of their multi-year contracts. Cost-share funding is provided for the establishment of the vegetative cover practices. Landowners also may receive funding to fence streams that exclude livestock, build grass waterways or develop shallow water areas for livestock. Applications are accepted during announced sign-up periods.

Conservation Security Program (CSP) *USDA/NRCS*

This new program, established in the 2002 Farm Bill and likely to be implemented in 2004, pays farmers to maintain or adopt conservation practices. Many types of natural resource concerns may be addressed, although The CSP focuses specifically on land-based practices. Producers participate in the CSP at one of three tiers (Tiers I, II and III). Higher tiers require greater conservation effort and offer higher payments. CSP contracts last a minimum of five years.

Debt for Nature *USDA/FSA*

The Debt for Nature Program is available to landowners with FSA loans secured by real estate. The program reduces a borrower's debt in exchange for a conservation contract with a term of 10, 30 or 50 years. The contract restricts development of the property for the life of the contract. Eligible land includes marginal cropland or other environmentally sensitive land.

Environmental Assistance Program (EAP) *Connecticut Department of Agriculture*

The EAP reimburses landowners for part of the costs of implementing an agricultural waste management plan. Grants under this program must be used for capital improvements and are given in coordination with Environmental Quality Incentive Program (EQIP) funding. Funding from the EAP and the EQIP together can provide no more than 75 percent of the project cost. Application to the EAP must be made through the NRCS EQIP process.



Courtesy Connecticut Department of Agriculture

Environmental Quality Incentive Program (EQIP)

USDA/NRCS

The federal EQIP program pays farmers up to 75 percent (90 percent for limited resource and new farmers) of the cost to implement structural and management practices on eligible agricultural land. Technical and financial assistance is available to plan, design and install erosion control measures and agricultural waste management facilities or to establish conservation practices such as nutrient management, integrated pest management, manure management and wildlife habitat management. The 2002 Farm Bill significantly increased the availability of EQIP funding nationwide. Applications are accepted during annual sign-up periods.

Farm Enhancement Program (FEP)

Connecticut Department of Agriculture

The FEP provides cost-sharing grants to farms for farm improvements that expand or diversify a farm operation. Funding may be available for up to 50 percent of the improvement costs, up to \$40,000. Applicants must have attended a FEP seminar and provide a farm business plan.

Forest Land Enhancement Program (FLEP)

USDA/Forest Service, in cooperation with Connecticut Department of Environmental Protection/Division of Forestry

Authorized by the 2002 Farm Bill, the FLEP replaces two previous conservation programs: the Stewardship Incentive Program and the Forestry Incentive Program. The goal of the FLEP is to encourage multiple resource

management of private forestland by providing forestland owners with technical and financial assistance to develop and implement forest stewardship plans. A minimum of 10 acres of forestland is required, and cost-share assistance of up to 75 percent is available for developing the plan and implementing the practices recommended. Applications are accepted at any time.

Renewable Energy Systems and Energy Efficiency Improvements Program

USDA/Rural Development

Established in the 2002 Farm Bill, this program provides grants to farmers and rural small businesses to purchase renewable energy systems and make energy efficiency improvements to their operations. Grants may be used to pay up to 25 percent of an eligible project's costs. Eligible projects include those that derive energy from a wind, solar, biomass or geothermal source, or hydrogen derived from biomass or water using wind, solar or geothermal energy sources.

Wildlife Habitat Incentives Program (WHIP)

USDA/NRCS

The WHIP offers technical and financial assistance to landowners to maintain, restore or enhance habitat for fish and wildlife. Participating landowners work with the NRCS to develop conservation plans, and the NRCS provides up to 75 percent in cost-share assistance to implement the plans. The 2002 Farm Bill significantly increased the availability of WHIP funding nationwide. Applications are accepted during annual sign-up periods.

Conclusion

To apply to any of the programs described in this guide, or for specific program information, please contact the agency listed. Contact information can be found on the back cover. For additional information about farmland protection tools and techniques, please contact the New England Field Office of American Farmland Trust at (413) 586-9330, or visit our Web site at www.farmland.org.

American Farmland Trust is a private, nonprofit farmland conservation organization founded in 1980 to stop the loss of productive farmland and to promote farming practices that lead to a healthy environment.

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Resources

Federal agencies

USDA/Farm Services Agency

344 Merrow Road, Suite B
Tolland, CT 06084
(860) 871-2944
www.fsa.usda.gov/ct

USDA/Natural Resources Conservation Service

344 Merrow Road, Suite A
Tolland, CT 06084
(860) 871-4011
www.ct.nrcs.usda.gov

USDA/Rural Development Southern New England Office

451 West Street, Suite 2
Amherst, MA 01002
(413) 253-4300
www.rurdev.usda.gov

Connecticut agencies

Connecticut Department of Agriculture

765 Asylum Avenue
Hartford, CT 06105
Farmland preservation: (860) 713-2511
Marketing programs: (860) 713-2500
www.ct.gov/doag

Connecticut Department of Environmental Protection

79 Elm Street
Hartford, CT 06106
Division of Forestry: (860) 424-3630
Open Space Grants: (860) 424-3016
www.dep.state.ct.us

Connecticut Department of Transportation

1107 Cromwell Avenue
Rocky Hill, CT 06067
Scenic Highways Coordinator: (860) 258-4516
www.dot.state.ct.us

Nonprofit organizations

American Farmland Trust

New England Field Office
One Short Street
Northampton, MA 01060
(413) 586-9330
www.farmland.org

(information on farmland protection programs and options, estate planning, planning for agriculture; consulting services available to towns interested in developing farmland protection strategies)

Connecticut Farm Bureau

510 Pigeon Hill Road
Windsor, CT 06095
(860) 298-4400
www.cfba.org

(membership organization working to promote and preserve agriculture and protect the rights of farmers)

Connecticut Farmland Trust

191 Franklin Avenue
Hartford, CT 06114
(860) 296-9282
www.ctfarmland.org

(statewide land trust dedicated to farmland protection; accepts donations of agricultural conservation easements and assists landowners with the sale of their development rights; "Growing New Farmers" project matches available farmland with current and new farmers)

Land Trust Service Bureau

55 High Street
Middletown, CT 06157
(860) 344-0716 ext. 314
e-mail: lbowers@tnc.org

(working to enhance the operational capabilities of Connecticut land trusts by improving communications, providing technical information and offering direct assistance and guidance; provides contact information for local Connecticut land trusts)

New England Land Link

P.O. Box 608
Belchertown, MA 01007
(413) 323-4531
www.smallfarm.org

(referral service that matches landowners wishing to sell or lease farmland in Connecticut and throughout New England with people seeking to purchase or lease farmland)

Working Lands Alliance

191 Franklin Avenue
Hartford, CT 06114
(860) 296-9325
www.workinglandsalliance.org

(coalition of organizations working to educate the general public and state and local officials about the importance of farmland protection and state PDR program funding)