



Photo courtesy of Eamon Heberlein

## A PATH TO CONSERVATION AND FARM VIABILITY: FARM VIABILITY PROGRAMS

Community  
EngagementFarmer  
ServicesAgricultural  
EasementsFarmland  
PurchaseFarm Viability  
Program

### 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.

## BUILDING A FARM VIABILITY PROGRAM

Some land trusts with farmland conservation and farm viability at the heart of their missions have built up a comprehensive suite of programs to address the varied needs of young and beginning farmers. Through public and private partnerships, such programs go beyond farmland conservation by merging community engagement, farmer services, innovative conservation easements, and farmland purchases.

Although few land trusts have built comprehensive farm viability programs, there are a few model organizations to look to:

**Maine Farmland Trust:** The Maine Farmland Trust (MFT) has incorporated a diversity of programs and resources through partnerships with other land trusts, municipalities, and departments at the local, regional, and state level. Some of their efforts include a buy-protect-sell program, a leasing program, purchase of conservation easements, beginning farmer services, a loan and contract guarantee program, and land-linking efforts.

**Vermont Land Trust:** Like MFT, the Vermont Land Trust (VLT) harnesses a large toolkit to promote farm viability and help farmers overcome land access barriers through diverse partnerships. Some of VLT's efforts include: adding the Option to Purchase at Agricultural Value into all its easements, expanding farm-leasing opportunities, and providing technical assistance to farmers.

*See back for more details on VLT's Land Access Program.*

“This program has helped a lot of farmers to buy their first farm, or to expand their operation.” —Jon Ramsay, Land Access Program Director

## VERMONT LAND TRUST: FARMLAND ACCESS PROGRAM

The Vermont Land Trust's (VLT) Farmland Access Program provides farmers opportunities to purchase or lease affordable farmland. Through farmland preservation, VLT works to support local agricultural communities, local food production, and ensure the long-term productivity and use of farmland. In particular, VLT's use of Option to Purchase at Agricultural Value (OPAV) provisions in all of their easements helps the land trust keep farmland affordable for farmers by ensuring that it is priced and sold according to its agricultural value, rather than for its value as a rural estate.

- **Buy-protect-sell:** The land trust will buy a farm, conserve it with an OPAV easement, and sell it at a more affordable value to a farmer selected through an RFP process.
- **Linking farmers with conserved farms:** VLT maintains a list of farm seekers who they contact when an affordable lease or purchase opportunity becomes available.
- **Simultaneous easement purchases:** VLT will purchase an OPAV easement on a farm at the same time a farmer is purchasing the land in order to make the farm affordable.
- **Exercise of OPAV rights:** When protected land comes up for sale, VLT reserves the right to ensure that the land remains affordable and continues to be owned by farmers.
- **Expanding farm-leasing opportunities:** VLT looks for opportunities to lease land trust-owned land or conserved land that is no longer farmed by its owners to farmers.
- **Technical Assistance:** VLT provides business planning, financial, and technical assistance to farmers in conjunction with the above approaches.



Photo courtesy of Nate Rogers

ABOVE: Jessie and Nate Rogers partnered with VLT's Farmland Access Program to access their farm near Montpelier, Vermont.

### ABOUT VERMONT LAND TRUST:

VLT is a statewide land trust that works on traditional open space and habitat conservation efforts, as well as farmland preservation and farm viability. Vermont has strong cultural and political support for farmland conservation, resulting in public-private partnerships that help ensure that farmland conservation funding is consistently available.

To date, VLT has conserved more than 700 working farms. Through the use of OPAV easements, most of these farms are not only protected from development, but will remain affordable as working farms. This ensures that land-owning farmers will remain the foundation of Vermont's agricultural landscape and economy.

YEAR FOUNDED

1977

NUMBER  
OF STAFF

47

2014  
OPERATING  
BUDGET

\$4.36M

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