

Farmland Conservation in Vermont

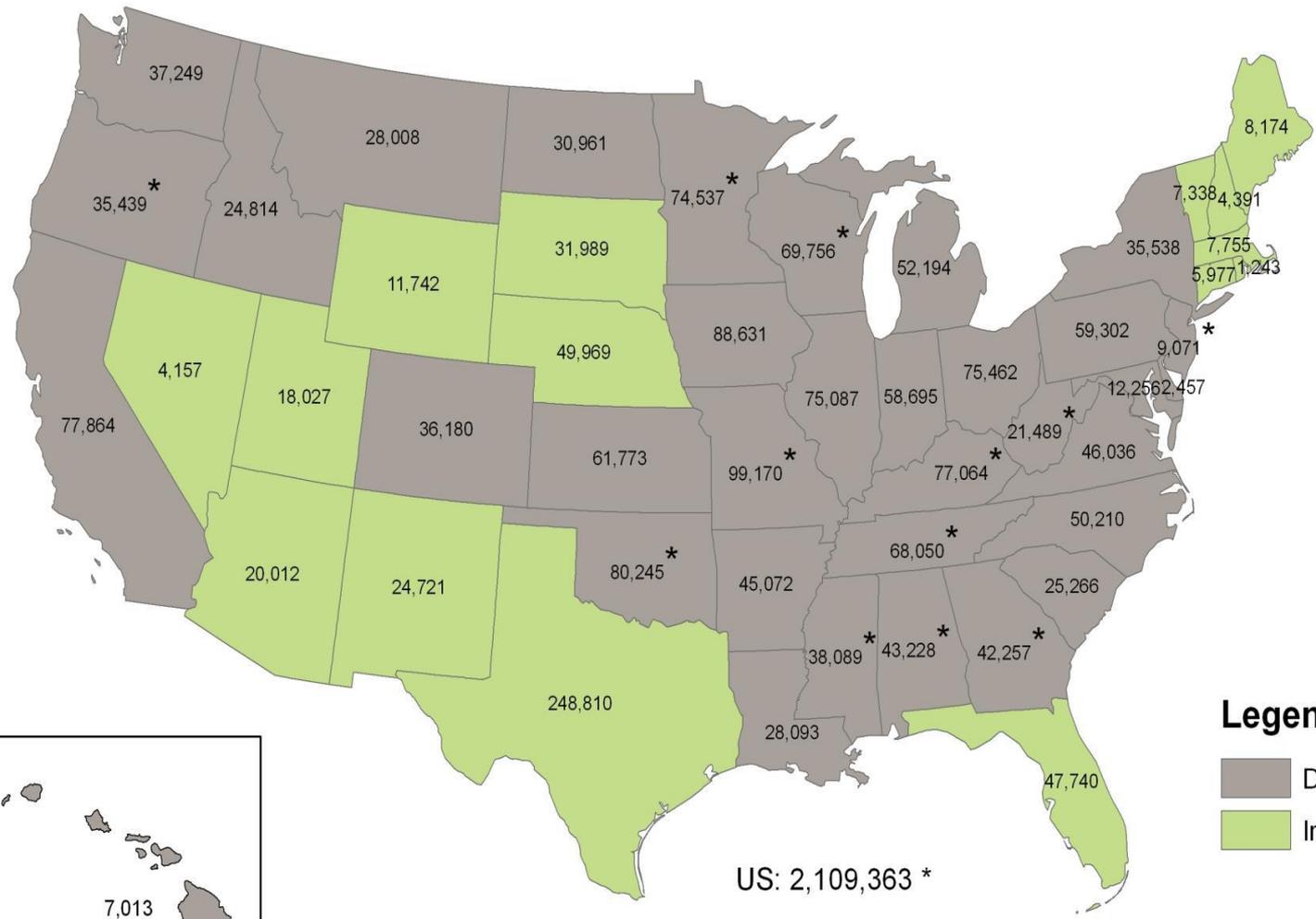
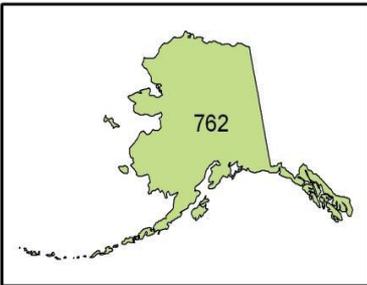
American Farmland Trust Conference
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Vermont
Housing &
Conservation
Board

Number of Farms: 2012 Census of Agriculture Change from 2007 Census of Agriculture



Legend

- Decrease
- Increase

* Indicates significant change

Trends in Agriculture in Vermont:

- # of farms nationwide **decreasing (4.3%)**
- # of farms **increasing** in VT and New England
- # of dairy farms continues to decline – but dairy still 70 – 80% of VT agricultural income
- Slight increase in acres in agricultural use

Vermont Housing & Conservation Board

- Quasi-state Agency established by Vermont Legislature in 1987
- Broad mission:
“... creating affordable housing, and conserving and protecting Vermont's agricultural land, forestland, historic properties, important natural areas, and recreational lands...”
10 V.S.A. Chapter 15
- Dedicated state funding source (1/2 of property transfer tax)



Conserved farmland in Enosburg

VHCB - a public foundation

- Governed by 11-member Board appointed by Governor & Legislature + 4 ex-officio members
- Provides capacity funding, training and technical assistance to a network of affordable housing and conservation non-profits
- Eligible applicants: non-profits, towns, municipalities and some state agencies

VT Farmland Protection Program: public/private partnership

- Key partners: Vermont Land Trust, Upper Valley Land Trust, VT Agency of Agriculture, Food & Markets, Natural Resources Conservation Service, other land trusts/towns
- Farm easements co-held by land trust, VHCB and Ag. agency; land trust always primary steward
- Stewardship MOUs govern responsibilities



Conserved Lawton dairy farm in Addison County

NRCS – key federal partner

- VHCB/NRCS – first Cooperative Agreement in 1997
- \$42.2 M in federal funding to date
- Since 2001, all VHCB-conserved farms include NRCS funds
- 357 FRPP/NRCS farms in VT – 69,000 + acres
- Especially since 2008, NRCS policies drive Vermont farmland protection

Farmland Conservation Process

- VHCB Ag. Advisory Committee meets twice each year, approves pre-applications from VLT, UVLT, VAAF, etc.
- VHCB cost-shares appraisal with landowner
- VHCB Board commits funding to project (meets several times/year), including funding for costs and stewardship
- All VHCB-funded farm projects include federal FRPP \$\$ - must be approved by NRCS and eligible according to NRCS rules
- Typically takes 1 – 2 years to close on easement purchase
- Some farms conserved without public dollars (by Freeman Foundation or other private funders)



Mimi Arnstein runs a successful CSA from her farmstand

VHCB Farmland Protection policies

- Focus on good ag soils in strong farming communities, conserving blocks of farmland
- Land must be in active ag use
- Original focus on “whole farms” – now infrastructure sometimes in, sometimes out
- 2004 on – Option to Purchase at Ag Value included – goal to keep land in farmer ownership, with sales at ag value



Jeep Madison in the milking parlor on his farm in Shoreham.

2009: Vermont Farm to Plate

- Statewide Food System plan with 10-year goals/vision:
- Increase economic development in Vermont's food and farm sector.
- Create jobs in the food and farm economy.
- Improve access to healthy local foods.
- *Goal 5: Agricultural lands and soils will be available, affordable, and conserved for future generations of farmers and to meet the needs of Vermont's food system*

Vermont Farmland Preservation Impacts



- 635 farms/ 149,000 acres conserved with VHCB \$\$ (840 farms/184,000A total)
- Approximately 300 with OPAV
- 11% of prime and statewide ag soils conserved
- 15% of agricultural land conserved
- 1/3 to 1/2 of all projects facilitate transfers

Benefits of VHCB public/private partnership

- Strong public support and reliable (mostly) \$\$
- Leverage – blend of state/federal and sometimes local/private \$\$
- Accountability – to each other (partners), farm community, general public
- Each partner brings different perspective
- Efficiency – VHCB is sole NRCS applicant; template easement; VLT stewards most farm easements



Programmatic Challenges

- With multiple co-holders, decision making more complicated and time-consuming – and can be confusing to landowners
- State and federal policies don't always align
- Flexibility and timeliness are more difficult to achieve



Conserved Kempton Farm in Peacham.

A. Blake Gardner photo from the Vermont Land Trust

Policy challenges/issues

- Subdivisions (separate conveyances)
- Renewable energy generation
- Housing – to include or exclude? Changing farm labor housing needs
- Environmental stewardship – Balancing ag land protection/production and other conservation goals, including water quality
- Easement amendments



Jim Choiniere purchased conserved farmland to expand and establish a goat dairy farm in a new location.



On Vermont's Family Farm, Greg Finch raises sheep, beef and pigs, meeting a growing demand for locally raised meat. VHCB Farm & Forest Viability program participant.