



**AMERICAN FARMLAND TRUST'S MISSION**

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*Saving the land that sustains us  
by protecting farmland, promoting  
sound farming practices, and  
keeping farmers on the land.*

# From the Leadership

Dear Friends,

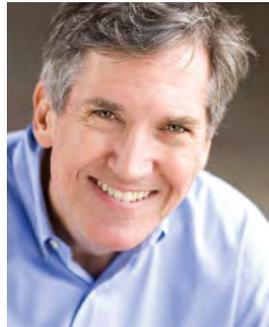
If there is an occupation that knows how to deal with change, it's farming and ranching. America's farmers and ranchers feed the nation and the planet—they have one of the most important jobs in the world. And they do so while navigating a world of uncertainty and risk.

As any family farmer knows, a sudden hail storm or insect infestation can wipe out a whole season's crop. A rapid market fluctuation can send prices for agricultural products soaring—or plummeting. A severe drought can leave an entire region's farmers looking to the skies and hoping fervently for rain.

The first months of 2017 are a time of great change for farmers and non-farmers alike, as the nation and world looks to a new presidential administration and tries to determine what lies ahead.

During this time of transformation and uncertainty, we promise you that AFT's core values and goals *will not change*. As we told supporters not long after the presidential election last November, five key beliefs that AFT upholds are:

1. We remain dedicated to the nation's over three million farmers and ranchers, who tirelessly work to produce the food and farm products that sustain us—in good weather and bad.
2. We believe that farming is America's future. At a time when many rural areas around the country struggle with declining economic opportunity, farms and ranches can and should be the linchpin of thriving rural communities.
3. We know that farming and a healthy environment are inextricably linked. Healthy soils, clean water, and wildlife habitat benefit farms and communities alike. We support sound environmental farming practices that



**Buzz Thompson**



**John Piotti**

protect the environment and make farming more economically viable.

4. We promote innovation. Farms are facing great challenges—from climate change to skyrocketing land values—that demand fresh, bold strategies. We seek practical, workable solutions to benefit not just farmers but all of humanity.
5. We respect dialogue and collaboration. At a time when rural and urban areas increasingly seem divided, we unite people around food and farming issues, which are important to us all.

In the pages ahead, we celebrate the many successes achieved last year that give us hope for a bright future for America's farmers and ranchers—who count on us to be steadfast in this rapidly changing world. American Farmland Trust could not have accomplished our mission and vision without you. We hope that we can count on you for continued support. Thank you.

Sincerely,



Barton (Buzz) Thompson, Jr.  
BOARD CHAIR



John Piotti  
PRESIDENT AND CEO

# Saving Farmland and Ranchland

**T**hirty-six years ago, a group of farmers and conservationists united to tackle a looming problem no one else was addressing in America: the loss of the nation's farmland and ranchland. New highways and an expanding automobile culture had spurred an explosion of shopping centers, parking lots and other forms of urban sprawl, leading to the loss of many farms and ranches.

In the decades that followed, AFT made great progress in stemming this tide, working with states and local communities around the country to pioneer programs that use agricultural conservation easements as a powerful tool to keep the nation's farmland in the hands of farmers.

Today, farmland protection is a national movement. Twenty-eight states have purchase of agricultural conservation (PACE) programs—and countless private land trusts and local programs do their part. In total, more than five million acres of U.S. farmland have been permanently protected from development. Beyond this, the movement has grown—thanks to AFT's



leadership—to additional efforts that focus on keeping farmers in farming and on helping them adopt more environmentally sound farm practices.

But it all starts with the land. And that's a battle we have not yet won. The nation is still losing farmland way too fast—at a rate of over 40 acres every hour. In many parts of the country, land values are increasing and development pressure weighs heavily on the nation's farmers—making it hard for them to acquire or hold onto the land they need to sustain or expand their businesses. And everywhere, an aging population of farmers and ranchers means that the ownership of an increasing amount

of land will be in transition—and thus even more vulnerable—in years to come.

A core part of AFT's work involves:

- Advocacy in state capitals, local communities, and at the federal level to craft and sustain policies and programs that protect a critical mass of farmland.
- Research, through our *State of America's Farmland* initiative, to show just how much land has been lost—giving communities, government agencies and committed citizens the tools they need to protect farmland.



Indiana



## 2016 SUCCESSES

We led the fight to protect America's most at-risk farmland and ranchland. A sampling of our successes:

### **Saving California Farmland from Annexation**

In March of 2016, AFT joined with partners from the San Francisco Bay area to defeat a proposal by the city of Morgan Hill to expand its boundaries and annex hundreds of acres of farmland and open space for development. AFT delivered testimony arguing that the city's plan was highly inadequate and would destroy a finite resource. Fortunately, the Santa Clara County Local Area Formation Commission (LAFCO) agreed, denying the city's proposal.

### **Restoring Funding to a Maryland Program that Protects Farms, Parks and Historic Places**

In 1969, Maryland was the first state to establish a dedicated funding source for land conservation, Program Open Space. However, governors and state legislators have repeatedly raided this money over the years. AFT and our partners fought back—finally succeeding after years of work to craft and build support for a bill to return the program to full funding. The bill, the Program Open Space Trust Fund Act, passed unanimously and creates a “lock box” for future protection of farmland and open space.

### **A Major Victory Toward Saving Connecticut's Farmland and Public Lands**

With minutes left in the 2016 legislative session, a bill passed in Connecticut representing an enormous step in a grassroots campaign to better protect the state's public lands. Years in the making, the bill was the start to enacting a constitutional amendment to stop the state's conserved and agricultural lands from being sold, traded or given away by the state legislature without a transparent public process. AFT and partners in the conservation community celebrated the success while planning to continue the fight moving forward.

### **Celebrating 20 Years of Farmland Protection Success in New York**

AFT's *Cultivate New York* report identified the critical need for New York state to protect 100,000 acres of farmland over the next 10 years. The state legislature listened, granting a record \$20 million for New York's Farmland Protection Program. AFT staff also worked with the New York State Assembly and Senate to pass a joint resolution celebrating the program's 20th anniversary, which protected 222 farms on nearly 60,000 acres over the last 20 years.

- Technical assistance through our *Farmland Information Center* to guide farmers, local officials and citizens who care about protecting the land.





Maryland

## FIGHTING TO SAVE MID-ATLANTIC FARMS

Yates Clagett protected his family's 300-acre farm along Maryland's Patuxent River last year through the state's Rural Legacy Program, which purchases conservation easements that permanently protect farmland, forests, and other natural areas.

"I couldn't imagine living anywhere else," Yates says of the farm that his grandfather bought in the 1920s. Once a tobacco operation, Yates transitioned the farm to local grass-fed beef. "I wanted to farm for life, and I wanted my kids to grow up on a farm. I didn't want to see houses on the farm that I grew up on—where I worked and sweated blood and tears. If something happens to me, the farm will always be there."

In the Mid-Atlantic region, AFT has been on the ground for over 30 years, helping to get farmland protection programs established and advocating tirelessly for their funding.

In Maryland, farmland protection programs like the Agricultural Land Preservation Foundation, Rural Legacy Program, and Historic Agricultural Resource Preservation Program give

*I didn't want to see houses on the farm that I grew up on—where I worked and sweated blood and tears. If something happens to me, the farm will always be there.*

— YATES CLAGETT  
Maryland farmer



farmers an incentive to keep their land in agriculture.

But the perpetual challenge is that legislators don't always understand the importance of these programs. Yates has seen farmers back out of the state's farmland protection programs after legislators failed to fund them or program inefficiencies led to long delays.

That's a problem in a state where land is quite expensive and agriculture is the number-one industry.

Keeping land in farming is also of value because farms provide critical environmental benefits. Yates' own land contains many environmentally sensitive areas, including marshland and river frontage along a tributary to the Chesapeake Bay.

"For the protection of the Bay and its water quality, farms are the best answer," Yates says. "Development brings more paved areas, roofs, traffic, trash, and more of everything that pollutes. As long as farms follow best management practices, they've got to be much better for the bay than houses."

And there's another incredibly important reason for supporting farmland protection. "You can't eat bark and you can't eat leaves," Yates says. "If you put houses everywhere, who will feed all the people? You need land to produce that local food."

## “FARMING ON THE EDGE” FOR THE 21ST CENTURY

Nearly 20 years after AFT’s seminal *Farming on the Edge* study sounded the alarm about America’s threatened farmland, a new analysis—*State of America’s Farmland*—is using the latest technology to create the most accurate portrait ever of the nation’s farmland and rangeland.

“Going forward, with climate change, an increasing population, and a greater demand for food and energy production, you’ve got to realize that eventually we’ll have a serious problem,” says Ann Sorensen, AFT’s Assistant Vice President for Programs and Director of Research. “The sooner we accept that and take action, the better.”

AFT’s forward-looking initiative will analyze and map the multiple challenges facing farmland and rangeland—and identify solutions that protect it.

Two of the project’s biggest focuses are land development and climate change—and how they will impact our farms and citizens for decades to come. “We’ve become increasingly sophisticated in how we can do the analysis,” Sorensen says. The process involves an interpretation of satellite imagery as well as statistical surveys of land use and natural resource conditions collected by federal agencies.

One of the project’s major goals is raising public awareness. “We have to overcome the public perception that we’ve got so much farmland that we don’t have to worry about it,” says Sorensen. “We hope that spotlighting the threats to this incredible resource will put this issue front and center.”



New Jersey

### Connecticut



*By 2030, it’s estimated that urban areas will triple in size, expanding into cropland and undermining the productivity of agricultural systems that are already stressed by rising populations and climate change.*

— A study in the *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences*



# Promoting Sound Farming Practices



Because so much of the land in the United States is devoted to agriculture, solving the nation's biggest conservation challenges often requires working directly with farmers and ranchers. On many environmental issues—from water quality to soil health—research shows that improvements in farm practices are among the most effective solutions.

As a trusted partner of both the farm community and the nation's leading conservation groups and agencies, AFT brings all sides together around commonsense strategies that

protect the environment and help farmers increase their bottom line. The nation's farmers and ranchers have more effective ways of being exemplary stewards of the land than ever before. They provide many important environmental benefits—from sheltering wildlife and promoting biodiversity to protecting wetlands and forests.

But many challenges remain. The runoff of topsoil and nutrients from agricultural lands is still a major source of pollution. According to the U.S. Department of Agriculture, a whopping 1.7 billion tons of topsoil are lost to erosion each year in the United States—a loss of a critical natural resource.

AFT's initiatives help farmers minimize erosion, protect soil health,

improve water quality, and remain a source of environmental benefits for all Americans.

A core part of AFT's work involves:

- Helping farmers and ranchers adopt proven conservation practices—such as no-till, crop rotations, and cover crops—that build healthy soils, mitigate climate change and protect streams and rivers.
- Serving as the leading voice for sound federal farm-conservation policies, especially those in the farm bill—the largest source of federal funding for farm conservation programs.
- Pioneering innovative models and programs to support conservation—such as water-quality trading markets that help farmers transition to best conservation practices while benefiting the environment on a large scale.

*I think soil and water are absolutely necessary for the long-term benefit of the nation. AFT has done a marvelous job of helping to save farmland. If just a small fraction of the defense budget were dedicated to farmland protection, we'd be much better off. Saving farmland should be viewed as a national security measure.*

— DR. VANCE KENNEDY  
Hydrologist and citrus farmer



## 2016 SUCCESSES

We empowered farmers and ranchers around the country to effectively improve water quality, soil health, and wildlife habitat. A sampling of our successes:

### Linking Farmland Protection to Climate Change Reduction

AFT's California office celebrated the approval of \$37 million in state funds to permanently protect 19,000 acres of farmland through the Sustainable Agricultural Land Conservation Program. Inspired by and crafted with input from AFT, the program is the first in the country that links the permanent protection of agricultural lands to reduction of greenhouse gases. In 2016, cities, counties, and land trusts could apply for funds to permanently protect agricultural land.

### Enlisting Farms in the Fight to Save Pollinators

According to the U.S. Department of Agriculture, the total number of managed honey bee colonies in the U.S. decreased from five million in the 1940s to only 2.5 million today. Scientists have yet to pinpoint the exact cause for the decline, but studies point to factors like climate change, pesticides, and habitat loss. In Michigan, AFT and partners launched an innovative program that supports farmers who provide habitat on protected land for bees and other pollinators.

### Supporting Soil Health— the Key to Healthy Farms

AFT was showcased as part of President Obama's White House Office of Science and Technology Policy's new soil



health initiative. AFT unveiled plans to work with partners in the Great Lakes basin over the next three years to implement innovative new models for improving soil health. And our Illinois office held a series of trainings to demonstrate how conservation cropping systems and various practices work together to build soil health.

### Protecting the Pristine Environment of the Pacific Northwest

In Washington, AFT and partners launched a new initiative to help farmers in the Newaukum Creek watershed of King County implement conservation and sustainable farming practices. The project concentrates its efforts in the threatened watershed to achieve the greatest improvement to water quality and salmon habitat. And in the Pacific Northwest, AFT brought together partners to explore new ways to handle manure that will reduce runoff while also creating a renewable fertilizer source.

# Keeping Farmers on the Land

For decades, AFT has fought to protect the farmland and rangeland that feeds America. But we know that land protection alone is not enough. We also need farmers and ranchers who can make a viable living from the land—to keep the land healthy and whole.

AFT addresses the most challenging issues confronting the nation's farm and ranch families to ensure a bright future for the next generation. For one, the overall aging of the farm population is a national concern. Many farmers have no heirs to take over their land. With the majority of America's farmers now over the age of 55, that puts millions of acres of farmland at risk in coming years.

And although there is a wave of renewed interest in farming among younger generations, new and



*AFT is dedicated to improving the land and the lives of family farmers in New York and throughout the country. I'm honored to work with AFT in advancing visionary goals for protecting farmland and helping the next generation of farmers.*

— **ROBERT M. MORGENTHAU**  
farmer and former District Attorney of Manhattan



Indiana

beginning farmers face many barriers that keep them off the land—from high land prices to a lack of financial capital.

In our efforts to keep America's farmers and ranchers on the land, we support policies and programs that help them manage the land well, keep their businesses thriving, and pass their land on to future generations.

A core part of AFT's work involves:

- Guiding communities in making smart planning decisions that protect farmland, keep family farmers thriving, and strengthen local food systems.
- Helping family farmers transition their land to the next generation through unique programs like our Farmland Advisors Project in New England and our Hudson Valley Farmlink Network in New York.
- Undertaking regionwide food-planning efforts that promote a more diverse structure for agriculture and more favorable economic conditions to help farmers and ranchers thrive.





*American  
Farmland  
Trust  
understands,  
as I do, that  
the best way to  
preserve farmland  
is to help make farming profitable.*



— **RICHARD L. FITZGERALD**, Equity Ag, a partner with AFT on two projects in Virginia's Shenandoah Valley to help corn farmers optimize fertilizer use—saving them money while protecting soil and water



New York



Oregon

# 2016 SUCCESSES



pudding Nut Farm in Oregon's Willamette Valley. AFT supporter Diana Gardener (bottom right) and her husband Judson Parsons worked with AFT to protect the land. The couple then transferred the farm to the young farm family of Jay and Courtney Thompson (above right), ensuring it would stay in farming.



We saw great progress in our programs to help the next generation of farmers and ranchers, women landowners, and farmers who grow local food. A sampling of our successes:

## Helping Communities Make Growing Food Connections

Across the country, communities increasingly are looking for ways to support the success of their farms and ranches while increasing food production and improving access to healthy food for the nation's citizens. Through our Growing Food Connections project, AFT continues to guide eight communities in bridging the gap between food production and food security through local policy. Newly released profiles of these Communities of Opportunity will help them advance food system planning and local policy development.

## Connecting the Next Generation to the Land

In New York, AFT's Hudson Valley Farmlink Network connected its 100th farmer to farmland while providing personal coaching to more than 1,000 farmers and farmland owners in two-and-a-half years. Nationally, a new grant from the USDA's Beginning Farmer and Rancher Development Program jumpstarted a nationwide Farms for the Next Generation initiative to help beginning farmers and ranchers secure land and succeed in agriculture. And in the Pacific Northwest, AFT partnered on a new website to connect local farmers to services and technical resources that make it easier for them to farm and grow their businesses.

## Releasing a New Planning for Agriculture Guide in Connecticut

AFT updated and revised our popular guide to planning for agriculture in

Connecticut. The new guide outlines ways that town governments can plan for the future of agriculture and provide a supportive community atmosphere for farming. The guide is a highly effective tool for local officials, agency staff, town board members, farmers, and concerned citizens alike.

## Creating New Markets for Farmers

One way to save farmland is to create greater economic opportunities for farmers. When farmers can better make a profit, they are under less pressure to sell their land to developers. Farm to Institution New York State is a partnership that AFT formed three years ago to connect farmers with state institutions like schools, colleges, and hospitals that annually feed millions of New Yorkers. In July, AFT completed the first phase of an assessment for scaling up the farm-to-institution movement in New York.

## FARMS IN TRANSITION AND AT RISK

In New England and elsewhere around the country, many aging farmers are having trouble finding younger people to take over the land.

A groundbreaking study, *Gaining Insights, Gaining Access*, by American Farmland Trust and Land for Good found that nearly 30 percent of New England farmers are likely to exit farming in the next 10 or more years, and 90 percent don't have a young farmer they're training to take over.

"A large number of older farmers are worried about their ability to retire and to find a younger farmer who can afford to buy their land," says AFT's Assistant Vice President of Programs Julia Freedgood.

That presents a significant problem, because at no point is a farm's future more at risk than during this transition. Senior farmers without a succession plan may lack a safety net and be forced to sell their land or give up the family business.

"They are overwhelmed in many cases by the complicated dynamics and challenges of finding a successor who can be economically viable and afford the financing of the farm," says Freedgood. "Even the most conservation-minded landowners can find themselves in circumstances where finances or complex family circumstances force a sale—unless they have the assistance of strong policies and programs. That's why we need to make sure all farmers get the support they need to transfer their operations and stay viable."

One way to make sure that farmland stays in farming is by protecting it.

"We're looking at a third of the land base changing hands in the next decade or two," says Freedgood. "The challenges of that transition are significant and require a bold strategy."



*Saving enough farmland for food production will be a defining challenge of this century. So too is ensuring that there will be a next generation of farmers and ranchers to steward the land.*

— **JULIA FREEDGOOD**  
AFT's Assistant Vice  
President of Programs



Maine



Illinois

## Summary of Activities

For the fiscal year ending September 30, 2016:

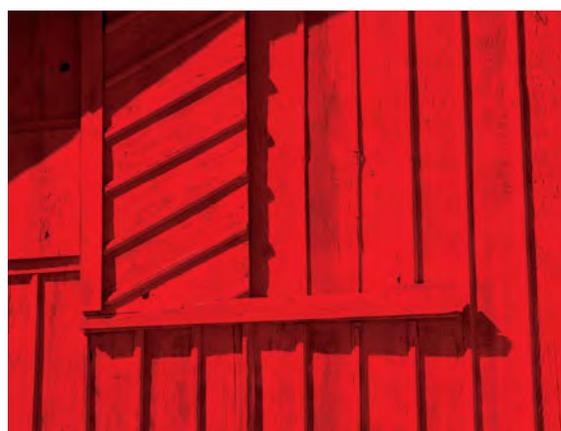
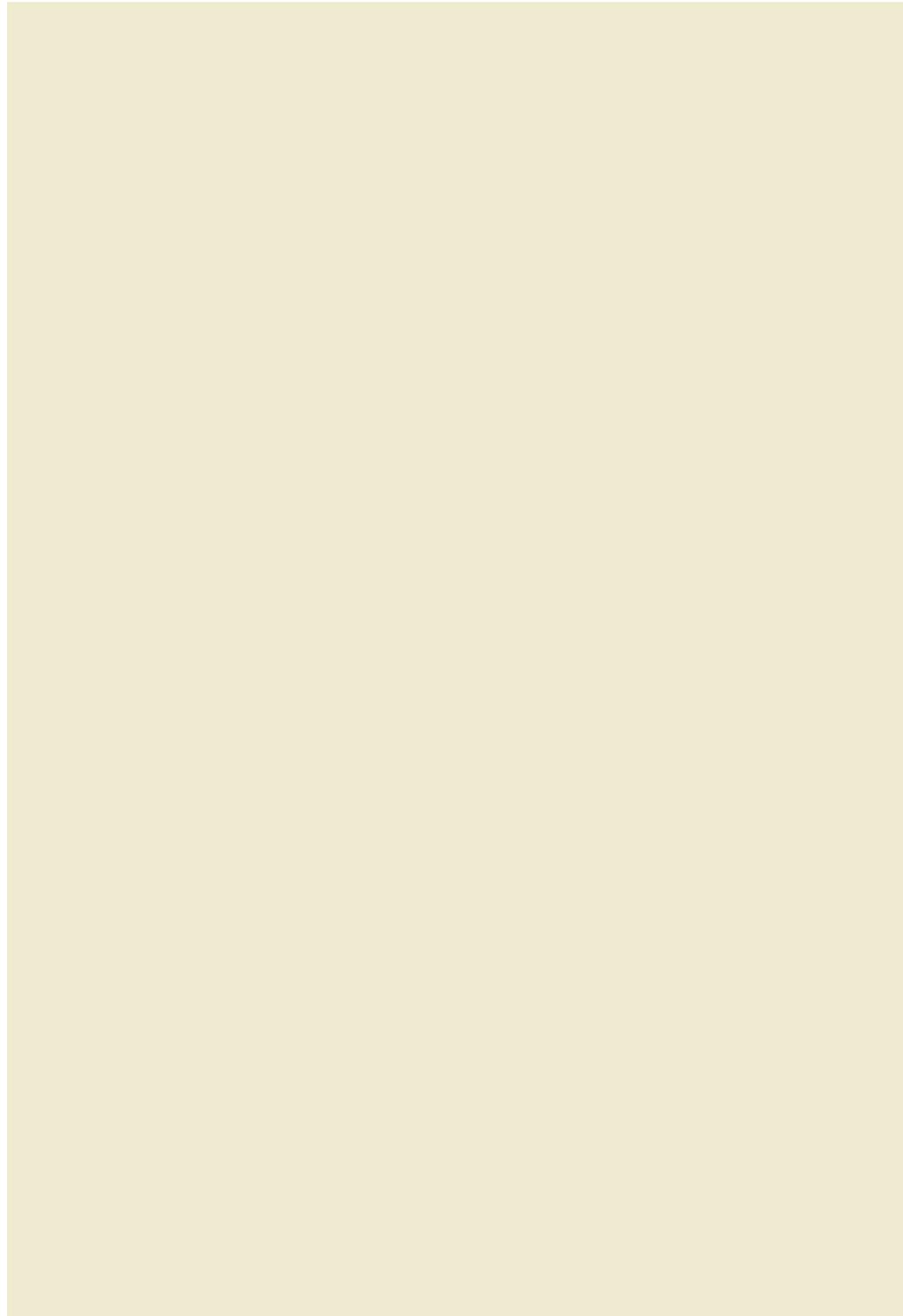
SUPPORT AND REVENUE	FY 2016	EXPENSES	FY 2016
Foundation Grants	\$4,101,699	State, Local and Federal Programs	\$5,626,506
Individual Contributions	2,977,713	Public Education	2,053,761
Government Grants	1,303,515	Communications and Media Outreach	499,484
Operating Investment Return	814,941	Other Programs	422,152
Non-Operating Investment Gain & Other	1,222,319	Total Program Services	8,601,903
Other Income, gains, and losses	397,695	Management and General	623,821
Bequests	325,146	Fund raising	1,628,633
Rental Income	13,505	<b>Total Expenses</b>	<b>\$10,854,357</b>
<b>Total Revenue and Support</b>	<b>\$11,156,533</b>		

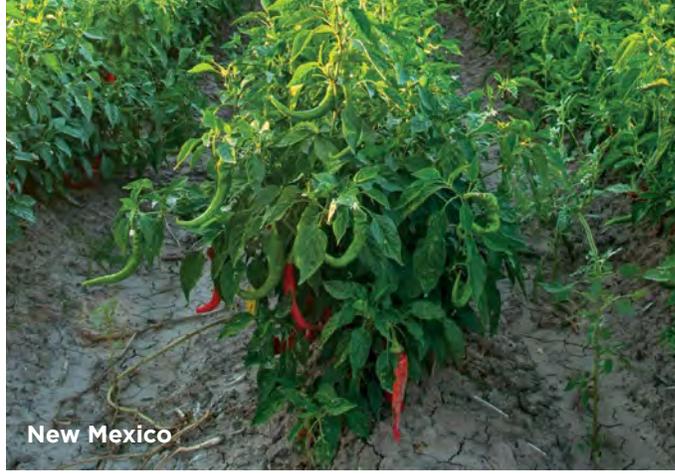
Additional financial statements are available upon request.

NET ASSETS	
Beginning of Year	\$19,820,230
End of Year	20,122,406
<b>Change in Net Assets</b>	<b>\$302,176</b>



Colorado





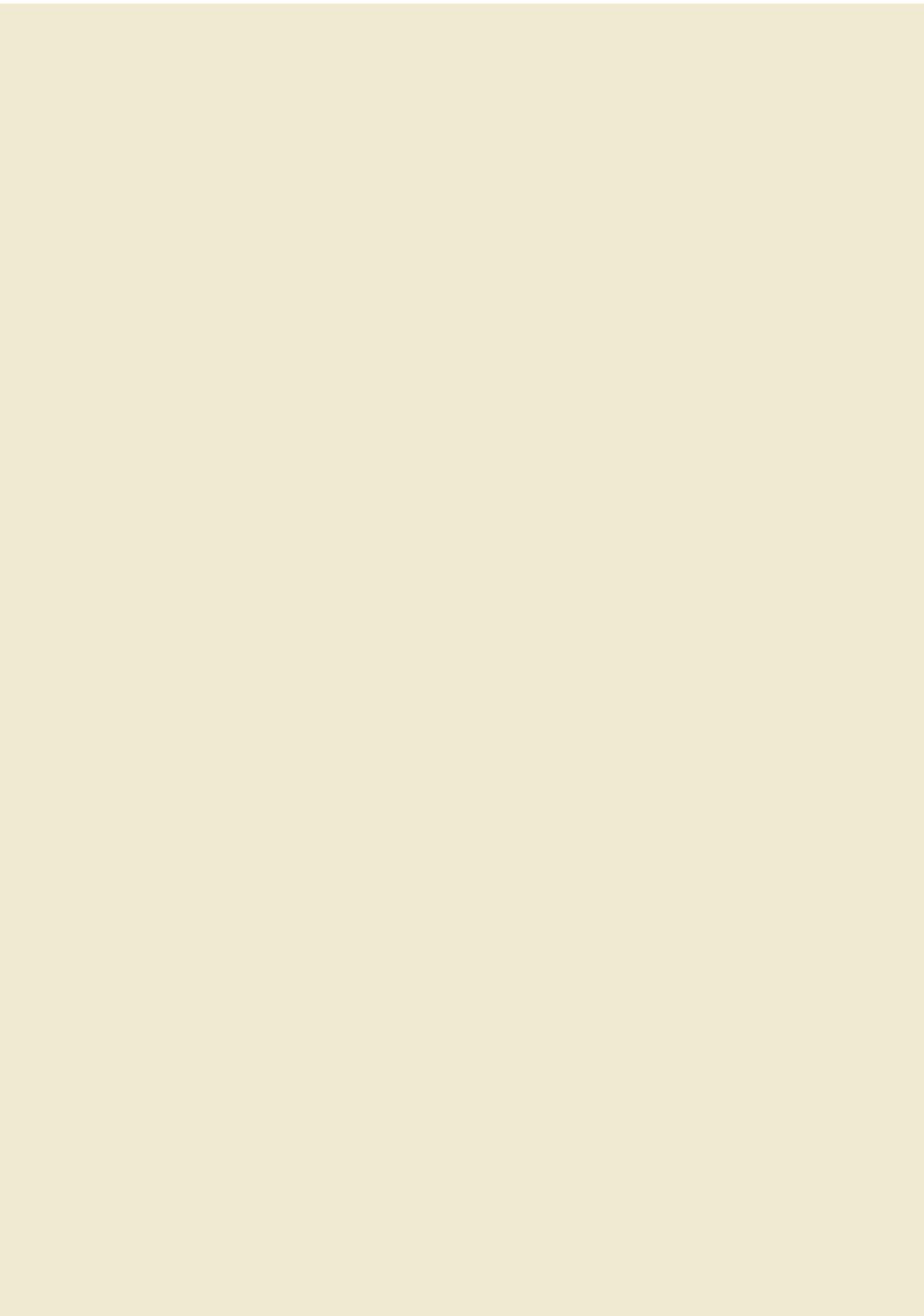
New Mexico



Washington



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**AFT'S BOUNTY OF THE LAND**



*We could not have done this work without the support, resources and knowledge of AFT.*



— **JANE HARDISTY**  
USDA's Natural Resources Conservation Service, co-sponsors with AFT of conservation learning circles for women landowners





Arkansas



## ABOUT THE COVER

Farmer Maria Reyes at Agriculture and Land-Based Training Association (ALBA), an organic farm incubator program in the Salinas Valley, California, where farm workers and aspiring farmers learn to launch and grow their own businesses. Photo by Shawn Linehan

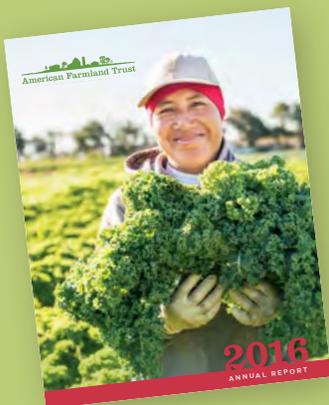


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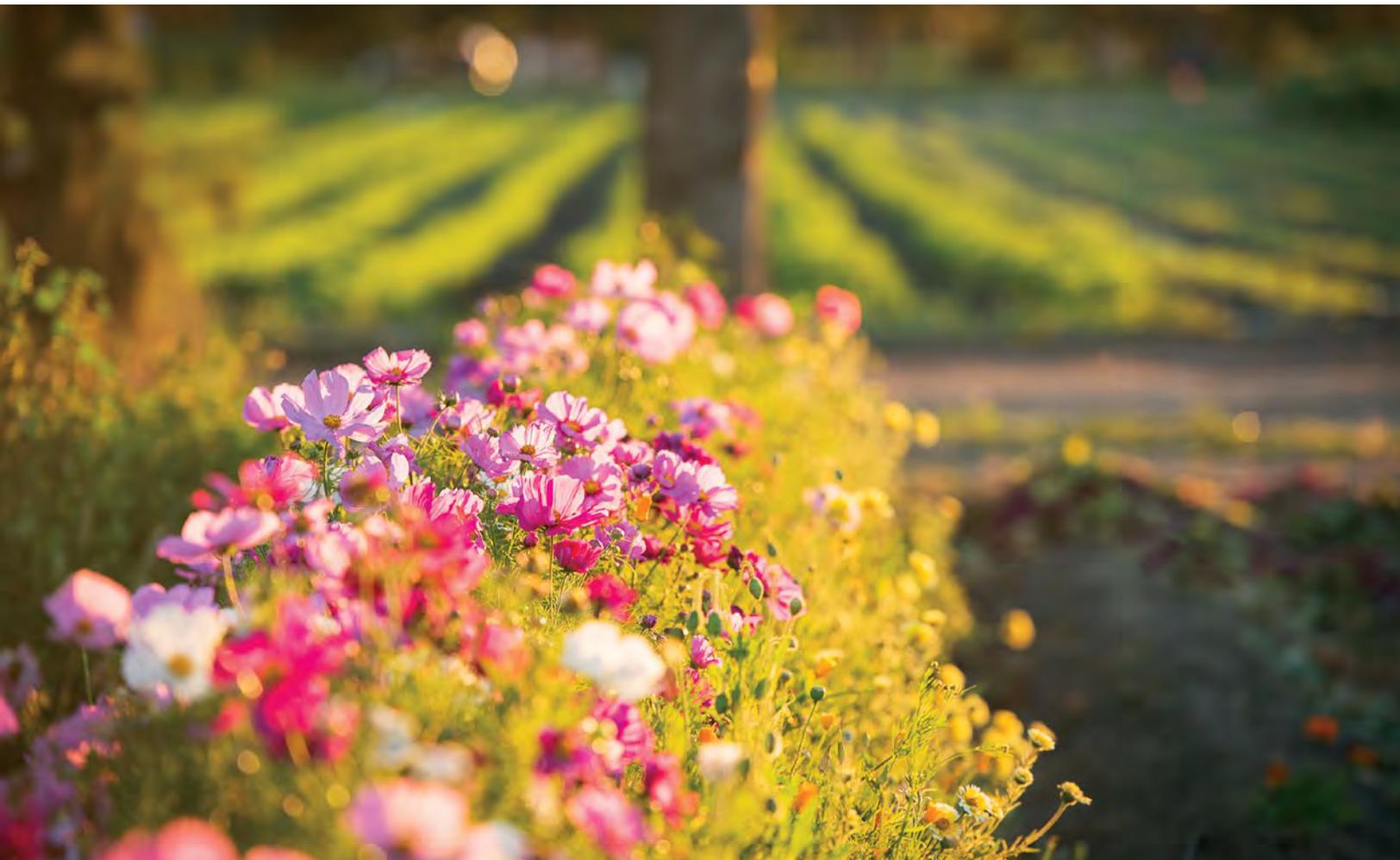
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