

Massachusetts Farmland Action Plan

Massachusetts Food System Forum
December 17, 2024 in Worcester

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Agenda and Goals

Agenda

- ❖ Farmland Action Plan
- ❖ Equity and EJ Strategy
- ❖ What's being done now?
- ❖ What could come next?
- ❖ Next steps and getting involved
- ❖ Comments and Questions

Goals

- ❖ Share basic information about Farmland Action Plan and related MDAR equity work
- ❖ Seek feedback on what is important to the audience to work on next
- ❖ Share information about how people can get involved in next steps

Farmland Action Plan

Why are farms and farmland important to you?

Feeds community

????

Contributes to local economy

Preserves rural heritage

????

Grow foods from my cultural heritage

????

Helps address climate change and mitigate its impacts

Sustains family businesses

Protects vital natural resources

Contributes to soil health

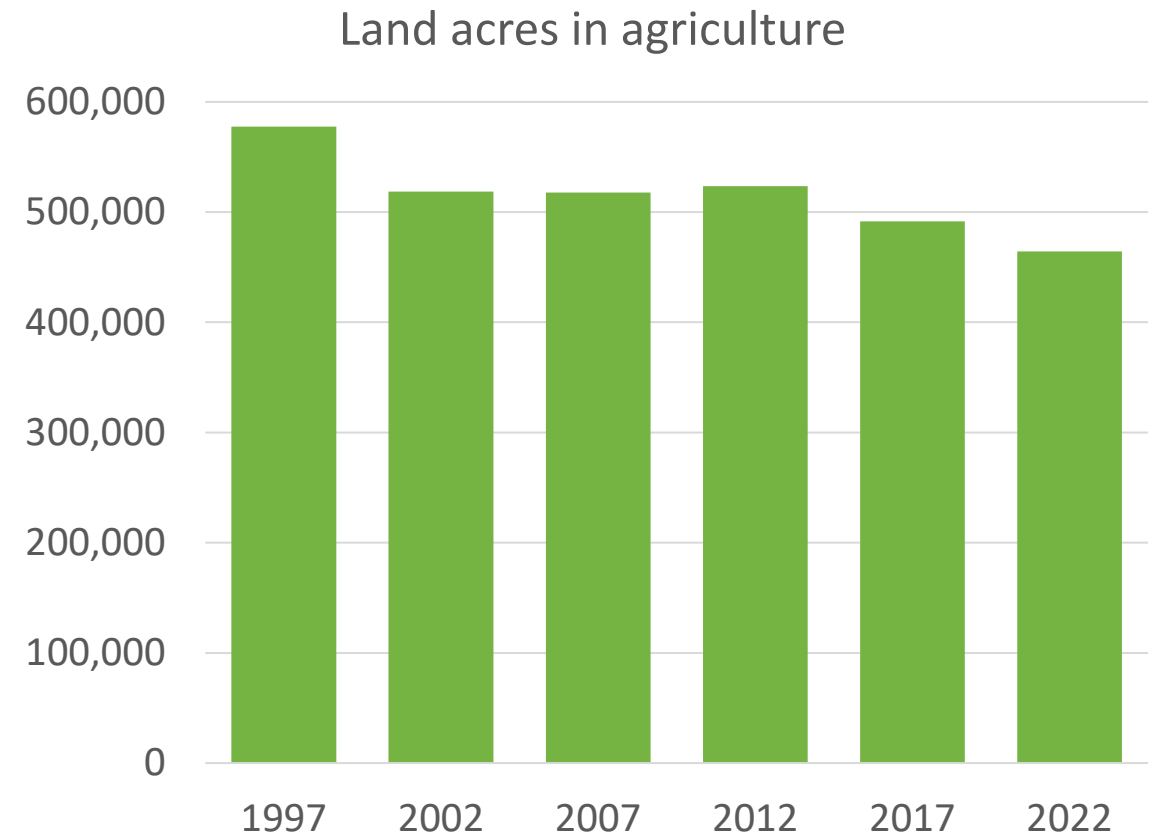
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Why is the Farmland Action Plan important?

We are losing agricultural land fast!

**Between 1997 and 2022
Massachusetts lost 113,000 acres**

Additional 50,000 – 89,000 acres projected to be lost by 2040

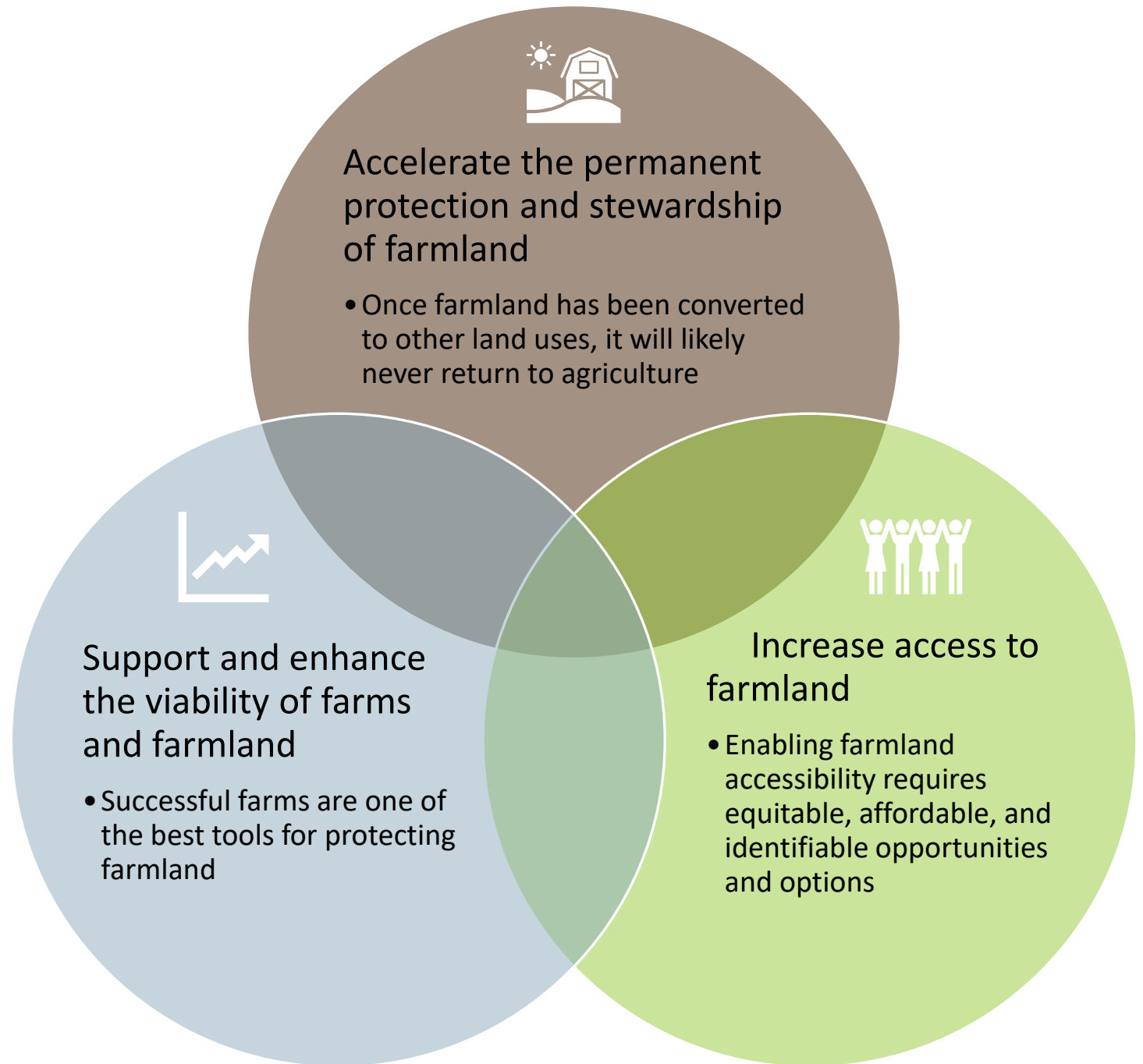


Sources: Census of Agriculture 2022 and earlier. Table 1

[www.nass.usda.gov/Publications/AgCensus/2022/Full_Report/Volume_1, Chapter_1_State_Level/Massachusetts/](https://www.nass.usda.gov/Publications/AgCensus/2022/Full_Report/Volume_1,_Chapter_1_State_Level/Massachusetts/)

What is the Farmland Action Plan?

- State funded
- State coordinated
- Long range strategic initiative
- Statewide, not just for state government
- www.mass.gov/farmland-action-plan



Other related statewide plans

- Local Food Action Plan (2015)
- Decarbonization Road Map (2018)
- Rural Policy Plan (2019)
- Clean Energy & Climate Plan (2022)
- ResilientMass (2023) (State Hazard Mitigation and Climate Adaptation Plan)
- Resilient Lands Initiative (2023)
- Healthy Soils Action Plan (2023)
- Special Commission on Agriculture in the Commonwealth in the 21st Century (forthcoming)
- And others!

Equity and EJ Strategy

MDAR's Environmental Justice Team

MDAR's Environmental Justice and Climate Equity Workgroup aims to foster equitable engagement and empower underserved farmers and communities by developing inclusive policies, providing multilingual resources, and facilitating access to all agency resources. Through strategic partnerships, capacity building, and data-driven initiatives, we seek to create a more just, sustainable, and resilient agricultural landscape and food system in Massachusetts.

Key Functions:

Outreach, Engagement, External Relationships, Capacity-Building – Dimple Rana,

Dimple.Rana@Mass.gov

Internal Training and Advancement of EJ Strategy, Transparency, Language Access– Olivia Palmer,

Olivia.Palmer@Mass.gov

MDAR's Roadmap: The Environmental Justice Strategy

- Released Feb '24
- Guides our progress on EJ initiatives
- Aims to center equity

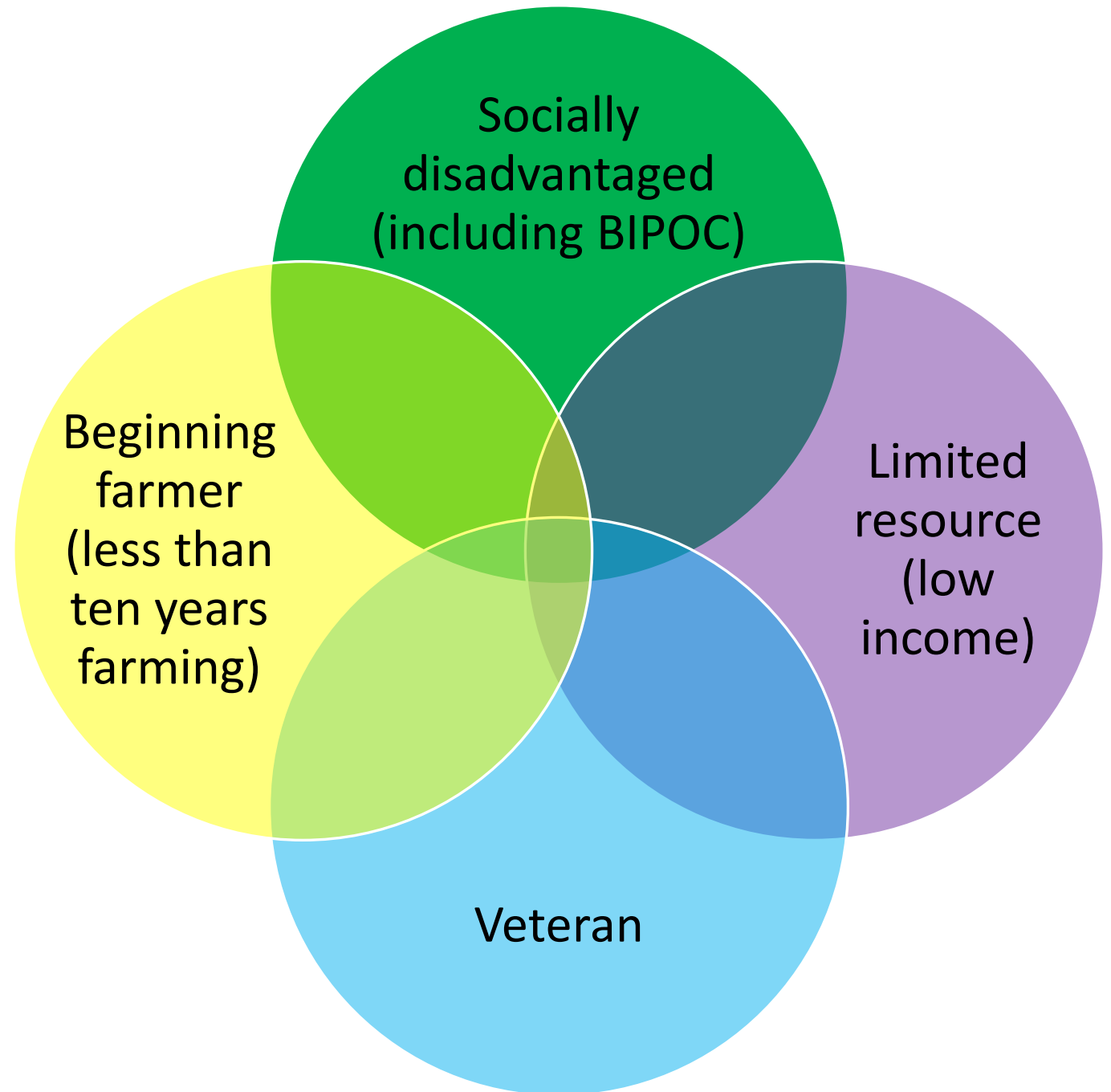
Who Contributed to the Strategy?

- EEA-wide public comment period based on draft strategy (Fall '22 – Feb '23)
- MDAR-specific listening session
- Written comments from Ag Equity Network
- Equity in Mission Statement
- Recurring meetings with BIPOC farming leaders and constituents + intentional work to ensure a future workgroup reflective of workforce.
- Intentionality in diversifying grant funding and support service recipients.
- This feedback was individually analyzed and incorporated into the final strategy by MDAR's EJ Task Force

Who is a Historically Underserved Farmer?

USDA Definition

www.nrcs.usda.gov/getting-assistance/underserved-farmers-ranchers



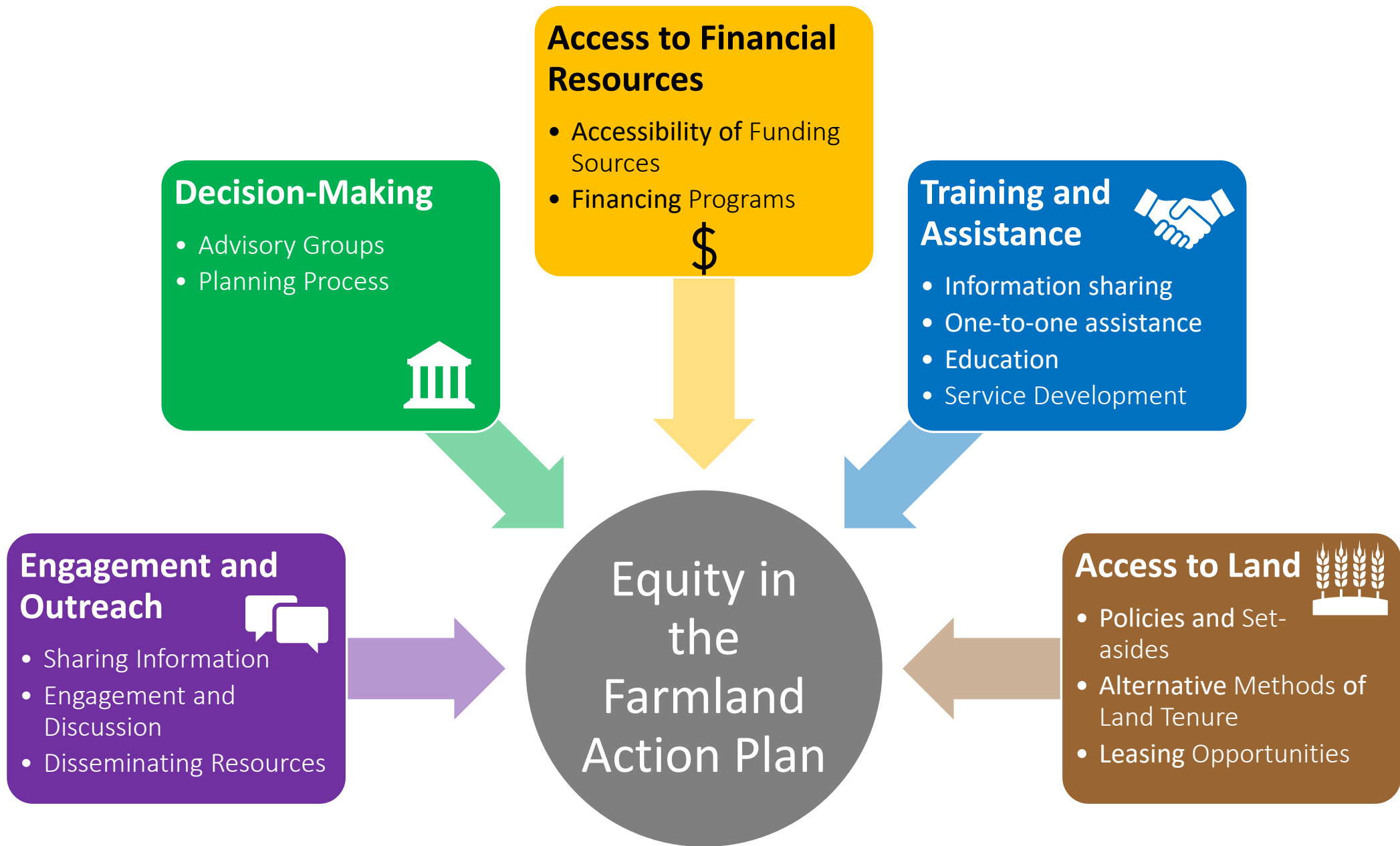
Understanding and Addressing Barriers: Grants as an Example

Here's what we heard:

- Match and Reimbursement Model can be challenging for Historically Underserved Farmers
- Historically Underserved Farmers request grant writing assistance to navigate the process
- Need for transparency in grant process to ensure that funds are distributed fairly and equitably, and that new applicants are awarded

Here's what we've done:

- Develop list of Agricultural Grant Writers available online and updated periodically
- Shared feedback with grant managers across MDAR to raise awareness of the barriers we hear
- Provide direct connections between farmers and grant managers
- Work with grant managers to provide education on grant (webinars, language access, phone calls/ texts)
- Review RFRs to bring an equity lens to the process (priority criteria, prioritizing authentic engagement)



Meaningful Engagement

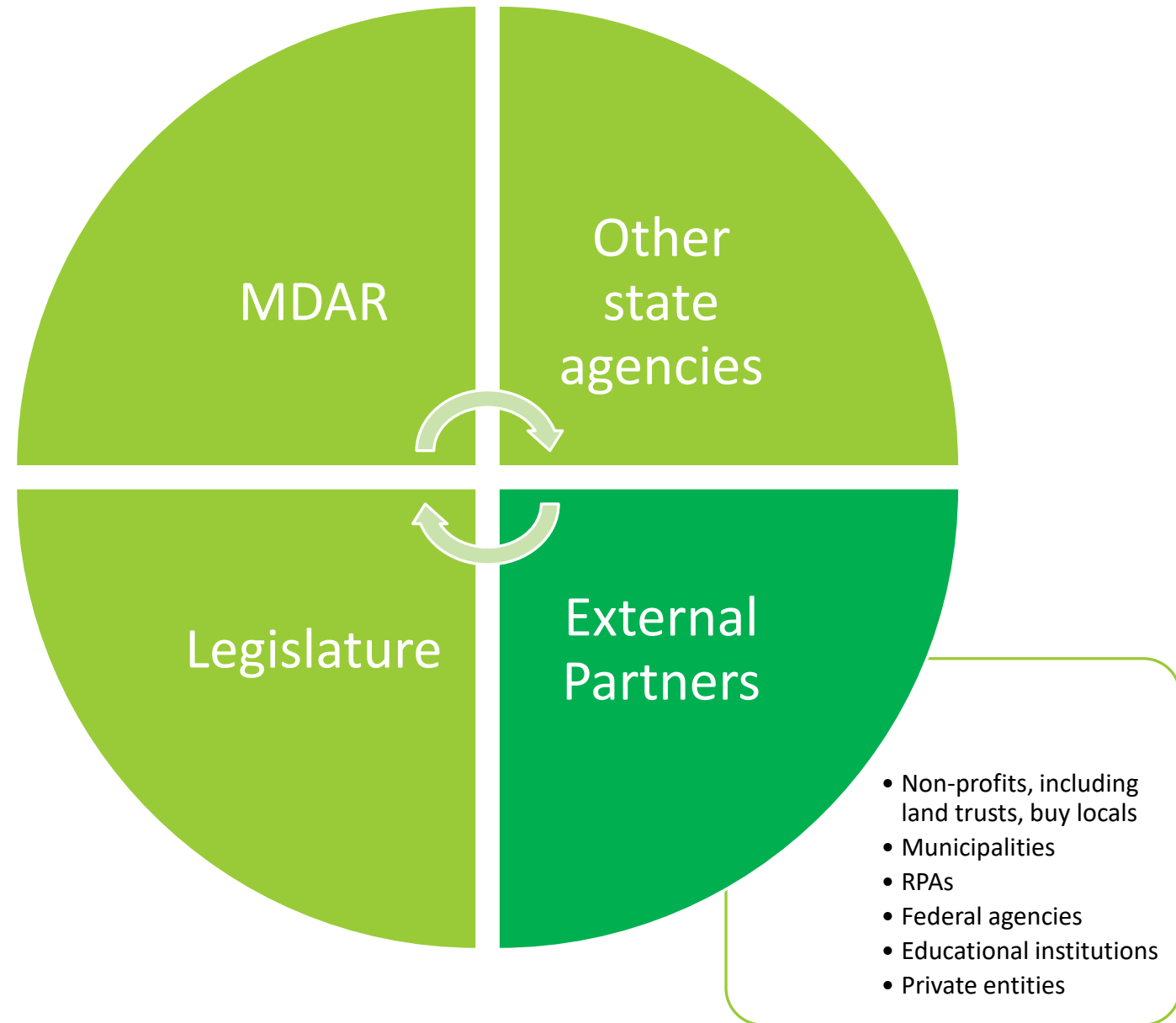
In order to understand, address barriers and make meaningful change, we must center listening, build trusted relationships, and create spaces that will foster capacity-building and inform programs and policies.

Moving into implementation

Who will implement the Plan?

This is a plan for the Commonwealth of Massachusetts.

MDAR is promoting, monitoring and facilitating implementation of the Plan, building momentum from existing programs and initiatives.



Lead implementer

How can I get involved?

Depending on the task you could be:

- **Lead implementer** – Partner who is the champion/ energy behind implementing a task
- **Other potential implementer** – Other partners who could be key for implementing a task, bringing specific expertise or insights that may shape implementation
- **Other interested entities and individuals** who may have useful information to share to inform the task, may be part of the solution, or are interested in the task outcome.

Other
potential
implementer

Other
potential
implementer

Other
potential
implementer

Other
interested
individuals

Other
interested
individuals

Other
interested
individuals

Other
interested
individuals

Other
interested
individuals

Other
interested
individuals

Overview of the matrix

Goals – what the plan hopes to achieve.

Strategy – clarify what aspects of each Goal will be addressed

Action – direct how each strategy will be advanced.

Task – details on how each action will be achieved

4-digit unique ID number



What's being done now?

Key features for implementation

Already started

- Foster partnerships and collaboration
- Learn from feedback on previous processes, including plan creation
- Encourage wider engagement and implementation

Going forwards

- Focus on topics or even specific tasks not the entire plan
 - Lead implementer role
 - Could involve meetings, listening sessions, working groups, etc
- Better understanding of equitable engagement and feedback mechanisms
- Build trusted relationships
- Capacity building, including funding for partners to help with implementation

Meetings with potential partners

Breaking the plan into pieces for specific audiences

Powerpoints, meeting notes and sometimes videos are available for many meetings at

www.mass.gov/farmland-action-plan

Refining the implementation matrix

The matrix is a living document that tracks

- what partners have done, and
- what partners plan to do.

Working draft matrix due to be published online soon!

www.mass.gov/farmland-action-plan

How has the matrix been reviewed so far?

- Identify a potential timeline for implementation
- Identify lead and other potential implementers
- Clarify language to ensure clear understanding of item
- Check whether additional tasks are needed to assist with implementation of actions

2024 Highlights

- 1) Hire Farmland Action Plan Coordinator
- 2) Leverage federal funding
- 3) Build capacity of entities to protect land
- 4) Increase applications to protection programs
- 5) Prioritize protection of whole farms
- 6) State and municipal land licensing programs
- 7) Expand farmland transfer and succession education and technical assistance
- 8) Increase use of public lands by Historically Underserved Farmers
- 9) Farmer access to grants and financing
- 10) Elevate BIPOC and other historically underserved farmer voices in implementation

Progress Report coming soon! www.mass.gov/farmland-action-plan

What comes next?

What would you like to see worked on next?

**Help prioritize what to work on next
(late 2025 into 2026)**

Topic areas

- Municipal support
- Land protection
- Land Access
- Transfer and succession
- Farmer assistance
- Housing
- Other suggestions

**Mentimeter (www.menti.com)
or in the room voting**

- No opinion/ not a priority
- Low priority
- Medium priority
- High priority

Handout

- **Handout** – Mark your priority on the handout and return at the end

Municipal Support



Raise hand if this is a high priority

1. Build up Ag Comms
2. Strengthen ag sections of municipal plans

Land Protection



Raise hand if this is a high priority

3. Landowner survey to understand protection issues
4. Increase funding for private APRs
5. Create prioritization system for farmland protection
6. Add additional funding sources for protecting farmland

Land Access



Raise hand if this is a high priority

7. Landowner survey to understand access issues
8. Develop a program to implement MDAR's new ability to buy and sell land
9. Have more state land to be licensed for agricultural use

Transfer and succession



Raise hand if this is a high priority

10. Help connect people to potential successors
11. Promote existing transfer and succession resources eg Farmland Finder
12. Share information about estate/transfer planning models, case studies, and best practices
13. Explore how to learn about APR properties going up for sale earlier

Farmer assistance



Raise hand if this is a high priority

14. Simplify MDAR grant application processes
15. Build capacity of ag service organizations
16. Provide more support farmers who have licenses for state lands
17. Establish a network of “navigators” who can work with aspiring farmers to launch a farming enterprise

Housing



Raise hand if this is a high priority

18. Explore how to address housing needs in the APR program

Other priorities



**Do you have any other suggestions
of what to work on next?**

This is not just for MDAR, but also
other partners!

5 minutes

Please keep answers brief

Use handout for more detailed answers

Engagement and implementation



What could MDAR and partners do to foster meaningful engagement, capacity-building, and equitable implementation around the Farmland Action Plan?

5 minutes

Please keep answers brief

Use handout for more detailed answers

Additional questions or comments



Do you have any additional questions or comments to share?
This could include any recommendations about actionable next steps

5 minutes

Please keep answers brief

Use handout for more detailed answers

Next steps

Comments/
Questions?



Return your handout!!



Farmland Action Plan Webpage www.mass.gov/farmland-action-plan

Sign up for newsletter - Katharine Otto, MDAR. katharine.s.otto@mass.gov 413-544-2400

Reference slides

Strategies for each goal



Protection

- A. Permanently protect farmland through purchases of agricultural restrictions
- B. Further develop and implement additional tools to avoid farmland loss and retain farmland
- C. Prioritize protection of whole farms
- D. Formalize and integrate decision-making processes regarding farmland protection



Access

- A. Make more land available for agriculture
- B. Support farm transfer and succession in ways that enhance access to farmland
- C. Prioritize increased access for BIPOC and historically underserved farmers in all farmland access programs and policies
- D. Support and expand service-provider networks to meet the needs of all farmers and potential farmers.



Viability

- A. Ensure that laws, regulations, programs, and investments support farm viability
- B. Grow resilience and sustainability practices on farms
- C. Increase use of services, programs, and other resources by farmers



All goals

- A. Implement the Massachusetts Farmland Action Plan
- B. Build public support for agriculture and for farmland protection, access and viability



Goal - Accelerate the permanent protection and stewardship of farmland

A. Permanently protect farmland through purchases of agricultural restrictions

- Creative financing mechanisms and strategies
- Federal funding
- Additional financial resources
- Prevent conversion
- Build capacity and coordinate
- Long term protection
- Short term covenants
- Stewardship
- Education and engagement

B. Further develop and implement additional tools to avoid farmland loss and retain farmland

- No net loss of farmland
- Chapter 61A
- CPA
- Underserved farmer access
- State lands
- Solar development
- Zoning & Smart Growth

C. Prioritize protection of whole farms

- Housing
- Infrastructure
- Other land
- Other tenure models
- Funding
- Ecosystem services

D. Formalize and integrate decision-making processes regarding farmland protection

- Agricultural suitability



Goal – Increase access to farmland

A. Make more land available for agriculture

- Agricultural suitability
- State land licensing
- Urban agriculture
- Private leases
- Tribal lands
- Farmland Restoration
- Conservation Restrictions
- Farm Incubators

B. Support farm transfer and succession in ways that enhance access to farmland

- Education and technical assistance
- Protected lands
- Registries

C. Prioritize increased access for BIPOC and historically underserved farmers in all farmland access programs and policies

- Programs and policies
- Prioritization and accessibility

D. Support and expand service-provider networks to meet the needs of all farmers and potential farmers.

- Diversification
- DEI training
- Business technical assistance
- Capacity building
- Resource toolbox
- Land search



Goal - Support and enhance the viability of farms and farmland

A. Ensure that laws, regulations, programs, and investments support farm viability

- APR Program flexibility
- Right to Farm Bylaws and Ag Comms
- Grants and financing
- Local taxation, policy and regulations
- Decision making
- Support industries
- Urban agriculture
- Farm infrastructure
- Service providers
- Financial facilitation

B. Grow resilience and sustainability practices on farms

- Climate change technical assistance
- Soils on public lands
- Non-market contributions
- UMass Extension

C. Increase use of services, programs, and other resources by farmers

- Strategic outreach
- Technical assistance
- MDAR programs
- Education



Supporting all the goals

Implement the Farmland Action Plan

- Encourage partners and partnerships that can implement the plan.
- Support BIPOC and other historically underserved farmers and organizations involvement.
- Monitor and report on the impact of farmland programs to demonstrate the success, inform changes, and identify needs.
- Map and track farmland (APRs, CRs, Chapter 61A, and more).
- Research and report on agricultural incentive models used in other states and countries.

Build public support for agriculture and for farmland protection, access and viability

- Education and outreach for residents and elected officials
- Comprehensive plan

What would you like to see worked on next?

- Municipal support
 - Build up Ag Comms
 - Strengthen agricultural sections of municipal plans
- Land protection
 - Landowner survey to understand protection issues
 - Increase funding for private APRs
 - Create prioritization system for farmland protection
 - Add additional funding sources for protecting farmland
- Land Access
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 - Develop a program to implement MDAR's new ability to buy and sell land
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 - Help connect people to potential successors
 - Promote existing transfer and succession resources eg Farmland Finder
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- Farmer assistance
 - Simplify MDAR grant application processes
 - Build capacity of ag service organizations
 - Provide more support farmers who have licenses for state lands
 - Establish a network of "navigators" who can work with aspiring farmers to launch a farming enterprise
- Housing
 - Explore how to address housing needs in the APR program
- Other suggestions