

# Farmland Access for New Farmers

## A Brief Overview

### History and Context:

Developing New Entry's farmland matching program was a logical next step to support farmers who complete our training program. We let farmers grow on our incubator sites for three years as they start their business. After three years, however, they must move to their own land and farmers have various challenges that prevent them from finding and accessing that land. In Eastern Massachusetts, farmland is often hidden and finding it involves doing a fair amount of outreach and detective work with community members. Once we made the connections to find available farmland we started compiling information and sharing it with farmers who have gone through our programs. Community members appreciate having a central point of reference (such as an organization) if they have farmland to offer rather than having to approach individual farmers. New Entry's Farmland Matching Program is now open to farmers who have completed our core programming, as well as all farmers in Massachusetts that are looking for land. However, more technical assistance and priority is given to the farmers that have come through New Entry's programs.

### Staffing and Partners:

New Entry's farmland matching service is run by a part time staff person. The hours spent on each activity vary per week. Over the summer and fall the staff person conducts outreach to relevant communities, maps farmland, and educates landowners about farmland leasing. In the fall, winter, and spring, staff spends more time evaluating farmland sites that were identified in the summer, meeting with landowners, and determining whether the site could be a good match for land seekers. In these months the staff person also devotes time to meeting with the farmers, introduces them to landowners, and helps both parties through leases and other agreements. An intern or two can also help with the initial outreach work and with organizing some of the landowner education events.

In Massachusetts, many partners are needed to keep tabs on available farmland. Connections with *Conservation Commissions* and *Land trusts* are essential to finding town owned land or conservation land that needs a farmer. *Agricultural Commissions* can help map the farmland resources of a given community and determine what land may or may not be available. Other farm service providers ("buy local" organizations, land link programs, etc.) can be helpful partners if they also preserve farmland or help landowners. Partnering with these groups gives you a much better chance of finding farmland for new farmers.

## Resources

- **Google Maps:** Used to keep a list of available farmland that land seekers can search. Land parcels are updated one by one as they become available.
- **SalesForce:** A database that holds all land seekers and landowners and makes it possible to track TA, visits, and other pertinent information.
- **ArcMap (GIS):** Maps out agricultural land in reference areas to identify locations for targeted outreach to landowners.
- **Google Earth:** Create engaging maps to enroll agricultural commissions in conducting outreach to non-farming landowners and creating farmland inventories in their communities.
- **Digital Camera:** Used to take pictures of available land on site visits.
- **iPad Apps used on site visits:**
  - Web Soil Survey (also available on desktop or laptop computers)
  - AgriPlot measures land while in the field
- **Projector:** for workshops with landowners and projecting agricultural lands maps during agricultural commission meetings.

## Budget:

- Staff - .5 FTE
- Interns - 400-800 hours/year
- Landowner Outreach printing: ~\$400
- Workshops: \$100 each (\$50 for space, \$50 for refreshments)
- Mileage to farm sites and agricultural commission meetings: ~150-200 miles/month

## Key Activities

- **Processing land seeker and landowner applications:** Landowners and land seekers fill out an application to be a part of the matching program. It takes about 10 minutes/application to process this information.
- **Land seeker technical assistance:** Land seekers often need extra help finding farmland. This can involve phone conversations, e-mails, and/or in-person visits. New Entry created a plain language kind that reduces the amount of one-on-one TA necessary. TA also involves connecting farmers to relevant resources, including financial and USDA resources for buying equipment or installing infrastructure.
- **Landowner technical assistance:** Landowners often want extra help working with farmers. This can include phone consultations and lease questions via e-mail.
- **Farmland evaluation:** Landowners want help evaluating their land. In addition, our program prefers to match farmers with land and landowners that will set them up for success. A site visit takes approximately one hour.
- **Outreach to community organizations:** Attend workshops, conferences, and other community events that are relevant to conservation, land trust, and agricultural communities to make sure people with farmland connections or who need farmland know about our service.
- **Land identification with agricultural commissions:** Work with agricultural commissions to map available farmland in their town to facilitate appropriate outreach to non-farming landowners and host workshops on leasing your land to a farmer. This is a good project for the agricultural community to work on, and we find more landowners who are willing to lease land to our farmers by reaching out to agricultural commissions initially.
- **Landowner educational workshops:** Conduct workshops for landowners in towns identified in our mapping efforts and for interested parties in general. A good way to increase land opportunities for new farmers.
- **Outreach Materials:** Develop case studies highlighting farmers and landowners to increase understanding of our program. Create videos of farmland matching program and mapping work to build interest amongst landowners and community organizations.

## Program Goals

- **Facilitate matches for 5-10 farmers/year:** Achieved through landowner outreach, our application and database, landowner TA, and land seeker TA.
- **Match 3 farmers per year to land that was not already used:** Mapping work with agricultural commissions and landowner educational workshops are intended to find land that has not been used as yet.
- **Help farmers scale up:** Connecting farmers with land is one effective way to support them scaling up. Land seeker TA also connects farmers to financial and USDA resources that facilitate the installation of infrastructure or allow farmers to buy equipment for their new land.
- **All MA towns accept new and immigrant farmers into their communities to strengthen their own agricultural system and economy:** Outreach and work with specific agricultural commissions increases community and individual understanding of the importance of farmers, farmland, and ecological diversity.

## Lessons Learned

- A good database is necessary to keep track of interactions with land seekers and landowners. When the program grows, it is impossible to keep track of all interactions and with staff changeover it is important that these are documented. The more streamlined you can make the database and the application process, the more time you will save.
- Make sure interns sent to do outreach and educational work with community organizations or agricultural commissions fully understand the project and the agricultural landscape in the community. This is necessary to avoid misunderstanding and or miscommunication about farmland matching program goals and intentions.
- When working with community groups, develop a relationship where both parties are getting something they want. For instance, we found that agricultural commissions are often excited about other types of projects – like inventorying farmland or increasing the general knowledge of farming in their town. Working together to figure out how you can help each other will help form more active partnerships.