

Natural and Working Lands 30 by 30 Work Group Meeting

Maine Climate Council

Presentation and Discussion: Farmland Conservation in Maine

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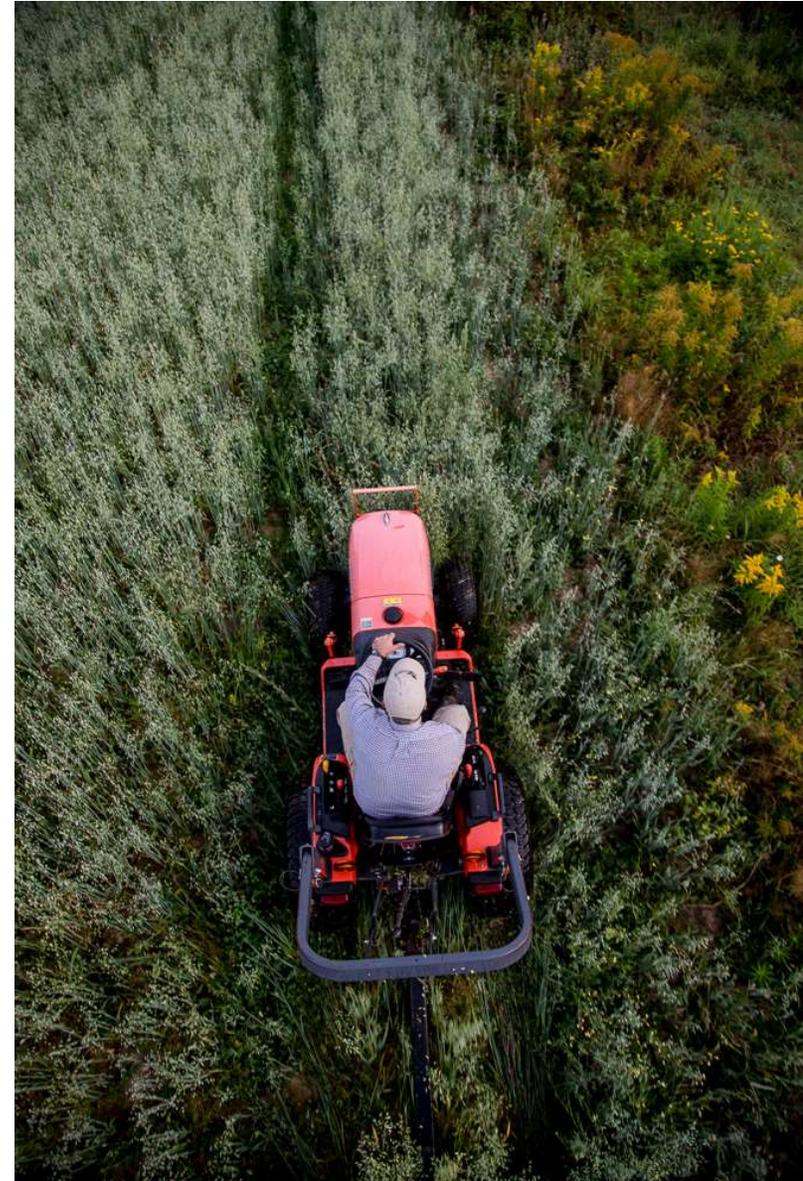




- **Accomplishments to Date**
- **Farmland Conservation Metrics**
- **Comparisons with Neighboring States**
- **What's Working, What's not Working**
- **Farmland Conservation in 30% by 2030 Context, Benefits and Importance**
- **Goals and Strategies**

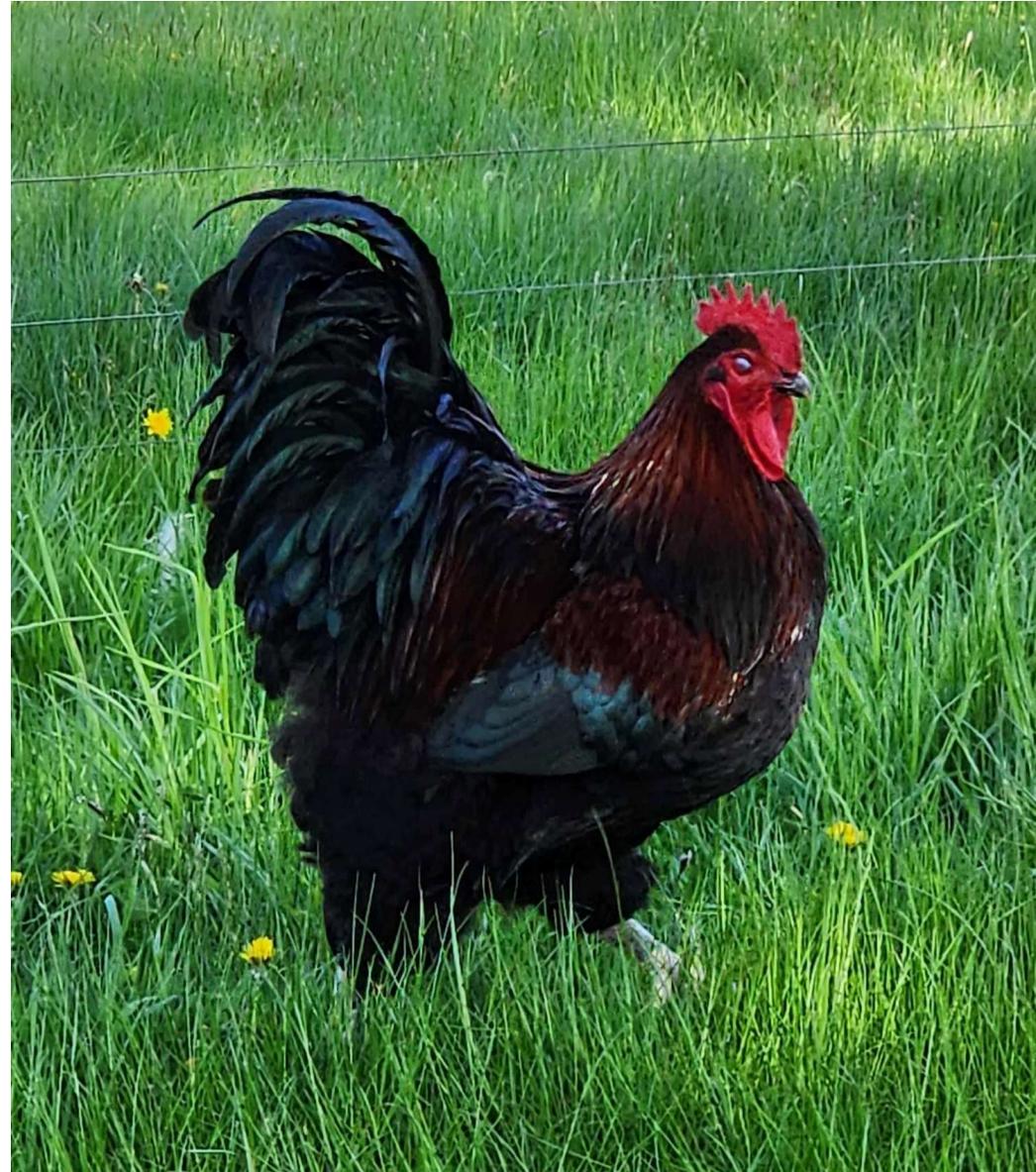
Accomplishments to Date

- **Approximately 380 farms protected, primarily by conservation easement**
(what “counts” as a farm?)
(Maine Farmland Trust, other entities)
- **Covering approximately 55,000 acres**
(not only farmland)



- According to the Ag Census Maine has approximately 1.4M acres in farms, of which approximately 54,000 acres have been protected (3.8%).
- According to the National Land Cover Data set, Maine has approximately 704,000 acres in cropland or pasture, of which approximately 3.5% is protected (~25,000 acres).
- Maine has approximately 2.9M acres of prime agricultural soils or agricultural soils of statewide significance, of which 19,900 acres have been protected, or about 0.7%
- Maine is home to about 7600 farms (2017 Ag Census)

(Percentages for ME and other states constantly in flux as more land is protected/developed)



What does success look like for farmland protection in Maine?

State	Farm Easements	Farm Acres Protected	Percentage of Remaining Farmland Protected
Pennsylvania	6044	611,620	8
Maryland	3341	457,335	20
New Jersey	2821	248,411	32
Delaware	1192	139,005	28
Massachusetts	942	74,775	21.6
Vermont	796	168,407	15
Connecticut	399	47,346	17.4
Maine	378	54,208	3.6
New York	344	95,738	1.5
West Virginia	271	38,361	1.5
Rhode Island	129	8,252	21.6

**Sources: Farms Under Threat, A New England Perspective (American Farmland Trust, 2020), Status of State PACE Programs (American Farmland Trust 2022), State PACE Programs, MFT GIS*

Maine lags behind due to lack of public investment in farmland protection:

**Sources: Farms Under Threat, A New England Perspective (American Farmland Trust, 2020), Status of State PACE Programs (American Farmland Trust 2022), State PACE Programs*

State	Total Farmland Protection Funding	State Funding	Other Funding
New Jersey	\$1,845,914,559	\$1,194,385,386	\$651,529,173
Pennsylvania	\$1,156,534,321	\$1,105,213,366	\$51,320,955
Maryland	\$1,018,134,473	\$986,023,683	\$32,110,790
Massachusetts	\$319,623,984	\$243,135,421	\$76,488,563
Delaware	\$264,455,368	\$172,300,005	\$92,155,363
New York	\$230,145,489	\$230,145,489	\$0.00
Vermont	\$215,378,925	\$88,794,121	\$126,584,804
Connecticut	\$179,215,249	\$131,842,666	\$47,372,583
Rhode Island	\$117,549,027	\$37,143,700	\$80,405,327
West Virginia	\$79,470,398	\$49,118,007	\$30,352,391
Maine	\$50,222,483	\$12,574,122	\$37,648,361

What's Working—What's Not Working for Farmland Conservation in Maine

- **Philanthropy (MFT and other) has been effective in contributing to scale in farmland protection, but relying on philanthropy alone will not get us where we need to be.**
- **Land For Maine's Future enjoys consistent public support for land conservation—including farmland.**
- **Funding and pace are not sufficient to address the scale of the problem**
- **Expediency is lacking/capacity is insufficient/matching federal funds is exceedingly difficult.**





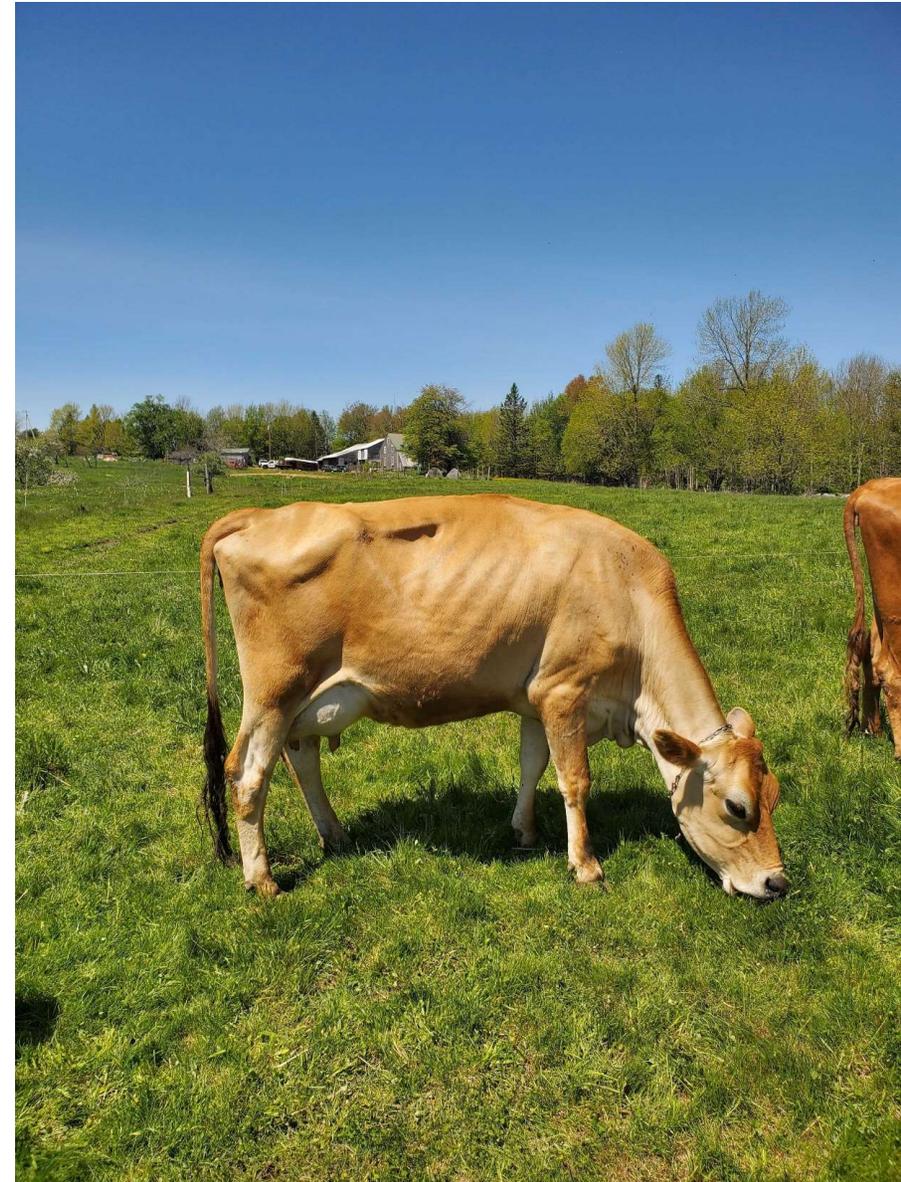
Goals?:

- **Protecting 30% of the total land in Maine in farms (1.45M acres) would mean protecting an additional 335,000 acres, over 3000 farms and probably 300M+**
- **Protecting 30% of Maine's current farmland (704,000 acres) would mean protecting another 55,000 acres of farmland, about 1600 farms, probably 165M+**
- **Achieving these targets by 2030 would mean 200-500 farm conservation projects annually. MFT has been averaging about 20-25 per year, and there have been less than 5 LMF funded ag easements in the last decade.**
- **Need a tangible goal. 50 projects annually, about 300 more farms or 30,000 acres, would it be possible to do more than this?**

Farmland Protection in the 30% by 2030 Context Importance and Benefits:

- **Affordable and equitable access to farmland**
- **Land protection, farm viability and economic development**
- **Maine's importance as a regional food supply (New England Food Vision)**

- **Multiple conservation values/benefits**
- **Community importance, local and regional land trusts**





Strategies: How will we get there?

- **Increase public investment in farmland protection**
- **The need to keep farms viable while we seek to achieve greater farmland protection goals**
- **Increased efficiency and speed**
- **Greater scale, including Aroostook County**
- **Ability to match federal funds**

Farmland's Role in 30x30



30x30 is going to take some work.

New funding, new programs, new ideas, new structures have to be on the table.

Strategic thinking on these new initiatives is essential:



A long way to 30%

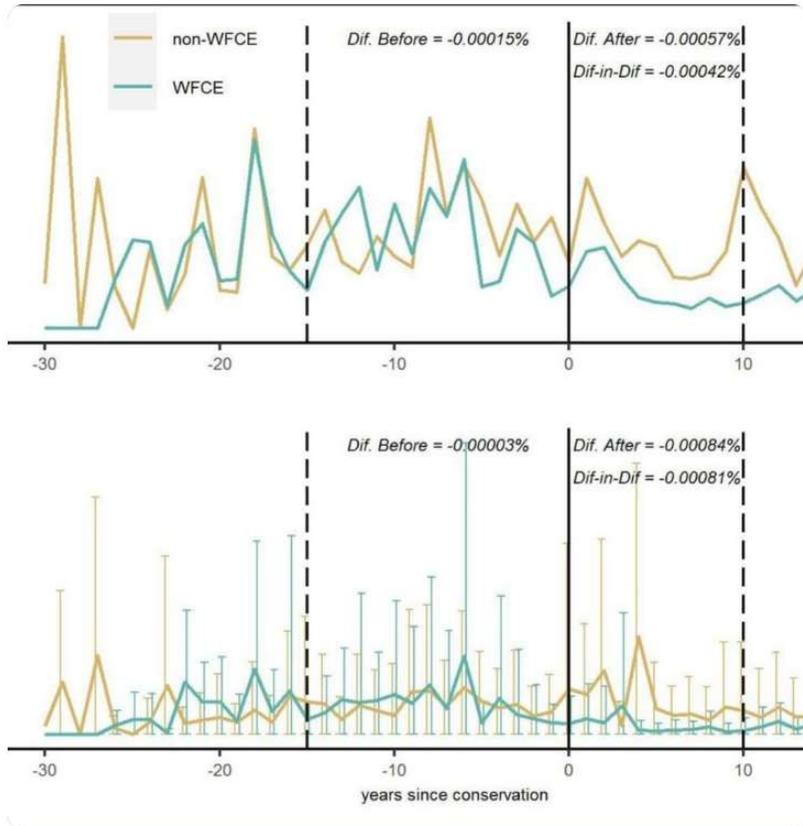


Too much at stake



Too good of an opportunity

Targeted Deployment of Conservation Dollars



The easiest way \neq the most impactful.

The track record of Working Forest Easements is questionable in some key outcomes: preventing forest loss, minimizing unsustainable harvest rates.

Do Working Forest Easements Work for Conservation?
Jonathan Thompson, Alexey Kalinin, Lucy Lee, Valerie Pasquarella, Joshua Plisinski, Katharine R.E. Sims - Harvard Forest, 2023

The Weakest Links of the Chain

Farmland

(Between 3.8% and 0.7% of Farmland is protected.)



Wildlands

(3.8% of forests are protected with biodiversity as the central management priority.)



What does an expanded investment in Farmland Protection allow us to do?



Ending Hunger by 2030

A food system with diverse pathways to land access is better equipped to contribute to the root causes of poverty and hunger: food access, rural employment, diversity of ownership.



Land Access for Indigenous & African American Farmers in Maine

Public investment in farmland protection can provide an opportunity to incentivize acquisition or ownership in line with stated policy goals. Diversified ownership of land and enterprises has proven to be an effective anti-hunger intervention.



Reduction in Carbon Emissions

Local supply chains are intrinsically less dependent on carbon-intensive distribution channels.



✓ **An off-ramp for an aging demographic.**

Funding opportunities allow for a new generation to start and grow farm businesses as commodity production becomes increasingly consolidated and precarious (potatoes, dairy).

✓ **Essential counterpart to ongoing processing investments.**

AIPP + CARES Funding

Maine Agriculture, Food and Forest Products Investment Fund

✓ **Valuable component of natural landscapes and habitat.**

A landscape that accounts for wild spaces, managed woodlands, farmlands, and centralized communities provides the ecological diversity our native species thrive in;

and is an essential element of the character of our state that is, at least recently, attracting essential new residents.

Getting it right vs. getting there fast.

Public investment in protecting natural resources should include mechanisms to represent the public interest.

- **Where does the public's money end up? Large landowners vs. small holders. REIT vs. communities.**
- **Public investment that allows for degradation of an essential resource should be a last resort to stave off development pressure (over harvests, topsoil loss etc.)**
- **It's worth spending the money to acquire an interest that allows for future leverage vs. fast acquisitions (Easements alone vs. Easements + OPAVs, eg.)**
- **Conservation protections should not inherently prohibit unexpected but valuable uses (Indigenous-owned land protects 80+% of global biodiversity and is an incompatible end use for traditional conservation mechanisms).**

From 3% to X% of Farmland Protected

Codifying OPAVs

Reviewing existing process for improvements and alignment:

- ME at the bottom of federal ACEP \$ in NE
- 2 years to close w/ WFAPP.

We're playing catch up to development pressure

Lean in to the economic justification

The population and buying power in southern New England depends on food and forest products from ME.

Keep the Land Open, Structural Reform

Statutory Adjustments
Farm Viability Investments

Expand appropriations in existing farm support programs (FFF, dairy subsidies)

Leverage social support dollars where they impact farm viability (nutrition incentive programs, rural housing)

Expand the Toolbox

Funding consistency and volume
Adopt other models from around New England

MA and CT hold easements or farms in fee and have 12 and 6 staff respectively (ME at .5 FTE)

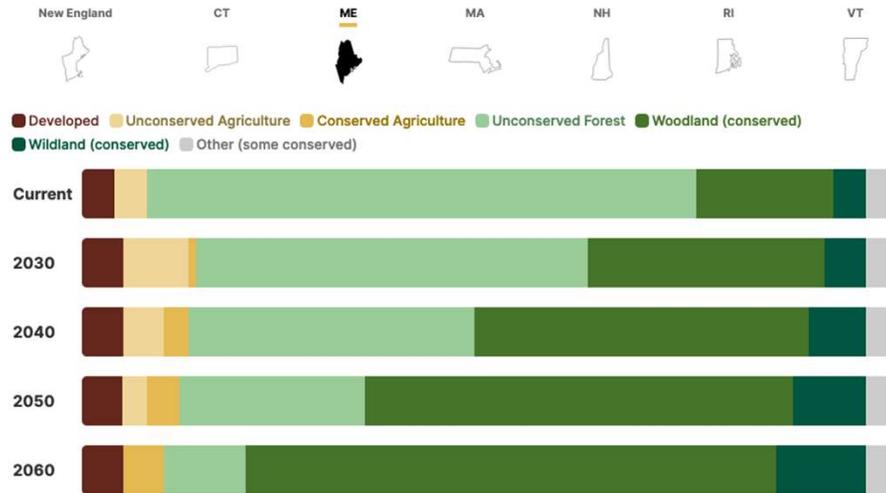
RI, VT and, as of 2024, NH have public farmland protection boards to administer farmland protection \$ directly.

Regional Integration

New England-wide partnerships
Regional infrastructure

Regional dollars and collaborations are behind the direction our energy grid, forest ownership and farmland resources right now; structures to influence their shape and design can emerge across state lines.

Conservation Targets by Land Types and State



[View Land Type Descriptions](#)

*Note: These figures are based on Harvard Forest (2030-2060) projections starting with the 2019 National Land Cover Database and are rounded for display. The goal for wildland conservation is for at least 10% in wildland preserves, with many organizations pursuing higher




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