

Land Access Session
Beginning Farmer Learning Network Meeting
Voorheesville, NY – March 8, 2013

ROUNDTABLE SESSION: LAND ACCESS UPDATES

Panelists: Diane Held (American Farmland Trust) and Kathy Ruhf (Land For Good)

American Farmland Trust – Diane Held

Focus on next generation of farmers

1. “Planning Your Land’s Future: Introductory Workshop for Landowners” held last year in CT

2. Farmland Advisors Program – 7 Northeast States, collaboration with Land For Good, funding by NE SARE

- Have 80 service providers who applied to participate in series of webinars on 3 main topics: Farmland access, farm transfers, non-farming landowners
- Compiling and developing resources, holding a conference next Fall, will follow up and provide phone support to trainees starting to work with clients on these issues
- Not trying to make experts of trainees; just getting them conversant in resources and where to look for help

3. Also starting a Hudson Valley Farmlink effort – a) building website and database, b) providing match facilitation, c) training and education (for landowners and beginning farmers) – these will be offered by partner organizations

Have looked closely at newenglandfarmlandfinder.org and other land matching services nationally. Focused on Hudson Valley because of particularly high development pressure and good market access

Existing Farmlink programs in NYS:

- Catskills Farmlink
- Columbia Land Conservancy
- NOFA NY Land Linking database
- NY FarmLink
- Westchester Land Trust Farmland Match

Additional partners include CCE and other land trusts in the Hudson Valley. Core partners will play an important role in facilitating matches

4. Policy Initiatives

Recommended actions: 1) review of state-owned lands available for agricultural use, 2) guidance to state agencies about leasing state owned land for agriculture, with special consideration for beginning farmers, 3) priority to farmland protection

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projects that help with successful farm transfers and transitioning farmland to a new generation of farmers.

Q: For the 750,000 acres lost to development, what's the biggest missing piece of the puzzle for preserving that land? Is there just an inherently "higher" use for that land? Is it just a matter of having a heap of money to buy up that land and permanently protect it? (Note: If the per acre value is \$20K, would need \$15B to buy it all up)

Land Access: Updates on Regional Efforts - Kathy Ruhf

Need a systems approach; traditional farm succession models aren't enough

Recent work:

- a) FarmLASTS (Land Access Secure Tenure and Stewardship) – research paper and land access curriculum,
- b) National "Just Land" convening (MN) – sponsored by Land Stewardship Project,
- c) Upcoming: New England Farmland Convening – bringing state ag chiefs/conservation heads together on policy issues

Land Access Project:

Includes 6 states, over 2 dozen partners, and five task forces (listing and linking, non-farming landowners, farm transfer network, tenure innovations, coaching)

- *Listing, Linking and Matching* – challenges: have often overpromised results to funders. Better strategy is to measure different types of impact, i.e. "better informed landowners, educated farmers, better lease models, etc"
 - Listing – a managed list of available farm properties; sometimes also list of seekers. May include: landowner application, seeker application, online/other posting, notification process, updating process (very important because it's not useful if sold properties are still listed, outreach/promotion
 - Careful with use of term "listing" because they don't have a realtor license. NY FarmLink is finding that people often list with them b/c they want to avoid paying realtor commission
 - Newenglandfarmlandfinder.org – managed by 9 partners who chip in to fund it, design and construction was paid for by BFRDP grant (up front expense with low maintenance costs)
 - Linking – goes a step further to provide contact info for seekers/owners, typically pre-sorted or screened.
 - Matching – service that facilitates a specific transaction between a specific seeker and owner

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- May include purchase transaction support, lease drafting, management agreement, facilitated meetings, advisor team-building, site visits, farmer recruitment

Q. Do you always have to have a lawyer on the team?

A. Depends. If it's a purchase transaction, yes, you need two. If it's a lease agreement for a hayfield and the lease is 1 page long, probably not.

Business planning courses often don't adequately address land acquisition and how it pencils out vs. leasing

Helping Farm Seekers is a 3-legged stool: 1) Education, 2) 1-on-1 TA/consulting and support, 3) Property lists

- Workshops, Educational materials (guides, tools, workbooks, etc.) and Online courses in acquiring your farm, leasing, and FarmLASTS
 - Many new guides published by Land Access Project – for farmers w/o identified successor, for farm seekers, for agencies and non-farming landowners – all available on Land For Good website
- *Tenure Innovation* - New reports from Land Access Project:
 - Investor research
 - Effectiveness of PDR and OPAV
 - Leasing improvements
 - Policy recommendations

Q. Is the big issue getting farmers w/o successors to the table? Because they don't want to think of the future/end-of-life planning?

A. Yes, it is a real issue. Also, farmers are retiring much later in life, and in stages... still active in management w/ reduced role, vs. totally off the farm. They say, "Not enough time to devote to it. I'm not ready yet. Not having an identified successor." For non-farming landowners, many don't even know that their land could be made available. They're concerned about stewardship, getting stuck with a tenant they don't want, liability, costs that would accrue to them...