



American Farmland Trust, or AFT, is the only national organization that takes a holistic approach to agriculture, focusing on the land itself, the agricultural practices used in stewarding that land, and the farmers and ranchers who do the work. Since its founding in 1980, AFT has helped permanently protect more than 6.5 million acres of farmland, advanced environmentally sound farming practices on millions of additional acres, and supported thousands of farm families.

AFT has a national office in Washington, D.C., and a network of seven field offices across the United States where farmland is under threat. The New York office was established in 1990, as the state is home to some of the best and most threatened farmland in the nation.

### *What's at stake when New York loses its agricultural land?*

The COVID-19 pandemic has highlighted the importance of a secure regional food supply – one that includes local farmers stewarding local farms – to feed all New Yorkers. But currently, one-third of the state's farmers are at or near retirement age and increasingly these farmers are transitioning out of farming without a known successor, leaving a quarter of New York's farmland acres at risk of being lost forever unless those acres change hands to a new generation of farmers. At the same time, new and beginning farmers face major barriers finding farmland at prices they can afford with conditions that will enable them to launch successful businesses.

And these challenges faced by new farmers are even more acute for many Black, Indigenous, and People of Color (BIPOC) due to systemic inequities in land access and existing power dynamics in land ownership. Even as current public attention leans toward a new reckoning, these barriers are being exacerbated by resources, tools and trainings that are inaccessible due to language disparities and institutional pathways not designed to be inclusive. At the same time, there exists an opportunity to build cultural competency for landowners to enable productive and equitable partnerships between them and a new, more diverse generation of farmers.

Farmers can be active participants in addressing climate change – and our research shows that this is top of mind for many farmland owners as they think about their farm partnerships and vision. While numerous state and federal programs offer incentives to farmers who adopt new conservation practices, landowners are not always aware of these opportunities and need guidance on how to encourage their farm partners to

change their practices to reduce climate impacts. Additionally, Northeastern states are experiencing a proliferation of solar projects on farmland, and there is a timely opportunity to bring landowners together to explore smart solar siting and dual-use solar options, including tools and resources to protect the best farmland for farming.

### ***Making the Farmer-Landowner Connection: Farmland for a New Generation New York***

Farmland for a New Generation New York is designed to keep land in farming as the state faces a critical period of generational transition in land stewardship to support a resilient local food supply. This partnership among American Farmland Trust, New York State Department of Agriculture and Markets, and organizations across the state leads the nation in helping farmers gain access to land while supporting farmland owners in transferring their farms. In its first two years, Farmland for a New Generation New York's centralized Resource Center and coordinated network of 27 Regional Navigators have provided one-on-one training, guidance, and support to more than 5,200 farmers and landowners, resulting in 68 farmers finding land for new and expanded farm businesses on 2,613 acres. Combined with its precursor, the Hudson Valley Farmlink Network, this has equated to more than 250+ farmers gaining access to land in New York since 2014. This impact is impressive, but it is not enough.

### ***Responding to Farmland Loss by Piloting a Hudson Valley NOL's Network***

The proposed project, **Fostering Equitable Farmland Connections in New York's Hudson Valley to Support a Resilient Regional Food System**, will accelerate AFT's efforts to better support non-operating landowners in making their land available for farmers, particularly BIPOC farmers, farmland itself and the conservation practices used on the land.

Beginning Fall 2021, AFT will organize peer-to-peer gatherings of non-operating farmland owners to share their experiences, network, and learn from each other and agricultural technical service providers who are experts in the fields of conservation practices, smart solar siting, water quality protection, and farm transfer planning as a vehicle for enhanced farmland preservation. With an initial focus on the Hudson Valley, AFT will harness our relationships and partnerships through Farmland for a New Generation New York, and with new generation farmers and landowners to create a cohort of 10 non-operating landowners who are motivated to find a farmer, clarify a vision for their land, and foster a community of learning with their peers around topics of interest that could include soil health, farmland succession planning, farmer-landowner relationship-building and cultural competency.

If we don't act now, and act boldly, to promote equity and conservation through this transition we will miss an incredible opportunity to impact the lives of hundreds of farmers of color, and other underserved farmers, in New York State who are ready to bring their farm visions and businesses to life in ways that center regenerative farming practices, healthy communities, and regional food systems. Additionally, our failure to act now will leave a gaping hole in our strategy to protect New York's farmland from changing hands, risking loss to development, including rampant solar farm development, that potentially removes productive, working lands from the landscape forever.

### ***How You Can Help***

This project is time sensitive and targeted to swiftly make lasting change for a new generation of diverse farmers, as well as for landowners who are ready to lead by example as pioneers who are focused on protecting farmland, promoting sound farming practices, and providing farmland access and tenure through a lens of empathy and equity. We are in the process of raising \$60,000 by August 1st to pilot this project for one year. A detailed budget and schedule of activities is available upon request.

Support for this project will directly and positively impact at least 20 families, as well as an estimated 1,000+ acres of farmland in the Hudson Valley. Please contact Karisa Centanni for more information.

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