American Farmland Trust
SAVING THE LAND THAT SUSTAINS US

AFT New England 2025–2026 Policy Platform

AMERICAN FARMLAND TRUST (AFT) is the nation's leading conservation organization dedicated to protecting farmland, promoting sound farming practices, and keeping farmers on the land. Since its founding in 1980 by farmers and citizens concerned about the rapid loss of farmland to development, AFT has helped to protect over 6.5 million acres of farmland and led the way for the adoption of conservation practices on millions more. Established in 1985, AFT's New England program works to save the land that sustains us all.

From Augusta to Hartford, AFT New England is committed to conducting and sharing the latest conservation research, promoting best farmland protection practices, and providing farmers on-the-ground support. We bring together people and organizations and participate in coalitions to advance state farmland policies. Our advocacy efforts seek to create systemic change and ensure that producers across the region have the resources they need to prosper. Agriculture is incredibly diverse across New England due to its geography, soils, land-use history, and glaciated geologic past. The region lends itself to diversified operations on small acreages. New England faces many complex and compounding threats to our land base, from development pressure and the conversion of farmland, to rising farmland prices and climate change impacts.

Our on-the-ground programming with farmers and communities drives much of our regional policy work. For example, our AFT New England Climate and Agriculture team works with farmers to implement better soil health practices. For farmers to do this successfully, they need resources and financial support from state and federal sources. Our policy advocacy encourages legislators to enact policies that support farmers and to create resource pools for soil health and other conservation agriculture strategies.

Recognizing that new and emerging policies are often needed to ensure farmers remain in agricultural production, the following document is not meant to outline every policy we support in the region.

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ESTABLISHED IN 1985, AFT'S NEW ENGLAND PROGRAM WORKS TO
save the land that sustains us all.

Strengthen the Economic Viability of Farms

Improving farm viability integrates many approaches, including climate-smart agriculture practices, land and market access, increased funding and/or opportunities for Black, Indigenous, and People of Color (BIPOC) farmers, urban agriculture, and other measures that increase opportunities for farmers from all backgrounds.

In 2022, almost sixty percent of New England's nearly 31,700 farms had less than $10,000 in sales. While their individual sales numbers may seem small, these farms collectively operated one-third of the region's agricultural land. The remaining forty percent of farms with more than $10,000 in sales operated just over 2.5 million acres of farmland. The economic viability of both groups is key to maintaining the region's agricultural land base.*

Almost 70%
OF NEW ENGLAND'S NEARLY 31,700 FARMS HAD
less than $10,000
IN SALES IN 2022.

As recent climate disasters and the COVID-19 pandemic demonstrate, there is a dire need for policies that support farms and businesses. Local farms are often a primary source of locally grown and fresh produce for BIPOC communities in urban areas. Improved farm viability measures will help incentivize more urban growers as a secondary source of income, strengthening agricultural and climate resilience.

Our policy work seeks to improve the agricultural viability of New England's farms and farmers. New England's land base must be able to withstand the pressures of development, climate impacts, and the changing face of the market while retaining adequate soil quality, being equipped for land transfer, and managing financially profitable operations.


CHERYL CESARIO

Dairy heifers grazing on spring pastures in Addison County, Vermont.

* USDA National Agricultural Statistics Service, 2022 Census of Agriculture. Complete data available at www.nass.usda.gov/AgCensus.

WINTER CAPLANSON

Sugar House at Trapp Family Lodge, Stowe, Vermont

Priorities

- Identify, expand, and fund market opportunities for New England producers.
- Increase funding and opportunities for farm-to-institution grant and incentive programs.
- Sustain investments in on-farm viability through business planning, technical assistance, and implementation of grants for value-added processing or direct-to-consumer marketing.
- Increase food security infrastructure funding to improve local food system supply chains such as the Massachusetts Department of Agricultural Resources Food Security Infrastructure Grant Program.
- Reduce tax burdens for small farms and urban farms.
- Implement farm investment tax incentives.
- Make assistance and funds for BIPOC farmers a priority to increase their long-term land tenure and agricultural viability.

Relevant New England Programming

- New England Farmer Microgrants Program
- New England Climate and Agriculture Programs

Increase Farmland Access Opportunities for Farmers

American Farmland Trust's "Farms Under Threat 2040: Choosing an Abundant Future" report projections show that from 2014 until 2034, 371 million acres of farmland in the United States—or 41% of all farmland—will change hands.* Farmers age 65 and older manage nearly one-third of New England's farms, and many of these farmers are looking to transition their farm operations to new ownership. According to a 2016 report written by American Farmland Trust and Land for Good, "Gaining Insight, Gaining Access," over 92% of New England's 10,369 senior farmers do not have a young (under 45) farm operator working with them.** In addition, other farmland owned by non-farming landowners is being transferred to the next generation, often without a clear direction toward long-term agricultural use.

Over 40%
OF FARMLAND IS EXPECTED TO CHANGE HANDS BY 2035.

While uncertainty grows around the imminent transition of ownership for thousands of acres of New England's farmland, competition for available farmland remains high. Aspiring, beginning, and established farmers compete with one another and with developers seeking land for residential, commercial, industrial, and, increasingly, renewable energy development. The 2023 National Agricultural Statistics Service Agricultural Land Values survey found that the average price of an acre of farmland in New England was $10,113, with higher land values in southern New England (Connecticut, Massachusetts, and Rhode Island) compared to northern New England (Maine, New Hampshire, and Vermont). In general, the region has the highest cost of farmland per acre in the nation. This makes land access for farming even more difficult for historically marginalized producers, including Black, Indigenous, and People of Color (BIPOC) farmers, beginning and/or young farmers, and veteran farmers.

IN 2023, THE AVERAGE PRICE OF AN ACRE OF FARMLAND IN NEW ENGLAND WAS
$10,113
WITH HIGHER VALUES IN SOUTHERN NEW ENGLAND THAN IN NORTHERN NEW ENGLAND

Hungry Reaper Farm Co-Owners, Will O'Meara and Jill Verzino with Farm Manager Enya Cunningham in Morris, Connecticut

* Hunter, M., A. Sorensen, T. Nogeire-McRae, S. Beck, S. Shutts, R. Murphy. 2022. Farms Under Threat 2040: Choosing an Abundant Future. Washington, D.C.: American Farmland Trust.

** American Farmland Trust, Land for Good. (2016) Gaining Insights, Gaining Access Project. Accessed (4/11/2024): https://landforgood.org/about/projects/insights

Priorities

- Increase funding and farmland access opportunities for young, beginning, and BIPOC farmers.
  - Explore and support opportunities such as tax credits/exemptions, down payment assistance, expanded access to publicly owned land suitable for agriculture, state funding for Farm Link programs, and BIPOC-led land access initiatives such as the Vermont Land Access and Opportunity Board.
  - Support state-funded farmland acquisition programs.
  - Create state tax incentive programs that increase farmland access opportunities, including for urban producers.
  - Fund research to address urban farmland access issues.
  - Fund racial justice/equity training programming opportunities for white-led organizations.
- Increase business technical assistance that aids farmland access and succession planning support.
  - Invest in the capacity of land trusts and state agency staff to offer and provide technical assistance that will aid in disseminating funding for land access programming.
  - Provide direct one-on-one support to farmers seeking farmland.
- Promote data collection that helps gain a more accurate understanding of the number of historically marginalized farmers and their specific needs in the region.

CHELSEA GAZILLO

Just Roots Farm, Greenfield, Massachusetts

Wingate Farm in Hinsdale, New Hampshire

- Incentivize land access solutions such as state land banks, Option to Purchase at Agricultural Value, state-run Buy/Protect/Sell programs, community land trusts, etc.

Relevant New England Programming

- Access, Succession, and Transfer Support Grants
- Berkshire County Farm Protection Program

Advance Climate-Smart Agriculture & Improve Climate Disaster Relief Efforts

Climate change is a "wicked" problem that threatens lives, livelihoods, food security, natural resources, and our economy across New England and the Nation. As a result of the increasing incidents of climate change-related extreme weather events, our regional communities will see more catastrophic on-farm losses from floods, drought, and frost events. Alongside more frequent natural disasters, the day-to-day impacts of changing growing conditions threaten a producer's entire operation. While all farmers are potentially vulnerable to losses caused by climate disaster, beginning farmers and Black, Indigenous, and Farmers of Color are most at risk because of historical, structural, and financial barriers.

Our farmers and the farmland they manage play a key role in the region's fight against climate change. Climate-resilient agricultural practices can help farmers respond to stressful weather events while increasing profitability and farm viability. The region's rich soils and farmland biodiversity keep carbon out of the atmosphere, protect our landscapes from erosion, create barriers against floods and drought, and nourish a more stable and just local food system. Dairy and livestock producers, who hold the greatest percentage of farmland in the region, actively seek new strategies to manage soil health and innovate with new technology, including investing in anaerobic digesters. Climate-resilient practices have the potential to improve yields, grow profits, and promote economic resiliency. Further funding is needed to support farmers who experience major losses because of extreme weather events.

WHILE ALL FARMERS ARE POTENTIALLY VULNERABLE TO CLIMATE DISASTER,

beginning farmers and Black, Indigenous, and Farmers of Color

ARE MOST AT RISK BECAUSE OF HISTORICAL, STRUCTURAL, AND FINANCIAL BARRIERS.

The following priorities outline some of the steps the region can take to ensure that farmers and the agricultural lands they manage are a part of the region's climate change resiliency planning efforts.

AMANDA FREUND

Cover Crops on Freunds Farm in East Canaan, Connecticut

Priorities

- Fully fund state soil health and climate-resilient agricultural programs. Include measures for farmers to improve stormwater infrastructure and water management within these programs and invest in on-farm climate solutions such as high tunnels, equipment, and edge-of-field practices that help address stormwater (like grassed waterways and buffers).
- Increase funding for governments and nonprofits to provide technical assistance to farmers and support farmer-to-farmer educational opportunities.
- Support tribal communities in greater land sovereignty and recognize traditional land management practices as powerful tools to enhance climate resiliency.
- Create, fund, and implement payment for ecosystem services programs that compensate farmers for additionality and fill gaps in current incentive programs.
- Develop and fund climate disaster relief programs for impacted farmers. This includes creating and continually funding an ongoing relief fund rather than solely an emergency fund.
- Include regenerative agriculture in all the region's Climate Action Plans.

AFT's New England Soil Health Project Manager, Caro Roszell, conducting soil sampling.

New England Programming

- New England Climate and Agriculture Program

Protect Agricultural Land from Development and Conversion

SHAWN LINEHAN

Jones Family Farms in Shelton, Connecticut sits on 400 acres of protected farmland.

NEW ENGLAND'S FARMLAND PLAYS A VITAL ROLE IN OUR REGIONAL ECONOMY AND FOOD SECURITY, WITH

over 32,000

FARM BUSINESSES,

close to 116,800

JOBS, AND ROUGHLY

$2.8 billion

IN DIRECT REVENUE.

New England's farmland plays a vital role in our regional economy and food security, supporting the region's economy with over 32,000 farm businesses, close to 116,800 jobs, and roughly $2.8 billion in direct revenue.* Protecting New England's local farms provides the region with long-term food security, meaning that regardless of disruptions in the global food system, local food will still be grown for New Englanders. According to AFT's 2020 Farms Under Threat: A New England Perspective Report, between 2001–2016, over 105,000 acres of agricultural land were lost to development or threatened by development pressures. AFT also estimated in the 2040 Farms Under Threat Report that if current development and conversion rates continue, the region will lose 267,100 acres of farmland in the next two decades. That's the equivalent of losing 3,300 farms, $291 million in farm output, and 13,100 jobs, based on county averages.

IF CURRENT DEVELOPMENT AND CONVERSION RATES CONTINUE, THE REGION WILL LOSE

267,100 acres

OF FARMLAND IN THE NEXT TWO DECADES.

Since 1978, the region's various Purchase of Agriculture Conservation Easement (PACE) programs have protected 435,338 acres of farmland. According to AFT's 2023 PACE survey, the region has invested $542 million in farmland protection efforts.** Although this is a significant amount, it is a far cry from the $10 billion needed to protect the remainder of the region's farmland. Furthermore, a 2023 report released by New England Feeding New England states that if our region wants to produce thirty percent of the food we consume by 2030, we must bring 590,000 acres of farmland back into agricultural production.†

The following priorities will expedite farmland protection efforts in the region and keep farmland in the hands of farmers.

* Pottern J. & Barley L. 2020. Farms Under Threat: A New England Perspective. Washington, DC: American Farmland Trust.

** Freedgood, J., M. Hunter, J. Dempsey, A. Sorensen. 2020. Farms Under Threat: The State of the States. Washington, DC: American Farmland Trust.

† Hunter, M., A. Sorensen, T. Nogeire-McRae, S. Beck, S. Shutts, R. Murphy. 2022. Farms Under Threat 2040: Choosing an Abundant Future. Washington, D.C.: American Farmland Trust.

Priorities

- Ensure adequate and secure state funding is available to protect farmland (e.g., consistent state bonds; dedicated conveyance fees; proceeds from mitigation funds; revolving loan funds for buy/protect/sell projects).
- Improve State PACE Programs
  - Reduce the amount of time it takes to close on Agriculture Conservation Easements.
  - Update statutes to leverage funds from federal, local, and private sources.
  - Improve to be more flexible and accessible to small farms, urban farms, beginning farmers, and historically marginalized producers.
- Promote provisions within easements that facilitate land access, such as the Option to Purchase at Agricultural Value.
- Explore alternative land protection arrangements that will increase Indigenous land sovereignty and promote conservation opportunities for other historically marginalized groups (e.g., cultural respect arrangements).
- Continue to improve the current use of agricultural taxation programs.
- Advance and expand state-wide planning efforts that include requirements and incentives for agricultural-focused land use planning practices that accommodate community growth (e.g., affordable housing) while directing development away from agricultural lands.

Relevant New England Programming

- Berkshire County Farm Protection Program
- Connecticut Working Lands Alliance

COURTESY OF MOLLY HEUSS, MAINE FARMLAND TRUST

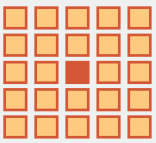
A Forever Farm in Aroostook County, Maine

Increase Support for Black, Indigenous, and People of Color (BIPOC) Farmers

American Farmland Trust (AFT) understands that achieving a resilient agricultural system depends on equity and inclusion for all groups who have been, and still are, marginalized. Social and racial injustices are entrenched in the history of our nation and our agricultural system, and we cannot fully appreciate either without acknowledging genocide, land theft, enslavement, and other injustices perpetrated against Black, Indigenous, and People of Color (BIPOC) groups. AFT supports policies that we believe will start to rectify the harm that systemic racism inflicted and continues to impact the lives of BIPOC across the region.

New England has a limited number of BIPOC farmers. According to the 2022 NASS Census of Agriculture* there are 2,071 BIPOC farmers in the region. This is in comparison to the 50,252 farmers who identify as white. Of the region's BIPOC farmers, only 1,243 of these producers own farms, in comparison to 23,894 white-owned farms.** This stark disparity is a result of centuries of land and agricultural policies (including partition and tenancy in common law), planning practices, and other forms of systemic racism that have prioritized white producers.

NEW ENGLAND HAS A LIMITED NUMBER OF BIPOC FARMERS.



For each BIPOC farmer,
MORE THAN
24 farmers
IDENTIFY AS WHITE.

ONLY 1,243 BIPOC PRODUCERS IN NEW ENGLAND OWN FARMS, IN COMPARISON TO 23,894 WHITE-OWNED FARMS.

* Note: AFT recognizes that the 2017 NASS Census data may be limited in capturing data that accurately depicts the number of BIPOC producers in the state due to numerous factors, including the history of discrimination and distrust of USDA and NASS by many BIPOC producers.

** USDA National Agricultural Statistics Service, 2022 Census of Agriculture. Complete data available at www.nass.usda.gov/AgCensus.

Priorities

- Support and uplift policies and provisions developed by BIPOC-led organizations and farmers.
- Encourage State Departments of Agriculture or similar organizations to convene working groups aimed at building and strengthening relationships between historically marginalized producers and public officials, such as the CT Department of Agriculture's Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion Working Group.
- Direct priority assistance to BIPOC farmers to increase long-term land tenure. Such efforts would include but not be limited to:
  - Conservation easements, cultural respect arrangements, financing, legal support, collaborative partnerships, racial justice/equity training for white-led organizations and municipalities, and granting of land to BIPOC producers and organizations.
  - BIPOC-led community-based farmer training programs.
- Implement the Uniform Partition for Heirs Property Act (UPHPA).
- Promote policies that increase land sovereignty and land rematriation for Tribal Communities and recognize traditional Indigenous land management practices as powerful tools to enhance climate resiliency and heal the land.

PHOTO COURTESY OF RHODE ISLAND FOOD POLICY COUNCIL

A new field at Whitehorse Farm for Revelry Greens on Aquidneck Island, Rhode Island

- Center and uplift the needs of those with the least access to land and resources in policies and programs (e.g., incentivize leasing to BIPOC farmers and prioritize funding). This includes offering compensation for BIPOC farmers to participate in the legislative process.

Relevant New England Programming

- New England Climate and Agriculture Program
- New England Urban Agriculture programs
- New England Farmer Microgrants Program
- Connecticut Working Lands Alliance

Promote Smart Solar℠ While Protecting Farmland

New England has committed to achieving at least an 80% reduction in greenhouse gas emissions by 2050. As a result of state renewable portfolio standards and related policies, demand for renewable energy in New England is growing rapidly. According to a 2019 study prepared for the Coalition for Community Solar Access, to achieve the region's 2050 clean energy and greenhouse gas reduction targets, New England will need to accelerate clean energy resource additions to between 4,000 and 7,000 MW per year on average.* Much of the additional capacity is projected to be new utility-scale solar, often located on farmland, followed by offshore wind. Solar energy development can create opportunities for farmers and landowners by generating new sources of income. Still, it also threatens farmer-renters who could be displaced, and it will have lasting impacts on local economies that are dependent on agricultural production.

NEW ENGLAND WILL NEED TO AVERAGE

4,000–7,000 MW of new clean energy

RESOURCES A YEAR TO MEET ITS 2050 CLEAN ENERGY AND GREENHOUSE GAS REDUCTION TARGETS.

American Farmland Trust (AFT) is a national leader in promoting Smart Solar Siting on farmland to support clean energy capacity while protecting our most viable agricultural lands from development pressures. In 2022, AFT released Smart Solar

ELIZA PATERSON

A Complimentary Planting of Corn, Squash, and Beans at Jack's Solar Garden in Longmont, Colorado.

* Hagerty, J. Michael., Weiss Jurgen. 2019. Achieving 80% GHG Reduction in New England by 2050. Accessed (4/12/2024): https://www.brattle.com/wp-content/uploads/2021/05/17233_achieving_80_percent_ghg_reduction_in_new_england_by_20150_september_2019.pdf

principles to ensure that solar projects are meeting three equally important goals: (1) accelerating solar energy development, (2) strengthening farm viability, and (3) safeguarding land well-suited for farming and ranching. AFT's four Smart Solar Guiding Principles include: (1) Prioritize Solar Siting on Buildings and Land Not Well Suited for Farming (2) Safeguard the Ability for Land to Be Used for Agriculture (3) Grow Agrivoltaics for Agricultural Production and Solar Energy, and (4) Promote Equity and Farm Viability.

JAMES HABANA HAFNER

Czajkowski Farm/Hyperion Systems LLC, Hadley, Massachusetts

Priorities

- Convene state-level multi-stakeholder groups that use consensus-building processes with representation from both developers and diverse members of the agriculture community, including Black, Indigenous, and People of Color (BIPOC) producers; small-scale and large-scale agricultural operations; young and/or beginning farmers; and both governmental and nonprofit organizations.
- Invest in market mechanisms incentivizing renewable energy development on degraded, already developed, or disturbed sites such as brownfield redevelopment areas and contaminated farmland.
- Fund research, technical assistance, and demonstration projects to test agrivoltaic systems.
- Develop and implement comprehensive mitigation fees that offset non-agrivoltaic solar development on prime and important farmland soils.
- Establish decommissioning bonds that pay for the removal of solar arrays at the end of their life cycle.
- Explore solar siting policies that incentivize land access opportunities for BIPOC producers.

Relevant New England Programming

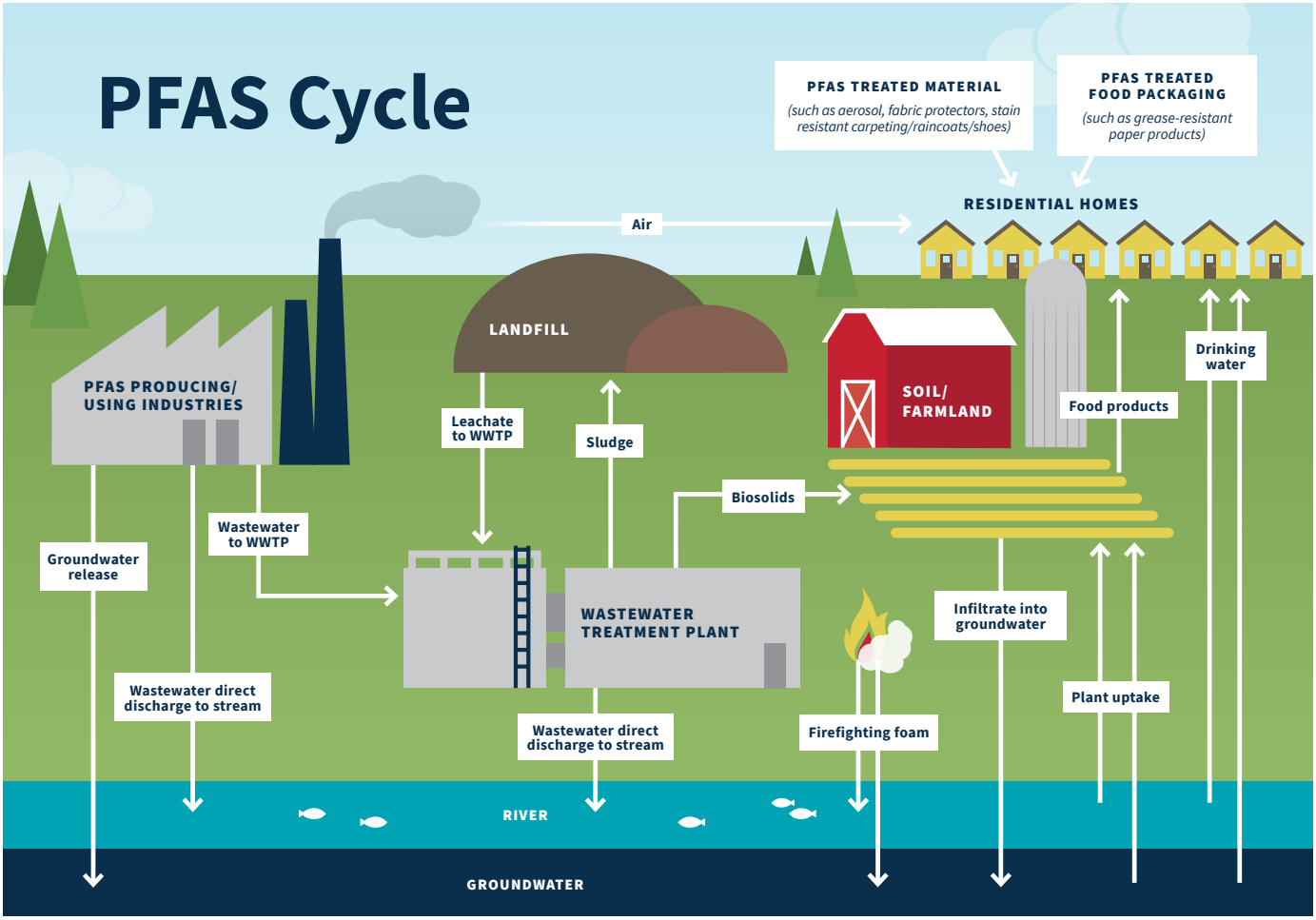
- New England Smart Solar℠

Support Farmers Impacted by PFAS Contamination

Per and polyfluoroalkyl substances (PFAS) is a class of synthetic organoflourine compounds that includes perfluorooctanoic acid (PFAS) and perflourooctanesulfate (PFOS). There are thousands of PFAS chemicals in use in industry. There is no known way to remove PFAS from land and water that has been contaminated. PFAS are dangerous chemicals that can cause major health problems including impacts to the immune system, hormones, liver, cholesterol levels, pregnancy and fetal development, and risk of cancer.

The primary ways that PFAS get into water and soil are from manufacturing industries, transportation, public safety, and military sectors, especially where firefighting foams are used. PFAS contamination on farmlands is often due to the historic spreading of municipal wastewater sludge as a fertilizer by farmers who were unaware it was contaminated. The majority of PFAS testing has been on water, and very little soil testing has been done globally. Few labs test for PFAS in soil, and there are no standards, thresholds, or guidelines yet established regarding safety thresholds for PFAS in agricultural soils.

With PFAS increasingly being detected in water on a growing number of farms in New England, it is imperative that measures are put in place to improve access to soil testing for PFAS, assist farmers in cases of contamination in their area, and ramp up research efforts into how different crops uptake PFAS from soils and water. States will also need to configure how



MICHIGAN DEPARTMENT OF ENVIRONMENT, GREAT LAKES, AND ENERGY

This diagram demonstrates the life cycle of PFAS chemicals and how they have come to contaminate farmland soils.

to establish safe PFAS consumption levels for people and livestock and develop effective soil remediation approaches. This will include developing guidelines for best land use approaches for farmland found to have PFAS contamination above future safety thresholds established by state or federal agencies.

Priorities

- Financial Assistance
  - Improve financial and technical assistance for farmers who have suffered losses or incurred costs resulting from confirmed or suspected presence of PFAS in soil, water, or products.
  - Establish PFAS relief funds to be spent on direct financial assistance for farmers, testing assistance/public infrastructure, farmer health, and farmland remediation.
  - Set aside funds for PFAS testing on urban farms and for Black, Indigenous, and People of Color producers.
- Exempt land removed from agriculture due to contamination from conveyance or rollback tax associated with the states' current use law.
- Require testing for PFAS of all biosolids used for land application, including those transported from composting facilities.
- Create transparency around PFAS contamination of compost, fertilizer sources, and locations where PFAS has historically been applied.
- Increase state-sponsored research on plant uptake of PFAS from both soil and irrigation water contamination, differences in concentration of PFAS in agricultural products (ex: milk vs. fruits vs. leafy greens), and trials into remediation methodology.
- Develop pilot programs based off trial-promising strategies for reducing leaching of PFAS contamination from soil, such as utilization of biochar amendments, and approaches to soil remediation and reduction of crop transfer risk from PFAS contamination.

Relevant New England Programming

- New England Climate and Agriculture Program

IF YOU HAVE QUESTIONS ABOUT THE AFT POLICY PLATFORM,
please contact AFT's Senior New England Policy Manager,
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or the New England Policy Associate,
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LANCE CHEUNG/USDA