



Photo courtesy of Mesa Land Trust

## A PATH TO CONSERVATION AND FARM VIABILITY: COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

### YOUNG FARMERS IDENTIFY

## LAND ACCESS

**AS ONE OF THEIR TOP BARRIERS TO ESTABLISHING A CAREER IN AGRICULTURE.**

This series of case studies highlights ways in which land trusts can promote and protect farm viability to keep land in production and in the hands of farmers.

NYFC is working with conservation organizations across the country to scale up innovative farmland protection strategies that go beyond protecting farmland from development and aim to keep farmers on the land now and for generations to come.



## ENGAGING YOUR COMMUNITY

Community engagement is at the heart of land conservation work. Land trusts can employ community engagement strategies to encourage support for local farm businesses, ensure their region is planning for agriculture, understand the needs of their agricultural community, and bring other partners into this work.

**Promoting Agriculture:** Promoting agriculture in your community is a good way to elevate local food and farms. These efforts can be as simple as a farm dinner, farm tours, or other community events.

**Planning for Agriculture:** Land trusts are uniquely situated to engage local officials and help ensure that zoning laws take agricultural needs into account. Land trusts can also work with officials to develop county agricultural plans.

**Engaging the Agricultural Community:** Engaging farmers, ranchers, and service providers helps build relationships, identify the needs of the community, and accomplish common goals. Hiring farmer-staff or engaging farmers on your board of directors can help create common ground and build trust.

**Partnering with Local Food Movements:** Partnerships with local nonprofits and businesses can build support for conservation, generate markets for farmers, and build community awareness around farmers' needs.

“This work requires patience and waiting it out. It’s really a long-term thing.” —Ilana Moir, Conservation Director

# MESA LAND TRUST

- **Community Engagement:** MLT’s Fruitlands Forever Initiative focuses on preserving fruitland surrounding the city of Palisade. Notably, the program was conceived after MLT spoke with stakeholders in the local farming economy about their needs. Through conversations with local service providers, fruit farmers, and interest groups, MLT discovered that a critical mass (about 1,000 acres) of fruit ground was needed to sustain the local agricultural economy and to keep local businesses investing in infrastructure and services. In this way, MLT learned through community engagement how to best serve its agricultural community for the long-term.
- **Results:** MLT has conserved 800 of their 1,000-acre goal. Conservation easements around Palisade regularly reduce property values by 40-50%, helping farm seekers access more affordable land and providing a source of income for farmers to reinvest back into their businesses or buy more land to reach a viable scale. For farmers who still can’t afford the land, knowing that it won’t be developed gives them confidence to lease the land and invest in tree crops.
- **Strategy Benefits:** By engaging and listening to their communities, MLT discovered how they could best harness their skills and capacity as a land trust to serve their community. Fruitlands Forever stabilizes the agricultural land base by keeping it available for fruit production. In turn, this stabilizes the local agricultural economy. The sale of conservation easements helps farmers access land, build their business, and bring on the next generation.



Photo courtesy of Mesa Land Trust

ABOVE: James and Laura Sanders sold a conservation easement on their property which enabled them to pay off farm debt and purchase another peach property under conservation easement.

## ABOUT MESA LAND TRUST

Mesa Land Trust (MLT) works in and around Mesa County, Colorado, focusing its efforts near the city of Palisade. In Mesa County the East Valley narrows, generating natural winds that keep frost from settling. Along with senior water rights, this creates ideal conditions for fruit trees, making it one of the best fruit-growing regions across the entire time zone. Although a family of four can make a living on about 30 acres here, development pressures mean unencumbered land regularly goes for \$45,000 an acre. This makes land access a major barrier for Mesa fruit farmers, and farmland is increasingly converted to other uses.

**YEAR FOUNDED**  
**1980**

**NUMBER OF STAFF**  
**6**

**2014 OPERATING BUDGET**  
**\$494,000**

For more information visit [mesalandtrust.org](http://mesalandtrust.org)



The National Young Farmers Coalition unites young farmers and ranchers to ensure a sustainable future for American agriculture.

[youngfarmers.org](http://youngfarmers.org) ■ 518-643-3564



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