

How Have State and Federal Programs Supported Farmers and Consumers in the Northeast?

STORIES OF SUCCESS FROM MAINE TO PENNSYLVANIA

Photo courtesy of American Farmland Trust

Across the Northeast, farmers, food enterprises, community organizations and researchers are using federal and state agriculture and food systems programs to create economic opportunities for farms and food businesses, improve consumer access to healthy food, help new entry and next generation farmers succeed, revive rural economies, and foster innovation in the food and farm sectors. Despite the positive economic impact these programs and others have sparked in our region, many are at risk in the current Farm Bill reauthorization. As these stories illustrate, ensuring that these programs continue at the same or higher funding levels is critical to fostering continued growth in the region's agricultural sector. They help farmers and food entrepreneurs in the Northeast meet consumers' ever-evolving demands, diversify market channels, steward the environment, and sustain economic viability. A growing agricultural sector means more jobs, greater economic activity in each of our states and a thriving agriculture future for our entire region.

This document was a collaborative effort of the following organizations:
Northeast Sustainable Agriculture Working Group, Community Food Funders, The John Merck Fund, Sustainable Agriculture and Food Systems Funders, Land For Good, National Sustainable Agriculture Coalition, Maine Farmland Trust, Hudson Valley Agribusiness Development Corporation

SUPPORTING FARMERS TO PRODUCE AND SELL VALUE-ADDED PRODUCTS

Founded in 2004 to serve African immigrants and refugees, the African Alliance of Rhode Island (AARI) offers a variety of community health, nutrition, food security, urban agriculture, and other programs and services to low-income families of all nationalities and ethnicities in some of Providence's poorest neighborhoods. Since 2009, AARI has focused on urban agriculture projects that help low-income families increase food security and earn income. From 2015-17, AARI received support and funds from *Rhode Island's Local Agriculture and Sea Act (LASA)* program to expand its growing space and build greenhouses, and from *USDA's Value-Added Producer Grant (VAPG)* to conduct market feasibility studies for value-added products. Today AARI growers supply a variety of African vegetables along with New England staples to their farmer's market customers.

Maine's artisanal cheesemaking industry is one of the fastest growing in the country. One of the leaders in this field is Fuzzy Udder Creamery, owned by Jessie Dowling, in Whitefield. In 2016, Fuzzy Udder was selected to receive a *VAPG* grant to cover costs of producing and marketing artisan cheeses from goat and sheep milk and to use as working capital to increase the farm's market channels and customer base.



Photo courtesy of the Urban Farming Institute

SUPPORTING THE NEXT GENERATION OF NEW ENGLAND FARMERS

Farmers age 65 and older manage 1.4 million acres of land in New England and 92% of them do not have a farm operator under 45 working with them. How and to whom their land and the \$6.45 billion in agricultural assets they own will transfer will have a significant impact on the region's next generation of farmers. A 2016 *Beginning Farmer and Rancher Development Program (BFRDP)* grant allowed Land For Good—a New England-based non-profit focused on gaining ground for farmers—to initiate phase 2 of its Land Access Project, which brought together over 40 collaborating organizations, agencies and individual experts across New England to tackle farm succession and transfer and land access challenges through a comprehensive, systems approach. To date, the project has reached over 4,400 farm seekers, transitioning farmers, non-farming landowners, and service providers and provided them information about land access tools, innovative tenure models, and farm succession and transfer through educational events, multi-day trainings, and online tools and materials, including the newly revamped New England Farmland Finder (with over 700 postings and 1500 registered farm seekers).

In 2017, Cultivating Community in Portland, ME, was awarded a *BFRDP* grant to train and help support the growth of New American and veteran farmers in Maine. The grant is being used to provide land access, new opportunities for product diversification and market access, and four levels of training to New American, veteran and other small-scale producers. Among other initiatives, the project will expand an existing gardener-to-farmer pipeline, provide intensive training to new farmers at varying levels of expertise, and work to address land access issues, in partnership with Maine Farmland Trust and Land for Good. This project builds on the success of existing training programs supported by *BFRDP* grants in 2014 and 2009 that have resulted in the creation of 52 new farm businesses to date. By project end, this *BFRDP* grant will result in the creation of another 30 new farm businesses, will provide intensive support to 12 new and beginning farmers, and will provide services to an additional 490 farmers and people exploring farming.¹

PROTECTING FARMLAND, PROMOTING FARM VIABILITY AND FACILITATING FARM TRANSFER

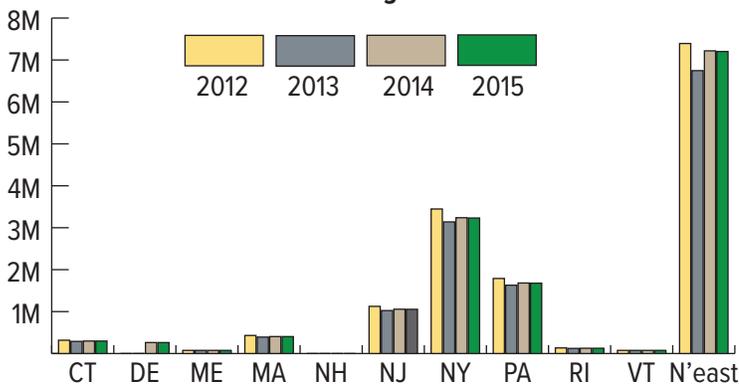
Between 1992 and 2012, almost 31 million acres of agricultural land were lost to development across the U.S. In the NEASDA region, since 1978, state **Purchase of Agricultural Conservation Easement (PACE)** programs have collaborated with USDA, towns and counties, land trusts, and philanthropic organizations to raise over \$4.2 billion to permanently protect over 1.2 million acres of the region's most productive and threatened farmland. An important source of funding is the **USDA's Agricultural Conservation Easement Program (ACEP)**, which provided \$22.4 million for farmland conservation in the region in FY 2016 alone.

These investments not only protect an invaluable natural resource, but also help facilitate farm expansion and improvements, on-farm conservation practices, and the transition of land at a more affordable price for next generation farmers.

According to a 2013 survey by American Farmland Trust and the University of Nebraska administered to farmers and ranchers who sold an easement or own land protected in part with USDA dollars:

- 84% who sold an easement reinvested some or all of the proceeds in their operations or agricultural land
- 75% applied at least one conservation practice on their protected land
- 65% of farmers who purchased protected land said the price was lower than comparable unprotected land

Farmers Market Nutrition Program Grants to Northeast States



“We are thrilled to bring [the Double Up Food Bucks] program to some of our New Hampshire stores. Food insecurity is a real challenge in New Hampshire, and being able to offer locally grown, healthy fruits and vegetables to low-income families is a big win. It’s good for our customers, our local farmers, and local businesses.”

—Mike Violette, President and CEO of Associated Grocers of New England

BOOSTING LOCAL FARMERS AND GETTING FRESH PRODUCE TO FAMILIES IN NEED

Nearly 20 independently-owned grocery stores and corner stores in New Hampshire and Massachusetts will now be increasing their purchases of fresh produce from dozens of local farms. **Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP)** participants will be able to double their dollars on their purchases of fresh fruits and vegetables as part of the Double Up Food Bucks program, supported through three federal Farm Bill Programs: the **Food Insecurity Nutrition Incentive (FINI)**, **SNAP**, and **SNAP Education (SNAP-Ed)**. More than 2,000 residents benefited from the program in its pilot phase in New Hampshire in 2017, with four stores in the state participating. The program will expand throughout New Hampshire and launch in the city of Boston this year. With Double Up, low-income families buy more fruits and veggies, farmers make more money, and the benefits ripple through the local economy.

In Pittsburgh, PA, Just Harvest’s Fresh Access Program provides financial incentives to consumers enrolled in **SNAP**. In partnership with the Food Trust, and thanks to grants from **FINI** and the **USDA Farmers Market Promotion Program (FMPP)**, Allegheny County farmers markets can now offer **SNAP** customers an additional \$2 for every \$5 they spend on fresh fruits and vegetables at participating markets. Over the five years of the Fresh Access Program, Just Harvest has facilitated over \$150,000 in **SNAP** sales, benefiting over 90 local farmers and producers and adding \$50,000 to the buying power of lower-income consumers, thus improving the health and well-being of their community, and supporting the financial viability of their region’s farmers.

East NY Farms! (ENYF!) has operated a farmers market in the East New York neighborhood of Brooklyn for 20 years. Their market was started by local community gardeners looking to provide healthy food for their neighbors. It has grown to include three upstate farmers and 36 local gardeners, in addition to hot food vendors and local artisans. The gardeners of East New York were the first urban growers in the state to be certified to accept **USDA Farmers Market Nutrition Program (FMNP)** checks by the NYS Department of Agriculture and Markets. These checks comprise over 50% of market income and make the market viable for upstate farmers that must travel long distances to come to this neighborhood. The market serves a low-income community and the **FMNP** helps EYNF! to form connections with local WIC and Senior centers. They offer healthy cooking demonstrations at the centers and build connections that bring new customers to the market.



Photo courtesy of Communities Involved in Sustaining Agriculture

LEVERAGING FEDERAL & STATE FUNDS TO BRING HEALTHY FOOD TO MASSACHUSETTS FAMILIES²

Thanks to the **Massachusetts Healthy Incentives Program (HIP)**, a new state program started with the help of a \$3.4 million federal **FINI** grant, thousands of families in Massachusetts that had previously been unable to afford fresh, healthy, local produce were able to purchase fruits and vegetables directly from Massachusetts farmers in 2017. Designed to improve healthy food access and health outcomes for low-income families, and to increase sales and sustainability for Massachusetts farmers, **HIP** provides a one-for-one match for **SNAP** recipients' purchases at participating farmers markets, farm stands, mobile markets, and CSAs.

HIP has been a tremendous success in its first year, with more than \$3.9 million in incentives earned in the first year. Fruit and vegetable producers across the Commonwealth have seen a dramatic increase in retail sales.

A coalition of more than 50 organizations successfully advocated for a commitment of \$1.35 million for **HIP** in Massachusetts' 2018 budget. The coalition has stepped up again this year, organizing a campaign to secure resources to sustain the program through fiscal year 2019.

MASS. HEALTHY INCENTIVE PROGRAM (HIP)

Families	Farms
SNAP families purchased \$2.97 million in fresh, healthy local foods.	More than 200 farms sold \$2.97 million more of the fresh fruit and vegetables they grew.
35,400 families earned HIP incentives. 50% of those families included seniors, and 34% included children.	SNAP sales at farm retailers increased by nearly 600% from 2016 to 2017, thanks to HIP.
62,200 individuals increased their fruit and vegetable intake by 1 serving per day.	Each dollar spent results in an additional \$1.12 in local economic impact, as farmers contribute to the local economy by spending those dollars on goods and services.
That increase in healthy eating can mean savings of more than \$1.1 million in public health costs.	In 2017, there was a 65% increase in the number of direct-to-consumer SNAP retailers.

“In one season our farmers market revenue blew up because of HIP. At several locations we went from one tent to three; one register to two, and sales were measured in thousands rather than hundreds. The HIP program placed us right on the front lines of feeding people who might otherwise go without. That mission – that idea of reaching out further to help people in need – is now central to the way we do business.”

—Justin Chase of Arrowhead Farm in Newburyport, MA



Photo Courtesy of Urban Farming Institute

THREATS AND OPPORTUNITIES FOR NORTHEAST AGRICULTURE

Agriculture and food production are vital to almost every aspect of our lives and connect to virtually all levels of our economic, environmental, social, and policy-making systems. This critical sector is in the midst of a fundamental structural transition in the Northeast worthy of far more attention than currently afforded it.

The average age of the principal farm operator in the region has been steadily increasing from 54 in 1997 to 58 in 2012.³ In 2012, the average age of new entrants in New York and New England was 49, which is on par with the national average for farm start-ups, but higher than the national average age of 40 for most start-up founders. Farmland trends are also negatively affecting the viability of the agricultural sector. For instance, between 1997 and 2012 there was an average decrease of 4% in acres of harvested cropland in the New England – New York region.⁴ This is consistent with a national trend in declining farm acreage. Increased development plays a role in the decline in available farmland. This region saw a 52% increase in developed land between 1982 and 2012.⁵ Twenty-three percent of this developed land was converted from cropland and pastureland; 75% was converted from forest land.

Farming—that is, primary production—represents only one facet of the agricultural and food sector, though. In 2016, 2.1 million full and part-time jobs in New York and New England were related to agriculture and food – 9.4% of total employment in the region.⁶ While employment in these sectors increased 21% from 1998 to 2016, direct agricultural employment (farming, forestry, fishing, and related activities) declined 7%. Currently, direct agricultural employment represents 0.7% of total employment. The total contribution of agriculture and its related industries to the GDP of the region remained around 3% between 1998 and 2015.

However, the 8,268 farmers' markets that operated in New England and New York in 2014—180% more than in 2006—are evidence of growing consumer interest in local foods and in directly supporting the local economy.⁷ Furthermore, there has been a significant increase in sales for the specialty food and beverage industry, rising 15% between 2014 and 2016 to a total of \$127 billion in sales in 2016, while all food sales at retail locations grew by just 2.3%.⁸ As consumer demand for fresh, local, and source-identified food options increases, food producers and suppliers in the Northeast are well-positioned to increase their share of that market demand.

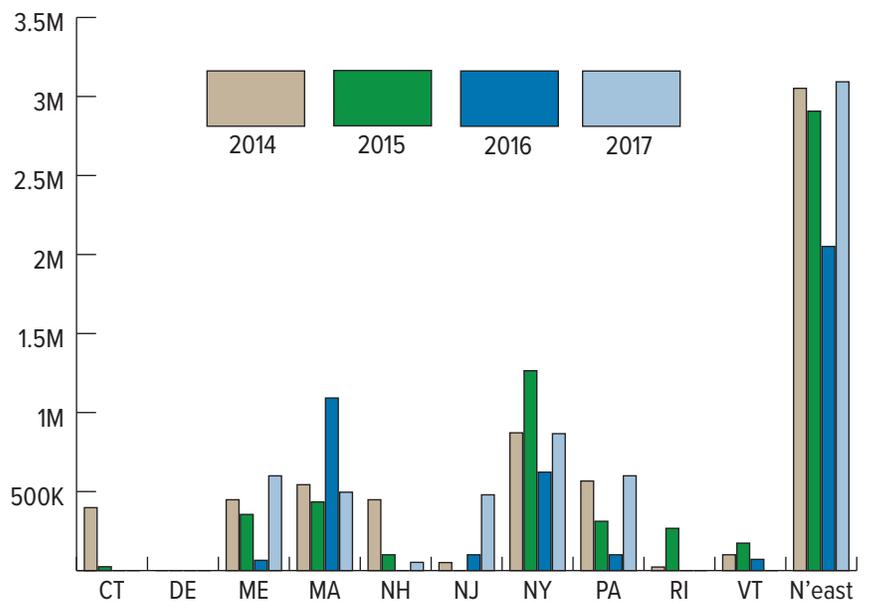


Photo courtesy of American Farmland Trust

HELPING FARMERS RUN PROFITABLE BUSINESSES

With funding from the **USDA Local Foods Promotion Program (LFPP)**, Hudson Valley Agri-Business Development Corporation launched its Farm and Food Business Accelerator (FFBA) Program in June 2016. Nine “Peers” participated in the seven month intensive training curriculum for farm and food entrepreneurs, which included classroom training, mentoring, peer-to-peer and industry networking, and pitch events. Following completion of the program, FFBA Peers reported that their aggregate sales increased by 26.4%, they collectively identified 43 new and 23 expanded market opportunities, 37.75 direct jobs and 27.6 indirect jobs were created, and \$3M+ was incrementally contributed to the local economy through direct purchases of product from 66 regional farms.

Local Food Promotion Program Grants to Northeast States



USING LOCAL FOOD TO IMPROVE HEALTH OUTCOMES FOR HOSPITAL PATIENTS

Support from the **LFPP** enabled Health Care Without Harm to develop a seasonal harvest program for health care dining services across New England. The program, called Nourished by New England, launched in the fall of 2017. After just the first quarter 44 hospitals across New England have registered to participate. They spent an estimated total of \$166,000 on local food over the first three months of the program, with a concentrated focus on four featured items. The program was able to develop posters, table tents, point of sale signs, and LCD screen images for promotion of local food throughout the facilities. In addition to the seasonal harvest program, funds from the project are supporting 20 farm and food businesses to scale up to meet New England’s institutional market. A virtual trade show in January allowed these businesses to meet institutional purchasers, connections which continue to bear fruit for both the entrepreneurs and the hospitals.

Nourished by New England Participating Hospitals by State

CONNECTICUT

New Milford Hospital
Yale-New Haven Hospital

MAINE

Blue Hill Memorial Hospital
Lincoln Health
Maine General Medical Center
Maine Medical Center
Mayo Regional Hospital
Mid Coast Hospital
Pen Bay Medical Center
Southern Maine Health Care
Spring Harbor Hospital
Stephens Memorial Hospital
Waldo County General Hospital

MASSACHUSETTS

Boston Children's Hospital
Boston Medical Center
Brigham and Women's Faulkner
Brigham Health
Newton-Wellesley Hospital
Cooley Dickinson Hospital
McLean Hospital
Haywood Hospital
High Point Hospital
Holyoke Medical Center
North Shore Medical Center Salem
Spaulding Rehab Hospital Cape Cod
UMass HealthAlliance Hospital
UMass Memorial Medical Center

NEW HAMPSHIRE

Concord Hospital
Manchester Medical Center
Mt. Ascutney Hospital & Health Center
Wentworth Douglass Hospital

RHODE ISLAND

Butler Hospital
Kent Hospital
Our Lady of Fatima Hospital
Women and Infants Hospital
Roger Williams Medical Center
VA Medical Center, Providence
Memorial Hospital

VERMONT

Northeastern Vermont Regional Hospital
Porter Medical Center
Southwestern Vermont Medical Center



Photo courtesy of Gardening the Community

GETTING HEALTHY FOOD AND GARDEN-BASED EDUCATION TO KIDS

Hartford Public Schools in Hartford, Connecticut was awarded a **USDA Farm to School** grant to incorporate higher volumes of local food into the school menu by installing new processing equipment to establish an enhanced “central production kitchen” in Hartford’s Journalism & Media Academy. This kitchen will process, package, and distribute local foods to a network of eighteen schools while increasing the flavor and variety of school meals. Hartford schools will also expand the district’s partnership with FoodCorps to increase nutrition promotion and food education in both the classroom and cafeteria.

Springfield, Massachusetts, the Commonwealth’s third largest city, exemplifies the stark disparities in our modern food system. Surrounded by farms stewarding some of the most fertile cropland in the world, many of Springfield’s residents, particularly those of color, have poor access to fresh produce and suffer disproportionately from chronic illnesses and diet-related diseases. Springfield-based Gardening the Community (GTC) has proven that changing the way youth interact with food is an effective way to both change eating habits and health outcomes, and build community and equity.

Encouraged by GTC’s evidence that access to healthy food improves health outcomes, the city’s Food Policy Council advocated for the school district to apply to **USDA’s Community Eligibility Provision (CEP)** which provides all public school students breakfast and lunch at no cost, eliminating the stigma for students receiving free meals and significantly reducing the number of hunger visits to school nurses. Thanks in part to the Council’s advocacy, the district superintendent mandated breakfast in the classroom for all schools in 2017. School nurses immediately noticed 25-30% fewer visits from children complaining of hunger. Twenty-six of the city’s schools also now have on-site gardens that serve as outdoor classrooms where students produce fresh vegetables and fruit. As students become more familiar with the taste of fresh vegetables, salad becomes more popular in the cafeterias.

Since the school gardens can’t keep up with student demand or meet some of the regulations for school meals, Springfield’s Food Policy Council has helped the school district build relationships with local farms that can sell fresh produce directly to the schools.

AGRITOURISM AS A STRATEGY TO INCREASE FARM VIABILITY

Agritourism is an increasingly popular strategy for small-scale farmers to raise farm income, diversify product lines, educate the public about farming, and build strong community engagement. Agriculture census data suggests that U.S. farms annually earn \$566.8 million from agritourism activities. To advance agritourism in the Northeast, the **USDA Northeast Sustainable Agriculture Research and Education (SARE)** program funded a multistate train-the-trainer project from 2011-2015, spearheaded by Rutgers University. A team of extension educators created a train-the-trainer curriculum and supporting educational materials—including fact sheets, a corn maze budgeting tool, farm assessment checklists, and educational videos. Twenty-four service providers at nonprofits, extension, and other organizations used the training and materials in their work with more than 1,680 farmers throughout the region. 313 farmers made changes to their marketing practices, 207 improved farm safety practices, 190 farmers enhanced liability or risk management strategies, and 126 developed employee training procedures.

Thank you to the following organizations for submitting stories:

Agricultural Justice Project
African Alliance of Rhode Island
American Farmland Trust
Arrowhead Farm
Communities Involved in Sustainable Agriculture
Crossroads Community Food Network
East New York Farms!
Fair Food Network
FoodCorps
Gardening the Community
Groundwork Lawrence
Healthcare Without Harm
Hilltop Urban Farm
Hudson Valley Agribusiness Development Corporation
Just Harvest
Land for Good
Maine Farmland Trust
Massachusetts Food Systems Collaborative
National Sustainable Agriculture Coalition
New England Farm to School Collaborative
New Entry Sustainable Farming Project
Northeast Organic Farming Association of New York
Northeast SARE
Rhode Island Agricultural Partnership
The Blueprint: Building a Better Business Assistance Network for Farms and Food Businesses
The Food Trust
Urban Farming Institute of Boston



Photo courtesy of Gardening the Community

Footnotes

¹ <https://pingree.house.gov/media-center/press-releases/cultivating-community-receive-nearly-600000-federal-grant-train-new>

² Source: The Massachusetts Food Systems Collaborative

³ USDA NASS. 2012 Census of Agriculture

⁴ USDA NASS. 2012 Census of Agriculture

⁵ 2012 Natural Resources Inventory; increase from 6130.8 acres to 8917.6 acres

⁶ US Department of Commerce, Bureau of Economic Analysis; Data as of February 1, 2018; Total Full-Time and Part-Time Employment by NAICS Industry

⁷ USDA ERS. Trends in Local and Regional Food System Report to Congress.2015.

⁸ Specialty Foods Association. The State of the Specialty Food Industry. 2017.