



GROWING PENNSYLVANIA'S FUTURE

Challenges Facing Young Farmers and
Recommendations to Address Them



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Young Farmers Podcast

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Growing Pennsylvania's Future: Challenges Facing Young Farmers and Recommendations to Address Them

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***Thank you to the many generous young farmers across Pennsylvania
who spoke with us, attended listening sessions, completed our survey,
and shared their knowledge and experiences with us.***

Contents

4	Executive Summary
8	Protecting and Investing in Pennsylvania Agriculture
10	Farmer Profile: Stewarding Land Through Five Generations
11	Methods
12	Findings
14	Case Study: Sankofa Village Community Garden, Pittsburgh, PA
16	Farmer Profile: Looking for Training Opportunities in Western Pennsylvania
18	Farmer Profile: Looking For Land Near a Devoted Customer Base
19	Recommendations
21	Case Study: Minnesota Beginning Farmer Tax Credit
22	Case Study: New York State Working Farm Protection Act
23	Case Study: Working Farm Easements in Vermont
24	Case Study: Pennsylvania Association for Sustainable Agriculture Apprenticeship Programs
25	Case Study: Colorado Interim Study Committee and Agricultural Workforce Development Program
27	Next Steps
28	Glossary
29	References

Executive Summary

IN PENNSYLVANIA, AND ACROSS THE NATION, AGRICULTURE IS AT A CRITICAL JUNCTURE.

The majority of farm operators are nearing retirement and leaving the field at a time when average farm income has declined by nearly half over the past five years and land prices in many areas have risen beyond what a working farmer can afford.¹ The land that these farmers steward and the knowledge they carry is at risk of being lost from farming forever. Young farmers are stepping up and looking to take on leadership in their communities, but they face significant obstacles to success. In Pennsylvania, we have an opportunity to confront the challenges facing this young generation and to invest in the future of the Commonwealth's agricultural economy and farming communities.

Reflecting national trends, the average age of farmers is rising in Pennsylvania. The 2017 USDA Census of Agriculture reported that the average age of principal operators in Pennsylvania was 56.5 years, rising from 52.4 years over the last two decades.² The trend of farmers aging in Pennsylvania was particularly steep in the decade between the 2002 and 2012 Censuses, when the number of principal operators under 35 years old decreased by 277, while the number of principal operators 65 and older increased by 3,909.³ While the 2017 Census showed

a small uptick in the number of primary producers under 35 in Pennsylvania, this increase is not nearly enough to replace those aging out and retiring. There remains a critical need to support the Commonwealth's young farmers.

Agriculture is an important source of employment and prosperity for the state of Pennsylvania. Yet, with shifting farmer demographics, growing real estate pressure on farmland, and increasingly extreme weather events due to climate change, agriculture in the Commonwealth faces an uncertain future. This critical moment demands that we define the challenges facing the next generation of Pennsylvania farmers and work together to act on solutions that will help these young people continue the state's strong agricultural tradition.

The National Young Farmers Coalition (Young Farmers/ the Coalition) has worked with farmers and legislators in Pennsylvania on national campaigns since our founding in 2010. The Coalition began more focused state-level work in Pennsylvania in 2018 after young Pennsylvanian farmers expressed the need for structural change to address their challenges and concerns, specifically regarding accessing land.

Fall 2018 National Young Farmers Coalition
Listening Session, Chester County.



In the past year, the Coalition organized young farmers across the Commonwealth to address shared challenges. We held listening sessions at farms throughout the state, supported the existing Young Farmers chapter in Eastern Pennsylvania, formed a new chapter in Western Pennsylvania, and provided leadership training to these farmers. We also conducted a statewide survey to better understand the challenges young farmers face, and we engaged policy makers, technical assistance providers, and other stakeholders to better understand the legislative and regulatory landscape in Pennsylvania.

This report summarizes our findings from 38 participants in three farmer listening sessions and our statewide survey completed by 94 respondents. The report also includes recommendations based on these findings for how the Commonwealth can support its next generation of farmers.

Through this work, we found three main barriers standing in the way of success for young farmers across Pennsylvania:

Land Access

Farmers across Pennsylvania told us in listening sessions, through our survey, and in on-farm visits that their number one concern is finding secure access to affordable, high-quality farmland. Due to high farmland prices, development pressure, and the lack of a transparent market for land, young farmers are struggling to find secure land access. Among farmers who lease land, many operate under short-term, tenuous lease arrangements—sometimes relying on only a handshake agreement. Without long-term, reliable, and affordable land tenure, young farmers cannot fully invest in their land and businesses.

Agricultural Workforce Development

Farmers across the Commonwealth have reported a lack of on-farm training opportunities, which are especially important as a significant number of young farmers are first-generation farmers.⁴ Similarly, young farmers reported a lack of skilled labor as a key challenge to running successful farms in Pennsylvania.

Farmer Business Services

Young farmers in Pennsylvania reported that increased awareness of state and federal programs, access to capital, and marketing assistance would greatly improve their ability to start and maintain successful farm businesses. Farmers lack business services that are both accessible online and applicable to the increasingly diverse business models which these farmers are adopting.



Frank Kurylo, farmer and chapter leader (TOP); Young Farmers staff members and farmers at a listening session.

We have great respect for the generations of policy makers, technical assistance providers, and agricultural stakeholders who have been working to promote Pennsylvania's agriculture sector. We hope that this report can be of assistance in building on the success of their efforts by increasing understanding of the unique needs of young farmers across the Commonwealth. We look forward to working together to ensure a bright future for agriculture in Pennsylvania.

About The National Young Farmers Coalition

The National Young Farmers Coalition represents, mobilizes, and engages young farmers and ranchers to ensure their success. Since 2010, Young Farmers has launched 43 farmer-led chapters across the United States, including two in Pennsylvania, and has built a grassroots base of nearly 200,000 individuals.

The Coalition helps young farmers become leaders in their farming communities through local chapter organizing and advocacy training. We elevate the voices of young farmers to ensure they are represented in local, state, and federal policy decisions. Together with our chapters, we have been effective advocates, successfully securing meaningful change in the 2014 and 2018 Farm Bills and making several advances in state policy across the country. The Coalition also supports young farmers by training key stakeholders and service providers to better serve

the next generation and by providing business services to young farmers—offering tools, resources, and technical assistance to help them navigate business challenges and seize market opportunities.

Our Pennsylvania Chapters

The National Young Farmers Coalition's chapters are farmer-led groups that boost morale among new farmers, facilitate friendships and business partnerships, and offer an organizing platform for tackling barriers on the local, state, and national level. In 2015, farmers in Southeastern Pennsylvania organized to establish the Young Farmers of Southeastern Pennsylvania chapter. Over the past several years, the Southeastern Pennsylvania chapter has held numerous mixers, potlucks, and collaborative workshops. Members have met with their local representatives in-district to share their experiences and the challenges of being a young farmer. Over the summer and fall of 2018, farmers in Southwestern Pennsylvania organized a second regional chapter, now formally established as of early 2019. In October of 2018, five Pennsylvania farmers joined nearly 100 young and beginning farmers from across the country in Washington, D.C. to participate in the Annual National Leadership Convergence. In March 2019, eight farmers participated in a lobby day in Harrisburg.

Young Farmers chapter members and staff at the 2018 Pennsylvania Women's Agricultural Network Symposium.



RECOMMENDATIONS

Young farmers in Pennsylvania are investing in the agricultural economy by taking risks, getting trained, and working hard to build successful farms across the Commonwealth. While barriers stand in the way of their success, these barriers are eminently surmountable. Pennsylvania has grown a vibrant agricultural economy that supports 579,000 jobs,⁵ and the Commonwealth leads the nation in total farms and acres preserved for farming. To secure a successful future for Pennsylvania agriculture, the Commonwealth must address the challenges facing young and beginning farmers. To respond to these challenges, we recommend that policy makers in Pennsylvania take the following actions:

Land Access

- Prioritize Agricultural Conservation Easement Purchase Program (ACEPP) funds for working farm easements that include affordability and farmer ownership provisions and allocate funding to retroactively place these provisions on existing easements;
- Prioritize easement projects that include a minimum of a three-year written lease in cases where the landowner-applicant is leasing to a farmer;
- Create two young farmer member positions on the Agricultural Land Preservation Board;
- Incentivize the sale and renting of land and other agricultural assets to young and beginning farmers; and
- Increase support for Pennsylvania Farm Link.

Agricultural Workforce Development

- Support on-farm training opportunities through a cost-sharing grant program.

Farmer Business Services

- Establish a young farmer outreach coordinator position at the Pennsylvania Department of Agriculture;
- Establish a young farmer advisory committee to report to Pennsylvania State Government on gaps in existing resources for young farmers and how to modernize and improve upon those resources so they are more accessible; and
- Actively solicit ideas and feedback from young farmers when creating the Pennsylvania Agricultural Business Development Center.

Protecting and Investing in Pennsylvania Agriculture

Agriculture as the Key to Pennsylvania's Economic Future

The Great Recession left lasting impacts on rural Pennsylvania that, a decade later, have not been fully alleviated. In rural Pennsylvania, the unemployment rate recovery, number of businesses, housing construction, and other economic indicators have all lagged below pre-recession levels.⁶ In the past decade, over 96,100 jobs have disappeared from rural Pennsylvania. Seventeen rural counties—35 percent of rural counties in the Commonwealth—experienced job losses of 10 percent or greater.⁷

Across Pennsylvania, farming and farmland are central to the Commonwealth's economy. The agricultural industry generates approximately \$83.8 billion in direct economic output^{8,9} and \$26.9 billion in earnings for farmers and others employed in agriculture-related jobs within the Commonwealth. The benefits of this economic engine ripple out beyond those directly engaged in agriculture, impacting local economies as well. One in every ten jobs in Pennsylvania is supported by agriculture—579,000 jobs in total.¹⁰ The number of farmers markets across the Commonwealth has increased in recent years as well, indicating that local and regional food systems can provide an opportunity to diversify employment prospects in light of persistent unemployment, particularly in rural areas.¹¹

In addition to feeding Pennsylvania families and supporting thriving communities, farmers stewards thousands of acres of land across the Commonwealth. Today, there are 58,000 farm operations in Pennsylvania covering 7,630,000 acres.¹² Farmers and gardeners have stewarded plots of land in urban centers for generations as well, growing food for their communities and contributing to valuable open space, stormwater management, and many other community services.^{13,14,15} Together, the rural, suburban, and urban farms—and the farmers who steward them—are essential to maintaining and growing Pennsylvania's regional food systems and to the Commonwealth's successful future.

Pressure on the Land: An Aging Generation and Rising Land Prices

In Pennsylvania, the average age of farmers is rising.¹⁶ As older farmers retire, some Pennsylvania farms are transitioning to new ownership, but the rate of attrition is steep. We need to support young farmers seeking to steward these farms. For every three principal farm operators in Pennsylvania over 65, there is only one under 35.¹⁷ Between 2007 and 2012, only 94 young farmers

entered the profession in Pennsylvania, while the total number of farmers decreased by 2,195 in the same period.¹⁸ Of the 7.3 million acres of farmland across Pennsylvania, 55% is managed by a farmer 55 years of age or older.¹⁹ And 11% of that land is expected to transfer in the next five years.²⁰

The demographic crisis facing the Commonwealth's agricultural system translates to a crisis for farmland transition. These dynamics are not unique to Pennsylvania. They follow the national trend in which the number of young farmers is declining while the percentage of farmland under the stewardship of older farmers continues to increase.²¹ Between 2012 and 2017, the Commonwealth lost more than 6,000 farms, with 400,000 acres transitioning out of farmland.²² There are clear policy solutions available to Pennsylvania to reduce the barriers young farmers face and to help weather the transition to the next generation. Without young farmers who are trained and able to access farmland, we risk losing more prime farmland to development. Once farmland transitions out of farming, it is almost always irreversibly lost to other uses and unaffordable to working farmers on a farming income.²³

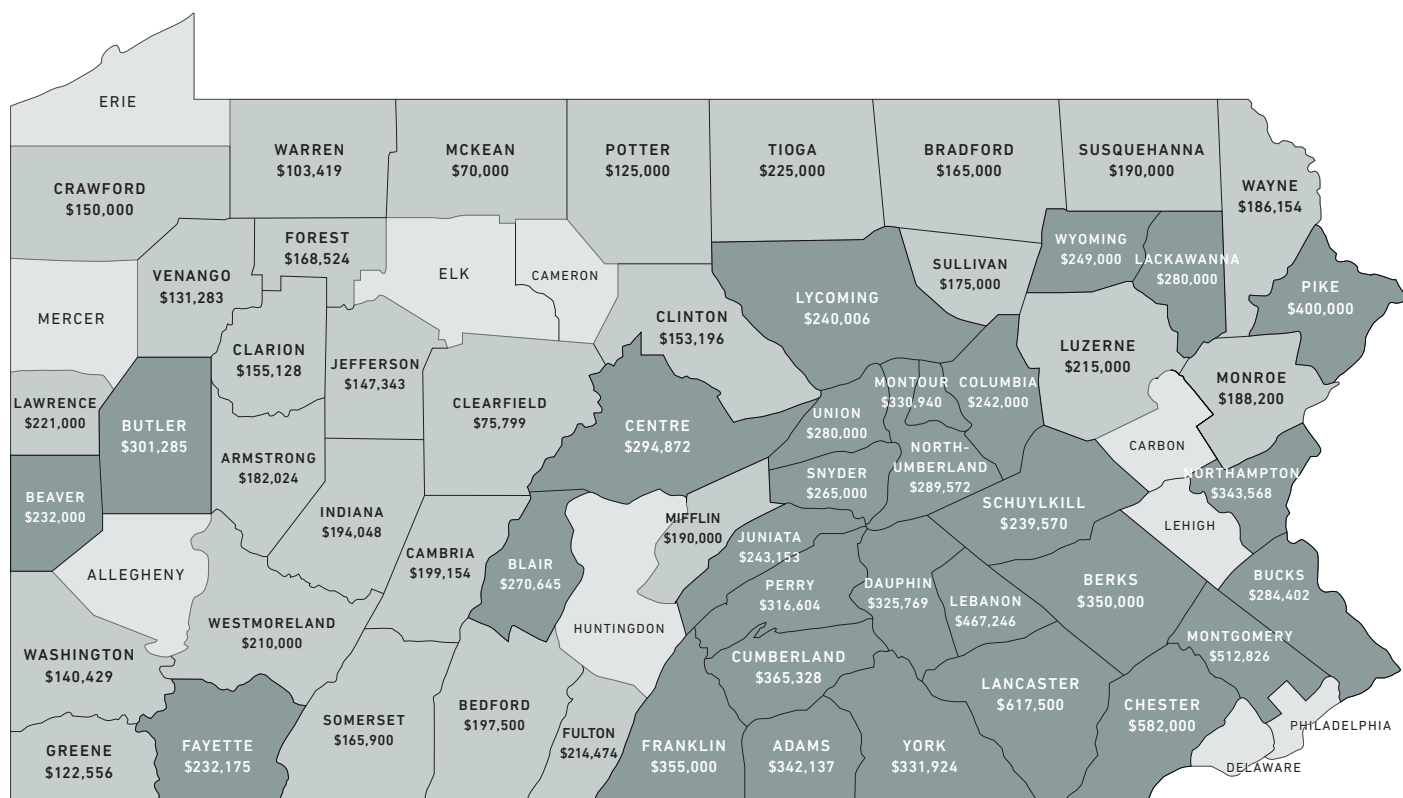
For every three principal farm operators in Pennsylvania over 65, there is only one under 35.¹⁷

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In 2017, the Coalition conducted a national survey of more than 3,500 current, aspiring, and former farmers and ranchers under 40 years of age across the country. The results, published in our report, *Building a Future with Farmers II*, showed that young

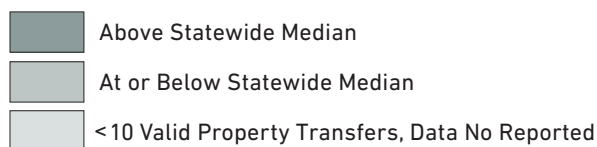
A New Generation—Ready to Lead

Across Pennsylvania, a new generation of farmers is eager to work hard, take a little risk, and contribute to the state's economy and food systems. Young and beginning farmers are breaking new ground, taking over farms from their families or other retiring farmers, developing new models, and building upon Pennsylvania's rich agricultural land and resources. Some are graduating from agricultural programs at Penn State and Delaware Valley, while others are learning to farm from their families, and still others are being trained through apprenticeship programs or while working on farms. They are the future of Pennsylvania's food system, and they are worth investing in.



Median Valid Sale Price of Properties Identified as Agriculture 2015-2017*

Statewide Median = \$225,000



Map from Jonathan Johnson, Senior Policy Analyst at Center for Rural Pennsylvania;
data from the Pennsylvania State Tax Equalization Board

Farmer Profile

Stewarding Land Through Five Generations

Zachary Jones, The Robinson Family Farm, Wayne County, PA

Zach Jones is a fifth-generation beef cattle farmer in Wayne County, Pennsylvania. He lives and works on land originally farmed by his great-great-grandfather.

Wayne County has historically been home to dairy farmers; Zach says that thirty or forty years ago, there were around 1,200 dairy farmers in the county. Today, he says, there are less than 55. The dairy crisis has hit Wayne County hard, and Zach says that it has left many residents of the county pessimistic about the future of farming.

Zach, however, has big dreams for his farm. He grew up with an interest in agriculture, participated in the local 4-H program as a young person, but then strayed from farming in college to pursue wrestling. After college, he worked in tree management and construction and then got a job with Wayne County as a nutrient management specialist. Through this work, he rekindled his interest and passion for agriculture. He joined his local Farm Bureau Board in 2015 and has been farming with his uncle on his family's land since 2016.

Zach and his uncle manage about 40 head of Hereford cross beef cattle, which they sell directly to consumers. Zach explains that while there is an influx of tourism each summer in Wayne County, most of the people who purchase his farm's beef are year-round Wayne County residents—many of them born and raised in the county.

Zach is very focused on the soil quality on his farm. He says that some of his fields are nothing but swamp grass right now and that his main goal in the short-term is to improve the soil quality through crop rotation. He is interested in growing small grains on his fields, both to improve the quality of the soil and to sell to market, due to growing demand. He's passionate about soil health, sometimes driving up to three hours to attend soil management workshops.

Of course, Zach faces challenges beyond improving his land's soil health. He says that there are not many agriculture education opportunities nearby, and he feels frustrated that he missed out on years of farming education he wishes he had received in high school. There isn't

much of a network of young farmers in his area, so he has to travel to share ideas and meet others in the early stages of growing their business. He also struggles to find agricultural infrastructure—he says that slaughter facilities are often backed up for months, and that if he does start farming small grains, there are no mills nearby that could process his product.

Despite all of this, and in the face of difficult soil conditions, equipment in disrepair, and the lack of education opportunities and a young farmer community in his area, Zach is excited about the future. He's committed to living and farming in Wayne County and to starting new farming ventures.



Methods

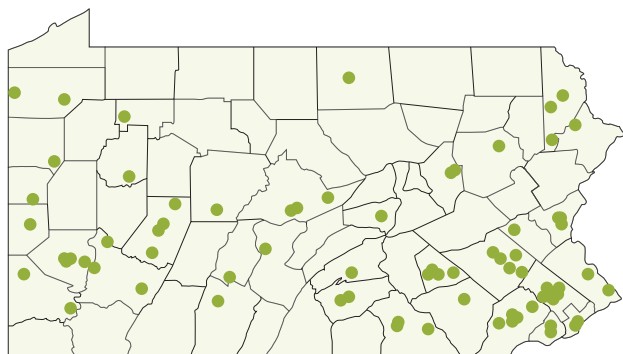
To understand the challenges and concerns of young people starting careers in agriculture, The National Young Farmers Coalition held three listening sessions across Pennsylvania in the autumn of 2018. A total of 33 young farmers participated. These three listening sessions were held in Westmoreland, Chester, and Juniata Counties. Attendees had varying degrees of farming experience—some were well into their farming careers, while others were currently working or apprenticing on farms with the goal of running their own operations. We heard from rural, suburban, and urban farmers using a wide range of operational structures, methods, and products, including businesses and nonprofits, organic and conventional, vegetables, livestock, row crops, and flowers. To solicit actionable feedback through these listening sessions, we prompted attendees to discuss what was working well in their region, what challenges they were facing, and what specific changes or solutions they would like to see.

To complement the feedback that we received from our listening sessions, we designed a Pennsylvania Young Farmer Survey, which more closely examined the issues with which young farmers are struggling. Ninety-four current farmers, former farmers, and farm apprentices/workers took the survey in October and November of 2018. Outreach was conducted through the Coalition's network, agricultural listservs, farmer organizations across Pennsylvania, agricultural extension services, county farmland preservation offices, and other partners. Survey questions focused on respondents' farming background; current work; challenges; land ownership status or lease structure; access to technical assistance and helpful programs; participation in state and federal programs; and a range of other issues impacting their ability to farm. Respondents were geographically diverse, covering much of the state, with a median age of 34 years old. Three quarters of respondents were currently farming—with an average of 8.5

years of experience—while the remainder were either aspiring to farm or no longer farming but had past farming experience. A majority (62%) of respondents owned their farms, and of those who did not, more than 80% said that they would like to own their farm. Respondents produced a wide variety of products, including field crops, small grains, vegetables, fruits and nuts, flowers, dairy, poultry, beef cattle, sheep, and other livestock.

Our listening sessions and survey evidence a highly motivated group of young Pennsylvania farmers with a desire to own their own operations and who have a clear need for affordable farmland. These young farmers are energized and committed, and they face a variety of challenges related to accessing land, services, resources, training opportunities, and skilled labor. For policy makers, service providers, and agricultural stakeholders, we hope that this report will be a useful guide in responding to the unique needs of this creative and resilient next generation of Pennsylvania farmers.

Geographic Distribution of Survey Respondents by Zip Code:



What Does Your Farm or the Farm on Which You Work Produce?

- 64% Vegetables
- 39% Fruit and Nuts
- 38% Flowers
- 35% Poultry
- 33% Beef Cattle
- 24% Other
- 20% Field Crops (i.e. Corn, Soybeans)
- 20% Hogs
- 18% Small Grains
- 15% Honey
- 15% Sheep
- 15% Dairy (Cows, Sheep, or Goats)
- 14% Other Livestock
- 14% Nursery, Floriculture
- 8% Forest Products
- 5% Seeds
- 2% Hemp

**When producing multiple products, respondents selected all applicable answers.*

Findings

The results of our listening sessions across Pennsylvania and our 2018 Pennsylvania Young Farmer Survey point to three main challenges that young farmers face across the Commonwealth.

These challenges were:

- **land access,**
- **agricultural workforce development, and**
- **farmer business services.**

Land Access

Secure access to affordable land is essential for young farmers to run viable businesses and was the number one issue impacting survey respondents' ability to farm. Without long-term, reliable tenure on affordable land, young farmers are at risk of losing the investments they put into soil quality and infrastructural improvements. In Young Farmers' 2018 Pennsylvania survey, 56% of respondents stated that land access was either a significant challenge or somewhat of a challenge impacting their ability to farm.

The two central concerns—availability of affordable farmland and stability of rental agreements—combine to uniquely disadvantage young farmers. With limited access to capital and steep up-front costs, young farmers face limited choices about where and how to invest in their farms. If those farms are on leased land, long-term investments are a risky necessity.

Availability of affordable farmland

Farm real estate values in Pennsylvania have increased consistently in recent years. In 2018, the average price of agricultural land in the Commonwealth was nearly double the national average.^{30, 31} Between 2007 and 2012, 34,900 acres of agricultural land in the state were converted to developed land.³²

This data aligns with feedback from farmers at our listening sessions, who explained that nonagricultural development pressure was driving land prices out of reach for beginning farmers. This trend was especially felt by farmers looking for land near urban areas, which have the highest concentrations of consumers for direct-to-market farm businesses. Even in areas where many farms have been protected from development with an agricultural preservation easement, farmers explained that this preserved land can still be prohibitively expensive, as farmers are competing with second home buyers and other purchasers with greater financial resources.

In our survey, we asked young farmers to help us understand

what specific land access challenges they were facing.

Respondents indicated that they struggle to find affordable, high quality farmland available for sale or rent because the cost of renting or buying land often exceeds what their farming operations can support.

In a series of interviews conducted with county-level administrators of Pennsylvania's Agricultural Conservation Easement Purchase Program (ACEPP), we heard that land prices are rising in many regions of Pennsylvania, especially in Eastern Pennsylvania and near cities in Western and Central Pennsylvania.³³ We also learned anecdotally that in Eastern Pennsylvania, some preserved farms—with easements restricting development—have converted from crop farms to horse farms. Some attendees at our Eastern Pennsylvania listening session reported seeing preserved farms that were once producing food and raising livestock transition to estates owned by non-farmers who lease to haying operations. This feedback suggests that non-agricultural second home buyers are competing with farmers for preserved agricultural land.

“I grow mixed vegetables and cut flowers in West Philadelphia. It’s a really daunting endeavor for young people, like me, to pursue a career in agriculture due to what feels like countless obstacles along the way. The biggest barrier is a lack of land access due to the high cost of farmland and a lack of transparency in the market place. It’s really hard to find land to farm on long term. We farmers want to work hard—we’re willing to take a little risk and start these operations, and we really want to contribute to Pennsylvania’s farm economy and community. We need to make farming a viable career for the next generation of farmers.”

– Kim Cook, farmer, Philadelphia County

Listening session attendees also broadly reported that markets for farmland depend on word-of-mouth networks. While these networks have been traditionally used in rural communities nationwide, they can exclude farmers outside specific regions or communities, as well as socially disadvantaged farmers such as female farmers, LGBTQ farmers, and farmers of color. Several farmers discussed the market for farmland in their region as closed to outsiders, with much of the best land sold within established farming communities rather than in a market open to all farmers.³⁴

Farmers and stakeholders in Pennsylvania have emphasized the connections between the history of land policy and unequal distribution of land access today. Dana Harris-Yates, of the Three Rivers Agricultural Land Initiative and the Black Urban Gardeners and Farmers of Pittsburgh Co-op, explained: "After being colonized and reclassified as Colored, Negro, and Black farmers, our land was stolen and lost through unlawful USDA practices. During the early 19th centuries we migrated up North and brought our agricultural culture. As the elders passed away, thus did some of our ways. There is a resurgence of the sustainable farming methods that we have used for generations. It is crucially important that agricultural land is available to all farmers in Pennsylvania, including farmers of color who have faced disproportionately large barriers to accessing agricultural land."

Finally, urban farmers at our listening sessions near Philadelphia and Pittsburgh explained that legal access to vacant or abandoned land can be extremely complex. These parcels

represent a powerful opportunity for urban farming and gardening activities. The City of Philadelphia estimates that there are approximately 40,000 vacant lots within its boundaries,³⁵ but urban farmers in Philadelphia described the mechanisms to obtain legal access to this land as both unclear and inconsistent.

Stability of Rental Agreements

In listening sessions, short-term or informal leases were commonly voiced as concerns among farmers renting land. Leasing rather than purchasing land can be a viable solution for early career farmers, and may work for some more experienced farmers depending on the lease terms. Short-term leases, however, can impact farmers' ability to invest in their operations. Frequent moves between parcels can discourage farmers from investing in infrastructure for their businesses and may inhibit them from developing a strong market presence. Without a long-term lease, farmers are also unable to access critical USDA grant funding.

Survey results also reflected lease-related concerns. Only half of farmers leasing land had a formal lease, and the remainder relied on unwritten "handshake deals." One farmer wrote that they have access to the land "until [our landlord] decides she doesn't want us to farm it anymore." Two separate farmers wrote that their landowner would not agree to lease the land to them if a written lease was expected. In listening sessions, young farmers also brought up that non-farming landowners and land trusts do not always understand the needs and realities of a farming operation, leading to misunderstandings that can cause tension and instability in a rental relationship.

Top land access challenges for young farmers in Pennsylvania:

1. Land costs more to purchase than the value of what I can produce.
2. I cannot find affordable farmland for sale.
3. I cannot find land with the appropriate resources for my business (e.g. healthy soils, existing infrastructure, organically certifiable, adequate water rights).
4. I cannot find affordable farmland for rent.
5. Land costs more to rent than the value of what I can produce.

**As identified in the National Young Farmers Coalition 2018 PA survey*

Case Study

Sankofa Village Community Garden, Pittsburgh, PA

Sankofa Village Community Garden (SVCG) is an urban farm in the Homewood neighborhood of Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, a neighborhood that has not had a grocery store in over 40 years. Among a long list of other programs, the garden employs young people aged 14-20 through a summer employment program run by the city of Pittsburgh. Ayanna Jones, the garden's founder, teaches these young people how to grow fruits and vegetables.

Students return to the garden year after year, learning about soil composition, plant varieties, irrigation, and more. Some have gone on to study urban agriculture in college. Ayanna says that young people do not start working in the garden because they are excited about growing food—they come for the paycheck—but they leave her program invested in gardening, their communities, and the health of the neighborhood.

SVCG is deeply rooted in the Homewood community. The garden hosts events, a farmers market with local produce, and a credit union that gives young people who have worked on the farm a way to borrow money in moments of need. When growers harvest from the garden, they place bags of produce on the fences for neighbors to come pick up. Ayanna explains, "We go beyond urban agriculture—it's a way to rebuild the unity in the neighborhood."

This summer, the young people working at SVCG are making soap using the mint, sage, raspberries, and strawberries that they grow in the garden. They are growing the ingredients, as well as marketing, packaging, and processing the product. Ayanna says, "I want them to see how they can take a patch of land and make it a business. You don't have to look around the corner, you can go to your grandmother's house and look at that plot of land and think, 'What can I grow here?'"

As young people learn how to plant and harvest, SVCG is expanding, hoping to build greenhouses soon. They are looking out at the next few years, relying on the young people who've built their skills at farming and who come back to help, contributing to the community and providing fresh, local food to a neighborhood experiencing food apartheid.

As Ayanna explains, gardening has a long and rich history in Pittsburgh's black community. When she was growing up, her grandparents had a mule, chickens, tomatoes, and more—all in the center of Pittsburgh. She was twelve years old the first time she ate something from a can. "What we're doing now is we're going back to what we know and what has helped our community survive."

Ayanna has been fortunate to secure this urban land, located on two formerly abandoned lots, and is committed to stewarding and growing this incredible resource so that it is available to even more Pittsburghers. Graduates of SVCG, and others interested in gardening or farming in urban areas in Pittsburgh and Philadelphia, would benefit from clearer pathways to accessing vacant or abandoned lots.



Agricultural Workforce Development

Our survey and listening sessions revealed a need in Pennsylvania for increased agricultural education and training opportunities, both to foster new business owners and increase the availability of skilled labor. When asked which training opportunity was most valuable in preparing them to start their own farm business, 49% of survey respondents pointed to an on-farm training opportunity, such as working, apprenticing, or interning on a farm. While the second most common training opportunity noted by respondents was growing up on a farm, over 60% of respondents to our survey did not grow up on a farm. The traditional intergenerational training that has sustained farming families across Pennsylvania for decades is still a bedrock of agricultural life, but as many first-generation farmers look to begin farms, on-farm training is essential to their success and the future of Pennsylvania's agriculture.

In listening sessions across the Commonwealth, young farmers expressed the desire for more apprenticeships to facilitate farmer-to-farmer training and assist with farm transition. They also saw a need for greater investments in incubator farms, where young farmers can access a small amount of land with which to start their businesses before they are ready to commit to a long-term investment.

Additionally, more than one-third of respondents who are currently farming, or who have in the past, noted that the limited availability of skilled labor is either very challenging or prohibitive to farm viability (a farmer's ability to maintain a profitable business). In our listening sessions, farmers explained that finding employees with the right experience and skills represented a key challenge to running a successful farm, further reinforcing the need for better training and learning opportunities in the Commonwealth.

In conversations with farmers, farm advocates, and others, we have heard about the negative impacts of labor shortages in key agricultural sectors, such as dairy, orchards, and mushrooms. These labor shortages on established farms may threaten the survival of those farms. As established farms represent a concentration of resources, land, knowledge, and service industries critically important to the success of the next generation, this threat also impacts young farmers.

Where did you learn to farm? (Top answers)

61%

Working on a farm

47%

Family and/or neighbors who farmed

33%

Growing up on a farm

30%

Volunteering on a farm

**As identified in the National
Young Farmers Coalition's
2018 PA survey*

75% OF RESPONDENTS IDENTIFIED AFFORDING OR FINDING SKILLED LABOR AS A CHALLENGE.

"On-farm training was difficult to find. I knew I wanted to gain experience in the variety of skills required in running a farm, not just field work. However, apprenticeships only seemed available in different states, and I wanted to stay in Western Pennsylvania."

– David Slebodnik, farmer, Beaver County

Farmer Profile

Looking for Training Opportunities in Western Pennsylvania David Slebodnik, Beaver County, PA

David Slebodnik grew up in Western Pennsylvania. After graduating from college, he began searching for opportunities to learn to farm. He wanted to stay in Western Pennsylvania, so he asked a farmer who ran a small vegetable operation nearby if he could work on his farm. The farmer couldn't pay him, but Dave volunteered a few days each week to gain experience until he found a paid position at a larger organic vegetable farm nearby.

Dave spent several seasons on this larger farm and learned much of the day-to-day work of growing food. He realized, however, that he was not learning how to successfully run a farm business. To start his own farm one day, he needed to learn more than just how to grow plants or raise animals—he needed to learn about marketing, hiring, food safety, and more. While looking for apprenticeships where he could learn these skills, Dave found many opportunities outside Pennsylvania, but he wasn't able to find anything close to

home. When farmers leave their local areas for farming apprenticeships in other states or regions, they are less likely to return home to start their farms. Dave is intent on farming in Beaver County and serving the residents there, rather than leaving home for areas that may have more farmer training opportunities or larger markets.

For now, Dave is taking a break from farming while he looks for other training opportunities and for affordable land. As the Student Farm Educator at Penn State-Beaver, he coordinates a campus farm focused on vegetable production to build student leadership, foster campus sustainability, and provide education on food systems. The farm is part of the campus's sustainable food systems program. He looks forward to the day when he can build his own successful farm business in Beaver County, serving the city of Beaver Falls.

Dave Slebodnik, Beaver County, PA.



Margaret Schloss, One Woman Farm,
formerly in Allegheny and Butler Counties, PA.



Don Holtz Photography

“I’m committed to carrying on the Pennsylvania tradition of agriculture here in Western Pennsylvania and find myself faced with significant roadblocks when trying to acquire affordable, arable land. Without addressing the lack of resources and business services available to young farmers, there won’t be a future of farming in the state.”

– Katy Lydon, farmer, Allegheny County

Farmer Business Services

In both our survey and listening sessions, young farmers described the challenge of starting farm operations without sufficient farmer services or knowledge of available resources, funding sources, and application procedures. Farmers foregrounded key areas of assistance in which farmer services could have the greatest impact on their businesses: awareness of state and federal programs, access to capital, and marketing assistance.

In listening sessions, many farmers explained that with a lack of connection and communication among farmers—especially in Western and Central Pennsylvania—early career farmers don’t know where to find guidance or resources. Farmers told us that this lack of resource-sharing among farmers, combined with insufficient farmer services in the state, represents a looming challenge to building successful businesses. They underscored that a lack of marketing assistance, insufficient consumer education measures, and resistance from institutions to local and regional purchasing all contribute to a difficult landscape for those attempting to market to a local customer base.

Young farmers often lack the necessary startup capital to make the initial large investments a farm requires. Therefore, access to credit is often essential to starting a farm business. In listening sessions, farmers discussed extensive difficulties receiving loans, especially for businesses outside of traditional commodity crop models. In our survey, respondents’ most common credit issue was not being aware of their loan options. Similarly, farmers discussed debt and managing risk as key challenges. A number of farmers reported student loans adding to their debt load.

In our survey, the most common answers to questions about interactions with state and federal financing programs were centered around a lack of knowledge about which programs exist, who they are available to, and who to reach out to in order to access these programs. Many farmers expressed confusion about what loan options are available to them. Only half of respondents reported having interactions with state programs; more than half of those who had not interacted with those programs reported that they were unfamiliar with what state resources exist and are available to them. Finally, only 30 percent of respondents had interacted with federal programs, with two-thirds of those who hadn’t explaining that they were unaware of what was available.

Farmer Profile

Looking For Land Near a Devoted Customer Base Root Mass Farm, Oley, PA

Neither Lindsey Shapiro nor Landon Jefferies grew up on a farm. Both children of the suburbs, they found their way to farming in early adulthood. Lindsey and Landon run Root Mass Farm, a five-acre mixed vegetable farm in Berks County, Pennsylvania. They started their farm in 2011 on leased land, starting small with just one acre and incorporating more parcels each year. Selling produce at two weekly farmers markets in Philadelphia, Lindsey and Landon have been successful at these markets and are very tied to their customers there. They accept Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) funds, Farmers' Market Nutrition Program coupons, and Philly Food Bucks (a SNAP incentive program specifically for farmers markets) at both markets. At one of their markets, funds from these programs make up 40% of their sales. It's important to Lindsey and Landon that they provide food to an economically diverse set of customers.

Lindsey and Landon have been grateful to find land to lease close to their customer base in Philadelphia, but are looking to purchase land in the future so that they can make long-term investments in their business. They currently lease a piece of land that has poor drainage—which has been especially difficult as the last few years have been very wet. They have found that it is not necessarily a challenge to find land to farm, but that it is a major challenge to find high-quality land suitable to fruit and vegetable production.

Root Mass Farm is about an hour from Philadelphia now, and Lindsey and Landon hope to buy land less than a two-hour drive from the city. Staying close to Philadelphia allows them to be near friends and family, as well as market directly to their urban customer base. Land prices near the city are considerably higher than those farther out into rural Pennsylvania, so even though they are looking for a relatively small farm (approximately 15 acres), saving for a down payment while farming is challenging. Lindsey is working part-time off the farm to help supplement these savings. As they save for a down payment, they continue to search real estate sites, wishing there were more resources to help them find land and to know what financial options are available to them.

Lindsey and Landon are committed to farming in Eastern Pennsylvania, to contribute to their local economy and produce fresh vegetables to feed their neighbors. They have been running a successful farm for eight years and are learning more every year. They want to own their own farm and to build equity by investing in that land, but finding an affordable property remains a challenge.

Check out Young Farmers' Finding Farmland calculator and online course for more resources designed to help farmers analyze their land access financing options:
www.findingfarmland.org



Lindsey Shapiro and Landon Jefferies, farmers at Root Mass Farm in Berks County, Pennsylvania.

Recommendations

Our findings in this report illustrate clear barriers young Pennsylvania farmers face when seeking available and affordable farmland; accessing training opportunities and finding skilled farm employees; and connecting with business services. To respond to these challenges and help build a brighter future for agriculture in Pennsylvania, we offer the following recommendations:

Land Access

- Prioritize Agricultural Conservation Easement Purchase Program (ACEPP) funds for working farm easements that include affordability and farmer ownership provisions, and allocate funding to retroactively place these provisions on existing easements;
- Prioritize easement projects that include a minimum of a three-year, written lease in cases where the landowner-applicant is leasing to a farmer;
- Create two young farmer member positions on the Agricultural Land Preservation Board;
- Incentivize the sale and renting of land and other agricultural assets to young and beginning farmers; and
- Increase support for Pennsylvania Farm Link

Agricultural Workforce Development

- Support on-farm training opportunities through a cost sharing grant program.

Farmer Business Services

- Establish a young farmer outreach coordinator position at the Pennsylvania Department of Agriculture;
- Establish a young farmer advisory committee to report to Pennsylvania State Government on gaps in existing resources for young farmers, and how to modernize and improve upon those resources so they are more accessible; and
- Actively solicit ideas and feedback from young farmers when creating the Pennsylvania Agricultural Business Development Center.

Land Access

For young farmers in Pennsylvania, the number one concern is finding secure access to affordable, high-quality farmland. Without long-term, reliable, and affordable land tenure, young farmers cannot fully invest in their land and businesses. Due to high farmland prices, development pressure, and a lack of a transparent market for land, young farmers are struggling to find secure land tenure. Among farmers who lease land, many operate under short-term, tenuous lease arrangements—sometimes relying only on a handshake agreement. The following recommendations respond to the need for fairer

markets for farmland among farmers, more secure land tenure, and incentives to aid in the transfer of farmland from one generation of Pennsylvanian farmers to the next.

Working Farm Easements

Pennsylvania has an opportunity as a national leader in preserving farmland to promote the use of working farm easements to other states. The Commonwealth should recognize working farm easements as an essential tool in the Commonwealth's farmland preservation toolbox. Working farm

easements stipulate that when preserved land is sold, it must be sold to a working farmer. If a farmer buyer can't be found, the easement holder has the opportunity to purchase the land at its agricultural value and resell to a farmer at a later date. This mechanism strongly encourages preserved land to stay affordable and in the hands of farmers. In addition to preserving the farmland itself, working farm easements protect farmers by helping to keep land at its agricultural use value and farmers as the owner-operators on the land.

Currently, the Pennsylvania Agricultural Area Security Law distinguishes between Farmland Value and Market Value,³⁶ and program regulations for ACEPP restrict non-agricultural activities on preserved land. While this approach is highly effective in protecting against conversion of farmland to non-agricultural uses, there is currently no provision in ACEPP to

protect preserved land from falling out of farmer ownership.³⁷ Competition from individuals who do not derive the majority of their income from farming is an increasing challenge for farmers in some parts of the state. These buyers can drive the value of preserved land up beyond what farmers are able to afford, preventing them from gaining the security of land ownership. Further, owners of preserved farmland are allowed to make residential improvements on preserved properties, potentially inflating future resale prices beyond what a farmer could afford.

The ACEPP program regulations state that one of the objectives of county farmland preservation programs shall be "to protect viable agricultural lands by acquiring agricultural conservation easements which prevent the development or improvement of the land for any purpose other than agricultural production." While the program has largely been successful, young farmers still struggle to find affordable farmland, and as our findings indicate, in some cases the current program requirements are not strong enough to meet the challenge of shifting real estate pressures in some parts of the Commonwealth. **We recommend that Pennsylvania strengthen the ACEPP program to better meet its stated objectives by prioritizing applications that include working farm easements and by allocating funding to retroactively place these provisions on existing easements.**

Easements With Minimum Lease Terms

As our findings illustrated, long-term, reliable land tenure is a significant obstacle for young Pennsylvania farmers. The Commonwealth should look for opportunities to incentivize minimum lease terms for farmland in order to provide some certainty to farmers just starting out that they won't lose their access unexpectedly. One way to address this is to incentivize minimum lease terms through ACEPP. Currently, applicants to ACEPP must demonstrate that the property they wish to preserve is in active farming. If the applicant is a non-farming landowner, they can achieve this by leasing land to a working farmer. The program does not include any requirements related to the terms of these leases, however. **We recommend that Pennsylvania prioritize applications that include a written lease with minimum terms of three years in cases where the landowner is leasing to a farmer.**

Young Farmer Member Positions On The Agricultural Land Preservation Board

Young farmers face unique challenges and therefore have important perspectives on how to address those challenges. As Pennsylvania grapples with addressing land availability and affordability, the Agricultural Land Preservation Board—the governing body partly responsible for administering the ACEPP program—would benefit from the addition of young farmer voices to its deliberations. Currently, the Board is required to have one farmer member.³⁸ **We recommend adding two young**



Don Holtz Photography

"As a national leader in farmland preservation, Pennsylvania is acutely aware of the threat to farmland conversion and the challenge of land access for young farmers. The Pennsylvania Department of Agriculture looks forward to working with the National Young Farmers Coalition to explore these recommendations further."

**– Douglas Wolfgang,
Pennsylvania Department of Agriculture**

farmer positions to complement this existing position and to maintain an odd number of total board positions.

Selling and Renting Land and Other Agricultural Assets To Young and Beginning Farmers

Part of the challenge of land access for young farmers in Pennsylvania is simply competing with all of the other potential buyers. Financial incentives can be effective tools for encouraging asset owners to sell to young and beginning farmers. **We applaud the General Assembly's enactment of two distinct tax policies that will work together in this regard:**

1. The Beginning Farmer Tax Credit will help address land access for young and beginning farmers by offering an income tax credit to landowners who sell or rent land or other agricultural assets to beginning farmers.⁴⁴ This model is yielding impressive results through a newly established program in Minnesota. A bill introducing this model in Pennsylvania was passed this June thanks to leadership from Pennsylvania Senator Elder Vogel (R-47) and other key supporters. We recommend amending the program to include a scaled tax credit provision, which would provide a greater tax incentive to land or asset owners who provide longer leases.
2. The second tax policy was among the proposals announced in Governor Tom Wolf's 2019 Pennsylvania Farm Bill and will provide a tax exemption in cases where a landowner sells easement-protected land to a beginning farmer.⁴⁵ This policy, passed this June, will incentivize such sales by exempting both buyer and seller from the one percent realty transfer tax required under current law.

Together, these creative tax policies will have significant positive outcomes for young farmers looking for land in the Commonwealth. **We recommend that Pennsylvania implement both of these policies, and that the income tax credit be expanded to include tiered credits in the case of a lease, to incentivize longer lease terms and thus greater certainty for young and beginning farmers.**

Increased Support of Pennsylvania Farm Link

Land linking databases are an important tool for young farmers looking for land, and for landowners who want their land to stay in farming. Our research revealed that many young farmers struggle to connect with traditional word of mouth networks in farming communities, particularly if they did not grow up in a farming family—which 60% of our survey respondents indicated they did not. Pennsylvania Farm Link has great potential as a resource, but the \$100 fee to post on the site limits access for farmers and landowners. **We recommend that Pennsylvania increase funding for Pennsylvania Farm Link to provide more one-on-one support and to make the database free to all.**

Case Study



Minnesota Beginning Farmer Tax Credit

In 2017, recognizing the shared challenge of finding access to affordable farmland as an aging generation of farmers retires, the Central Minnesota Young Farmers Coalition—a Coalition chapter—launched a successful policy campaign to help facilitate transfer of land to the next generation. Working with leaders in the Minnesota State Legislature, former Governor Mark Dayton, and the Minnesota Department of Agriculture, the chapter built upon an existing legislative proposal to create a tax incentive program to incentivize the sale or renting of agricultural land and other assets to beginning farmers.⁴¹ This program has already been successful at meeting its mission within its first year. Since Governor Dayton signed the program into law in May of 2017, 439 land owner applications have been received and approved by the state, for a total of \$2.277 million in tax credits.⁴²

“We know the struggles that young farmers face in trying to start a business, and get access to quality farmland. We continue to support programs, like a beginning farmer tax credit, that will help this next generation of entrepreneurs pursue their passion of starting a farm of their own.”

– Darrin Youker, Pennsylvania Farm Bureau

Case Study

New York State Working Farm Protection Act



Similarly to Pennsylvania, agriculture is an integral part of New York's economy, culture, and landscape. The state's 35,500 farms keep over 7 million acres of land in agricultural production,⁴³ support more than 160,000 jobs, and generate in excess of \$39 billion annually.⁴⁴ As a growing number of farmers prepare to retire, it is critical that young farmers are positioned to step up and carry on this legacy.

New York's young farmers have struggled to find affordable farmland. While traditional agricultural conservation easements have been very effective in keeping New York farmland in farming—protecting over 61,000 acres from residential and other development pressures—they do not guarantee that an individual who earns their income from farming will own the protected land in the future. As pressure from non-farmer residential owners and second-home buyers has increased in some regions, anecdotal feedback from farmers and land trusts has pointed to a risk of protected farmland transitioning out of farmer ownership.

Recognizing this challenge, the Cuomo administration and the New York State Legislature took action. In 2018, New York passed and enacted the Working Farm Protection Act, which made working farm easements permanently eligible for state funding.

Working farm easements are a proven way to keep farmers on the land. This type of easement not only protects the land but also protects farmers by restricting the resale price of protected land to its Agricultural Use Value and excluding non-agricultural buyers. Working farm easements have been the key to keeping hundreds of protected farms in farmer ownership in Massachusetts and Vermont, and are being implemented by an increasing number of New York land trusts.⁴⁵



Alewife farm, Kingston, NY.
Pete Mauney, Farmland for Farmers, 2018.

“Pennsylvania Farmers Union is committed to ensuring the success of the next generation of farmers in Pennsylvania. We support the Coalition’s recommendations to incentivize land transfer to young farmers and to increase investments that will expand workforce development and business services for young farmers across the Commonwealth.”

– Heidi Secord, Pennsylvania Farmers Union

Case Study



Working Farm Easements in Vermont

Farmland conservation policy in Vermont started as a response to the rapidly changing pattern of development in the state in the 1980s. This development was seen as the cause of rising house prices and growing development pressure on valuable agricultural lands, as well as a threat to the rural character of the state. The Vermont Housing and Conservation Board (VHCB) was established by the Vermont Housing and Conservation Trust Fund Act of 1987 and charged with not only conserving farmland and the future affordability of that land, but also recognizing the unique relationship in Vermont between farmland, forestland, housing, and historic preservation.

The law, as amended, states that Vermont should, among other priorities, “encourage and assist in...keeping conserved agricultural land in production and affordable for future generations of farmers.” To accomplish this directive, VHCB has worked closely with the Vermont Land Trust and Upper Valley Land Trust to develop a pipeline for program applications as well as shared responsibilities associated with stewarding conserved farmland and facilitating future sales. Vermont Land Trust, Upper Valley Land Trust, local nonprofit conservation organizations, and municipalities work with landowners to develop pre-applications, which are reviewed by VHCB’s pre-application committee. The full VHCB Board then decides which projects will move forward and receive funding. Since 1987, the VHCB has conserved 431,000 acres of agricultural and recreational lands and natural areas.⁴⁶

Early projects included right of first refusal provisions, but in 2003, VHCB adopted the use of the option to purchase at agricultural value to better ensure that state-funded agricultural conservation easements are effectively keeping conserved farmland available and affordable for future generations of farmers. VHCB’s 2016 policy guide for funding conservation of agricultural land states that, “The option to purchase at agricultural value is VHCB’s standard tool to promote the goal of maintaining farmer ownership and active agricultural use of conserved farmland, and keeping conserved farmland at agricultural values.” Today, 434 Vermont farms are conserved by an option to purchase at agricultural value.

Since 2003, Vermont has only had to fully exercise the option once on the 118 farms protected with the option to purchase at agricultural value that have changed hands.⁴⁷ In all other cases, either the proposed purchaser has met the requirements to be exempt under the option to purchase at agricultural value, has been issued a waiver (used to facilitate sales to farmers who are good candidates but may not strictly meet program guidelines), or the sellers have chosen to rework the sale.

The adoption of working farm easements through Vermont’s farmland conservation policy has improved farmland affordability for Vermont farmers and is an attractive draw for farmers from other states who are seeking an affordable path to farm ownership.



Rows of vegetables in Vermont.

Photo by David Middleton, courtesy of Vermont Land Trust.

Agricultural Workforce Development

Our findings illustrated a clear demand among young Pennsylvania farmers for more learning opportunities and a deeper pool of skilled farm labor. Meeting this demand will require a diversified approach that considers each aspect of workforce development from early education to on the job training and professional development. We applaud Governor Wolf and the Pennsylvania Departments of Agriculture and Education for their attention to agricultural workforce issues and for spotlighting the significant challenges facing the Commonwealth's food and agriculture industries writ large through the 2017 Report of the Pennsylvania Agricultural Education Advisory Committee.⁴⁸ The report makes a compelling case for directing greater investment in agricultural education from K-12 through post-secondary learning, to inspire more young people to pursue careers in the food and agriculture industries. Certainly, to ensure a healthy future for Pennsylvania agriculture, we must inspire more young people to enter farming. In addition, we must also address the clear demand among young farmers for training opportunities that will prepare them to be successful in eventually running their own operation on land that they own. Forty-nine percent of respondents to our survey indicated that working, apprenticing, or interning on a farm was the most valuable training opportunity in preparing them to start their own farm business, and over 60% of respondents did not grow up on a farm, where they might otherwise have gained such experience. These responses highlight that while agricultural education is a crucial piece of the puzzle, on-farm training is equally important.

On-Farm Training Opportunities

Meeting the demand among young farmers for greater on-farm training opportunities will require a creative and strategic approach from policy makers to invest in diverse models of on-farm training in addition to agricultural education. Examples of on-farm training models include:

- Early training opportunities such those provided by Sankofa Village Community Garden;
- Formal apprenticeships such as those provided by Pennsylvania Association for Sustainable Agriculture;
- Farm business incubators that provide a proving ground for young farmers; and
- On the job training on farms where employees can learn each aspect of farm operation.

We recommend that Pennsylvania establish a grant program that could support each of these models through a cost-sharing model that would help cover the costs associated with providing meaningful on-farm training opportunities.

Case Study



Pennsylvania Association for Sustainable Agriculture Apprenticeship Programs

Founded in 1992, the Pennsylvania Association for Sustainable Agriculture (PASA) offers a variety of learning and training opportunities ranging from issue specific workshops to formal apprenticeship programs. Currently, PASA's apprenticeship programs include: the Dairy Grazing Apprenticeship (DGA) program,^{49, 50} which was founded by Wisconsin dairy farmers in 2011 as the first formally accredited agricultural apprenticeship program in the country, and a new Diversified Vegetable Apprenticeship (DVA) program created by PASA, which was recently formally approved by the Pennsylvania Department of Labor and Industry.⁵¹ PASA began partnering with DGA in 2016 to offer that program, and then soon after created the DVA. Together, these programs are an incredible resource for young Pennsylvania farmers and a model for other states to look to. Through extensive curricula, apprentices connect with master dairy graziers or master growers through intensive programs that last twelve and eighteen months, respectively.



Master Grower Liz Krug, owner of Fullers Overlook Farm in Waverly, PA, and Apprentice Logan McCabe, participants in PASA's Diversified Vegetable Apprenticeship.

Case Study



Colorado Interim Study Committee and Agricultural Workforce Development Program

In 2017, the Colorado General Assembly established a bipartisan, bicameral Interim Committee to examine young and beginning farmer issues between the 2017 and 2018 legislative sessions. Made up of three Senators and three Representatives with equal representation from both parties, the Committee met twice to hear expert testimony, consider policy recommendations, and ultimately approve recommendations to the full General Assembly.

This approach, which any state could replicate, helped bring to the table a diverse coalition of agricultural stakeholders

and provided legitimacy and momentum for key legislative proposals. It ultimately led to the enactment of a Colorado law creating the Agriculture Workforce Development Program, which provides cost-share incentives to agricultural businesses, including farms and ranches, to provide hands-on internships. Pennsylvania should study this model and build upon it to bring state resources to bear on addressing the challenges of a lack of training opportunities for young farmers and a lack of skilled agricultural labor.

“Today, when 75 percent of beginning and aspiring farmers under the age of 40 did not grow up on farms, on-farm training programs are vital to cultivating the next generation of Pennsylvania’s agricultural workforce. That’s why we administer government-registered diversified vegetable farm management and dairy grazing apprenticeship programs, which serve the dual purpose of offering beginning farmers a guided path toward managing or starting their own farm business while helping to meet the labor needs of established farms. A cost-sharing grant program devoted to workforce development would help us grow our capacity and truly make an impact by meeting the high demand for these programs.”

– Hannah Smith-Brubaker,
Pennsylvania Association for Sustainable Agriculture

Farmer Business Services

In our listening sessions and in response to our survey, young Pennsylvania farmers discussed the need for greater awareness of and greater accessibility to business services to help them succeed in growing their increasingly diverse operations. Farmers also highlighted that they struggle to connect to traditional farmer networks—especially in Western and Central Pennsylvania. The following recommendations are designed to improve coordination between the Commonwealth and young farmers, including socially disadvantaged farmers such as female farmers, LGBTQ farmers, and farmers of color, and to inform the establishment of additional and more accessible resources.

Young Farmer Outreach Coordinator

Engaging young farmers throughout the Commonwealth and collaborating to address gaps in business services is work that deserves a centralized presence to drive it forward. The 2018 federal Farm Bill requires that USDA establish beginning farmer and rancher coordinator positions in each state to coordinate technical assistance for beginning farmers in accessing USDA programs. **We recommend that Pennsylvania establish a young farmer outreach coordinator position at the Pennsylvania Department of Agriculture to liaise with this new USDA coordinator and serve in a similar role, coordinating technical assistance for young farmers in accessing state resources.**

Young Farmer Advisory Committee

To identify specific legislative and programmatic solutions for improving access to business services for young farmers in Pennsylvania, **we recommend establishing an interim young farmer advisory committee to—over a finite period of time—report to the Governor and the General Assembly on gaps in existing resources for young farmers and on modernizing and improving upon those resources so they are more accessible.**

Agricultural Business Development Center

Governor Tom Wolf's proposed 2019 Pennsylvania Farm Bill included \$2 million to establish an Agricultural Business Development Center.⁵² This proposed center, recently signed into law, will serve farmers across the Commonwealth in creating business plans, transition plans, or succession plans. **As the Governor works to establish this resource, we recommend that he consider the unique needs of and actively solicit input from young farmers. The Center should include adequate funding and staffing resources to meet the diverse needs of farmers across the Commonwealth.**

PASA Dairy Grazing Apprentice Jessica Matthews, Hameau Farm in Belleville, PA.



Emily Decker

Next Steps

Pennsylvania's young farmers are skilled and ready to take the necessary risks to grow their businesses and contribute to the health of Pennsylvania's agricultural economy and the accessibility of quality food. In return, we must ensure that they have clear pathways and support in finding the land, training, and resources necessary to create viable businesses that can support them and their families through farming. We hope that Pennsylvania policy makers, technical services providers, and agricultural stakeholders find this report to be a compelling case and a call to action to address the top needs of Pennsylvania's young and beginning farmers. **We look forward to working together to build a brighter future for agriculture in Pennsylvania.**

Margaret Schlass, One Woman Farm,
formerly in Allegheny and Butler Counties, PA.



Don Holtz Photography

Glossary

Agricultural Conservation Easement

Conservation easements are voluntary, legal agreements between a landowner and a public agency or qualified conservation organization, such as a land trust, that permanently limit uses of the land in order to protect its conservation values. An agricultural conservation easement is a voluntary deed restriction designed to keep productive land available for farming. Landowners can either sell or donate the rights associated with a conservation easement in exchange for monetary compensation or tax breaks.

Agricultural Use Value

The as-restricted fair market value of a property based on its productive commercial agricultural use value rather than its "highest and best" potential use value for residential or other nonagricultural purposes.

Conserved, Preserved, Protected

Throughout this paper, these terms are intended to be interpreted as synonymous in meaning. The use of one term over another depends on the program and the state. All of these terms are intended to describe the work of keeping farmland available for farming.

Farmer Ownership and Affordability Provisions

Voluntary language included in, or added as an addendum to, an agricultural conservation easement that is designed to ensure that protected farmland is affordable to qualified farmers and remains in farmer ownership. Preemptive purchase rights are an example of this type of provision.

Farmland Value

(as defined in the Agricultural Security Area Law)⁵³

The price as of the valuation date for property used for normal farming operations which a willing and informed seller who is not obligated to sell would accept for the property and which a willing and informed buyer who is not obligated to buy would pay for the property.

Land Tenure

Tenure means "to hold." It describes the relationships among people or entities with respect to land and related resources. Rules of tenure define how property rights to land are allocated. The two main modes of holding rights to land in the U.S. are ownership or tenancy.⁵⁴

Market Value

(as defined in the Agricultural Security Area Law)⁵⁵

The price as of the valuation date for the highest and best use

of the property which a willing and informed seller who is not obligated to sell would accept for the property, and which a willing and informed buyer who is not obligated to buy would pay for the property.

Preemptive Purchase Right

(also known as Option to Purchase at Agricultural Value)

Voluntary language included in, or added to, an agricultural conservation easement that is designed to ensure that protected land remains affordable to, and owned by, farmers. Preemptive purchase rights recognize the agricultural use value of protected land, establish criteria for qualified farmer buyers, and establish the preferential right of the easements holder or its assignee to purchase protected farmland at its agricultural use value in the event that the landowner intends to sell to a non-farming buyer.

Qualified Farmer

A person who meets the qualifications required to purchase land protected by a farmer ownership and affordability provision. Qualified farmer definitions are generally determined by the easement holder and typically include requirements for farming income and experience that indicate serious intention and capability.

Working Farm Easement

An agricultural conservation easement that includes a farmer ownership and affordability provision.

Young Farmers

We advocate for farmers who are in their early years of farming, and largely those under 40 years old.

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