

Williamstown Farmland Project

*Assessing Contemporary Threats to Farmland in Williamstown,
Massachusetts*



Elizabeth Bigham, Juan Rebolledo, Nicholas Sommer
ENVI 302 Environmental Planning Workshop
Fall 2020



David McGowan – Executive Director,
Williamstown Rural Lands Foundation



Andrew Groff – Town Planner, Town of
Williamstown

Project Goals



- 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) Get a sense of farmer succession plans.
- 4) Identify 4-5 priority farms for preservation efforts.

Why Preserve Farmland?



Declining number of farms and shrinking farm sizes

Retiring generation of farmers

Aesthetic + historical value

Regional food networks

Conversion to single-family residential housing

How to Preserve Farmland?



Challenge:
Market Land Value vs. Agricultural Land Value

Methods for Farmland Preservation:

- APR – Agricultural Preservation Restriction – permanent agricultural protection
- Conservation Restrictions – land use restriction
- Ch 61A – property tax breaks for active farms
- Farmer match + land lease programs

Methodology

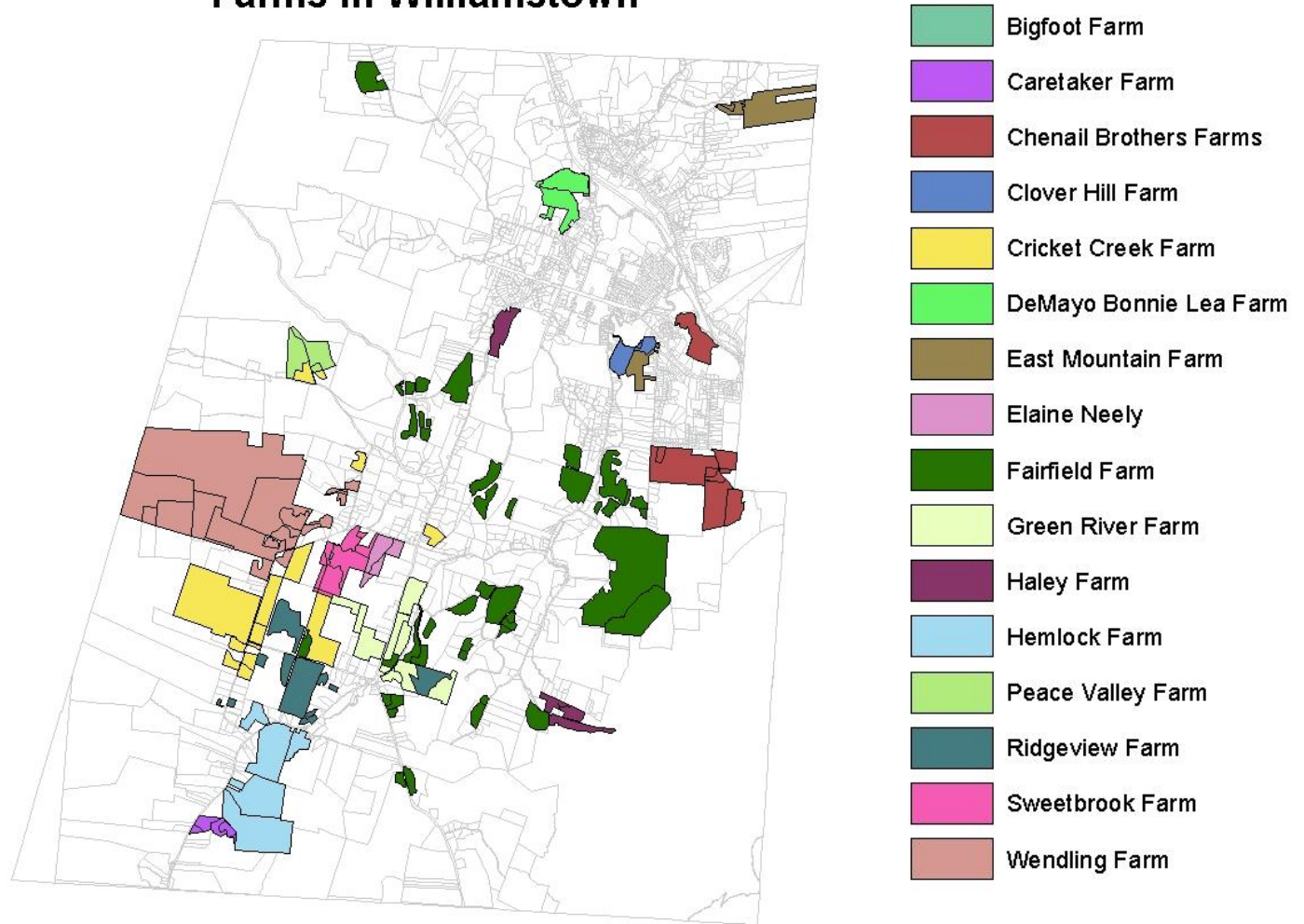


©Berkshire Eagle

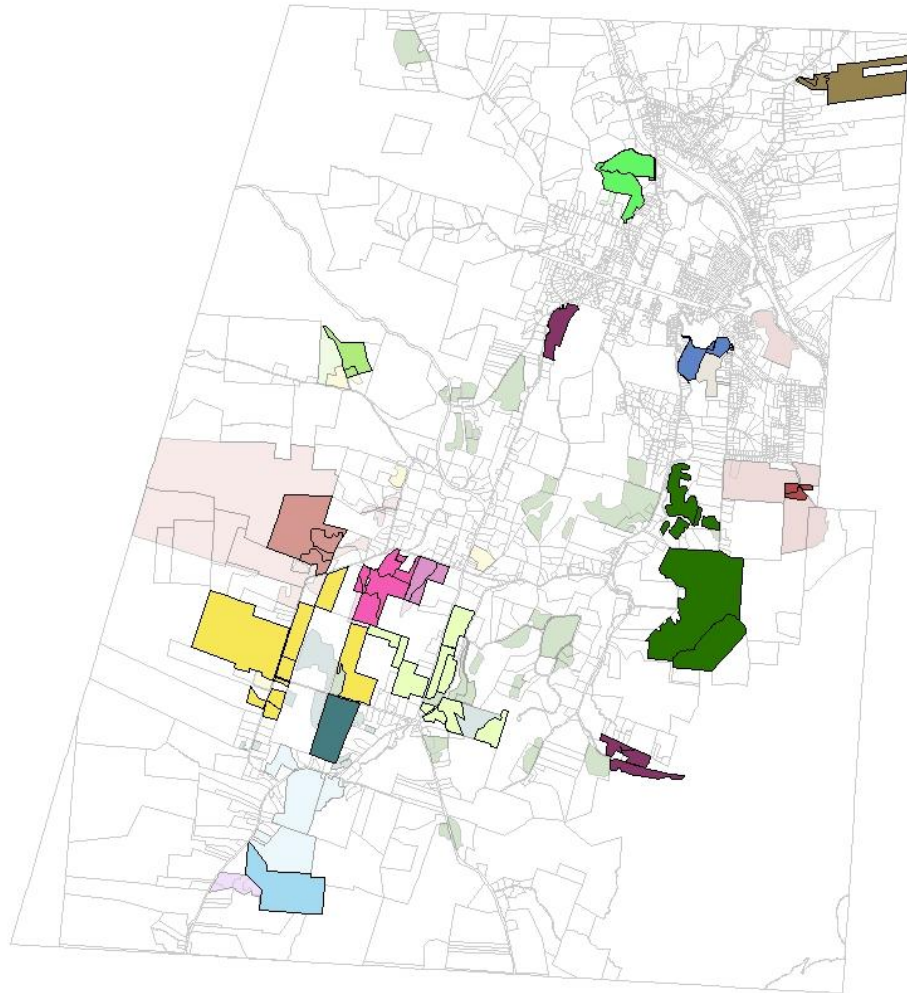
- **Background Research**
 - Agricultural Reports
 - Farms Under Threat (2020)
 - APR Program Guide (2020)
 - A Future for Farming (2013)
 - NE Food Vision (2011)
 - Paul Catanzaro (MassWoods)
 - Dr. Eric White (landowner)
 - Mr. Dustin Griffin (historian)
- **Farm Interviews**
 - 14 in-person farm visits
 - 1 Zoom interview
 - 1 Phone call
- **Evaluation Matrix**
- **Parcel Mapping**

Parcel Maps

Farms in Williamstown

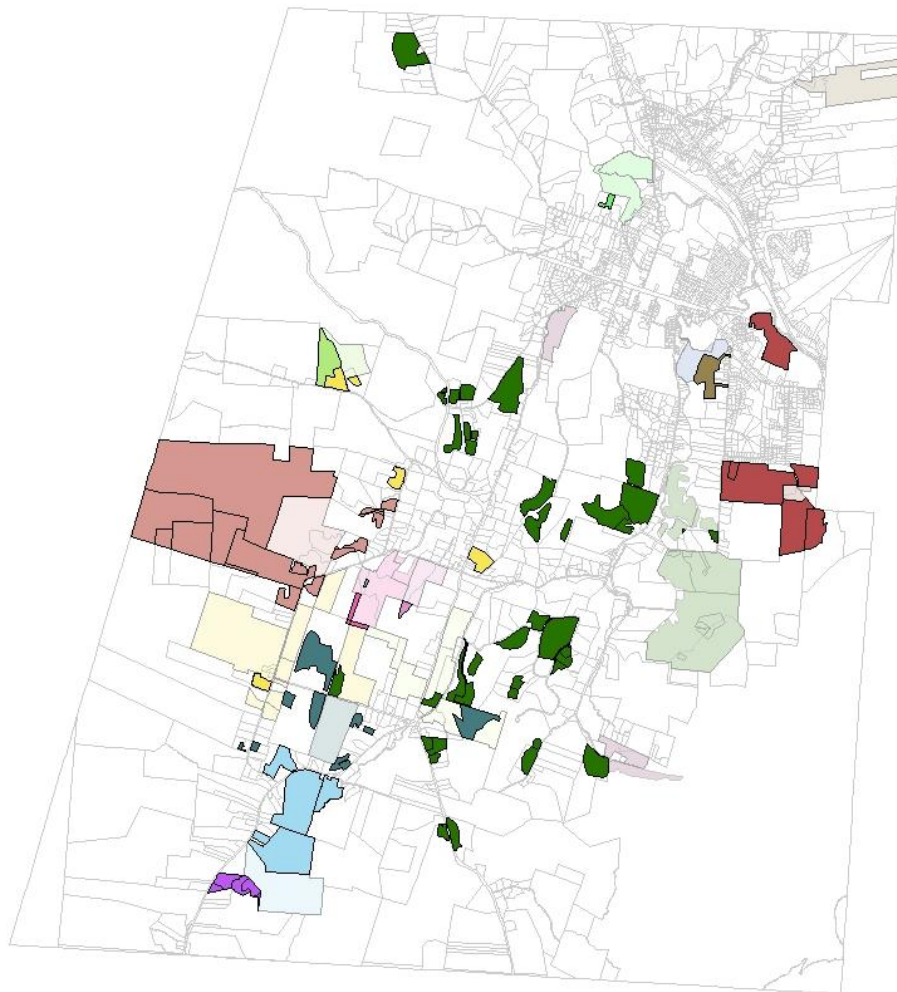


Owned Farmland Parcels



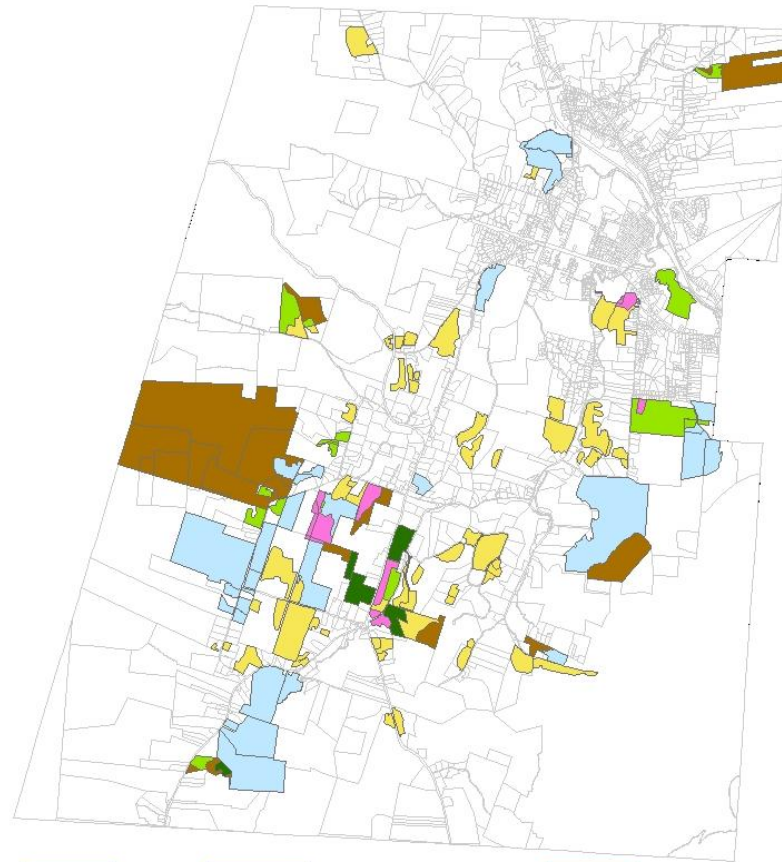
- Bigfoot Farm
- Caretaker Farm
- Chenail Brothers Farms
- Clover Hill Farm
- Cricket Creek Farm
- DeMayo Bonnie Lea Farm
- East Mountain Farm
- Elaine Neely
- Fairfield Farm
- Green River Farm
- Haley Farm
- Hemlock Farm
- Peace Valley Farm
- Ridgeview Farm
- Sweetbrook Farm
- Wending Farm

Leased Farmland Parcels



- Bigfoot Farm
- Caretaker Farm
- Chenail Brothers Farms
- Clover Hill Farm
- Cricket Creek Farm
- DeMayo Bonnie Lea Farm
- East Mountain Farm
- Elaine Neely
- Fairfield Farm
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Agricultural Use



hay



crops



special



cows

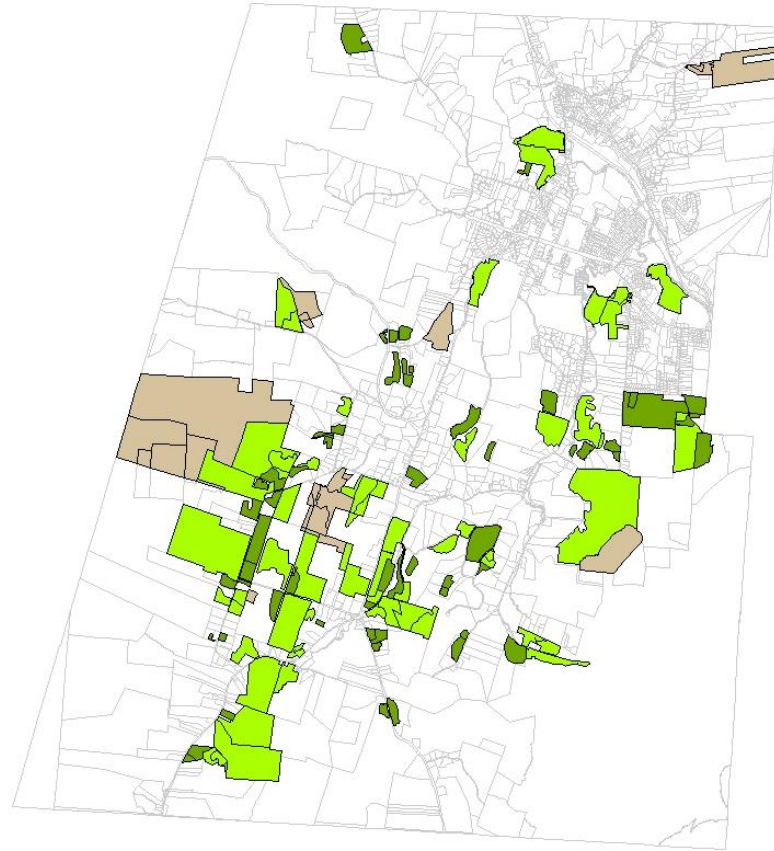


meadow/pasture



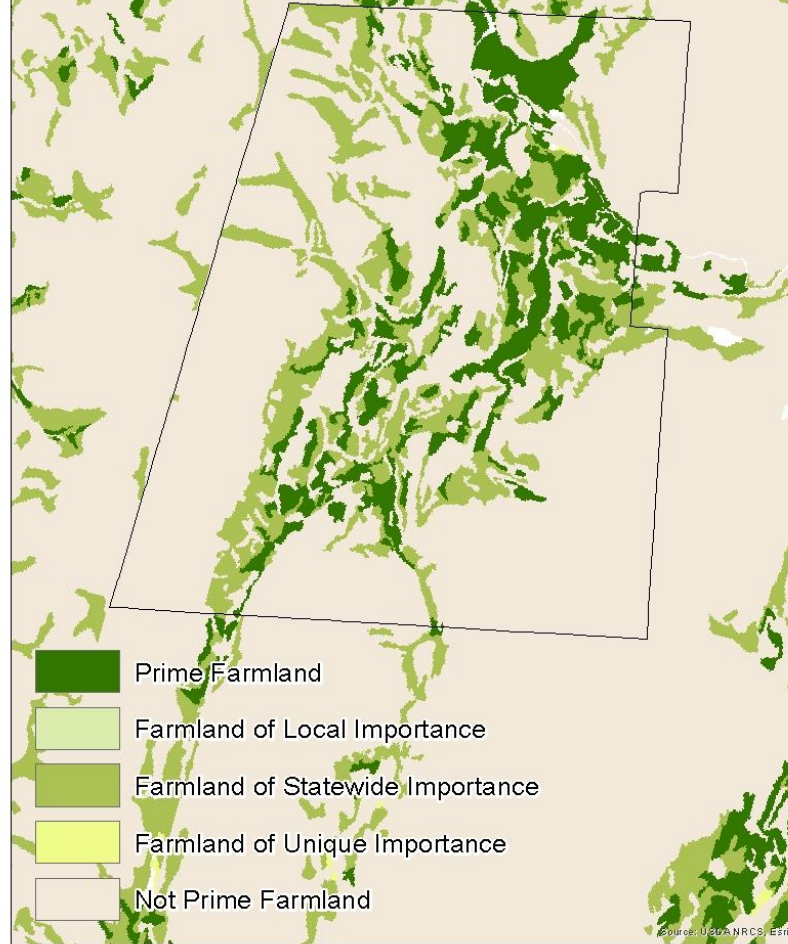
timber/wood

Soil Status

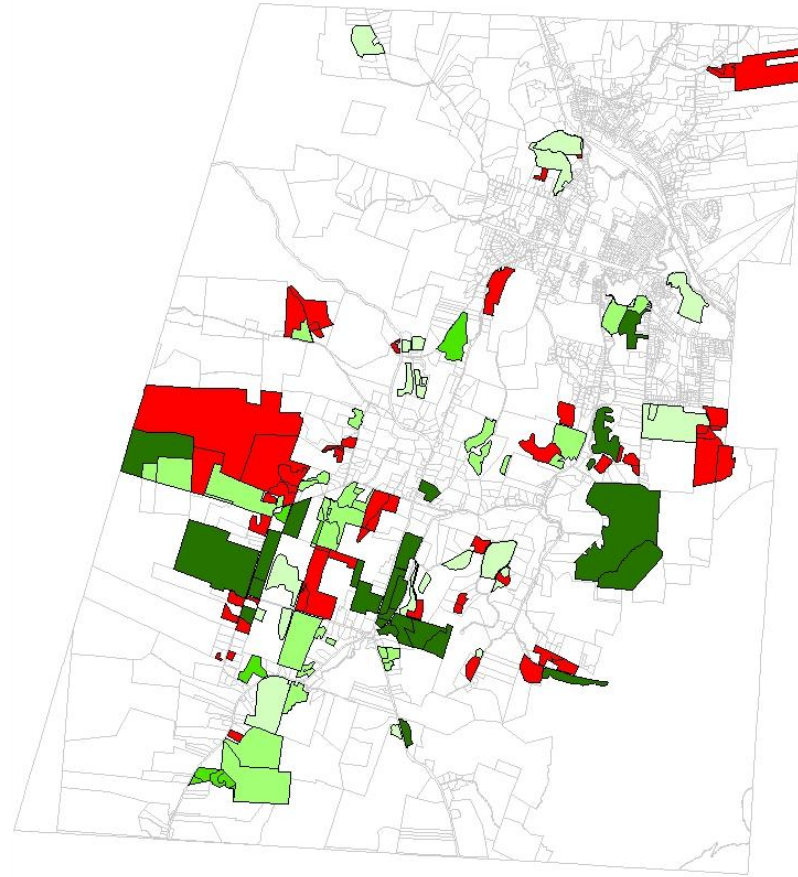


prime ag mixed non-prime

Farmland Protection Policy Act Soils Map



Conservation Status



APR



Ch. 61



None



WRLF



conservation

Threat Evaluation Matrix

Evaluation Matrix

			Threats to Farmland						Raw Threat Score (6-19)
			Land			Operational			
Farms	Owned Farmland Size (ha)	Leased Farmland Size (Estimate) (ha)	Size	Soil Type	Land Protection Status	Succession Plan	Business Model Adaptation	Willingness to Consider APR/CR	
Farm A									
Farm B									
Farm C									
Farm D									
Farm E									
Farm F									
Farm G									
Farm H									
Farm I									
Farm J									
Farm K									
Farm L									
Farm M									
Farm N									
Farm O									
Farm P									
Lowest Possible Raw Score: 6			Highest Possible Raw Score: 19						

Evaluation Matrix Legend

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 Restrictions	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.

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Results [Alphabetical]

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

Lowest Possible Raw Threat Score: 6 Highest Possible Raw Threat Score: 19

Results [Raw Threat Score]

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Farm B	0.00	33.64	1	1	1	1	1	1	6

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Results [Succession Plan]

			Threats to Farmland						
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Farm E	410.66	53.17	1	1	2	2	1	2	9
Farm F	93.87	4.72	1	2	2	2	2	2	11
Farm J	202.54	0.00	1	2	1	2	1	1	8
Farm L	131.49	232.00	1	2	3	2	2	2	12
Farm P	169.94	869.39	1	3	4	2	1	2	13
Farm B	0.00	33.64	1	1	1	1	1	1	6
Farm I	441.73	506.79	1	2	1	1	1	1	7
Farm O	107.93	9.30	1	3	4	1	1	2	12

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Results [Land Protection Status]

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Key Findings

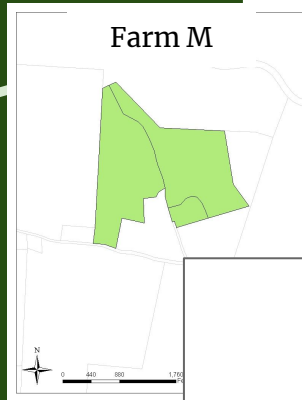
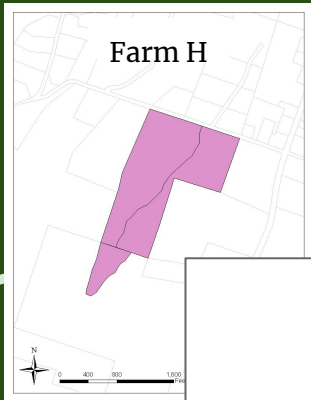
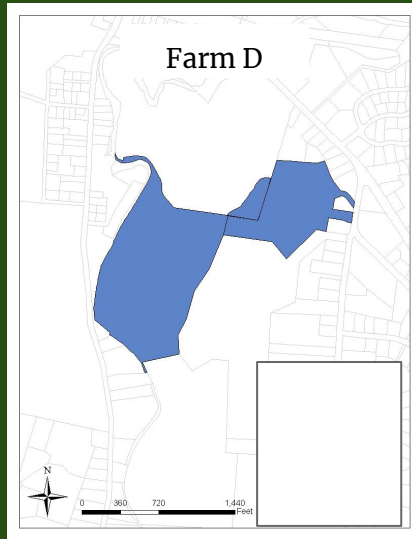
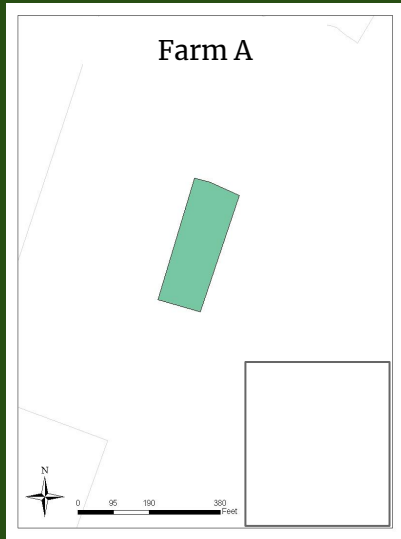


Key Findings

- Farms with little-to-no land protection status have high threat scores
- Land Protection Status and Succession Plan scores are the best indicators of where preservation focus should be directed
- Added Value & Community Engagement

Key Findings

- Five farms in danger of being sold in next 5 years
 - Farm A, Farm D, Farm H, Farm K, Farm M
- Possibility for Conservation Restrictions > APR
 - (most low hanging conservation fruit gone)



Recommendations

Recommendations

Farms to Preserve:

- Farm P
- Farm F (southwestern parcel, 5 acres)
- Farm D
- Farm H

Relationships with Land Owners:

- Herb Allen (via Bruce Grinnell)



Recommendations

Williamstown Rural Lands

- Farmer matching
- Conservation Restrictions
- Succession Planning events + workshops (MassWoods)

Town of Williamstown

- Smart growth development in town center
- Support for regional food network + farmer co-ops
- Conscientious forest-to-farm land use conversion

Williamstown Agricultural Commission

- Farm succession planning to promote future of farming
- Promote innovative + value added products
- Peer-to-peer assistance with grant acquisitions



Thank You!



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ENVI 302 Environmental Planning Workshop
Professor Sarah Gardner
Fall 2020

Clients:
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David McGowen, ED Williamstown Rural Lands Foundation

Stay tuned!