

The Williamstown Farmland Project

Assessing Contemporary Threats to Farmland in Williamstown, Massachusetts



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Contents

Land Acknowledgement	3
Executive Summary	4
Introduction	6
A Brief History of Farming in Williamstown	7
What is Farmland Conservation?	8
Project Goals	10
Methodology	11
Threat Evaluation	16
Farm Summaries	20
Private and Other Landowners	46
Recommendations	51
Conclusion	57
Appendix	59
Bibliography	69

Land Acknowledgement

“It is with gratitude and humility that we acknowledge that we are learning, speaking and gathering on the ancestral homelands of the Mohican people, who are the indigenous peoples of this land. Despite tremendous hardship in being forced from here, today their community resides in Wisconsin and is known as the Stockbridge-Munsee Community. We pay honor and respect to their ancestors past and present as we commit to building a more inclusive and equitable space for all.”

– Stockbridge-Munsee Community

Executive Summary

Williamstown is an iconic escape in the Berkshires of Massachusetts. Stewarded for centuries by the Mohican community of western New England and eastern New York, the 1800s saw the clearcutting of as much as 80% of the town's forests for agriculture ("Farms Under Threat," 2020). Since then, the town's agricultural economy has seen many ups and downs. Recent decades have revealed unprecedented losses of farms and farmland in Williamstown and throughout the region. Today, sixteen active farms and stables remain in Williamstown operating on approximately 2,005 acres of owned land and 2,180 acres of leased land. Five of these farms are at imminent risk of loss within the next five years.

"The Williamstown Farmland Project" is a collaborative effort by three students in the Williams College Environmental Studies program as well as their professor, Williamstown's town planner, and the executive director of the Williamstown Rural Lands Foundation (WRLF). During the fall of 2020, this team worked to identify contemporary risks to farmland operated by these sixteen farms in Williamstown. They also produced tools and recommendations that can be used for immediate farmland conservation in Williamstown.

The report's findings reveal a farming community that is persevering and committed to agriculture but finds it increasingly difficult to make a living. Of the town's sixteen farms, seven have no form of land protection status above Ch. 61A, and only two have all their possible owned lands conserved through APR or Conservation Restrictions. In addition to the five farms identified at imminent risk of loss, two farms have no succession plans in place while only three have solid plans for who will operate the farm long-term.

Although the ages of Williamstown's farmers vary, many are at—or near—retirement age. This reflects a statewide trend where the average principal farm operator is 59 years old (USDA, 2017). Due to the prevalence of non-prime agricultural soils and woods, the types of land use practiced by these farms vary greatly. Agricultural land uses range from beef cattle to dairy, vegetables to maple sugaring, horse boarding to pig farming, and haying to timber lots, etc. The diverse nature of these farms means that most do not compete directly with each other even as many have moved away from commodity market production due to low prices and an inability to compete with larger, more productive farms. Farms that engage the community and market value-added products seem to remain vibrant, which could serve as a model for future

farm evolution. However, our team found no farms in Williamstown were turning much—if any—profits annually. Many were happy just to be able to get by.

As 2020 draws to a close, resiliency is a theme that has amassed renewed attention. In Williamstown, the resiliency of farms is a topic of immediate concern as seven out of sixteen farms face high levels of threat to their farmland (*Matrix 1*). With 52% of all farmed land in town being leased land, the status of lands owned by non-farm entities is also of significant importance.

This report, “The Williamstown Farm Project: Assessing Contemporary Threats to Farmland in Williamstown, Massachusetts” builds off significant bodies of work by town historians, farmland advocates, private citizens, and others to address these issues and more. It is our hope that the insights and recommendations outlined below will serve the Williamstown Rural Lands Foundation and the Town of Williamstown well and help guide the town’s farmland conservation efforts for years to come.

Introduction

There is no place quite like Williamstown. Nestled within the heart of the Purple Valley, salutary sunrises and sunsets have delighted residents and visitors alike for over 200 years. Since its days under the stewardship of the Mohican people, the land has undergone significant changes related to land use, particularly farmland. Currently, the town attracts those who seek to trade the hustle and bustle of urban life for the tranquility of echoing woods and manicured pastures. Visitors and seasonal residents come to appreciate the views, extensive hiking trails, farm-to-table cuisine, and the charming rural-aesthetic that is maintained by local farms.

Williamstown, however, is no longer the expansive agricultural hub it once was. Today, only sixteen farms remain active in town, five of which are in danger of immediate loss. This is a significant decline from the town's peak of 138 farms in 1861 (Williamstown Historical Museum). It is also a trend that is consistent with other New England towns which have seen much of their agricultural land reclaimed by woods or lost to urban and residential development use ("Farms Under Threat," 2020).

In Williamstown, the primary driver of farmland conversion to other land uses is large-lot single family residential housing. This is also known as low density residential housing (LDR). The onset of the COVID-19 pandemic has worried town planners of a possible increase in LDR pressure that could expedite the loss of farms and farmland in Williamstown. While our research generally found that many of Williamstown's farmers are persevering and staunchly committed to farming and the agricultural economy of the town, the economic reality is that many are finding it harder than ever to make a living farming in the Berkshires.

Over the fall semester of 2020, our team partnered with Andrew Groff, the town planner for the Town of Williamstown, and David McGowan, the executive director of the Williamstown Rural Lands Foundation (WRLF), to conduct an assessment of the contemporary threats to farmland in Williamstown, Massachusetts. Our team interviewed each of the town's sixteen active farmers and developed a series of recommendations for how the Town of Williamstown and WRLF can prioritize farmland preservation efforts in the near future. In this report we have detailed our findings and recommendations as well as the evaluation criteria we utilized to quantify the threat to each of the town's farms.

Although Williamstown has many tools at its disposal and good work is being done by many of its residents, the town can and must do more to protect its farms. This report provides

new insight into how Williamstown should proceed with its efforts to preserve the land and keep the town's strong agrarian tradition alive.

We would like to thank our clients, David McGowan and Andrew Groff, our professor, Sarah Gardner, all the farmers we interviewed, and the other townspeople and farming experts we talked to related to this project. Our team learned a great deal along this journey, and we are proud to present our work to the town and our clients.

A Brief History of Farming in Williamstown

Williamstown has a complicated history. When the town was incorporated in 1765, indigenous communities had already been inhabiting the region for at least 12,000 years. The new settlers that came over the hills brought with them a slew of new agricultural practices and economic forces that changed the local landscape. Throughout the 18th and 19th centuries, extensive land clearing for subsistence agriculture resulted in the deforestation of as much as 80% of the landscape throughout Williamstown and New England in general (“Farms Under Threat”). Deforestation for agriculture peaked around 1880, and since then Williamstown’s land usage has been evolving and will continue to do so (Williamstown Historical Museum).

Once renowned for its exemplary dairy industry, the Williamstown area has seen a dramatic decline in the number—and size—of its active farms. In 1861, the town had as many as 138 active farms (Williamstown Historical Museum), and at points throughout the 19th and 20th century, historical farms like Sweet Brook Farm and Haley Farm sprawled over as many as 2,800 and 800+ acres, respectively.

Nowadays, plazas along Route 2 and condominiums and motels along Route 7 all stand in places that used to contain sprawling pastures, erasing from memory the history on which much of the town was formed. It is common practice for farmers to work day jobs just to keep their farms afloat. Henry Art, professor emeritus of Williams College, sums up the primary issue facing farms today, noting, “It’s ironic that a lot of land was kept open by an economic activity that used to generate money. Now, it’s costing money to keep it in an open state” (iBerkshires, 2002). The rural landscape of Williamstown is the direct result of numerous generations of farmers pouring their heart and soul into the soil, and its pastoral aesthetic continues to be maintained by farmers today—mostly through haying.

While the majority of Williamstown's farmland has already been permanently lost, ideally, farmland in the area will soon see a resurgence as organizations like the Williamstown Rural Lands Foundation, MassWoods, the American Farmlands Trust, and others attempt to support the goals outlined in "A New England Food Vision" (2011) and "Wildlands and Woodlands: Farms and Communities" (2017). One of the primary ways these organizations are working to realize this vision is by utilizing legal contracts to preserve the agricultural use of farmland in perpetuity.

What is Farmland Conservation?

As the tumultuous year of 2020 nears its close, one of the most profound themes that has emerged in the last few months is resiliency. In the context of farmland, ensuring and supporting the resiliency of local farms is paramount to supporting local food networks as well as community vibrancy and historical values. Without protected land, the future of farming in western Massachusetts is uncertain. In the five years between 2012 and 2017, Berkshire County lost 52 of its 527 farms and over 3,000 acres of farmland to LDR development and other pressures (USDA, 2017). In Massachusetts, the average principal farm operator is 59 years old (USDA).

As farmers enter retirement, these numbers indicate that the window for farmland conservation is closing fast as many farms are losing their agricultural status. To stem the flow, it is vital to add increasing amounts of protected agricultural land to preservation registries, so they may be legally preserved for agricultural use for decades to come. Farmland conservation must focus on both lands containing fertile/viable soils as well as lands with poorer soils but high use values such as pasture or cropland because losing excessive farmland to development is not an option. Instead, conservationists need to focus on finding a balance between conservation and development that will sustain the economic and ecological vitality of the community in Williamstown and the region generally.

Unlike cows, we don't have the luxury to ruminate on what the future will bring for farming. We have already reached the point where we must think creatively and take agency by utilizing any resources available to conserve farmland. Since farming in New England is an increasingly immense (and unprofitable) financial burden for farmers, land conservation tools attempt to alleviate some of the financial onus of farmland ownership. They achieve this by

compensating farmers for the difference between the market use value of their land and the agricultural use value of their land. In Williamstown, there are four primary conservation tools commonly used by WRLF and other organizations to preserve farmland:

First, **Conservation Restrictions (CRs)** allow landowners (primarily private landowners) to sell the development rights to their land in return for receiving a personal tax credit for the difference between the appraised value of their non-residential land and its enhanced value if developed. CRs can restrict land use in different ways including for agricultural use, wildlife habitat, drinking water supply, or hiking trails. To ensure compliance, a land trust or other organization is usually designated to monitor the property in perpetuity to ensure that all the restrictions are being met. CRs are binding for future owners of the land, and so long as the land itself remains in private ownership, it continues to generate taxes on the full value of the residential part of the property and a reduced value on the CR-protected land. CRs are able to do this because they serve effectively as charitable gifts which reduce overall income tax for the farmer and reduce the owner's property taxes due to the decreased market value of the property.

The second tool is an **Agricultural Preservation Restriction (APR)**. An APR is a state-managed land preservation agreement for active farmland. This is an agreement between the landowner and the state. Providing farmland meets certain criteria, a farmer trades the development rights of the property and commits to using their non-residential land for agricultural purposes in perpetuity. In return, the landowner receives a one-time cash payment from the state equal to the difference between the appraised value of the farmland and its enhanced value if developed. The APR also binds future owners to agricultural businesses, and the state assumes responsibility for monitoring and enforcement. A farm's land is eligible for an APR if it meets three basic criteria: 1) the farmland is greater than five acres, 2) it has been actively devoted to agriculture for the past two years, and 3) it produces at least \$500 (or \$0.50 for each additional acre) in revenue annually. A number of other considerations also go into APR eligibility. These include: soil quality (prime agricultural soils preferred), location, the degree of threat to the land based on owner circumstances and financial situations, parcel size, and the economic viability for future agricultural use. Due to these considerations, not all land that may be eligible for an APR receives APR designation. Land that does not qualify can usually still qualify for CRs or other conservation methods.

The third conservation tool is **Chapter 61 of the Massachusetts Tax Code**. Chapter 61 is a preferential tax program for land actively engaged in agricultural, forestry, or recreational land use. Providing the land meets the state's criteria, the landowner (farmer or private landowner) enters into a deed restriction which commits the owner to conforming to the specified land use and to providing annual evidence to the town that demonstrates the restrictions are being met. So long as the landowner upholds the land use agreement, they are exempt or pay reduced property taxes on the designated land. The specification for agricultural land use is known as Ch. 61A. Unlike a CR or APR, Ch. 61 deed restrictions are revocable providing the landowner pays five years of back taxes on the property when the land is withdrawn from the program. Withdrawal of land from Ch. 61 makes it again eligible for development purposes. Future landowners are not bound by Ch. 61 restrictions providing they pay the necessary back taxes to withdraw the land from the program.

The fourth tool to conserve farmland is a **Gift or Purchase of Land** with the WRLF or an equivalent 501(c)(3) land trust. When lands are gifted to a land trust, the land use conditions for the parcel are established by both parties at the time of transfer. These land use conditions are binding in perpetuity. In exchange for gifted land, the landowner receives a personal tax credit for the appraised value of the land and the land trust acquires management responsibility of the property. In certain instances, a land trust may choose to purchase a property from the landowner outright using a combination of its own, state, local, and other funds. When this happens, a compensation rate is agreed upon and the land trust assumes management responsibility of the property.

In Williamstown, all four of these conservation tools are commonly used to preserve farmland and open spaces. Our project focused on identifying farmland at risk of loss and developing recommendations for how these tools can be leveraged to best conserve more farmland in town. The next section of this report describes the Project's Goals and Methodology followed by its Evaluation Criteria, Key Findings, and Recommendations.

Project Goals

Our research on Williamstown's farmland consisted of four main goals. These goals were clearly outlined by our project clients, David McGowan and Andrew Groff, and helped guide our methodology and analysis. Our goals were as follows:

1. Identify land at risk of conversion from farmland to other purposes
2. Update parcel information of lands owned and leased by Williamstown farmers
3. Identify 4-5 priority farms for preservation efforts
4. Get a sense of farmer succession plans

Over the fall semester of 2020, our team set out to accomplish these goals with the understanding that our findings would help identify contemporary threats to existing farmland and help inform planning efforts to preserve the farming economy of Williamstown for the near and long-term future.

Methodology

Background Research

First, we dove into research on farmland threats, agricultural preservation, and development pressures. We started with a report by the American Farmland Trust (AFT), called “Farms Under Threat New England,” which provided a solid understanding of the current state of farmland, and what the future holds for farms across the region. While the AFT provided a key background on a wide range of agricultural issues, “A New England Food Vision” (2011) provided another, more local, food-based perspective on the matter. Importantly, we also wanted to understand how to protect and preserve farmland into the future, as this was one of the goals of our clients. We looked into literature on Agricultural Preservation Restrictions (APRs) which are voluntary covenants that preserve farmland for future generations. We also looked into other conservation restrictions, such as Conservation Restrictions and Ch. 61A, which both grant tax breaks for farmers who utilize the program. Unlike CRs and APRs, farmers can remove their farmland from Ch. 61A although they have to pay several years’ worth of back taxes as a result of ending this contract. Finally, we looked at the 2013 “A Future for Farming” report, created by Williams College students for the Environmental Planning Workshop course. This report serves as a useful complementary tool to this report for conservation advocates like WRLF because it identified among private property owners in Williamstown and North Adams those who would convert or lease some of their lands to agricultural use when provided with information on how doing so could benefit them (“A Future of Farming,” 2013).

Semi-structured Interviews/Farm Visits

Farmer outreach and in-person farm visits were the centerpiece of our project. As part of farmer outreach, we acquired lists of farms, farmer names, and contact information from Sarah Gardner and our project clients. We then drafted an introductory email, asked our clients to review it, and sent it out to the sixteen active farmers in Williamstown. Within a few days, over half a dozen farmers had responded to our email and reached out to set a meeting time. We contacted farmers who did not respond by phone. Ultimately, we were able to interview representatives from all sixteen farms including fourteen in-person visits, one Zoom call, and one phone interview.

The in-person interview process consisted of farm visits to fourteen active farms and stables in Williamstown. Each visit lasted between twenty and ninety minutes. To avoid asking scripted questions, a semi-structured interview style was adopted for each visit. The goals for each site visit were the following: 1) map out the farm property and other lands “leased”/farmed by the farmer on a large map of Williamstown, 2) identify the primary land use of each piece of land (hay, crop, vegetable, pasture, stable, etc.), 3) determine the ownership status of each piece of farmed land, 4) identify which if any land parcels were designated as conserved via a CR, APR, or otherwise, and 5) assess the general financial health of the farm and what—if any—succession plans might be in place for the farm’s future. Most sessions were conducted by at least two team members, but some sessions had all three team members present while others only had one. During each meeting, notes were taken by hand and team members debriefed verbally afterwards about the experience. In practice, most interviews consisted of conversations around a large, printed map of Williamstown followed by a site tour and continued conversation.

Parcel mapping

Our clients were able to provide a number of ArcGIS related resources, including the web address to the Williamstown property map, shapefiles of land parcels in Williamstown containing geospatial and property information, and a printed 3’ x 3.5’ town map that could be marked up by the farmers during the interviews. A brief study of the property map and parcel data gave us a good idea of what parcels we would be visiting or talking about during our discussions with farmers. The property map also gave us an idea as to whether the farmer themselves owned the land or leased it from another landowner. Finally, the printed town map

included land parcel outlines which proved extremely useful in our conversations with farmers as it acted as a great talking point and provided farmers a way to physically draw out the properties they owned/leased and label how they used the land.

Once the maps were marked up, we began to input this geospatial data into ArcMap. We started by creating a series of new shapefiles to recreate each parcel that the farmer had marked up. While several farmland parcels were within property boundaries, we wanted to stay true to mapping only what was being actively farmed rather than the whole property lot. Once the shapefiles were created, we added several categories to the attribute table in order to geospatially show certain descriptors.

Map 1 in the Appendix shows all the lands actively farmed by the 16 farmers in Williamstown.

One of the first attributes we created was land ownership. While some farmers owned parts of the land they farmed, several also managed hay or produced crops on leased land. “Leased” farmland can take many forms, but is most often a handshake agreement or understanding between a farmer and landowner that allows the farmer to farm and maintain the land for little to no cost. Since leased land comprises a large portion of the farmland in Williamstown (52%), it was vital to understand where all these leased parcels were located since the owners of these properties can decide independently of the farmer whether to place the land into conservation protection or put it up for sale. To understand who land-owning players might be in the future, and it was helpful to create a list of property owners who had farming activities on their land. In ArcMap, farmland parcels that were owned by the farmer were marked with an O, and those that were leased were marked with an L. We then wrote down the owner of each specific farmland parcel, which can be used in the future to contact landowners who might be selling their land.

Map 2 in the Appendix shows what farmland is under a lease agreement (either formal or informal) versus what land is owned by the farmer. *Map 3* in the Appendix shows what farmland is owned by farmers themselves.

Next, we identified whether or not each farmland parcel was under a form of conservation protection, or if there was a plan for that land in the future. We identified several types of conservation, including APR, WRLF conservation, State Forest conservation, Ch. 61A, FEMA flood zone protection, and others. While we found that several farmers (and landowners)

were strongly anti-development and though this could be viewed as a temporary conservation restriction, we decided not to list it as such.

Map 4 in the Appendix shows the conservation status of each individual parcel of land.

We also looked at farm size because lots less than five acres are not considered for either APR or Ch. 61A. While it appears that there are several small lots that do not qualify for APR, we decided to break up large chunks of farmland *if* they crossed parcel property lines. Even if individual pieces make up a large field, we decided to split these if parcel ownership was different despite being one consistent piece of farmland. Therefore, while these small plots may not be considered for APR or Ch. 61A, they can still be considered for other conservation restrictions, particularly if they make up a larger field when ignoring the property lines. *Map 4* defines five unique types of conservation as such:

Map 4: Land Conservation Categories	
APR	Agricultural Preservation Restrictions only.
WRLF	Land protected by WRLF only (includes lands owned by WRLF under APR and other conservation restrictions).
Ch. 61	Includes Ch. 61 (forest land) and Ch. 61A (farmland protection).
Other Conservation	Includes FEMA flood zone plane development restrictions, State Forest development restrictions, town owned lands, state owned lands, and other assorted land trusts (Purple Valley Partners, Mt. Hope Conservancy, Trustees of Reservation). Does not include any land under APR or Ch. 61A.
None	No conservation. While some farmers had a clear anti-development stance, we did not consider that to be a conservation restriction.

Finally, we analyzed current agricultural land use and parcel soil status. This gave us insight into the kinds of farming operations occurring in town and whether prime soils would be lost if the farmer sold the land or the owner terminated the lease with the farmer.

Map 5 in the Appendix shows the broadly defined land use/type of farming conducted on each parcel. While there were multiple types of farming in Williamstown, we grouped all agricultural practices into one of the six categories listed below:

Map 5: Land Use Categories	
Crops	Includes vegetables (pumpkin, tomatoes, leafy greens, cauliflower, broccoli, ginger, peppers, butternut squash, etc.), corn and rye. Could be broadly defined as “human food.”
Meadow/Pasture	Includes all cover crop production (such as alfalfa, <u>excluding rye</u>) and all meadows, both maintained and unmaintained.
Timber/Wood	Includes all woodlots, whether harvested for timber or not. Includes woodlots that have other agricultural purposes as well (such as animals roaming in woodlots). Does <u>not</u> include sugaring or any sort of maple-related production.
Cows	Includes any land that had cows, whether it be for dairy infrastructure, grazing, or a dual use of grazing/hay. Includes land that is grazed on by multiple animals, including but not limited to a mix of horses and cows.
Hay	Any land that involves <u>haying only</u> (dual use lands are categorized elsewhere).
Special	Any activity that did not fall into any of the above categories. Includes apple orchard, berries, business lot, compost, horse boarding, (a former) llama barn, maple production, and a USDA experimental field.

To map soil status for each parcel, we took soil data from the Farmland Protection Policy Act (FPPA) soils map, updated August 2020 (Map 6). As a part of the Farm Bill of 1981, the FPPA was designed to identify high quality soils as “Prime Farmland,” “Unique Farmland,” and “Land of Statewide or Local Importance.” Using this data, we defined three farmland categories.

Map 7 in the Appendix shows the soil status of each farmland parcel with three soil categories defined below. Map 8 in the Appendix shows the FPPA soils map from August 2020 with farmland parcels overlaid.

Map 7: Soil Status Categories	
Prime Farmland	Little to no non-prime farmland (0 - 25% NPF)
Mixed Farmland	Some non-prime farmland (25 - 75% NPF)
Non-Prime Farmland (NPF)	Majority non-prime farmland (75% - 100% NPF)

Threats to Farmland Evaluations

To assess the overall and specific risks to farmland loss for individual farms, we developed a Farmland Threat Evaluation Matrix (*Matrix 1*). This matrix details the acreage each farm owns and leases and rates threat risks within six categories that could contribute to farmland loss. Each farm is rated on six categories: Three of these are Land-Specific: i.e. Farm Size, Soil Type, and Land Protection Status, and three are Operation-Specific: i.e. Succession Plan, Business Model Adaptation, and Willingness to Consider APR/Conservation Restrictions. These categories were chosen based on their ability to gauge the overall risk of farmland conversion facing each farm. It should be emphasized that these six categories also only refer to farmland *owned* by the farmers themselves and not land they lease.

Using the Threat Ratings Legend (*Matrix 2*), we developed color-coded ratings for all six categories for each farm. A rating of 1 is green and considered the best. This rating generally reflects land that is suitable for agriculture use and has been conserved in perpetuity through APR or equivalent land conservation status. A yellow rating (usually a 2) is intended to identify land that is worth keeping an eye on, but likely does not face imminent threat. This rating encompasses a wide range and may include lands with mixed soil quality, some historical business model adaptation, and mixed conservation status. A red or burgundy rating (usually 3 or 4) indicates a high level of threat which may present immediate concern, but not always.

By horizontally summing the category ratings for each row in the, *Matrix 1*, the Threat Evaluation Matrix, we were able to produce a Raw Threat Score. This Raw Threat Score provides a general indication of the overall risk to farmland for each farm. *The lowest Raw Threat Score is a 6, while the highest score is a 19.* This means that farms with high scores operate farmland that is more at risk than farms with low scores.

We found that out of sixteen active farms and a maximum Raw Threat Score of 19, seven farms earned a score between 15 and 19, and five earned a score between 10 and 14. Four farms earned a score between 6 and 9. While these results could be interpreted with alarm, it is important to note that the Raw Threat Scores are only one interpretation of threat level. The kind of “immediate” threat to farmland loss may vary depending on the farm. As a result, individual Raw Threat Scores should be interpreted with caution and readers should also understand that this is only one metric that attempts to provide a general temperature check but does not account for the full story behind the threat to a farm’s land.

To allow for more nuanced interpretation of the Threat Evaluation Matrix, the online version of the matrix allows users to sort farms based on individual categories such as Soil Type, Land Protection Status, or Succession Plan. Categorical rankings can be particularly useful to singularly evaluate important questions such as: which farms lack succession plans and which farms have land with no protection status?

While these matrices alone can provide a significant amount of information about the risk to farmland in Williamstown, they do not tell the whole story. For instance, a farm with prime soils but no land protection might receive a lower Raw Threat Score than it should whereas a farm with non-prime soils and no Business Model Adaptation in over 20 years might receive a higher Raw Threat Score than it should due to the type of farming it conducts which might render these categories less important. Since any evaluation criteria requires tradeoffs, to provide greater insight on farm-specific nuances, we have included detailed summaries about our key learnings about each farm in our evaluation.

Matrix 1. Farmland Threat Evaluation Matrix organized alphabetically by farm name. A Raw Threat Score of 6 is the lowest level of threat to farmland loss. A Raw Threat Score of 19 is the highest rating and indicates immediate threat of farmland loss.

Farms	Owned Farmland Size (ha)	Leased Farmland Size (Estimate) (ha)	Land				Operational				Raw Threat Score (6-19)
			Size	Soil Type	Land Protection Status	Succession Plan	Business Model Adaptation	Willingness to Consider APR/CR			
Farm A	0.00	1.00	2	3	2	3	1	1	3	14	
Farm B	0.00	33.64	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	6	
Farm C	14.48	270.37	1	2	4	2	3	3	3	15	
Farm D	44.42	0.00	1	2	4	4	3	3	3	17	
Farm E	410.66	53.17	1	1	2	2	1	2	2	9	
Farm F	93.87	4.72	1	2	2	2	2	2	2	11	
Farm G	128.08	32.67	1	3	2	4	2	2	3	15	
Farm H	44.60	4.81	1	2	4	4	3	2	2	16	
Farm I	441.73	506.79	1	2	1	1	1	1	1	7	
Farm J	202.54	0.00	1	2	1	2	1	1	1	8	
Farm K	89.67	0.00	1	2	3	4	3	3	2	15	
Farm L	131.49	232.00	1	2	3	2	2	2	2	12	
Farm M	40.74	36.66	1	3	4	4	3	3	2	17	
Farm N	84.383	125.40	1	2	4	3	3	3	3	16	
Farm O	107.93	9.30	1	3	4	1	1	1	2	12	
Farm P	169.94	869.39	1	3	4	2	1	1	2	13	
Lowest Possible Raw Threat Score: 6			Highest Possible Raw Threat Score: 19								

Matrix 2. Farmland Threat Ratings Legend. This legend explains the Threat Level point values included in the Threat Evaluation Matrix. A higher Threat Level rating indicates a greater risk of farmland loss.

Legend						
Threat Level (Low-High) (1-4)	Size	Soil Type*	Land Protection Status	Succession Plan	Business Model Adaptation	Willingness to Consider APR/CR
[1]	>5 Acres farmable land greater than 5 acres, eligible under APR farm size guidelines	Prime Ag >75% of all soils are Prime soils	All APR/Land Trust owned land is conserved as farmland in perpetuity via Mass APR or land trust organization	Solid Plan young farmer, or plans for family member taking over	Recent Adaptation evidence of changes in farming practices within last 5 years or plans to change in next 2 years	APR Achieved all eligible lands are already placed in APR
[2]	<5 Acres owned land is less than 5 acres, therefore not eligible for APR restriction	Mixed mixture of Prime and Non-Prime soils	Mixed: APR/CR owned lands partially conserved. Mixture of APR and CR lands	Semi-Plan farmer starting to take action on who gets/wants the farm. Unlikely to sell/pass on farm in next 5 years	Historical Adaptation evidence of changes in farming practices within last 5-20 years	Interested APR/CR eligible lands. Farmer could benefit from land conservation agreement. Farmer holds strong sentiments that lands should remain undeveloped
[3]		Non-Prime >75% of all soils are Non-Prime	Some CR some owned lands protected through Conservation Resprictions	No Plan no individual lined up to take over the farm. Could be because they couldn't find someone or because they are scaling back operations. Farm facing threat of being sold in next 5-10 years	No Adaptation no evidence of changes in farming practices in over 20 years	Does Not Qualify/Not Interested land does not meet the eligibility requirements for conservation. The owner is not interested in conservation options.
[4]			No Conservation Status owned lands have no conservation status	Market Listing Imminent no succession plan in place, farmer likely to sell land within 5 years		

*Regarding the Soil Type category, we chose to label soils as Prime Ag, Mixed, and Non-Prime. The purpose of our matrix assessment is to show the level at which particular farmland is at risk of being lost. Although non-prime agricultural soil is beneficial to the biodiversity of an area, based on APR requirements we ranked Prime Ag soils above Non-Prime in terms of being targets for potential conservation efforts.

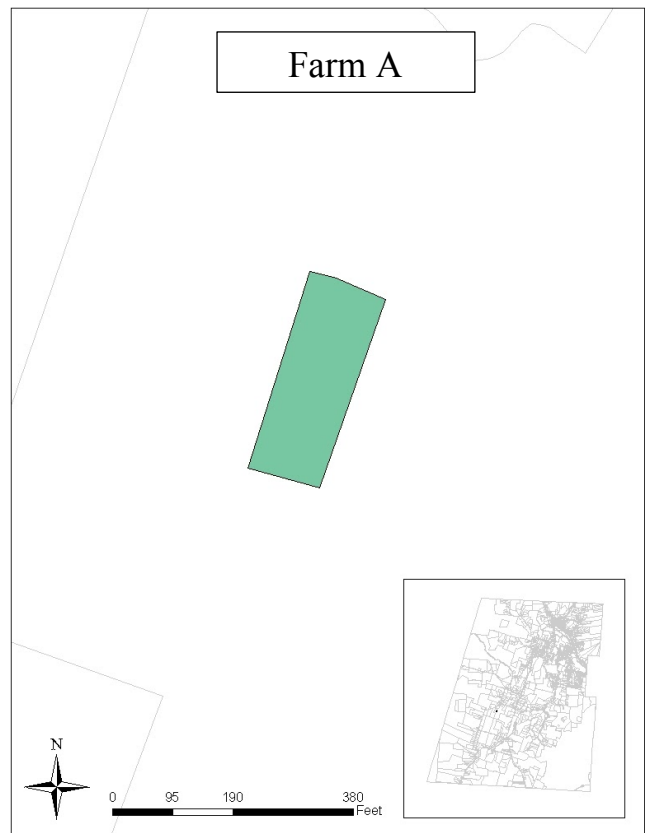
Farm Summaries

In Williamstown, there are currently sixteen active farms. Our team was fortunate to visit or make contact with all sixteen of these farms. To provide more insight into the Farmland Threat Evaluation Matrix described above, we have compiled key learnings and takeaways for each of these farms. These farm summaries include: the farm’s Raw Threat Score, a map of the lands they farm (owned and leased), a summary of their land usage, a brief discussion of the major threats facing the farm, and a short recommendation for how the Town of Williamstown and Williamstown Rural Lands can foster relationships with each farm. This information can be used to understand the unique challenges facing each farm as well as inform future farmland conservation policy and priorities in Williamstown.

Farm A, Raw Threat Score: 14

Despite the name, Farm A actually has a surprisingly small footprint. Operated by a young farmer, [REDACTED], Farm A is a one-acre vegetable operation that leases land from Farm O. In 2018, [REDACTED] started the farm and signed a five-year lease agreement with the [REDACTED] family. Now in year three, the farm has seen success and earned a good reputation, but barely brings in enough money to support [REDACTED]. If things continue the way they have, [REDACTED] will likely not renew the lease agreement at the end of its term.

The land on which [REDACTED] operates has good soils which allows him to grow a variety of vegetables that take full advantage of the available space. [REDACTED] likes to say that he “grows a bit of everything” including lettuce, ginger, tomatoes, spinach, all kinds of vegetables, and the occasional “mystery” vegetable. Normally, about 75% of the farm’s sales come from the Williamstown Farmers Market and the remaining 20-25% from agreements with local



restaurants. Due to COVID-19, ██████ has been forced to adapt and has turned most of the farm into a CSA (Community Supported Agriculture) where town residents buy shares of produce which ██████ packages up for them each week and personally distributes in town. Although these business models work for Farm A, they require a lot of effort and barely bring in enough money to support ██████. For now, Farm A is able to remain operational because ██████ enjoys the lifestyle and does not have to worry about supporting a family or high lifestyle costs. He admits, however, that he does not foresee a long-term future for the farm.

In terms of production methods, ██████ is committed to organic farming practices but admits this can lead to 20% loss in crop yields. Without Federal, State, and National Resource Conservation Service (NRCS) subsidies and grants, the farm would not be able to continue. These monies have helped fund irrigation and greenhouse investments on the farm. Today, Farm A has two hand-made greenhouses which help expand the variety of crops the farm produces and extends the growing season for some temperature-sensitive crops.

As a young farmer, ██████ has learned that farmland—even leasable land—is very inaccessible unless one inherits it from their family. Ironically, he has observed that interest in farming within farming families often seems to skip a generation. ██████ has also observed that in order to succeed as a modern farmer, a good education is also necessary. Even the smartest young farmers, however, still face high startup costs, small marginal returns, and equity issues that make entering the industry very difficult. APR protected lands can help lower some of these costs and make life easier for new farmers, but that does not mean their life will be easy. For now, ██████ is committed to seeing Farm A through until the end of his lease agreement, but he is uncertain about what he might do afterwards. One potential option may be to partner with another farmer in growing cannabis or another crop, but it is unclear what the future might hold.

Farm A receives a Raw Threat Score of 14 and is in imminent danger of loss, but due to its size and lease status, this is not a farm that should receive priority preservation attention. That said, ██████ could be a farmer who might be interested in partnering with an existing farm in the near future or taking over a larger farm in a few years if the opportunity arose. Ensuring ██████ remains an active farmer in Williamstown could go a long way in supporting an agricultural future for the town. (Source: ██████, Oct. 24, 2020)

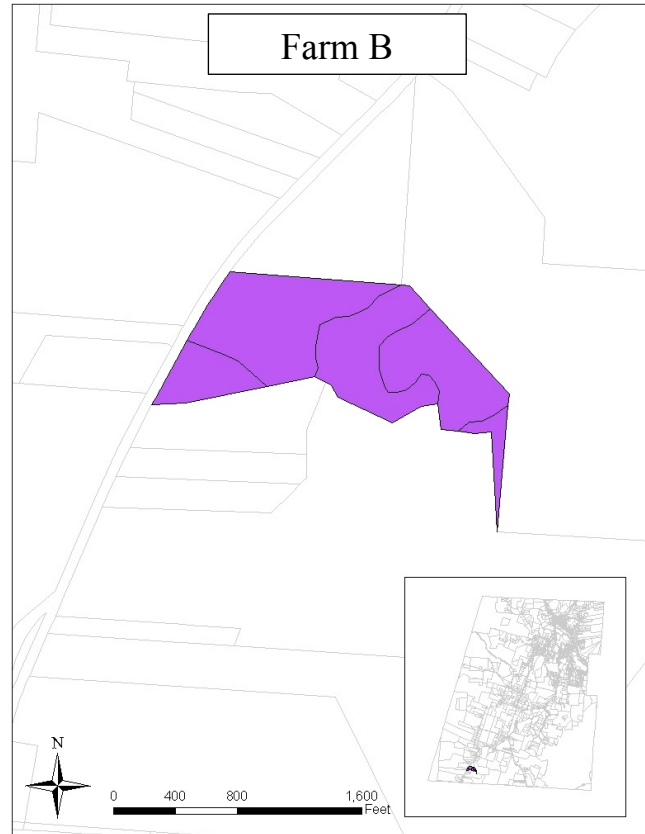
Farm B, Raw Threat Score: 7

Farm B is a small but bustling operation located on 34 acres abutting Hancock Rd. in southwestern Williamstown. The farm is primarily a vegetable farm but has a diverse portfolio of smaller operations including chickens (100), apple orchards (1 acre), and pigs (~5). The 40+ varieties of vegetable crops benefit from prime agricultural soils and the [REDACTED] family which manages the farm takes care to rotate crops when necessary and practice organic farming methods and large-scale composting.

The business model for the Farm B is unique because it is the only farm in Williamstown completely supported by Community Supported Agriculture (CSA) shares. Farm B’s CSA first started in 1991 and the farm now runs two CSA seasons: spring and winter. Farm B benefits from over 85% retention rate year-after-year. One of the reasons the farm benefits from high retention rates is because it makes a substantial effort to make the farm a welcoming place for families to bring their kids and enjoy picking crops themselves, seeing the animals, or attending cooking/gardening workshops or other fun events hosted by the farm. Earlier this year, a young boy who visits the farm regularly expressed interest in teaching a frog catching class at one of the farm’s ponds. The owners of Farm B supported his idea and made the event happen and the frog catching became a muddy success!

One of the things that helps the farm keep its energy up is its apprenticeship program. Every year, the [REDACTED] train 2-3 agriculture apprentices in all things farming-related. Each apprentice stays with the farm for two years and this ensures the farm is always maintained by smart, fresh talent.

Today the farmland at Farm B is entirely protected by APR and is owned by the Williamstown Rural Lands Foundation. This land is leased to the [REDACTED] family for 99 years



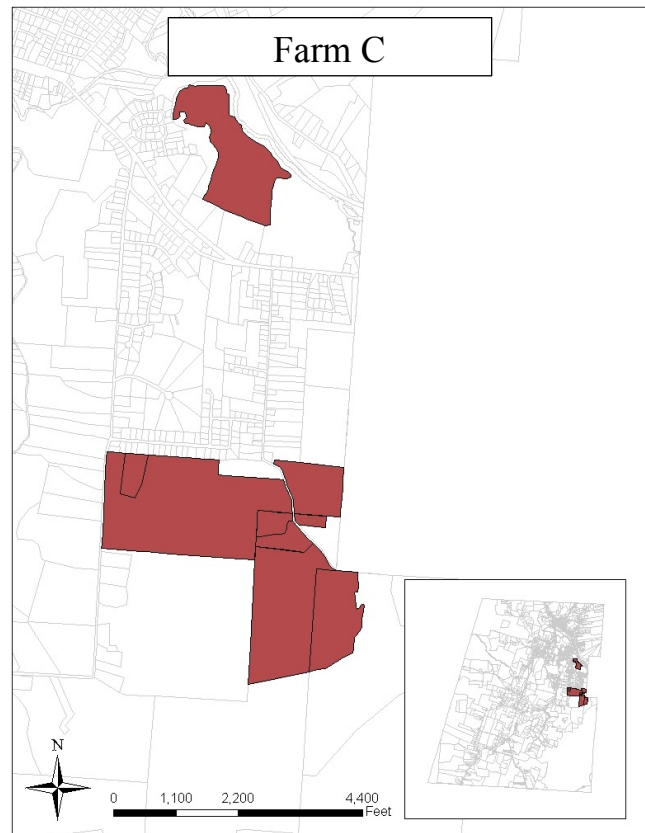
which ensures its sustainability. Although the family lease the farmland, they own the house and this creates a model that works well for the family, WRLF, and the town’s agricultural economy. Prior to being placed into APR and purchased by WRLF, the farm had operated as a family-run dairy farm for 150 years. The [REDACTED] family moved to the property in the early 2000s and have been growing the farm’s community engagement ever since.

Ultimately, Farm B is a model farm that is making the most of opportunities available to it. If farms in Massachusetts are to continue operating, it seems that more will need to adopt the community-first and value-added ethos embodied by Farm B. While an abundance of community-centered farms could lead to oversaturation and market competition, it seems that this is the direction small-scale farming in Massachusetts is headed (“MA Local Food Action Plan,” 2015). This type of farming could also have many positive externalities and help restore the importance of local food production to regional food networks.

Farm B receives a Raw Threat Score of 6 out of 19 which is a perfect score. This farm is not in danger of farmland loss. (Source: [REDACTED], Oct. 26, 2020)

Farm C, Raw Threat Score: 15

Located in the eastern-most corner of town, the [REDACTED] brothers manage the second largest remaining dairy farm operation in Williamstown, MA. Their herd consists of 170 cows, half of which are milked at any given time, the other half are kept as “rotator” cows. Today, the [REDACTED] brothers officially own only about 15 acres of crop and pasture fields immediately surrounding their property, but they lease over 270 acres of farmland for grazing, corn harvesting, and hay. The majority of this leased land is owned by the Town of Williamstown, including The Spruces which



was transformed from a trailer park into park/farmland in 2011. The remaining 58 acres of leased land is owned by Williamstown resident Herb Allen who has a close relationship with the [REDACTED] Brothers and who bought the land from them with the understanding that the [REDACTED] would continue to farm the land.

In 1913, the grandfather of the [REDACTED] brothers bought the farm which has now been passed down through three generations. The farm has used town-owned land for over seventy years and has built a self-sustaining dairy operation that does not make much money but continues to operate. As dairy farmers, the [REDACTED] belong to a milk co-op that sells their milk on the commodity market. This means that the prices the farm receives for its milk are low and the farm is sometimes told to dump excess milk so that supply can be regulated. With the decline of small-scale dairy operations throughout New England in recent decades, the [REDACTED] now compete against large-scale dairy operations (500+ cows) in New York and Pennsylvania. These operations are backed by big banks that force the farmers to continually increase their scale and production and decrease their costs. To achieve low costs, the [REDACTED] note that many of these large farms employ primarily migrant laborers which keeps prices low and hurts smaller operations like the [REDACTED].

With the onset of COVID-19, the dairy industry nationwide suffered massively as restaurant and school demand (which account for over 30% of the market) evaporated. This forced many farmers including the [REDACTED] to dump thousands of gallons of milk and take government subsidies just to stay afloat. Even as demand has returned, the [REDACTED] admit they are still in “survival mode” and they have been forced to limit production by 15%.

In terms of land use, the fifteen acres owned by the [REDACTED] is primarily used for corn and some vegetable production including pumpkins. The property has a small farm stand along Luce Rd. open to the public which operates on the honor system. The land owned by the [REDACTED] benefits from Ch. 61A tax exemptions but has no other conservation status. The brothers are hard workers who care a lot about their farm and their animals, but this keeps them very busy, so land conservation is not high on their priority list. That said, the brothers are middle aged and do not seem to indicate plans of slowing down, so it is unlikely their lands face development risk at this time. That said, the farm did go out of business briefly in the early 2000s but came back. As noted before, a significant portion of the land the farm leases is now owned by Herb Allen which means its future is tied to whatever Herb Allen decides. For now, Mr. Allen

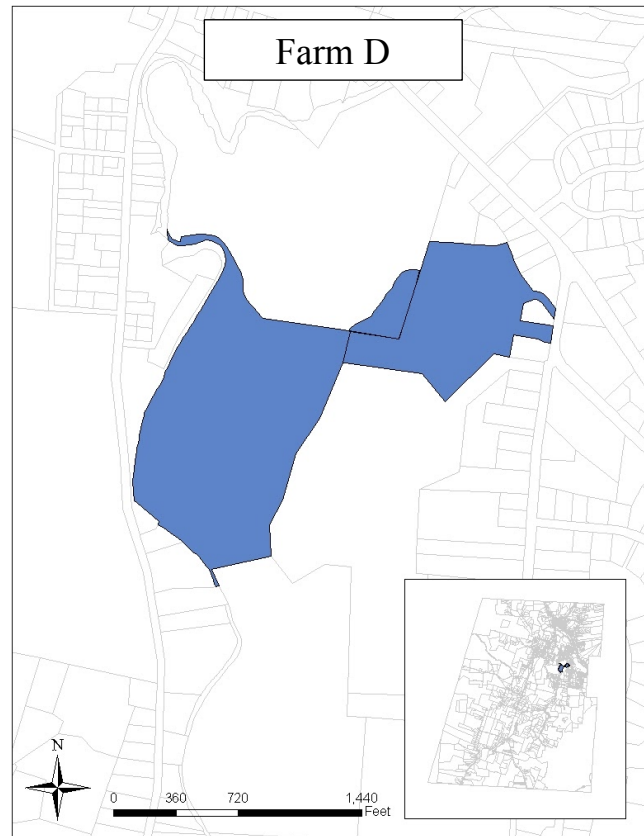
seems content for things to continue the way they are, but the status of the land becomes more concerning if Herb Allen were to move on or sell his land without designating the land for conservation. The remaining lands the brothers lease are all town-owned, therefore their fate is tied to whatever the town decides to do with these lands. (Source [REDACTED], Oct. 28, 2020)

Farm D, Raw Threat Score: 17

Farm D is a small and private operation. Nestled into the land at the end of a long and winding driveway, anyone would be caught off guard to see that the farm is right in the middle of Williamstown. A host of farm animals reside at the farm, perking up at the sign of visitors. You're likely to run into a baying beagle when you get out of your car. Luckily, [REDACTED] is there to shut off the natural alarm.

The farm used to operate as a 500-acre dairy farm but over time the land has been sold off to the town. The original barn burned down in the 1940s and was replaced by the current horse barn. Since then, it has been functioning as an equine facility and boarding stable with room for 20+. [REDACTED] states that she is downsizing the number of available spots in her stable as she approaches her retirement. The upkeep of her facility is labor intensive and it falls on her shoulders to get things done around the farm. Since a smaller operation makes her day-to-day activities more manageable, she now limits the space to a handful of horses. The majority of these horses are rescues. Currently, her operation primarily functions as a sanctuary to various animals including horses, goats, chickens, ducks, dogs, and birds therefore it is difficult for it to turn a profit.

Interestingly, in 2000 [REDACTED] built a large post-and-beam home on her property. The large house, along with a small guest house, are used to advertise another venture at the



farm—a pet friendly country inn. Guests pay for lodging at the inn where they can enjoy a taste of farm life and also visit the surrounding area. These additions provide [REDACTED] with an alternative source of income.

[REDACTED] owns the 50 acres that make up her property. The majority of the land does not have any conservation status, except for a small slice that abuts the Williamstown cemetery. In terms of land use, the property is parceled into various pastures for the horses. The property's fields are hayed and used as feed for the horses. A stretch of woods is also found on the property. The woods are not used for anything aside from recreational mixed-use trails. [REDACTED] states that town residents are often found hiking through the back sections of her property,

The future longevity of Farm D is uncertain. [REDACTED] does not have a succession plan in place and no one is lined up to take over operations of the farm once she retires. Instead, solar and golf businesses have approached her to express interest in the land. She says that, ideally, someone would step up to continue her farm work and maintain the land.

Possible future alternative revenue sources include: growing berries on a small patch of fertile soil, providing hayrides during the fall, and more horse boarding. While possible, these ventures will most likely not come to fruition. [REDACTED] states that, “The less we do, the less we have to deal with the town.” As previously mentioned, [REDACTED] is also not trying to actively grow her business; on the contrary, she has been slowly downsizing and will continue to do so, most likely until the farm gets sold off to the right buyer.

For these reasons, Farm D received a Raw Threat Score of 17 out of 19. This farmland is in danger of being lost to residential development, but an opportunity may exist to facilitate a farmer-match program to find someone willing to take over operations after [REDACTED] retires. (Source: [REDACTED], Oct. 31, 2020)

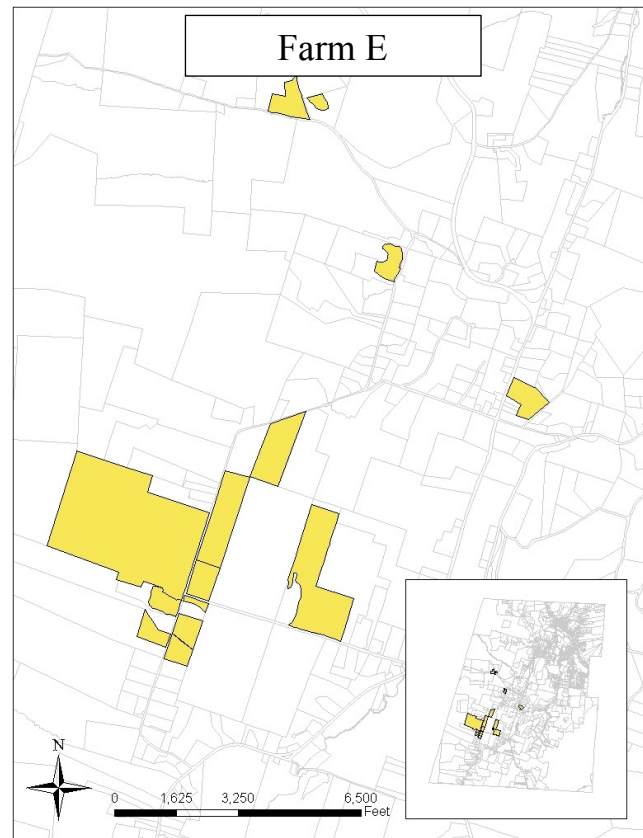
Farm E, Raw Threat Score: 9

Farm E is a 460 acre farm off Oblong Rd. that specializes in dairy and beef products. Renowned for its delicious meats and cheeses, Farm E is a 35-40 cow operation, some of which are heifers for milk, as well as a number of beef cows.

██████████ and his family, who own and operate most of the farm, also have pigs, maintain and log the forest on their property, and hay other parcels in town for grazing and bedding for their animals. The ██████████ do not produce milk for the commodity market—instead, they have opted to add value into their product by converting it into cheese. Farm E also has a farm store, which houses their products as well as other local and artisan items.

The ██████████ purchased the land in 2002 from the Phelps Family, who had put several parcels of the farm into APR. The ██████████ have since put several other parcels into Conservation Restriction, part of which is managed by the WRLF. Having several parcels in CR has the added bonus of increased access to grazing fields, which is incredibly important to maintaining his herd. Beyond CRs, the ██████████ have also worked with the state on a number of farmland grants, ranging from temporary CRs to management plans. The most recent covenant that part of the farm has been put under is the Farm Viability (Enhancement) Program (FVEP), which offers farmland grants in exchange for agricultural protection for a maximum of fifteen years. Farmers can opt to put land into FVEP twice. In the case of Farm E, the ██████████ are on their second of two FVEP terms, each lasting ten years.

While the FVEP program effectively conserves farmland, the protection is ultimately short-lived. FVEP can protect land for up to thirty years with two fifteen-year grants. ██████████ mentioned that he could in theory develop the plots that are currently in FVEP but did not seem



overly interested in that. He did, however, mention that he's been in conversation with David McGowan of WRLF, as he feels the land ought to be preserved for farmland in the future. One of his plots is currently under no restriction, and his family has been considering putting a house on that lot, which would still allow it to be conserved in APR.

Near the end of our visit, [REDACTED] expressed desire for an easier way to identify private landowners in town who might be willing to lease their land for grazing or haying purposes. Although no database or network like this currently exists, a 2013 study by Williams students in the Environmental Planning Workshop class found that many landowners in Williamstown and North Adams were open to the idea of leasing their land for agricultural purposes once they were informed about the tax breaks and other benefits this could bring ("A Future of Farming"). Future farmland conservation efforts may want to consider reaching out to landowners identified in the 2013 study to see if they would be willing to lease their lands to existing farmers.

Overall, Farm E is a stable operation, with young farmers who are eager to build the business. Their ability to create and market unique products has enabled them to stand out from the rest of the town's dairy crowd. Farm E is also very open to visitors, mainly in the form of their farm store, but their connection to Williamstown has helped make their farm a household name. Farm E receives a Raw Threat Score of 9 out of 19 which is only three points above a perfect score 6. This farm is not in danger of farmland loss. (Source: [REDACTED], Oct. 31, 2020)

Farm F, Raw Threat Score: 11

Farm F is a nearly 100-acre farm near the Hoosic River in the northern part of Williamstown. While the [REDACTED] are known throughout town for their horse boarding and riding school, they also have a number of Scottish Highland cows, goats, and chickens. The chickens provide eggs, and every so often [REDACTED], the owner and manager of the farm, sells off one of her cows for beef. However, the cows are much more useful to the farm as land clearers: they trample and graze on otherwise pesky plants, which allows the horses to roam freely throughout the property.

[REDACTED] most important operation is horse boarding and riding. The farm offers riding lessons, summer programs, pony rides, and competitive riding. The Williams College

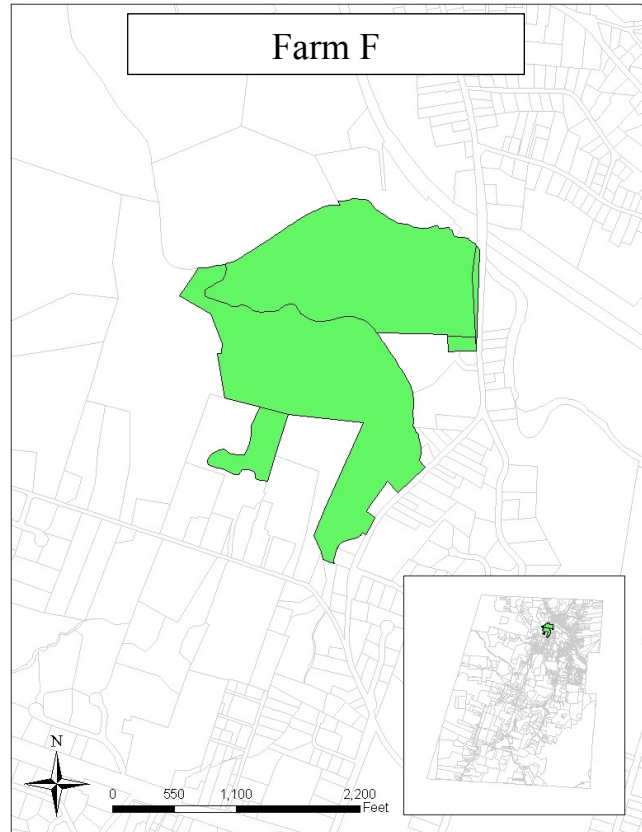
Equestrian team also uses her space because it is an adequate size for competitive riding.

██████████ noted she had a few dozen horses boarded and/or ridden at the farm before COVID-19, and although that number has dropped since, people have been “in the market” for horses as a quarantine activity. She did, however, have to cut her number of cows in half.

The Farm F is on a few hilly parcels, some forested, some clear. The cleared parts can be used by the grazing animals, but the forest is so dense that ██████████ has no way of using it. She did note that a recent storm blew over several old trees in the forests, and this has allowed her farmhands to begin clearing the land for horse trails. ██████████ hopes to create a number of trails in the future to expand where her riders can go on the property.

By nature of being located so close to the Hoosic River, the ██████████ run the risk of flooding and have been deemed a FEMA floodplain. This effectively functions as a conservation restriction as the floodplain designation prevents the land from being developed. ██████████ noted that when Hurricane Irene swept through town, it managed to erode a significant portion of her river and stream banks including parts of a fence that prevents the horses from wandering off. The ██████████, who are related to the ██████████, built a mound to prevent more land from flooding in the future.

While the river and stream are two watery threats, the farmland faces another. Because the soil is soggy, the ██████████ have experienced landslides before; some more significant than others, but all disruptive in nature. ██████████ did not mention any direct losses caused by the more recent large landslide, she did mention that as long as her family has owned the property, the land has been marshy. This makes it unsuitable for crops, but also development. As a result, the marsh also functionally helps conserve the farmland on the property.

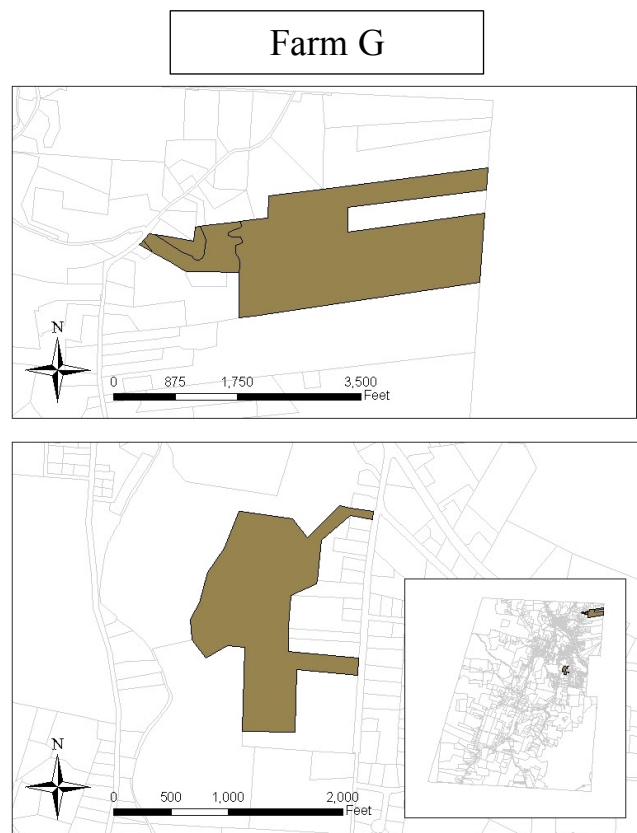


Despite the natural “conservation restrictions” on the Farm F, parts of the land are still developable. ██████ noted that she has received interest in part of her land, however she has little to no intention of selling. In fact, she has expressed solid interest in agricultural protections. Despite this, she remained skeptical of whether or not the land could be protected under conservation measures because of the flood and landslide risks. Overall, the Farm F faces the dual challenges of climate change and development. It will be crucial to maintain a close eye on this farm in the near future, not only because it is at risk in several ways, but also because it is a cultural staple in town, serving numerous local residents.

Farm F receives a Raw Threat Score of 11 out of 19. This farm is not immediately at risk for farmland loss, and likely will not be for at least a decade. (Source: ██████, Nov. 18, 2020)

Farm G, Raw Threat Score: 15

Farm G is known for its pork, beef, and chickens. Made up of 130+ acres (primarily woodlands), Farm G has enough resources to support ██████ model of raising livestock. As a pasture-based operation, the cattle are grass-fed, the chickens are pasture-raised, and the pigs are free to roam the wooded acres that make up the property. ██████ bought the land for Farm G in 1982 and started raising and selling livestock in 1987. Since then, he has gained a reputation in the Berkshires for providing the local cuisine scene with fresh meat products. Individual shoppers can also go to his farm store (located at Farm G) or the Williamstown Farmers Market to buy his selection of USDA-inspected and USDA-processed meats.



██████████ was the only farmer who we were unable to set up a full interview with, but we were able to briefly speak with him over the phone. In addition to the work he does on his land in the northeast corner of Williamstown, ██████████ also leases and hays the Lowry property. This property is town-owned and is in APR.

The land that ██████████ actually owns, however, is not associated with any conservation status. Since Farm G is composed of mostly non-prime farmland, ██████████ does not do much vegetable farming. The lack of prime-agricultural soils also signifies that his property may not meet farmland conservation prerequisites and this is most likely the reason why his land is unprotected.

██████████ does not have a succession plan in place for Farm G, as he does not have any children or relatives who are interested in taking over operations. That said, ██████████ is in good health and is not planning on retiring in the near future, therefore the farm is not in immediate danger of being sold to developers.

██████████ is a big proponent of people “going to the farm.” So much so that he set up his own farm store inside his barn at Farm G. He encourages the community to use his self-serve store (much like the one found at Farm E) and hosts periodic events to boost his sales. On top of his direct sales, he has also built working relationships with local businesses like Wild Oats, Mezze Bistro, and other local farm-to-table restaurants. He is frustrated by the lack of farming infrastructure in Williamstown. Having more immediate access to things like grains, equipment, and nearby slaughterhouses would make farming in Williamstown easier. He mentioned that—in the past—he was held back by the lack of local USDA processing facilities. He still faces challenges with his chicken processing, but he gets by.

Although the status of Farm G may seem positive, it receives a relatively high Raw Threat Score of 15 out of 19. It scored worst in the categories of Succession Plan (4), Willingness to Consider APR/CR (3), and Soil Type (3). It is interesting to note that while this farm has very little prime-agricultural soil, it still plays an important role in the local farm economy. ██████████ meat products are highly sought after and are integral to the character of the local economy. People love his products and it would be a sad event if Farm G went under. For these reasons, special attention should be directed towards Farm G to ensure that it receives ample community support and that a plan for its eventual succession be established. (Source: ██████████, Nov. 11, 2020)

Farm H, Raw Threat Score: 16

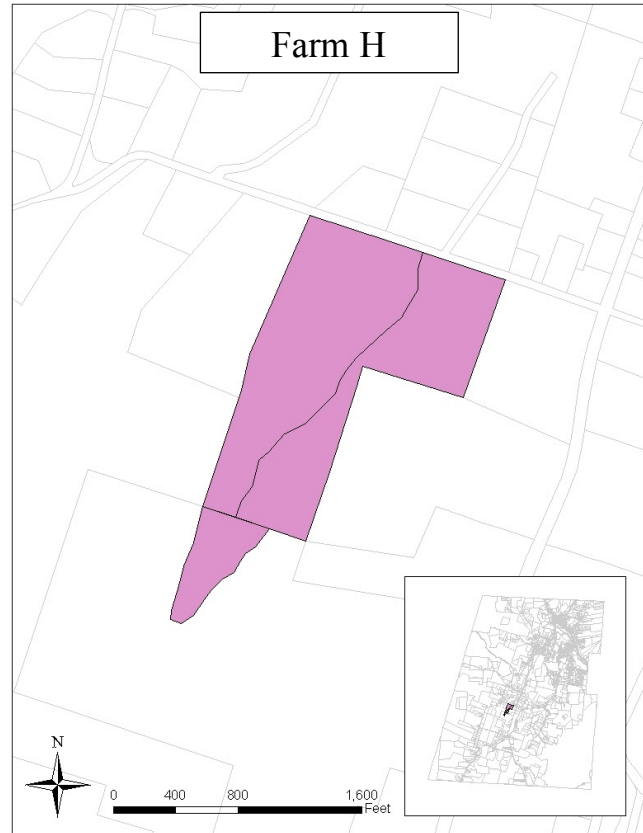
For over 25 years, [REDACTED] bred Trakhenir riding horses at her 45-acre property on Woodcock Rd. as well as a secondary property in Vermont. A few years ago, [REDACTED] retired from breeding horses and her Williamstown property now serves principally as a stable for seven retired brood mares. The Farm H is located on what was once the original Farm O and is divided roughly evenly between horse pasture and unused woods which extend behind Greylock Regional High School.

Although the horses do not bring in any money to the farm today, [REDACTED] purchases hay from the owner of Farm N

and she rents a small house on the property to a friend. Since [REDACTED] lives alone and no longer breeds horses actively, the property has unfortunately lost its agricultural designation and no longer qualifies for APR and cannot benefit from Ch. 61A tax exemptions. As a result, the high taxes on the property (approximately \$[REDACTED] per year) make succession plans difficult. [REDACTED] is getting older and her children have families with kids entering college, therefore they will likely be unable to accept the additional costs and responsibilities of the farm.

If her children do not inherit the farm, [REDACTED] admits that she will probably have to sell. Ideally, she would like to sell to someone who will use the property and its stables for horses, but it is unclear what kinds of buyers might be interested when that time comes. For now, [REDACTED] seems content for things to continue the way they are at least for a few more years. Although [REDACTED] did recently explore the possibility of growing cannabis on the property, she admits she does not have the energy to start such an endeavor at this point.

When discussing the farming economy of Williamstown, [REDACTED] says she is proud of the work and her fellow farmers do but acknowledges that no one makes money and it's hard to get by as a farmer. For Williamstown's farmers, life is made more difficult when town residents



who claim to love the bucolic aesthetic of the town also advocate for bylaws that make it harder and less economical for farmers to continue farming. For ██████████, growing cannabis is one of the only ways she sees the town’s farmers being able to continue operating, but she admits that subsidy programs like those in Vermont which pay farmers to bush hog their fields could also help if implemented in Massachusetts.

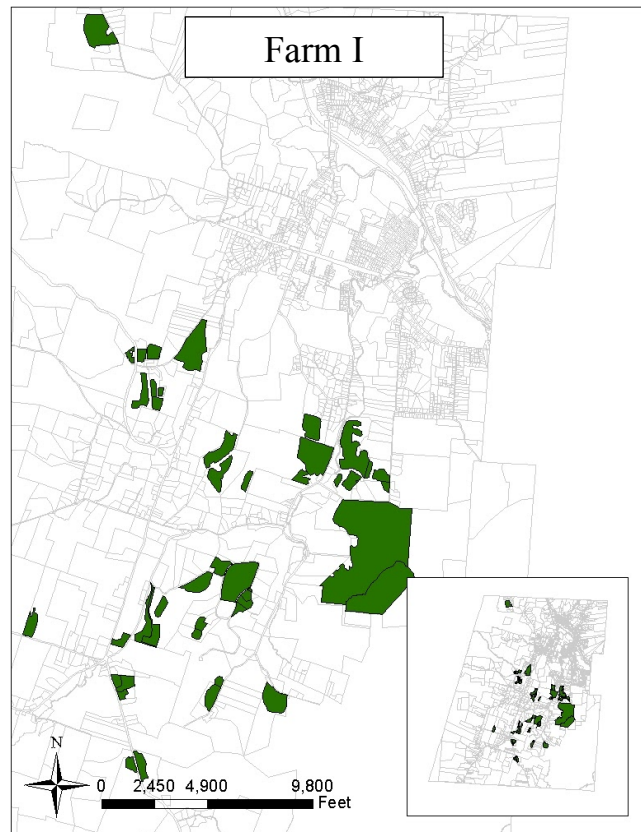
For now, ██████████ property is in danger of being sold within the next few years. Implementing a CR that lowers the farm’s property taxes could help the farm stay in the family, but otherwise a farmer-match program might be advisable when the time comes for ██████████ to sell. The farm’s proximity to other large beef and dairy farms also opens the possibility for one of these farmers to purchase or lease the land in the future for grazing operations, but it is unclear if this would be of interest to either party.

██████████ property receives a Raw Threat Score of 16 out of 19 and is in imminent danger of loss. (Source: ██████████, Oct. 25, 2020)

Farm I, Raw Threat Score: 7

Farm I is one of the largest farms in Williamstown. It has been a family-owned dairy farm for the past five generations, making it as much a fixture of the community as the Berkshire mountains themselves. The farm is owned by the ██████████ family, who manage approximately 400+ acres of hay fields and 250+ acres of corn. ██████████ said, “I’m a dairy farmer, the crops I grow are to feed my cows.”

Through a series of wise business decisions and the help of conservation tools, Farm I has managed to grow their operation to one that can support their large



farming family. Started in 1905 by [REDACTED], the farm weathered the transition from retail to wholesale and is now one of two remaining wholesale dairy farms in Williamstown.

The [REDACTED] family is no stranger to the APR process. They have used this conservation tool numerous times to the benefit of the community and themselves. The actual land owned by the [REDACTED] family is mostly prime-agricultural soil, which makes it a desirable conservation target in the eyes of the state. Leveraging their coveted soils, the [REDACTED] family has been able to invest the money earned from their APRs into a fleet of farming equipment to expand their custom harvest business. The custom cropping/harvest business now serves close to a dozen properties in Williamstown and surrounding towns.

It's their custom harvest business that allows the [REDACTED] to hay so extensively all over town. [REDACTED] stated that his team can hit all his fields in just a few days. This efficiency and forethought is reflected in his farming practices. [REDACTED] is a big proponent of no-till and cover cropping. These practices have saved him thousands of dollars in operation costs (fuel, time, equipment, labor), while at the same time providing ecological benefits to the soil (aeration, increased microbial health, increased biodiversity, increased nutrient retention). By maintaining a healthy soil, [REDACTED] is able to provide his crops with adequate nutrients (in addition to the fertilizer he uses) and he has witnessed the positive effects that regenerative farming can have on crop yields.

Looking towards the future, [REDACTED] mentioned that he wants to revitalize the farm's maple syrup operation by making use of the 200-acre timber lot behind the farmhouse. [REDACTED] hopes to partner up with two other farms to restart the old taps.

The COVID-19 pandemic has also affected farm operations. COVID-19 destabilized an already volatile commodity milk market to the point that [REDACTED] had to reduce his total number of cows from 240 down to 200. At one point he was literally pouring milk down the drain. The headaches brought about by such waste have spurred ideas he has had in the past of getting back into the retail bottled milk business. Such a move would allow him to decouple the dairy operation from the commodity market but would require significant upfront costs.

Farm I is here to stay. [REDACTED] is relatively young and he is already talking about how his son is taking steps to take over the custom cropping/harvest business. The family is active in conserving their land with current efforts underway to conserve another 20 acres of their prime-

agricultural farmland. For these reasons, Farm I received a near-perfect Raw Threat Score of 7 out of 19. (Source: ██████████, Oct. 31, 2020)

Farm J, Raw Threat Score: 8

Farm J is a nearly 200-acre farm operation located at the “Five Corners” where Route 43 intersects Route 7. The farm is owned by ██████████ and formerly managed by ██████████. Up until recently, Farm J was looking to expand their own operation by inviting other farmers to lease their land and sell their products in their soon-to-be refurbished farm store. Currently, Farm J has thirteen acres of apples, three acres of blueberries, part of an unmaintained orchard, twenty acres of meadows, and a parcel that is hayed by ██████████ of Farm N. There is also another meadow on the western edge of the farm, although ██████████ was unsure how it was being used. Nearly all of Farm J’s property is in APR.



While Farm J has had an extensive history in town, both ██████████ and ██████████ seemed to have an intense focus on the future of the farm. These goals were twofold. First, Farm J hoped to offer a variety of financial resources, including funding, product purchasing and marketing. Second, they planned to offer a number of operation and infrastructure resources, including storage and physical land to grow crops and graze animals. While the first goal was intended to attract other farmers to Farm J, the second was designed to increase community participation in the farm.

From our conversations with ██████████, it was clear that ██████████ wants farmers farming the land. ██████████ mentioned hopes of bringing in farmers who would want to maintain the

pastures and raise poultry, cows, and sheep. The goal was to create “niches” for other producers to lease land. [REDACTED] hoped to accomplish this in part by opening a farm store, but also by expanding financial resources available to farmers, as mentioned above. This would have turned Farm J functionally into a co-op, one that [REDACTED] suggested could bring benefits to several other Williamstown farmers.

Second, [REDACTED] discussed revamping the orchard so it could continue to produce fruit. While the current orchard is old and may not produce for much longer, [REDACTED] discussed starting a new orchard that would have been used for a “pick your own” business model that would have brought consumers directly to the farm. This could have also been applied to the three acres of berries that Farm J also operated. [REDACTED] mentioned that having Williams College students nearby and a steady stream of autumn tourists would have helped the apple and berry picking businesses thrive.

However, these goals were to be short lived. Between the time we visited Farm J and the completion of this report, we learned that [REDACTED] would no longer be working there. This essentially throws a wrench into the plan that [REDACTED] and [REDACTED] devised. As of December 18, 2020, the farm is for sale, listed for \$5 million according to Farm J’s website (FarmJ.com). This sale includes all agricultural land, as well as the barn, cidery, and the storefront on the five corners.

Farm J is at an important transition point in terms of its lifecycle as a farm. Now that it is up for sale, the future of Farm J is much less certain, and this new development throws into question the plans for the farm’s revitalization efforts. We have decided to include this farm summary (in the past tense) for the sake of consistency and continuity.

Farm J receives a Raw Threat Score of 8 out of 19 which is only two points above a perfect score 6. This farm is not in danger of farmland loss due to its APR status, however its managerial consistency and future ownership remains uncertain. Given that our matrix was based off our conversations with [REDACTED], we have decided to maintain the current raw threat score. (Source: [REDACTED], Oct. 28, 2020)

Farm K, Raw Threat Score: 15

Farm K and its farmers have a rich history in Williamstown that spans over 100 years. Originally located along Hopper Rd on the Hopper Property, the majority of the land has been sold off to the state of Massachusetts to be placed under conservation status.

The [REDACTED] have been farming the Hopper since before they even had land rights. They officially took over a large portion of the Bacon Farm (the original farmers/landowners) when the late [REDACTED] purchased it from his cousin, Everett Bacon, in 1951. With the help of his two sons ([REDACTED]), [REDACTED]

[REDACTED] ran the farm for over 20 years. During that time, specifically in 1970, [REDACTED] also bought 7 acres of land (that belonged to Williams College) right off Route 7 on the western slope of Stone Hill. A few years after his death in 1974, his sons inherited the Hopper. In 1982, [REDACTED] had 367 acres of farmland put into Ch. 61A with the goal of lowering his property taxes. In the 1980s the [REDACTED] began to realize that farming in Williamstown was not economically viable. In 1988 they ceased dairy operations and sold off their dairy cows. Developers had their eyes on the Hopper land, but [REDACTED] decided to keep it undeveloped by selling 465 acres to the Greylock Reservation in 1991. [REDACTED] brother, [REDACTED], was able to lease 45 acres of Hopper land, and with the help of his son, [REDACTED], and his nephew, [REDACTED], cut hay and raised replacement heifers.

Today, [REDACTED] continues to focus on raising replacement heifers and haying the Hopper. [REDACTED] says that the heifer operation is difficult to depend on because he does not get a fixed price for his heifers. Unlike other farms with cow operations in town, he does not receive any kind of subsidy or stimulus package from the federal government. He is on his own. Money is the big issue for this farm. [REDACTED] wants to put the parcel off of Route 7 into

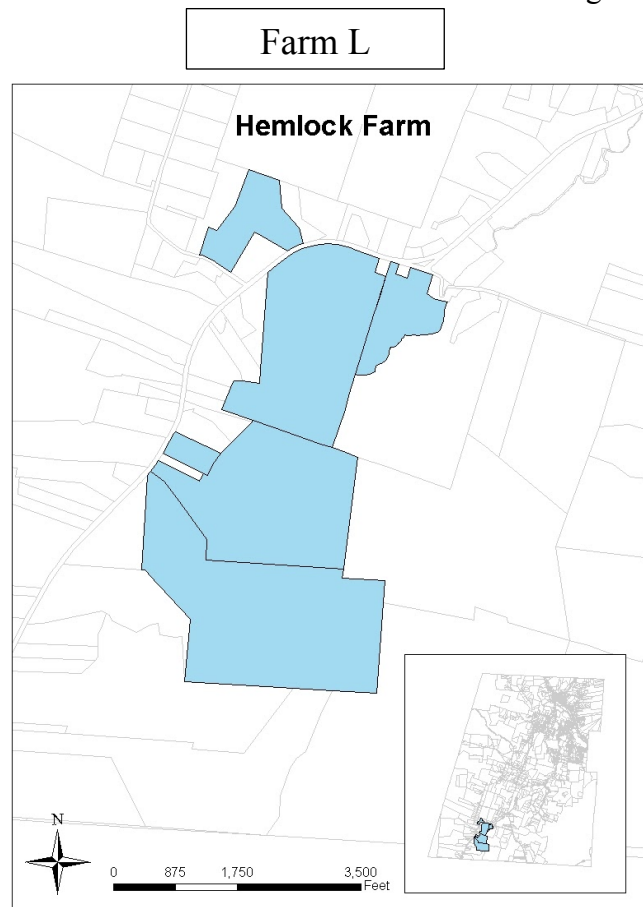


Chapter 61A but he has some reservations; he doesn't like the idea of having to pay five years of back taxes on land if he wants to take acreage out of the program, and he is against the prohibition of growing cannabis on lands under Ch. 61A. ██████ said he is interested in growing cannabis as a crop, but he doesn't see that as a viable option under current legislation. Instead, he is hoping to sell his land to a nonprofit organization (like the Clark Art Institute) to eliminate his property taxes. He would like for the Clark to give him a life lease on the land so that he can continue to raise cows on the property since they have become a cultural attraction for tourists and town residents. ██████ also stated that he would like to sell the woodlot on the western slope of Stone Hill to the Clark so they could expand their recreational trails. With a bit of work, these woods could become a popular addition to the Clark's walking trails.

Going forward, the vision for the farm is bleak. ██████ has no succession plan in place. His children are grown and have expressed zero interest in taking over operations. ██████ works a part time job in addition to farming to maintain his livelihood, and as such cannot afford to hire additional farmhands. ██████ needs someone to take over, he won't be able to do this work forever. For these reasons Farm K receives a 15 out of 19 and the farm is in danger of being sold in the next 5 years. ██████ loves farming and would ideally continue to do so well into his old age, but as he stated, "Farming is a dying industry in Williamstown. It just doesn't make sense to do it anymore." (Source: ██████, Oct. 31, 2020)

Farm L, Raw Threat Score: 12

Farm L is a medium-sized beef cow farm located on 130 acres on Hancock Rd. in southwestern Williamstown. Farm L is the family farm of the ██████ and is now run by ██████, and their son. In the 1990s the farm was converted from a dairy farm into a beef farm as low milk prices



made dairy operations less and less sensical. Even today, the beef industry is also subject to dramatic price swings and the ██████ comment on how it can be difficult to get the beef processed because the nearest processing plants are far away and subject to market swings. With the rise of COVID-19, meat processing has been especially unpredictable, but the operation is still plodding along with a herd of 40 cows.

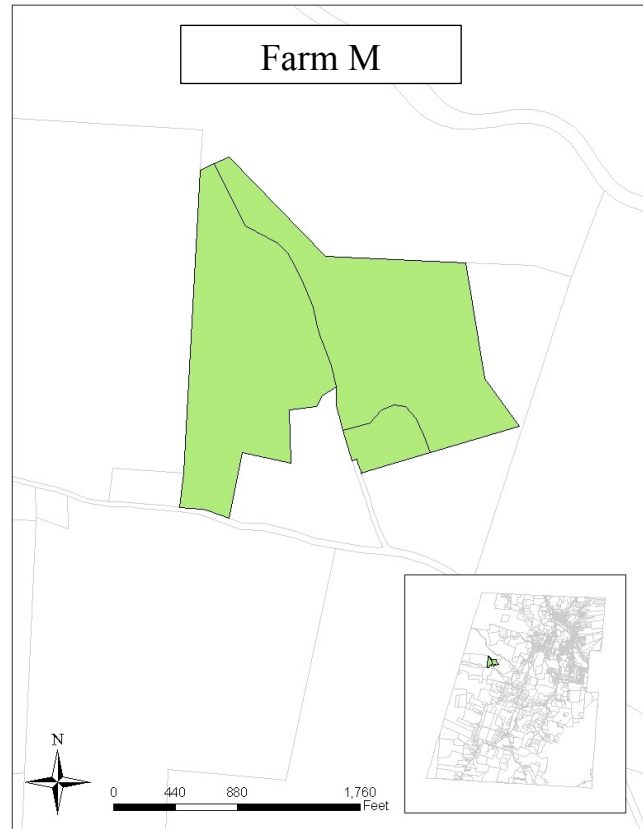
The farmland owned by the ██████ itself consists mainly of pasture, woods, wetlands, and two large greenhouses. For years the greenhouses on the property have not been used for much, but now that ██████ is getting older and no longer works winter shifts at Jiminy Peak, he has more time to devote to vegetable growing and the greenhouses may become a larger part of the farm in the next few years. The land outside the greenhouses is a mix of prime and non-prime agricultural soils which benefit from Ch. 61A tax exemptions but have no other conservation designations. Due to the large percentage (~75%) of non-prime soils, very little—if any—of this land would likely qualify for APR preservation. Despite this, the ██████ admit that they have witnessed firsthand many of the properties near theirs succumbing to development pressures. While the family has never seriously pursued CRs or other forms of land preservation, they value the persistence of farmland along Hancock Rd. For this reason, the ██████ may be willing to consider pursuing preservation if it made sense to do so and didn't cause too many headaches, but they have no plans to at the moment.

In terms of leased land, the ██████ have close relationships with many of their neighbors who allow them to graze their cows and hay their fields at no cost. Through these relationships, Hemlock Farms leases approximately 230 acres for grazing and haying on properties along Hancock Rd.

For his part, the ██████ son is in his 30's and seems actively involved in the family business despite having a second job he devotes time to as well. As his parents reach retirement age within the next 5-10 years, ██████ seems poised to take over the family farming operations but we were not able to confirm this for sure. While the farm does not appear at risk for this reason (Farm L receives a raw threat score of 12 out of 19), it remains unclear what the younger ██████ might decide to do with the land when ██████ retire. This is a question worthy of further investigation and developing a relationship with the family now could help aid the succession process when it occurs. (Source, ██████, Oct. 31, 2020)

Farm M, Raw Threat Score: 17

Farm M is a small, four-acre vegetable farm located on the slopes of the Taconic Crest. Owned and operated by [REDACTED], the farm has been around since 1977, and has served as a key connector between Williams College, its students, and local food systems. The [REDACTED] operation nowadays consists mainly of vegetables, although they once managed livestock. [REDACTED] also manages other parcels of land nearby totaling about 36 acres. The [REDACTED] hay this land for ground cover to protect their crops in the winter months. [REDACTED]



currently operates two greenhouses for tomatoes and grows a variety of other vegetables on the other side of the two parcels. He tends to grow carrots, butternut squash, green beans, spinach, and cauliflower, as well as a variety of soil and seasonally appropriate crops. He mentioned that he starts his own seeds in a greenhouse near the on-farm house where he and his wife live. While [REDACTED] manages to grow vegetables in his rocky, mountain soil, he noted that it's not the best in the world for growing crops.

The [REDACTED] also take pride in their organic farming practices. [REDACTED] noted that this method of farming can get "expensive," but found that it was much better for the environment in the long run. He also tries to avoid tilling if he can, as it can rid the soil of important nutrients. Instead, he's opted to use a plastic covering to get rid of weeds. This essentially "sterilizes the soil" since weeds cannot grow because they're deprived of sunlight, and therefore the dirt is weed-free in about two weeks. This method allowed him to produce nearly a 100% yield on his fall batch of carrots.

Farm M's operation is much more than just a farm. The [REDACTED] view their operation as a way to connect Williams College and its students with the land and local farming practices. Bringing students to the farm in a variety of ways has been an important tradition at Farm M for

decades. Students have worked or volunteered in a number of ways since the 1990s. The Lehman Center as well as the Williams Outdoor Club have both brought students up to the farm for learning and farm volunteer service. Students have and continue to work for the [REDACTED] each year, and [REDACTED] is currently employing one member of the class of '21.5. He's also had over 100 students work for the farm over the past 30 years, but these numbers have dwindled since the start of the pandemic.

This is not the only [REDACTED] tradition that has been sacked by the COVID-19 pandemic. The [REDACTED] once had a multi-thousand dollar "handshake" contract with Williams College to provide butternut squash, a deal that fell through both because of the pandemic but also because of shifting values at Williams College. [REDACTED] felt that dining services and the college as a whole no longer valued local food, and that this has been a gradual, generational shift. He now has to sell his vegetables to restaurants and CSAs, and he's recently opted to donate his leftover crop. In the early months of the pandemic, a significant amount of his crop, particularly leafy greens, had nowhere to go, and had to be left to rot. While [REDACTED] reported he's doing "much better" than he was in the early months, he still expressed sorrow over the loss of crop and community that the pandemic, and larger attitude shifts, has caused.

Overall, the future of Farm M is uncertain. [REDACTED] expressed hope that Williams College would take it over in some capacity, either as a research lab or as a farm run by alumni to keep the college-to-farm connection alive. While an effort to move the farm into the hands of the college was tried before by [REDACTED] and the Williams College class of '79, the proposal failed to come to fruition and hasn't been pushed since. The [REDACTED] want the farm to go to the college, but if this cannot happen, [REDACTED] said he would like a young farmer to take over.

Regardless of who the farm passes to, the [REDACTED] are actively "closing up shop" ([REDACTED] is quite literally graveling up rows of growable soil because he cannot produce so much food by himself anymore). For the [REDACTED], the farmland is their retirement plan and the family will need to make money off of their land somehow. [REDACTED] has remarked that this is only possible by selling it. Although he wants to keep it for farm/scientific purposes for the college, he will sell it to a wealthy alum of the College if the opportunity arises. [REDACTED] daughters do not wish to take the farm over.

Farm M receives a Raw Threat Score of 17 out of 19 which is only two points below the highest threat score of 19. This farm is in imminent danger of farmland loss. (Source: [REDACTED], Oct. 25, 2020)

Farm N, Raw Threat Score: 16

Farm N is a moderately sized hay bale operation in the southwest quadrant of Williamstown. Back in 1765, a land grant for 100 acres was given to [REDACTED] to start the farm. Since then, the farm has stayed in the family, making it one of the oldest running operations in town.

Ridgeview is owned and operated by [REDACTED], and the farm now sits on about 85 acres of owned land and makes use of an additional 125 acres of leased land. The owned land is composed of mixed soils. The grass grown in these fields gets baled and sold as feed for companion animals, namely horses. The farm is a seasonal operation; hay production typically occurs from the 1st of June to the 10th of October. In the winter the farm is focused on selling their product.

Similar to other local hay farmers, [REDACTED] leases much of the land that he hays. Some of these leases are fixed agreements but he also has annual agreements (handshake leases) with property owners for the smaller parcels. The general model is that he hays someone's land, they don't have to deal with the work of haying and baling, and [REDACTED] gets to keep the hay. He mentioned that when he was younger the smaller parcels did not have any monetary consideration for the haying of the land. For the larger parcels, the farmer historically paid a rent to hay the land. He can see the time coming where farmers will need to get paid by the landowner because there is simply not enough profit in it to justify the expense of harvest



machinery. This is a significant change—it will go from the farmer paying the landowner to farm the land to a future where the landowner will pay the farmer.

The ownership of harvest machinery is a luxury that many small farmers can't afford. Small amounts of land are not conducive to large harvests, and may not help provide the financial means to own equipment. This limits small farmers from being able to work more land, thereby limiting potential revenue. Luckily, [REDACTED] has his own machinery, and so he is able to hay extensively. When asked about value added he states that hay is a particularly difficult commodity to get creative with. Aside from using grass to make milk or meat (used as feed) or selling it as feed for companion animals, there is not much one can do with grass.

On the topic of preservation, [REDACTED] is not optimistic for the future of farmland in Williamstown. He mentioned that the Commonwealth's dream is for farmers to reinvest the proceeds from an APR into their business, but this doesn't work for everyone. We need to employ a holistic understanding of the landscape and take into consideration the geographic constraints that other regions don't have. The vast majority of land in Williamstown can only be used to grow grass. "That's what it's been in the past, that's what it'll be in the future," states [REDACTED]. He also brings up the lack of local processing facilities. Food has to travel 40-50 miles to get processed and brought back. There is little transportation advantage. Back when Williamstown had a more local economy this wasn't an issue, but now farmers have to compete with other farmers who are in different regions. The problem with this competition is that those other farmers have bigger/better land that lets them be more efficient with their operations. Farmers in Williamstown can try to complete but they can't win.

All that said, [REDACTED] believes that Williamstown does have some positives in its favor. The town has people who care deeply about farms. Oftentimes these are people with affluence and the ability to support the farms. This is precisely what farmers should be tapping into. Getting the community involved is what allows these farms to be successful. Though he questions how, as a commodity farmer, he will be able to do this for more generations. The future farmers will have to appeal to local people who want to see the farms succeed and are willing to pay the premium for their goods. He hopes that when the time comes, his daughter is willing to keep the land going. She is very young, so this is a great uncertainty.

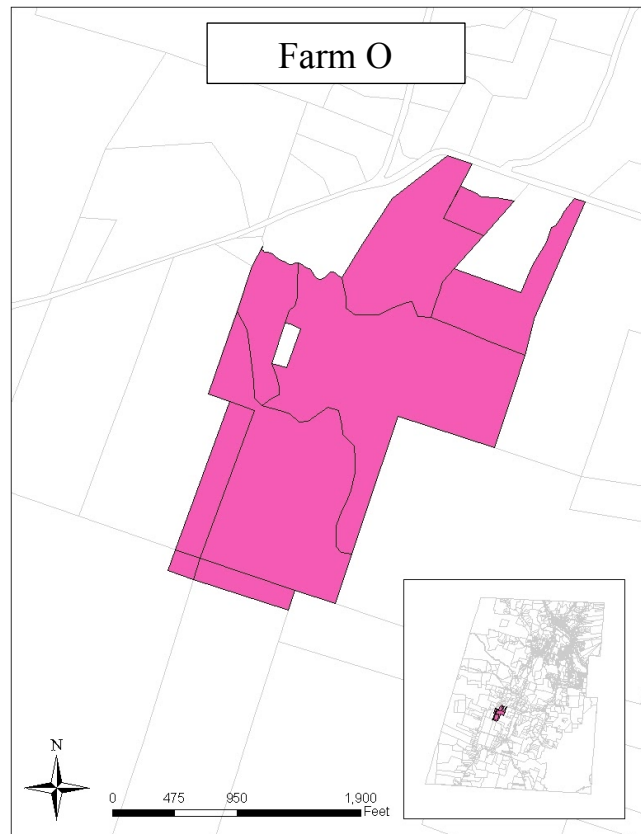
For these reasons, Farm N was received a raw threat score of 16 out of 19. While the score is high, we do not believe the farm is in immediate danger of being sold seeing as it has

been in the family for numerous generations and [REDACTED] is a dedicated farmer. He loves his land and the time he gets to spend working it. WRLF and the Agricultural Commission should spend considerable effort on developing programs that foster community engagement with local farms. They must drive home the idea that residents can vote with their pocketbook. That they can drive around town to see exactly where their food is coming from and who is growing the commodities that contribute to the local economy. (Source: [REDACTED], Nov. 19, 2020)

Farm O, Raw Threat Score: 12

Located at the corner of Woodcock Rd. and Oblong Rd., Farm O is a historically iconic farm in Williamstown. The original Farm O, established by [REDACTED] in the early 1800s, sprawled over 2,800 acres at its peak (FarmO.com). The land has since been sold and divided up over the years for many uses including agricultural, residential, and land trust. Today, [REDACTED] is the 5th generation [REDACTED] family farmer, and she and her husband [REDACTED] now farm approximately 100 acres of the property.

As recently as 2019, Farm O was a maple sugar and llama farm run by [REDACTED] parents. That year, however, a fire destroyed the main sugar house and barn, motivating her parents to transition into retirement and pass the farm, and responsibilities of rebuilding, to [REDACTED]. As a young couple, the [REDACTED] have gradually brought the family business back. However, instead of raising llamas, the family now raises beef cattle and continues to tap the sugar maples on their property and neighboring land owned by the Trustees of Reservation. In 2020, the [REDACTED] inaugural herd consisted of eight black angus cattle and the family has plans to expand to over 20 in 2021.

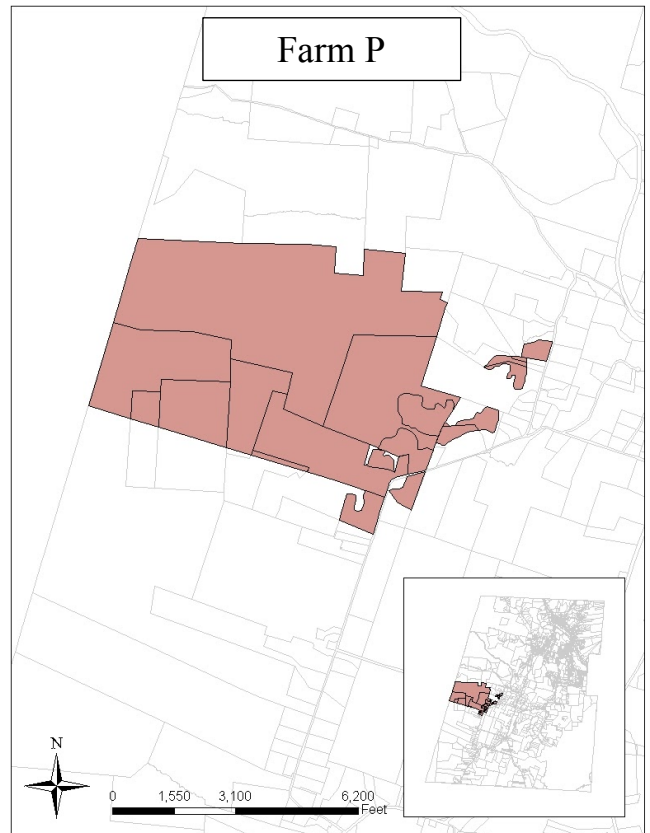


The land of Farm O consists largely of non-prime agriculture soils and sugar maple woods. The non-prime soils are used for grazing the cattle and the maple woods are tapped for maple syrup and maple creams. In 2018, [REDACTED] signed a five-year lease to farm one acre of the Farm O's land for vegetables. Unfortunately, the land currently owned by the [REDACTED] likely does not qualify for APR because of the poor soils and has no other conservation protection besides Ch. 61A tax exemptions. It is unclear whether the [REDACTED] would be open to considering conservation protection of their land, but as new young farmers themselves who are actively involved with the Williamstown Agricultural Commission, the threat to further farmland loss at Farm O is low.

Over the next few years it will be important to foster a positive relationship with the [REDACTED] to ensure that the long legacy of Farm O endures. Farm O receives a Raw Threat Score of 12 out of 19. (Source: [REDACTED], Nov. 7, 2020)

Farm P, Raw Threat Score: 13

Farm P is the biggest farm in Williamstown by acreage with at least 1000 acres managed. Farmer [REDACTED] oversees a number of cows, but also an extraordinary amount of woodlands. His operation includes 27 beef cows, 13 broad calves, 220 acres for cultivation (120 owned, 100 leased), and over 1,000 acres of wood lots. He produces timber that is used for a number of things, including baseball bat handles, rake handles, and more. [REDACTED] harvests the maples on his timber lots for furniture and logs poorer woods such as ash to produce railroad ties and pallets. He is the sole owner of his main farmstead but has a number of handshake leases with his neighbors who allow him to hay their land. He also has a rentable guest house on the top of a hill in the eastern part of his property.



While [REDACTED] oversees a large acreage as is, it is his future endeavors in cannabis that excite him currently. With the help of outside partners, he would like to start a half- or one-acre cannabis/hemp plot, but would want to lease it out to a younger farmer who would actively manage it. The six-acre parcel next to this potential plot currently supports buckwheat, oats and serves as pasture land for some of his cattle. He noted that cultivating cannabis/hemp requires a lot of intense labor and management, something he doesn't want to undertake on his own. It also seems a partnership with another farmer could function as a potential succession plan for [REDACTED], although he has a granddaughter who may be interested in farming but is still far too young to take over the farm in any meaningful way.

Part of the draw of cannabis/hemp for [REDACTED] is its income potential. [REDACTED] noted that he gets relatively little money for hay and timber compared to what he might get for cannabis/hemp. Organic cannabis crops can sell for well over \$1,000 per pound according to [REDACTED], which would help continue the farm operation into the future. While he seemed to suggest that he and the farm were "doing fine," it seemed like, despite his age, a successful cannabis/hemp operation would allow [REDACTED] to continue to own and enjoy his land for a long time to come.

Overall, Farm P's operation is quite diverse, but it is clear that [REDACTED] is hoping to diversify even more in coming years. He suggested that this crop could help a lot of farmers in town who are doing poorly financially and noted it could help preserve both farms and the farmland aesthetic of Williamstown. A sentiment of cooperation among farmers exploring cannabis/hemp cultivation, [REDACTED] remarked, could help rebuild dying farms in town and could attract new and young farmers to Williamstown.

[REDACTED] receives a Raw Threat Score of 13 out of 19. This farm is not immediately at risk for farmland loss but could be in the future. (Source: [REDACTED], Oct. 24, 2020)

Private Landowners

The scope of our research was limited to active farms in Williamstown; however, over half of the farmed land in town is not actually owned by farmers. Our research found that these leased lands are owned either by private landowners, trustee/land trust organizations, the Town

of Williamstown, or the State of Massachusetts. These other owners often “lease” their lands to farmers at little-to-no cost which allow the farmers to use these lands for grazing, hay, crops, and timber. These lease agreements ensure the lands remain well tended and help farmers support their operations; however, these agreements can change or be revoked at any time.

We found that in Williamstown, 48% of the farmed land (2,005 acres) is owned by farmers, and 52% is leased (2,180 acres).

Due to their significant contribution to farmed land (1,100+ acres), private landowners in particular are important players in farmland preservation and conservation. While many of the leased lands owned by private landowners benefit from Ch. 61A tax breaks because they are used for agricultural purposes, they do not qualify for APR because they do not function as actual farms. Because of this, Conservation Restrictions and land grants/purchases are two ways development rights can be purchased from these lands so that the lands remain in agricultural or recreational use.

In discussing the future of farmland in Williamstown, we would be remiss to overlook the importance of leased land. For this reason, we have included learnings from conversations with several of Williamstown’s largest landowners that we believe the town and Williamstown Rural Lands Foundation should work with further to cultivate positive relationships and ensure the lands they lease are not lost to development or other pressures.

We have also included brief details of some of the private organizations that own significant swaths of farmland in town.

Herb Allen, Private Landowner

Herb Allen values land, vistas, and privacy. As one of Williamstown’s largest landowners, he strives to preserve the farming character of the land surrounding his properties. Owning extensive acreage throughout the Purple Valley, Mr. Allen prefers to keep his land free of any intensive farming operations, opting instead to keep it aesthetically well-manicured through seasonal haying. Mr. Allen’s holdings are intimately tied to the local farming industry because many farms depend on his land and business for their own livelihood. During the interview with his lawyer, Bruce Grinnell, it was mentioned that Farm I’s custom harvest business is in charge of haying approximately 100 acres of Mr. Allen’s local properties. This

opportunity provides Farm I with hay that is used to feed their dairy cow operation. The Farm C is also involved with Herb Allen seeing as they farm on approximately 60 acres of land he owns.

One of the main goals of this farmland project was to elucidate the nature of farmer succession plans. This extends to landowner succession plans. To put it plainly, there is great interest surrounding what Herb Allen plans to do with his land—will he use tools like APR/CRs to preserve his land for future generations of outdoor enthusiasts? Will he donate his land to the college (like he has done in the past)? Will he sell off his land only to have it be overrun by low-density-development? We simply do not have a clear indication of what he might do. Mr. Grinnell stated that he would be surprised if Mr. Allen did not want to preserve his land seeing as he has gone through great lengths to keep it the way it is while he has been its owner. Future efforts might include more interviews with Bruce Grinnell or Herb Allen himself to see if his position on informing the town of his plans has changed. This meeting was a step in the right direction. (Source: Bruce Grinnell, Nov. 21, 2020)

Dr. Eric White, Private Landowner

A decade after the colonial establishment of Williamstown in the 1760's, the Torrey Family purchased two property lots on the northern end of Oblong Rd. In time, the Torrey's would expand their land holdings, earning the west section of Williamstown the nickname "Torrey's Woods." In the early 1900s, the lands were sold to Williams College Reverend, Dr. John H. Denison, who grew the farm to over 460 acres and named it Thorvale Farm. For a time, the farm produced dairy, however this ended in 1947 with the sale of the farm to the author Harry Sinclair Lewis, who leased the property's farmland to other farmers to keep it operational and grew the estate to 781.5 acres. In the late 1900s, the Carmelite Fathers of New York transformed part of the property into a novitiate house and then a retreat house before selling their share of Thorvale Farm to Dr. Eric White at the turn of the 21st century ("Before Carmel").

Today, Thorvale Farm is owned by four private landowners including Dr. White and Daniel Holland. Mr. Holland owns the majority of the woods on the property while Dr. White owns the majority of the three remaining agricultural fields. Dr. White leases these fields to Farm P and Farm I who hay and harvest corn on 17 acres of mixed prime and non-prime soils.

In 2008, due to concerns that the property would be divided up into residential lots and developed in the future if not preserved, Dr. White pursued a CR on the remaining farmland of

Thorvale Farm. Although Dr. White pursued the process at length, he was unable to win the support of two of the other landowners who own small strips of land that run through the fields all the way to Oblong Rd. Without these landowners permission, Dr. White was forced to discontinue the pursuit of a CR on the fields and now worries that when he sells the property (which may occur in the next several years) there will be little to stop the other landowners or a development group from buying the rights to the land, paying the necessary back-taxes to end Ch. 61A restrictions, and transforming the fields into house lots.

When thinking about the future, Dr. White believes he will sell the property within the next few years since he is now retired and lives alone and his kids are not interested in taking over the farm. Dr. White cares a lot about the land remaining in agricultural use which is why he pursued a CR. With the CRs failure; however, the future of the land is uncertain. In 30+ years living at Thorvale Farm, Dr. White has seen the steady transformation of farmland along Oblong Rd. from fields to 2+ acre residential lots owned by wealthy professionals. This transformation in land use has been occurring steadily for well over half a century, and Dr. White remembers that people used to say “one cannot throw a rock down Oblong Rd. without it hitting a doctor.” This saying is a reference to the fact that many wealthy professionals have established residence along what used to be a primarily agricultural country road.

Ideally Dr. White would like to sell his land to a farmer who can take care of the fields and make use of the farmhouse and barns which he has renovated and kept in prime condition. To do this; however, an active relationship needs to be developed with Dr. White to aid in the succession planning process. If not, and the land gets sold to the highest bidder, it is possible that Thorvale Farm will soon lose all its agricultural use which would start a new chapter in the life of the land. (Source: Eric White, Nov. 14, 2020)

Daniel Holland, Private Landowner

Mr. Holland is one of the town’s largest landowners. For years, Mr. Holland has been accumulating property around Oblong Rd.—mostly consisting of 857+ acres of unmanaged woods—to preserve the aesthetic nature of the valley and protect them from development. From our conversations with other landowners, Mr. Holland is someone who enjoys his privacy. Although he owns vast swaths of Williamstown’s woodlands, he does not seem to have pursued

CRs or other forms of land preservation on these lands. He does; however, appear to have some sort of agreement with Farm P owner [REDACTED], who logs a portion of Mr. Holland's land.

Our team was unable to contact Mr. Holland for this project; therefore, we cannot comment on his intentions or exact land holdings. Nevertheless, Mr. Holland remains one of the largest landowners in the town and the fate of his property going into the future remains an open question.

Other Landowning Organizations

Hopkins Forest

Hopkins Memorial Forest (HMF) is a 2,600-acre research forest owned by Williams College. The forest is located in the northwest corner of town and extends slightly into eastern New York and western Vermont. Of this acreage, the forest owns 22 acres of Wire Bridge Farm which the college acquired from the Teitgens family in 2004. This section is currently hayed by Farm I. The forest also taps sugar maples on a handful of acres surrounding the Rosenberg Center.

Although the manager of HMF, Drew Jones, is not aware of additional legal protections on the forest or the Wire Bridge land, the forest is classified as research/teaching and therefore is not taxed. There are also significant development and land use restrictions written into the deeds of the property that ensure the forest and farmland's conservation. (Source: Drew Jones, Nov. 19, 2020)

Purple Valley Trustees

Made up of alumni from the Williams College Class of '60 – '62, the Purple Valley Trustees own 850 acres of land surrounding the Mount Hope estate. They also own an additional 150 acres located south of the Waubeeka Golf Course. The members wanted to acquire a substantial piece of land where they could build homes in Williamstown. Longtime associates of Herb Allen, the members settled into their properties down the road from Mr. Allen's estate on Green River Road. Of the original eight partners, a number of them have sold off their individual parcels. Today much of the land is leased out to Williamstown farmers for hay. (Source: Bruce Grinnell, Nov. 21, 2020)

Rural Lands Foundation

The Williamstown Rural Lands Foundation (WRLF) has been a key player in town land conservation since 1986. They currently manage fifteen properties, totaling over 1,000 acres of land. WRLF is a member-supported nonprofit organization, meaning that they can only conserve as much as their donors and funders provide. While this limits how much land they can conserve, their website reports a solid cohort of nearly 400 members who support WRLF on a cyclical basis.

WRLF's goals include preserving family farms, preventing loss of open space, and managing smart development. In terms of farmland, WRLF maintains management responsibilities mostly over small farmland parcels including those on Farm P, Farm I, Farm O, and Farm L. WRLF manages all of Farm B, which is under a 99-year land lease agreement with the [REDACTED] family. Overall, they manage over 100 acres of farmland in town, and their commitment to preserving farmland remains vital to farm preservation in Williamstown. (Source: Williamstown Rural Lands Foundation)

Town of Williamstown

Although it owns much more land, the Town of Williamstown leases six parcels of land to Williamstown farmers totaling approximately 245 acres.

State of Massachusetts

Like the Town of Williamstown, the State of Massachusetts owns a significant portion of land in town. It actively leases approximately 160 acres of these lands to Williamstown farmers.

Recommendations

Our research findings illuminate many of the unique opportunities and challenges facing farms and farmland in Williamstown. From these learnings we have identified four farms with farmland at risk of loss/conversion that should be prioritized in conservation efforts. Not all these properties are at imminent risk of loss, nor did they necessarily receive the highest Raw Threat Scores from our Evaluation Matrix. However, their threat levels are high and their circumstances make them amenable to immediate conservation efforts.

In addition, we have also developed a series of recommendations that Williamstown Rural Lands Foundation, the Town of Williamstown, and the Williamstown Agricultural Commission might consider in their efforts to support farms and promote the sustainability of Williamstown's agricultural economy.

The farms we recommend for priority conservation efforts:

Farm P: Farm P presents a unique opportunity for conservation by the WRLF. While it seems that [REDACTED] is open to the possibilities of APR and this may be worth pursuing, a Conservation Restriction under the oversight of WRLF could also serve his farm well. Farm P encompasses a lot of land, both for grazing and timber. The sheer size of the farm's woods and the pre-existing logging trails could be used for hiking or other outdoor activities. This, in turn, could bring growth to Farm P as hikers or other outdoor enthusiasts could utilize the property's rentable cabin for multi-day trips. While Farm P is already doing well, it could have an incredibly successful farm operation in the near future; one that might attract young farmers to Williamstown. In the near future [REDACTED] hopes to begin cannabis cultivation, which would serve as a revenue generator for his farm and the region. He is also seeking a young farmer for this cannabis cultivation, and a land preservation would allow [REDACTED] to successfully pass down this new business to a young farmer, potentially someone in his family. Finally, [REDACTED] also seems incredibly open to cooperation in his farm operation, making Farm P an ideal candidate for conservation.

Farm F southeastern parcel: While much of Farm F's land is already in a "de facto conservation restriction" because of the Hoosic River and the FEMA flood plain, part of the farmland remains unprotected. This is where WRLF could step in. One main draw to this parcel is that it is small, therefore it would not be expensive to conserve compared to some larger plots of land. Another draw is that [REDACTED] is already anti-development and seems willing to conserve her land if it allows her to continue using the land as is. Perhaps the most important reason that this parcel should be put under a formal conservation is because there are already very real development pressures facing this parcel. [REDACTED] is not near retirement and plans to continue operating the farm for years to come, but other landowners are eagerly interested in her southeastern land parcel for development purposes. While [REDACTED] notes that she has no intention of selling the parcel anytime soon, if a wealthy individual offered her a lot of money for

the farm, she would at least be tempted by it. Therefore, if WRLF opted to conserve this parcel, the [REDACTED] might feel even less inclined to sell this parcel in the future, as they would then have the funds to continue owning and operating as a result of new funds from the parcel's conservation.

Farm H: Farm H's horse stables present a third interesting candidate for immediate conservation action. This property is likely to be sold within the next few years, and although the horse stables on the farm are no longer economically active, it would be relatively easy for a new owner to revive the agricultural use of the property. The first conservation action that could be taken would be to pursue a CR on the property. If a CR agreement can be reached, this may help reduce taxes on the property that could allow her children to retain ownership of the land. If a CR is not possible, [REDACTED] has expressed a desire for the land to be passed on to someone who will continue to use it for horses. This presents an interesting opportunity for WRLF to work with another organization to facilitate a farmer match succession plan for the property. Alternatively, Farm H is situated near a number of active farms along Woodcock and Oblong Rd. If a farmer-friendly agreement can be reached, it is possible one or more of these farms may be interested in buying or utilizing the property's land for grazing or crops in the future.

Farm D: Farm D presents an interesting fourth and final candidate for immediate conservation efforts. As with Farm H, the farm is likely going to be sold in the near future, perhaps even within the next 5 to 10 years. [REDACTED] appears to be near retirement and is slowly limiting any new operations. This property is a solid candidate for several reasons. First, the total farm acreage is not large, therefore it would be relatively inexpensive to conserve this land compared to other farms. Second, farming infrastructure already exists on the property which could allow a farmer to come in and farm without needing to build new infrastructure. Third, there is already conserved land nearby such as the Lowry property which is conserved through CR by WRLF, therefore Farm D could be an appropriate extension of this agreement. Finally, and most importantly, the land faces rural sprawl pressures. [REDACTED] explained to us that because of the road near her house, someone could easily come in and build two additional housing units on the property. This would be an expensive endeavor considering town water and power infrastructure would have to be extended to these houses, but it's not an impossible feat. The new houses would at least reduce the farmable acreage, if not eliminate farming all together on the property. The combined rural residence development potential and

the near retirement of owner [REDACTED] creates an immediate need for conservation, and a CR should be strongly and urgently considered.

Recommendations for the Town of Williamstown:

Ensuring that farmland is preserved for future generations is not just the responsibility of farmers. Smart and thoughtful growth managed by the Town of Williamstown can help preserve farms and prime farm soils as well. In “Farms Under Threat,” the American Farmland Trust identified “low-density residential land use” (LDR) as one of the biggest threats to farmland. This sort of development occurs when land is bought up by singular owners, and a house is built on the lot. While the rest of the farmland can still be farmed, the presence of residents on the property discourages agricultural practices because of noise, smell, and aesthetic concerns. The Town of Williamstown cannot completely prevent private market transactions; however, it can encourage growth in the center of town through a number of measures. First, Williamstown can focus housing efforts on pre-existing lots (ADUs), or can build on spaces within the center of town that are not currently being used for agriculture (lot off Water St and Meacham St., etc.). The town can also expand the boundaries of the General Residence District to encourage development within the already built-up areas of town. In a similar vein, the town can expand Rural Residence District 1 zones to encompass more farmland (Town of Williamstown Zoning Bylaws). RR1 is intended to preserve the “rural and upland character of sensitive environmental areas at the higher elevations of town,” but could be expanded to simply include environmentally sensitive areas, a designation that could be given to farmland (particularly to areas with prime soils).

Beyond limiting rural sprawl, the Town of Williamstown could support existing farms and foster new ones by incentivizing the creation of a regional or town co-op. Such a regional co-op has been developed before. The River Valley Co-op in Northampton, MA was opened in 2008, and has been supporting farmers ever since, buying nearly \$4 million worth of local farm food. The co-op supported 400 local farmers and food partners in 2016 (River Valley Co-Op). This sort of arrangement could provide essential economic support to the remaining farms in town. The development of a co-op at Green River Farm could help fill this gap, and the town should assist in this effort.

The Town of Williamstown can also help in terms of land acquisition and bringing in new farmers. A portion of town land can be set aside specifically for agriculture and could be leased out at a discounted rate to farmers. Arrangements can be supported or matched by other entities in town, such as the WRLF. While it is unlikely that town land goes unused, it is worth analyzing the costs and benefits of allowing agricultural practices on more town land. Finally, and perhaps controversially, the town could also look into clearing forests for farmland. Clearing forests was originally how Williamstown acquired most of its farmland, and the American Farmland Trust suggests that it could be an effective way to create more farmland and strengthen regional food systems if managed wisely (“Farms Under Threat”).

Finally, it is worth looking into the relationship between the Town of Williamstown and Herb Allen. Mr. Allen owns several parcels of farmland in town and strengthening a relationship between the two parties could prove beneficial to farm preservation.

Recommendations for Williamstown Rural Lands Foundation:

The Williamstown Rural Lands Foundation plays a crucial role in the conservation of land in the Purple Valley. The land trust is in a position to carry out meaningful conservation efforts by working directly with landowners. In addition to conserving land for public access they also focus on preserving farmland to maintain the rural character of Williamstown. To this end, we recommend that the WRLF take the following actions:

Promote involvement in farmer match initiatives. There are organizations that already exist like Land for Good, but WRLF can play a role in having personal relationships with farming families and connect them with these organizations before they put their property on the market.

Support Vermont-inspired farm purchasing. In 2004, the Vermont Land Trust (VLT) created the Farmland Access Program which can be used as an example for how to promote access to farmland. The program helps entrepreneurial farmers find affordable farms by buying farmland from previous owners and then leasing this land to new farmers who ultimately purchase the land from the VLT. So far, the program has helped nearly 40 farmers, and most new farmers are able to buy their first farm after leasing land for a few years (Vermont Land Trust). For this program, the VLT focuses on buying farms at risk of development and they ask for business proposals from the new farmers who want to buy land. Due to their funding efforts, the

VLT is able to resell these lands at affordable prices to new farmers with strong business plans. Additionally, the VLT also works with retiring farmers to match them with new farmers. In these cases, the land trust acts as a facilitator by purchasing a conservation easement to offset the cost for the incoming farmer.

Pursue CRs. Through our research, we realized that much of the land that qualifies for APRs has already been placed into the program. Prime agricultural soil farmland that remains should be prioritized for APR preservation, but CRs are still a great option for other land that lack strong land conservation status. Our farm summaries have identified multiple farms with land parcels that may be worth considering for CRs.

Host Succession Planning Workshops. These events create a space where farmers can learn more about succession planning by connecting with legal experts who specialize in legacy planning/wills. Although this is a complicated activity, these strategic planning sessions will encourage conversations centered around succession planning. MassWoods led by Paul Catanzaro has organized successful succession planning events that could be looked to as a model for future events (MassWoods). Until it can organize its own events, WRLF may also consider promoting additional webinar events in the immediate future by MassWoods for Williamstown farmers to attend.

Recommendations for Williamstown Agricultural Commission:

Currently composed of a Chair and five Williamstown farmers, the Williamstown Agricultural Commission discusses issues pertinent to farming and the town's agricultural economy. The Commission also recommends actions to the town's other governing bodies. Although our team did not work directly with this organization, the "Ag Com" is an important voice in town politics and an established forum that connects many of the town's farmers.

Recognizing this, we first recommend that the Ag Com promote farm succession planning as a way to preserve the farming economy of the town and expand farming opportunities for young farmers. By treating conversations about succession as a positive tool that can be used to achieve a strategic goal (rather than a painful topic that is left unmentioned) we believe the stigma around succession planning can begin to erode. One easy way this can be accomplished would be for the Ag Com to support and promote in person or online succession planning events for farmers hosted by WRLF, MassWoods, or other organizations.

During our research, we noticed that although nearly every farm in Williamstown finds it difficult just to scrape by financially year-to-year, a number of the farms with the most sustainable business models incorporate value-added products and direct-to-consumer marketing strategies. This observation aligns with larger trends in New England agriculture (Davis, 2017) as well as visions for farm growth outlined in the Massachusetts Local Food Action Plan (“MA Local Food Action Plan”). In our conversations with farmers, we learned that a handful of farms were considering adding more value-added type products. We also learned that a number of farmers are considering exploring cannabis cultivation. Due to the unknown future of cannabis production and its potential to serve as merely a short-term boon for the region, we believe the Agricultural Commission should give value-added and direct-to-consumer operations the same, if not more, attention as it gives to cannabis cultivation due to its more predictable long-term benefits.

Finally, this report has discussed how the farming community in the Berkshires is growing increasingly smaller as the number of farms and the amount of farmland significantly decreases. Today, only sixteen active farms in Williamstown remain with five of these at risk of imminent loss. To preserve the farms that remain and expand the number of operations in the future, our final recommendation is for the Agricultural Commission to leverage the close-knit community of farmers in Williamstown to encourage them to advise and assist each other with administrative challenges like changing business plans, identifying and writing grant applications, and expanding cooperative partnerships that promote local food networks. Since most of Williamstown’s farms do not compete directly, sharing knowledge and working collaboratively is a strong way the Agricultural Commission can build community and support the sustainability of Williamstown’s farming economy.

Conclusion

Our report finds that farms in Williamstown face a number of challenges that threaten the viability of farming as a hallmark of Williamstown’s economy and cultural identity. We found that the number and size of farms have decreased dramatically over recent years in line with agricultural census data from Berkshire Country and New England generally. Single family residential housing/LDR stands out as the primary driver of farmland loss, and lack of succession planning coupled with unconserved land are principal factors driving this land conversion.

All the farmers we interviewed were perseverant, resilient, and cared deeply about the town and their land. For many, while it can be tough to keep their farms economically viable, hard work makes the lifestyle worthwhile. We were impressed to learn about the many ways Williamstown farmers have adapted and innovated farming strategies to farm on non-ideal land and harsh weather conditions.

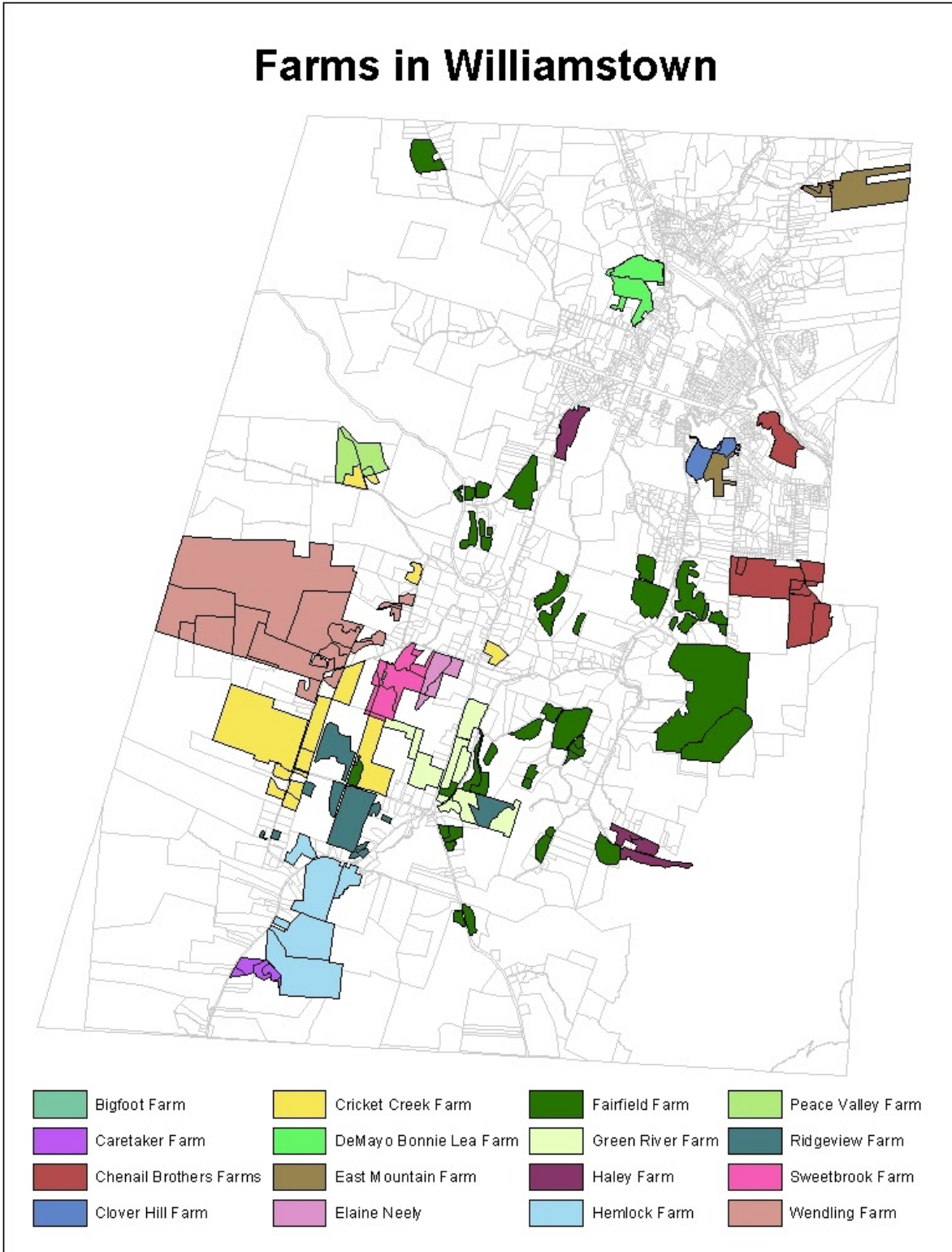
As with many things, the future of farming depends on the next generation. Williamstown is fortunate to have farmers of varied ages, but it must do more to preserve farmland so that it can be accessible to new farmers who might not have the capital to pay market rates for existing farmland. Of the sixteen active farms in Williamstown, our Evaluation Matrix and ArcGIS mapping reveal that seven have no land conservation status higher than Ch. 61A. If farming is to remain viable, the conservation of these lands must be prioritized.

In coming years, ensuring the sustainability and resiliency of farms in Williamstown will require strategic planning and ongoing support from the town and the state. This report has surveyed the town's farms and identified the major threats to farmland. It has also presented recommendations that the town, the Williamstown Rural Lands Foundation, the Williamstown Agricultural Commission, and others can use today to begin moving toward this goal. While the path ahead will not be easy, there are many tools at the town's disposal. Further creative thinking should be always encouraged and entertained as well.

As it stands, the farming community in Williamstown is small, and that has its advantages. Let's make sure it does not grow any smaller.

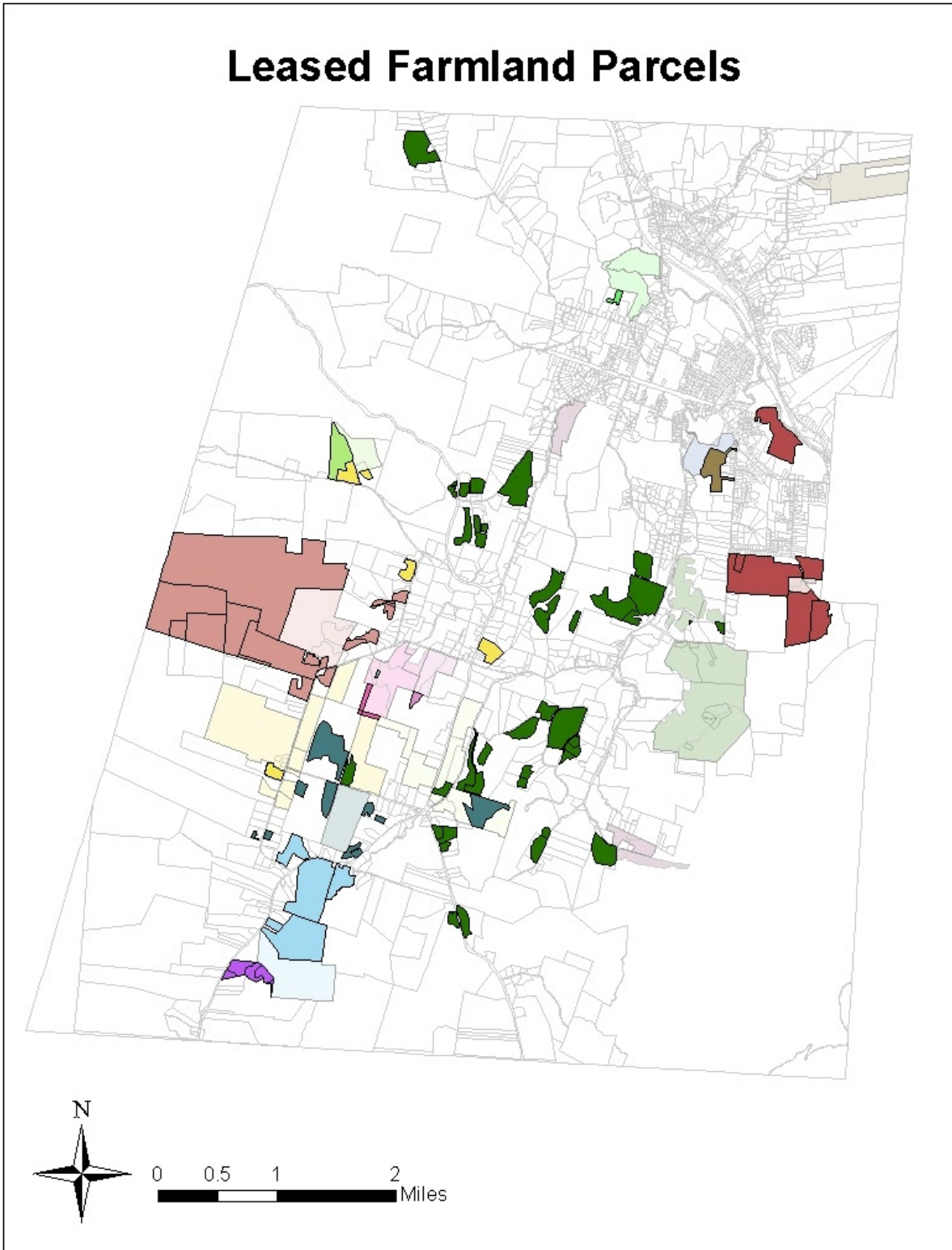
– The Farmland Team

Appendix



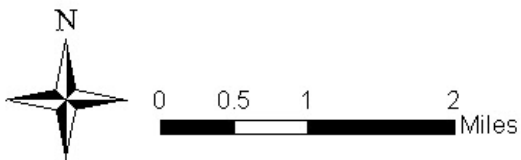
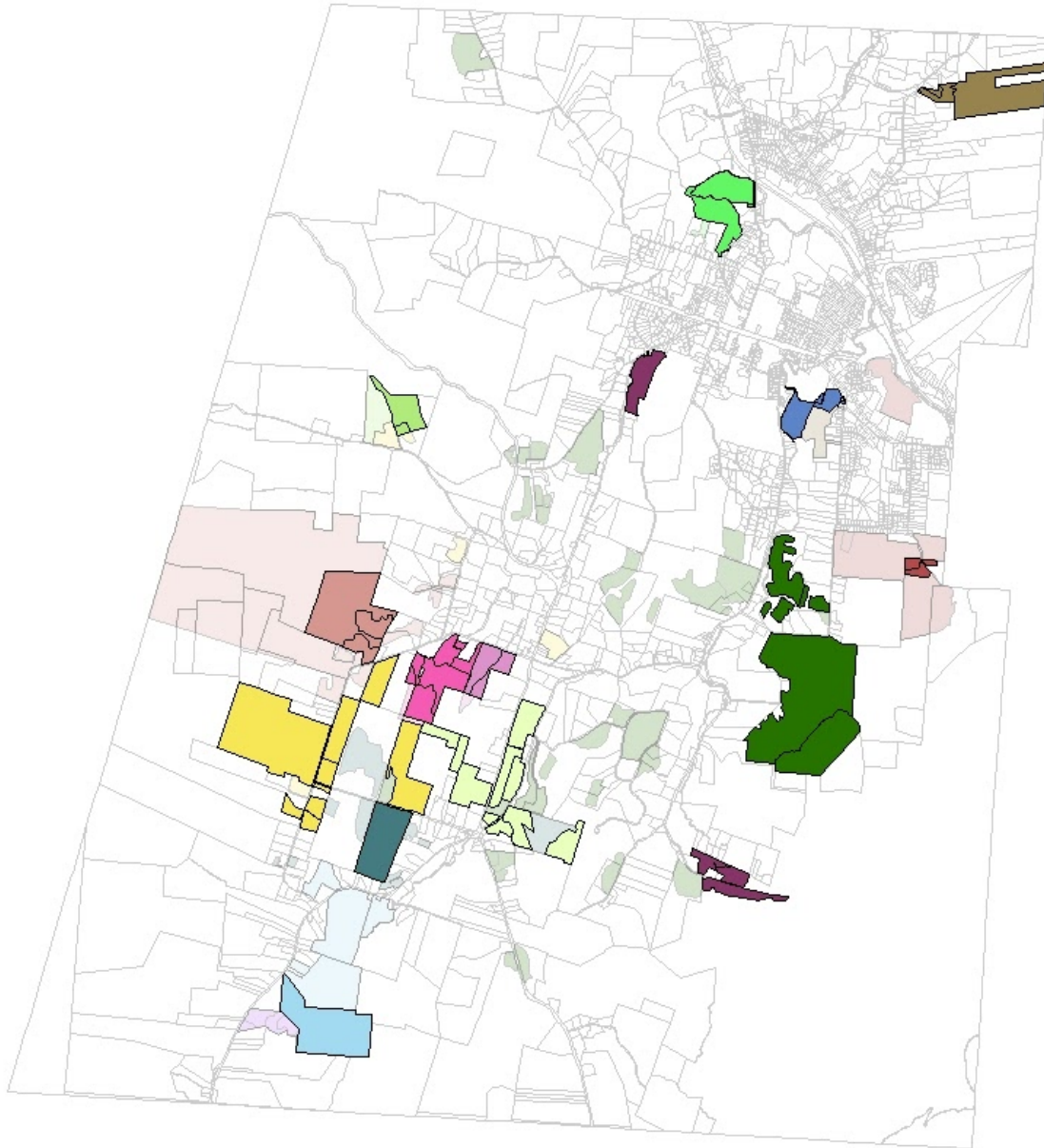
Map 1. Farmland in Williamstown including leased and owned land, organized by farm name.

Leased Farmland Parcels



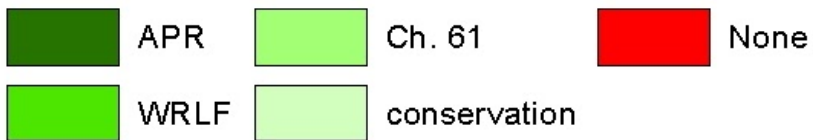
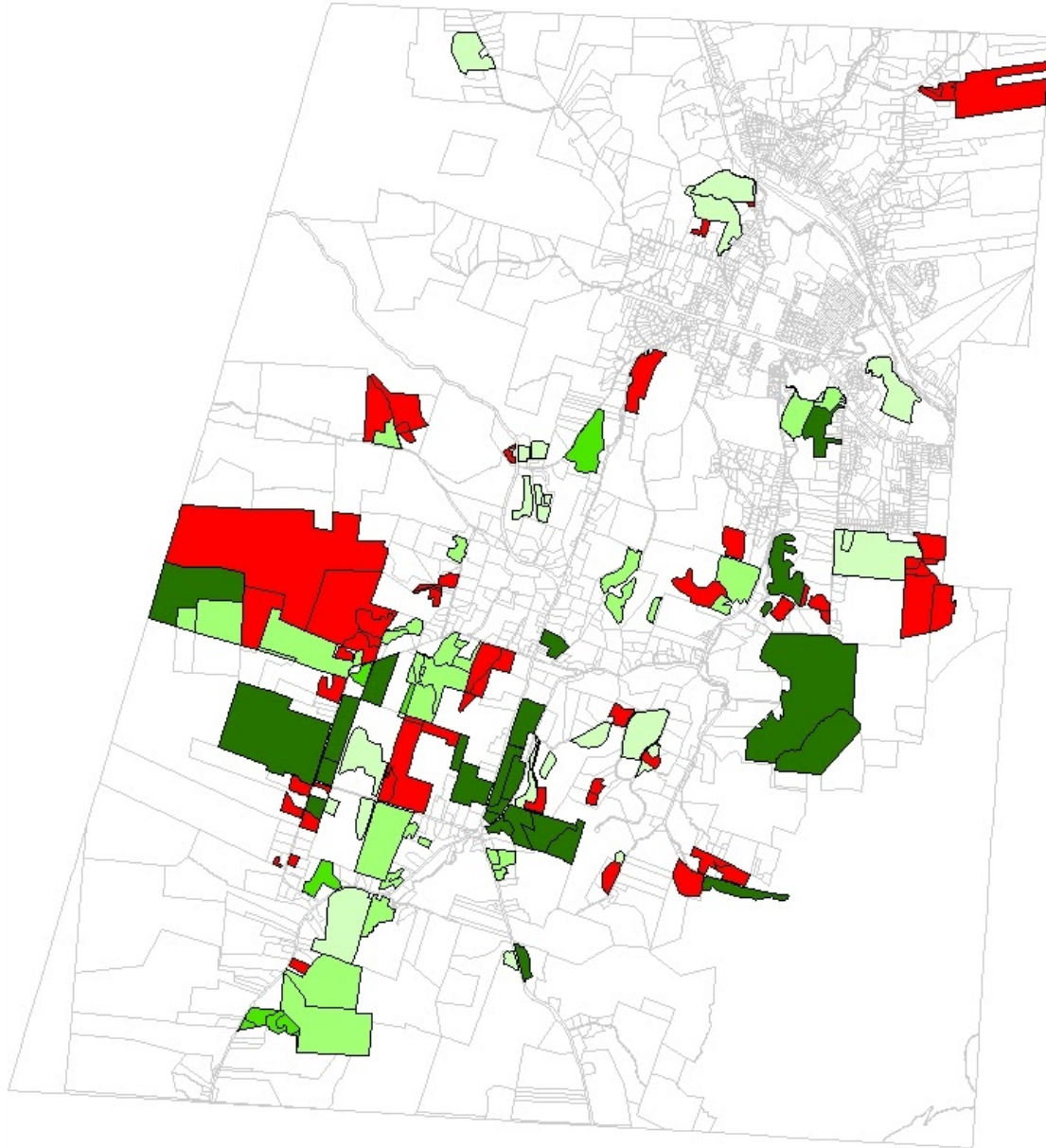
Map 2. Farmland that is under lease. Land that is owned by the farm is displayed at 80% transparency.

Owned Farmland Parcels



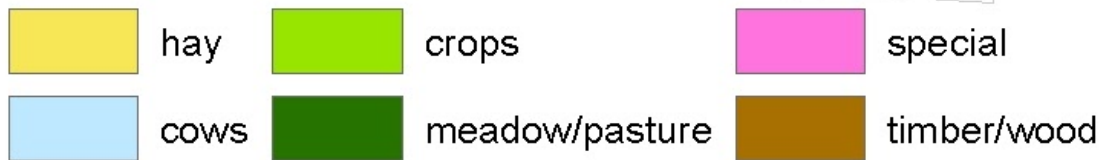
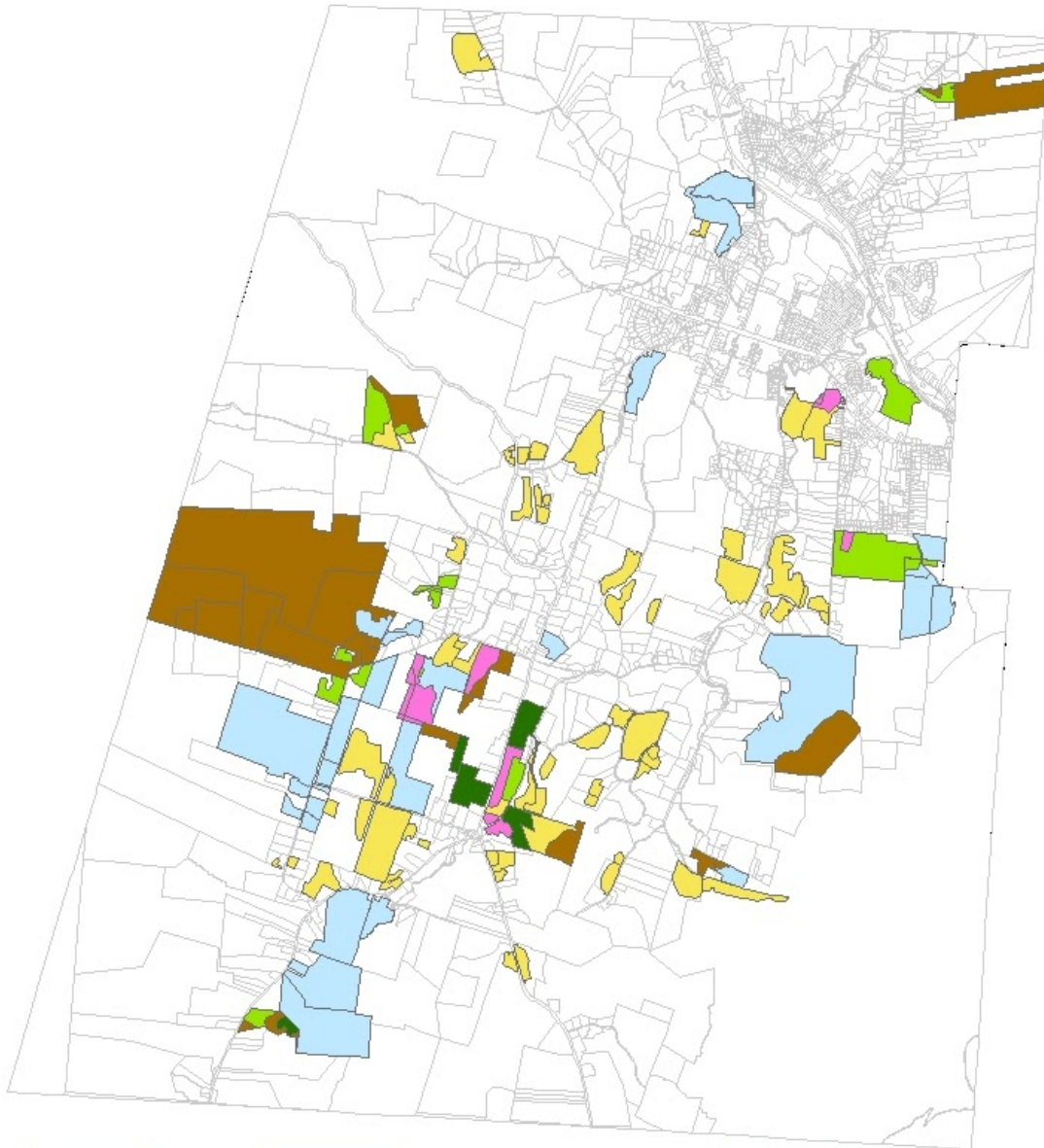
Map 3. Farmland that is owned by the farmer. Land that is leased by the farm is displayed at 80% transparency.

Conservation Status

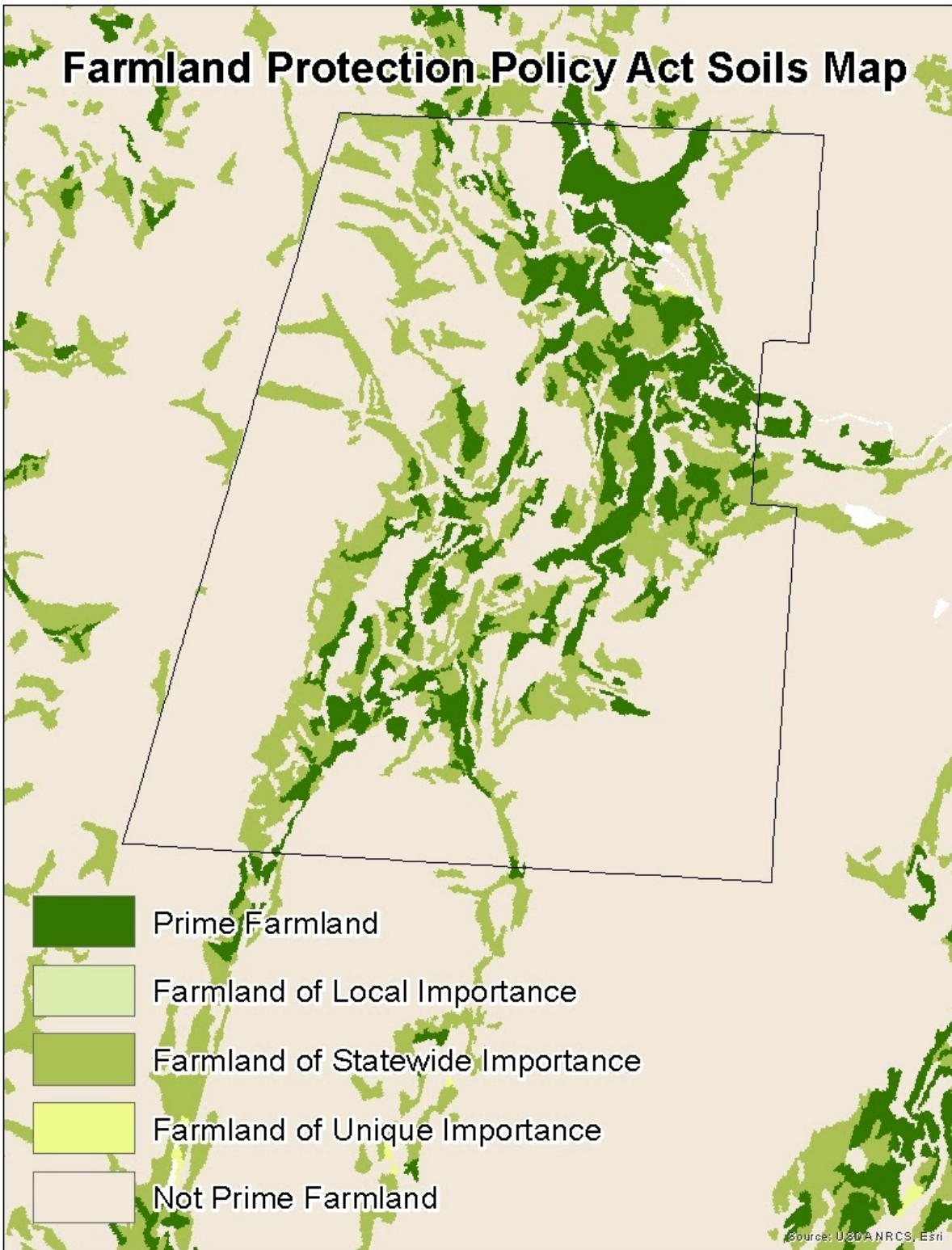


Map 4: Conservation Status of farmland in Williamstown, MA.

Agricultural Use

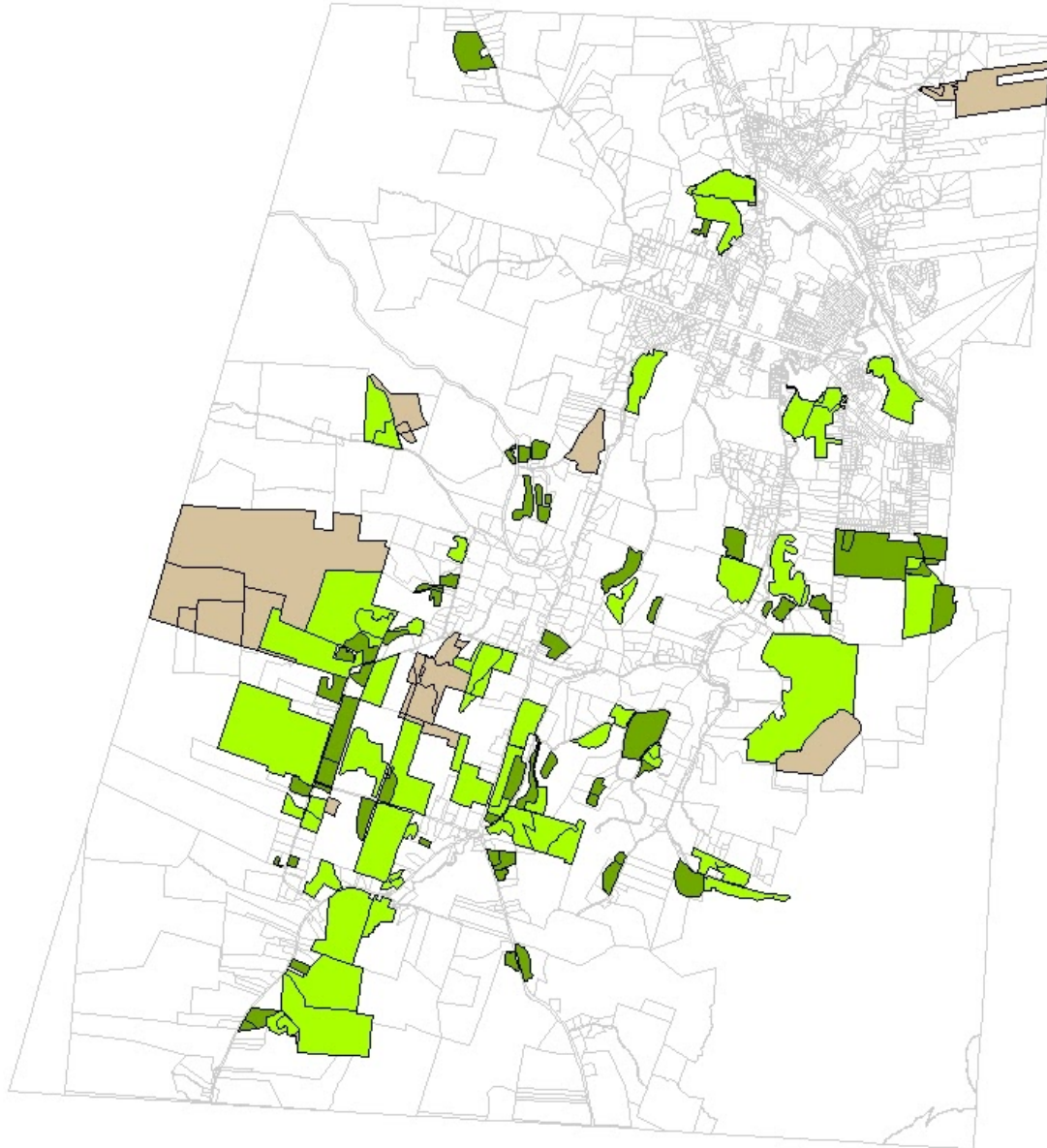


Map 5: Agricultural land uses of farmland in Williamstown, MA.



Map 6. Farmland Protection Policy Act soil map for Williamstown, MA

Soil Status



prime ag mixed non-prime

Map 7. Soil Status of farmland in Williamstown, MA.



Map 8. Farmland Protection Policy Act Soils map with farmland parcel overlay

Photos





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