## Vermont Farmland Conversion: What's at Stake and What We Can Do About It

Vermont Farm to Plate Annual Network Gathering, Burke Mountain

November 20, 2025



# Today's Agenda

Intro/framing: Stacy Cibula (10 mins)

Farms Under Threat: Jamie Pottern (20 mins)

Panel Discussion and Q&A: (50 mins)

Break (5 mins)

**Break-out groups** (40 mins)

**Group report outs** (25 mins)





# **VHCB Agricultural Program**

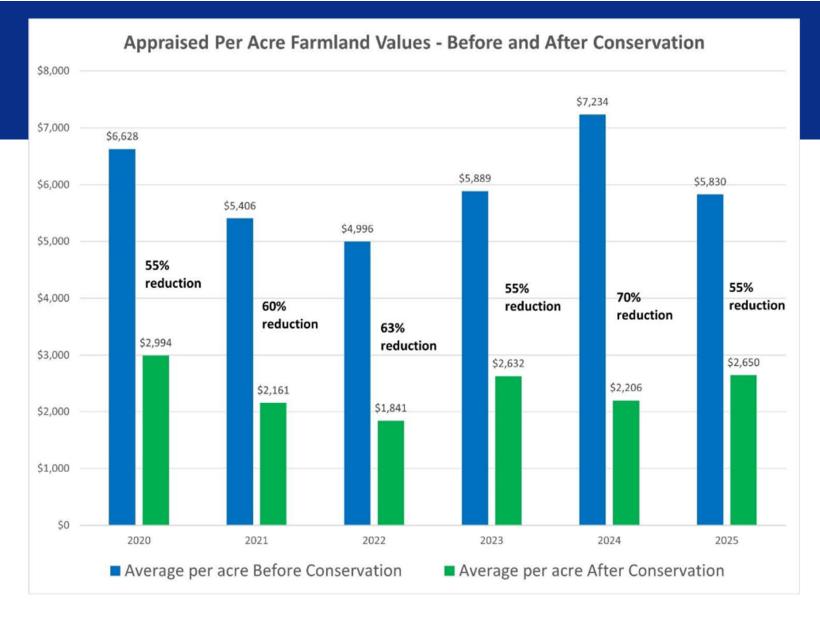
Purchase of development rights (conservation easements)

Farmland Access & Affordability

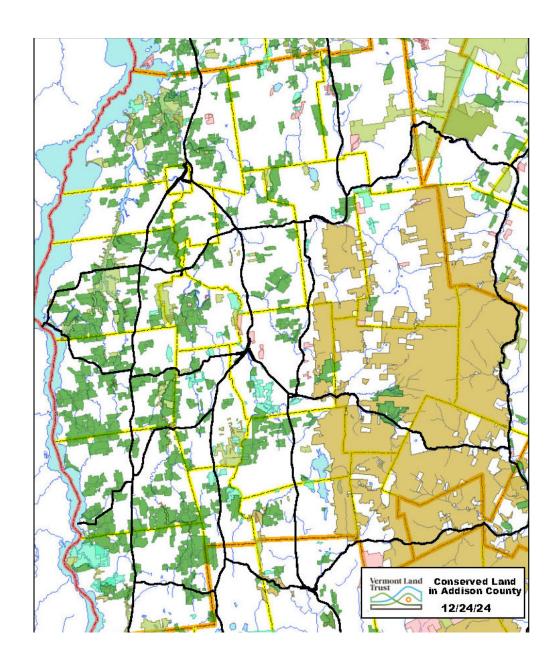
**Farm Viability** 





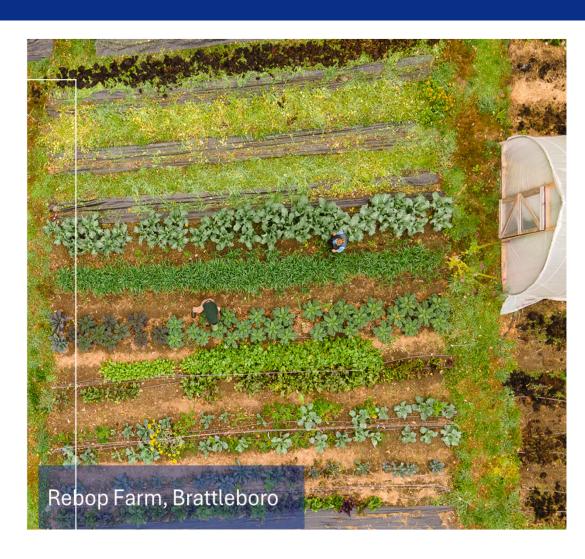


Conserved
Land in
Addison
County



# **Final Thoughts**

- Vermont has made an incredible investment in farmland conservation.
- We are facing headwinds.
- Holistic approach across sectors is needed.



#### **Contact Us**

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# Farmland Conversion Trends in Vermont



## VT Farm to Plate Network Gathering 2025

Burke Mountain Resort, E. Burke, Vermont November 20, 2025

## **Jamie Pottern**

Senior New England Program Manager American Farmland Trust

# No Farms No Faod®



American Farmland Trust

# **American Farmland Trust**

## SAVING THE LAND THAT SUSTAINS US



#### PROTECT FARMLAND

We lose 2,000 acres of farmland a day across the US: this has serious implications for food production, our environment, and the next generation of farmers. Climate change and extreme weather are compounding risks to farmland and soil health.



#### PROMOTE SOUND FARMING PRACTICES

We help farmers with the difficult transition to more regenerative farming practices that rebuild soil health, sequester carbon, protect our waterways, and boost income.



#### **KEEP FARMERS ON THE LAND**

A seismic transfer of farmland is looming. More than 40% of American farmland is owned by seniors aged 65 and older. AFT provides guidance, tools, and partnerships that connect current landowners with diverse, new farmers to ensure a sustainable farming future.







# **Highlights of AFT's Work in Vermont**

## 1. Advancing Climate Resilience:

 AFT is currently piloting a climate adaptation planning & grant program with 10 VT farmers with subawards to NOFA VT & UVM Extension.

## 2. Financial & Technical Assistance:

- Since 2020, AFT has provided 93 microgrant awards (\$5k-\$10k grants) to farmers totaling \$714,800.
- Advanced grazing assistance and business planning for dairy farmers is offered by Cheryl Cesario.
- Our Regional Conservation Partnership Program focused on regenerative agriculture offers conservation planning support for farmers in partnership with Windham and White River NRCDs, which has resulted in ~\$1 million in cost-share for farmers.

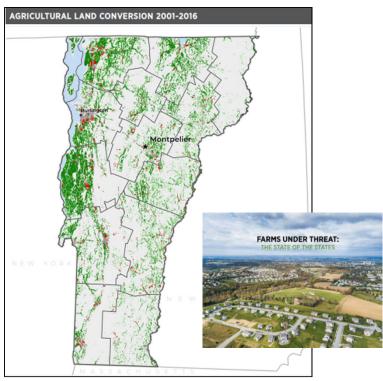
### 3. Policy:

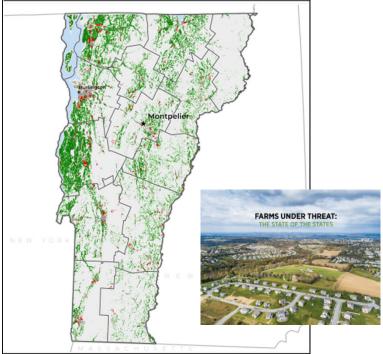
• AFT supports policies that protect farmland and increases farmland access opportunities (e.g., VT Land Access Opportunity Board).





Figure 2. Urban and highly developed (UHD), low-density residential (LDR), and rural land uses exist on a continuum from high-density urban areas to low-density rural areas. The UHD category encompasses dense urban cores, suburbs, and highly developed areas like warehouses. UHD transitions into LDR in residential areas where house lots exceed 1-2 acres. The LDR category also encompasses very large-lot residential areas, which might appear rural at first glance but are primarily used for housing, not for production agriculture.





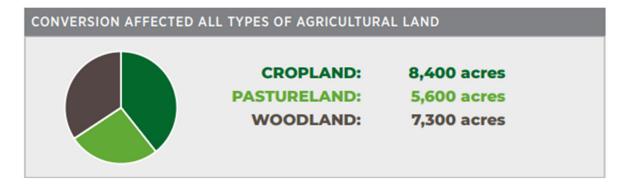


Agricultural land in LDR areas in 2001 was

TIMES MORE LIKELY

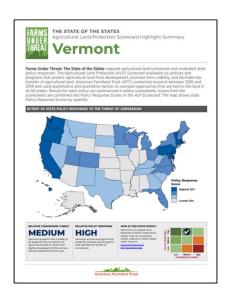
to be converted to UHD by 2016, compared to other agricultural land.

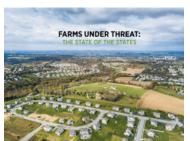




From 2001-2016, <u>21,400 acres</u> of VT agricultural land were developed or compromised.







Vermont ranks <u>5<sup>th</sup></u> nationally in terms of its policy responses to farmland conversion threat.

#### RELATIVE CONVERSION THREAT

# **MEDIUM**

Vermont scored in the middle of all states for the conversion of agricultural land to urban and highly developed (UHD) and lowdensity residential (LDR) uses.

#### **RELATIVE POLICY RESPONSE**

# HIGH

Vermont scored among the top states for policies and programs that address the threat of conversion.

#### HOW IS THIS STATE DOING?

Vermont is in a green box because its policy response is higher than its conversion threat, relative to other states. Learn more at www.farmland.org/ farmsunderthreat







Projected agricultural land conversion from 2016-2040 in the Business as Usual scenario

**Projected Conversion (2040)** 

Urban and highly developed (UHD) and low-density residential (LDR)

Land Cover (2016)

Farmland\* Other lands Urban areas Forestland Federal (no grazing) Water

\*Farmland is composed of cropland, pastureland, and woodland associated with farms.

# Farms Under Threat 2040: Choosing an Abundant Future: 2016-2040

#### WHICH FUTURE WILL WE CHOOSE?

How Vermonters choose to develop will shape the future of farming. The scenarios in Farms Under Threat 2040 show the impacts:



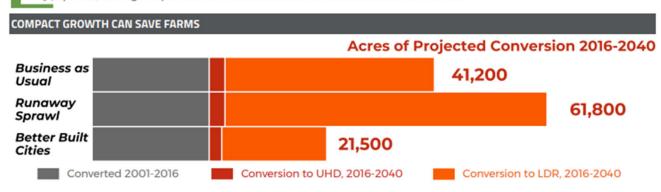
Business as Usual: Development follows recent patterns. Poorly planned development and low-density residential sprawl continue to rapidly convert farmland and ranchland.

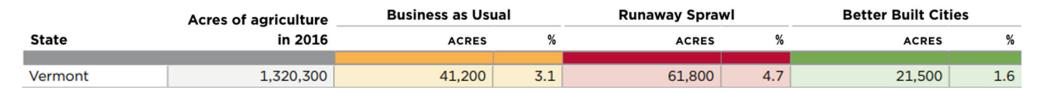


Runaway Sprawl: Development becomes even less efficient than in Business as Usual. Low-density housing sweeps across the countryside, displacing farmers and ranchers.



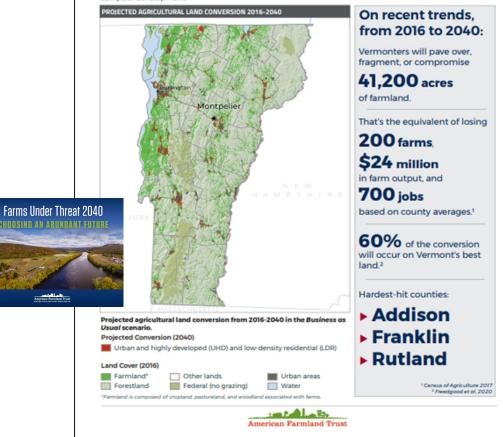
Better Built Cities: Policymakers and land-use planners promote compact development and reduce sprawl, saving irreplaceable farmland and ranchland from conversion.

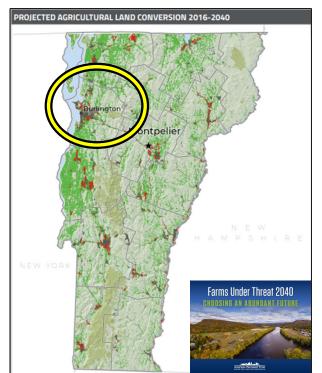






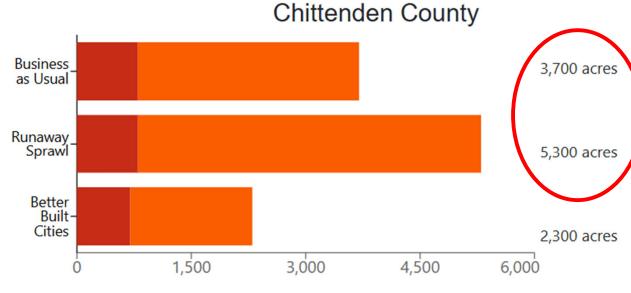
Farms Under Threat 2040: Choosing an Abundant Future mapped three scenarios of development between 2016 and 2040. If recent trends continue, 41,200 acres of Vermont's farmland will be paved over, fragmented, or converted to uses that jeopardize agriculture. That's 3%. Vermonters can slash conversion, save farmland, and safeguard the future of agriculture and the environment by choosing compact development.





3,700 - 5,300 acres of Chittenden County farmland are projected to be converted by 2040 (mostly to LDR).

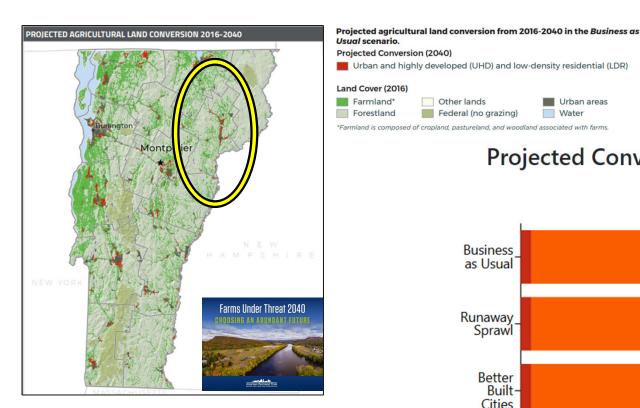




Acres converted

Urban and highly developed Low-density residential

American Farmland Trust SAVING THE LAND THAT SUSTAINS US



Farmland\*

Other lands

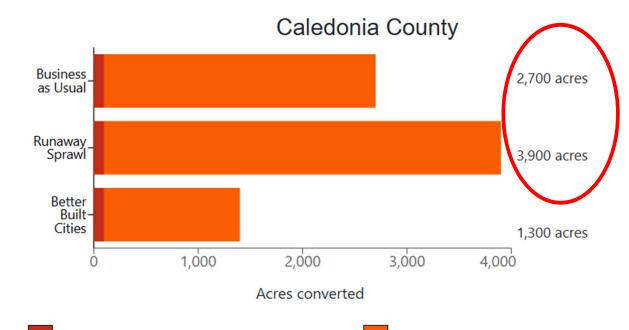
Federal (no grazing)

Urban areas

Urban and highly developed

2,700 - 3,900 acres of **Caledonia County farmland** are projected to be converted by 2040 (mostly to LDR).



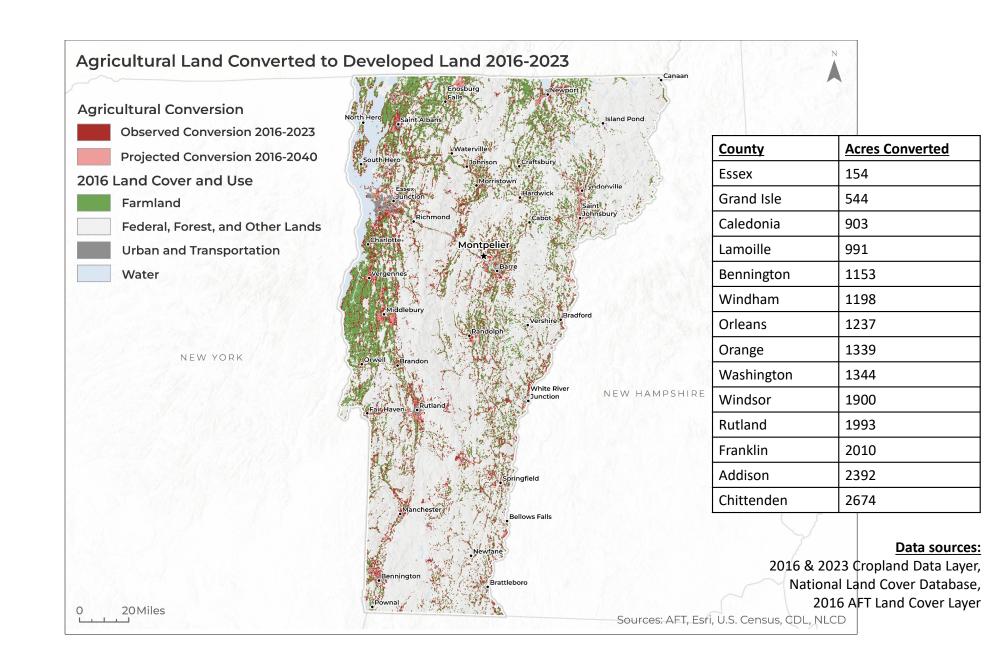


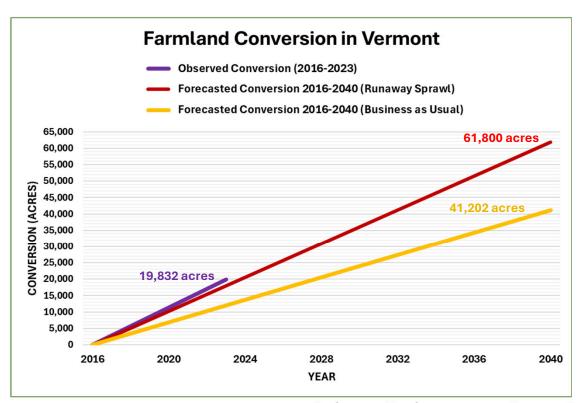
Low-density residential

# 2022 Census of Agriculture









Forecasted Conversion (BAU, 2016-2040)	-1,717 acres/year
Forecasted Conversion (RS, 2016-2040)	-2,575 acres/year
Observed Conversion (2016-2023)	-2,833 acres/year

Observed	Forecasted	% Forecasted
Farmland	Farmland	Conversion
Conversion	Conversion	Already
(2016-2023)	(2016-2040)	Converted
19,832 acres	BAU: 41,202 acres	48%
	RS: 61,800 acres	32%

Acres of agriculture		Business as Usual		Runaway Sprawl		Better Built Cities	
State	in 2016	ACRES	%	ACRES	%	ACRES	%
Vermont	1,320,300	41,200	3.1	61,800	4.7	21,500	1.6

#### **Talking Points:**

- We have already converted 48% of what we forecasted to lose by 2040 under Business as Usual (1.5% of all VT farmland).
- This conversion is happening 65% faster than forecasted under the BAU scenario, and 10% faster than under the Runaway
   Sprawl scenario.
- As of 2023, Vermont was hitting conversion projections ~5 years ahead of the BAU schedule.

What type of farmland is getting converted?			
Top 5 Categories	Acres of Farmland Converted 2016-2023		
Other Hay / Non-Alfalfa	12,227		
Deciduous, Evergreen, and Mixed Forest (Associated with Farmland)	3,751		
Grassland/Pasture	1,835		
Corn	917		
Fallow/Idle Cropland	339		
All other categories	763		
TOTAL	19,832		

What type of development is farmland getting converted to?			
Category of Conversion	Acres of Farmland Converted 2016-2023	Percent of Conversion	
Developed - Open Space	9,430	47%	~76
Developed - Low Intensity	5,672	29%	LDR
Developed - Medium Intensity	3,623	18%	~24
Developed - High Intensity	1,107	6%	UHI
TOTAL	19,832	100%	

**Data sources:** 2016 & 2023 Cropland Data Layer, National Land Cover Database, 2016 AFT Land

Cover Layer

#### "Developed" Categories from National Land Cover Database

- 21Developed, Open Space- areas with a mixture of some constructed materials, but mostly vegetation in the form of lawn grasses. Impervious surfaces account for less than 20% of total cover. These areas most commonly include large-lot single-family housing units, parks, golf courses, and vegetation planted in developed settings for recreation, erosion control, or aesthetic purposes.
- 22**Developed, Low Intensity** areas with a mixture of constructed materials and vegetation. Impervious surfaces account for 20% to 49% percent of total cover. These areas most commonly include single-family housing units.
- 23**Developed, Medium Intensity** -areas with a mixture of constructed materials and vegetation. Impervious surfaces account for 50% to 79% of the total cover. These areas most commonly include single-family housing units.
- 24Developed High Intensity-highly developed areas where people reside or work in high numbers. Examples include apartment complexes, row houses and commercial/industrial. Impervious surfaces account for 80% to 100% of the total cover.

# Why are we losing farmland faster than projected?

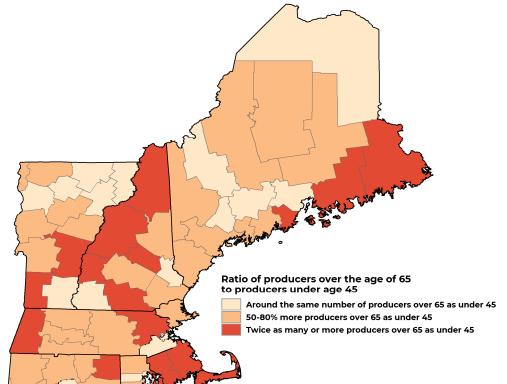
Projections are based on conversion trends from 2001-2016 (projected out to 2040), during which there was:

- **1.** Housing Recession: A housing recession between ~2007-2010, so development trends projected forward would have under-forecasted the amount of development.
- 2. Housing Boom & Covid-19: A housing boom and an unanticipated move of people from urban areas to rural areas took place from 2020-2022
- **Return to cities**: "Post"-Covid, many people are moving back to cities. Development trends may even out with time.

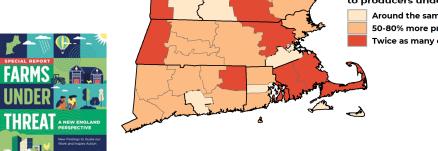
## **TAKEAWAY:**

Farmland was developed more quickly and significantly in the first 7 years of the study than was projected. Given how much land was consumed so quickly, farmland conversion rates are likely to exceed our forecasts.

# Aging Farmland Owners & Lack of Succession Planning

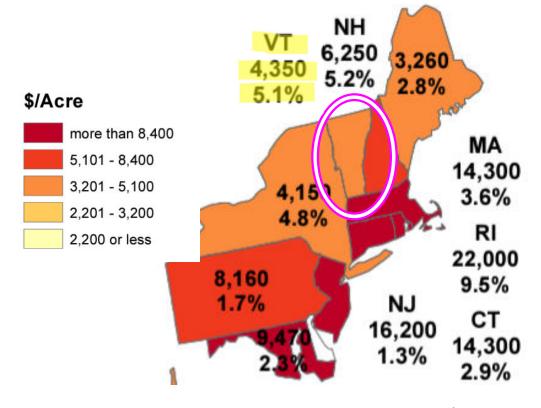


39% of VT producers are over 65, but many have not undertaken estate or succession planning





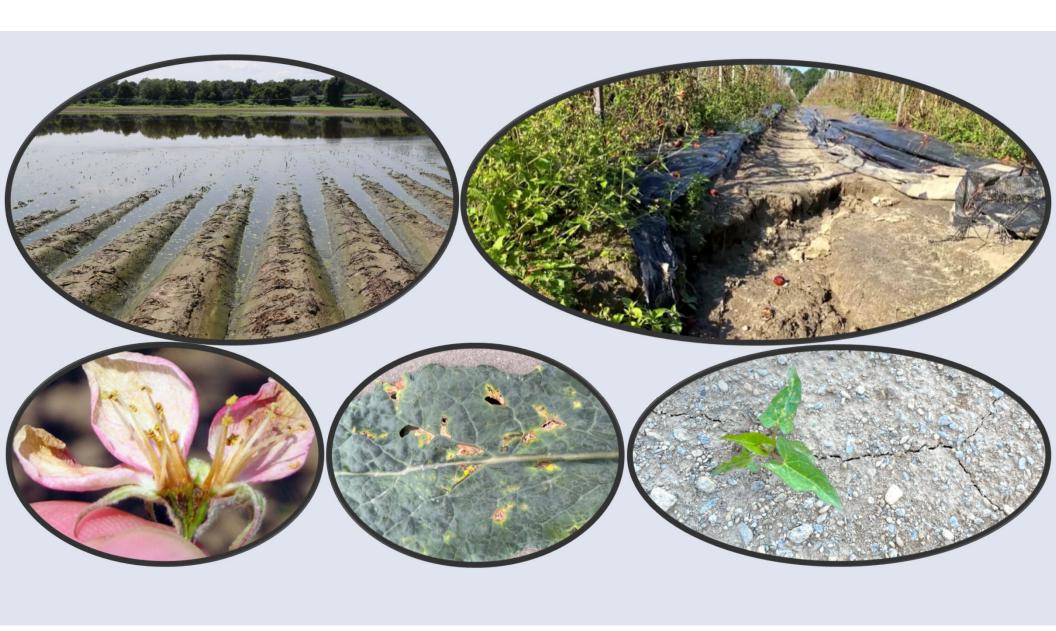
# High Cost of Farmland & Housing for Next Generation Farmers



VT farm real estate values are **\$4,350 per acre** (up 5.1% since last year). (NASS, 2024)

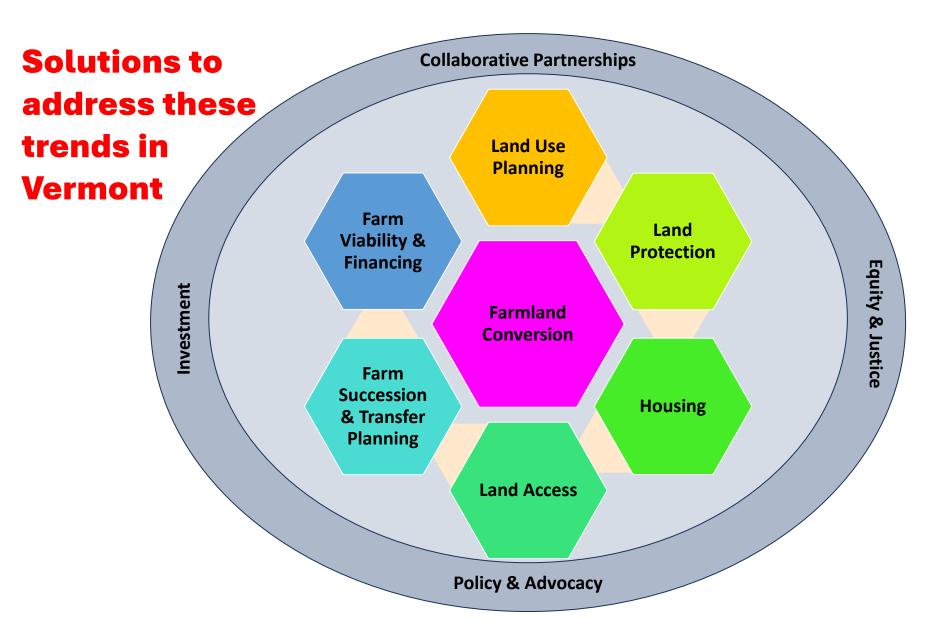
- →32% of producers are new& beginning farmers
- →9.7% of producers are young farmers





# Takeaways from data & trends

- 1. Farmland conversion is happening faster than projected
  - The vast majority of conversion is to Low Density Residential (LDR)type development
  - It is happening on the outskirts of cities and towns, primarily on hayfields, woodlands associated with farmland, and pastureland.
- 2. Farmers are aging and many don't have successors lined up
- 3. Next generation farmers struggle to afford farmland and housing
- 4. Increasing economic and climate threats further impact farm viability
- 5. Only ~15-20% of VT agricultural land is permanently protected



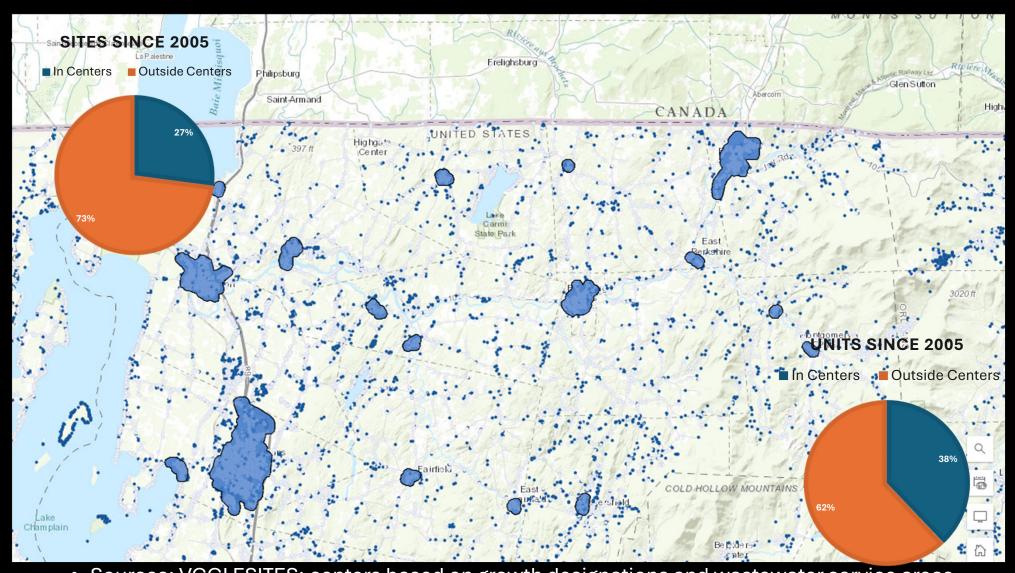




# Goals, Tiers, Targets, and Tools:

# Planning and Farmland Protection in 2025

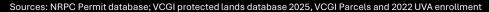
Farm to Plate Gathering November 20, 2025

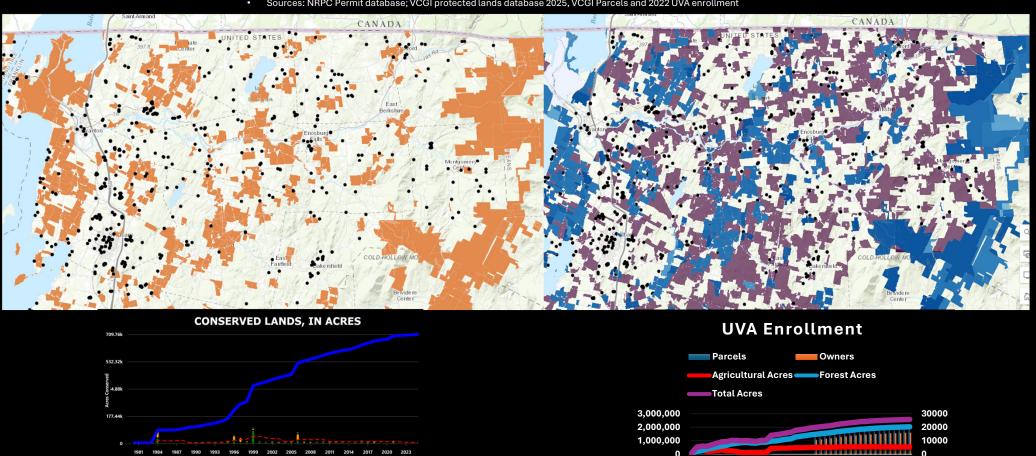


• Sources: VCGI ESITES; centers based on growth designations and wastewater service areas

# What's 'protected' already

Cumulative Acres Conserved 5-Year Moving Avg PUBLIC PRIVATE UNKNOWN

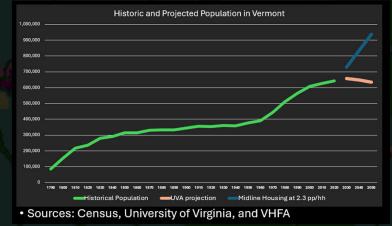




# New Statutory Framework: Tiers and Targets

Recent law (Act 181, 2024) has established housing targets and a new "Tiers" system.

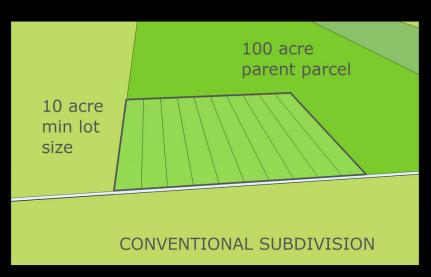
- Tier 1 (Growth Areas): Areas in designated downtowns and village centers... limited or no Act 250 review (to encourage development, especially housing).
- Tier 2 (Default Areas): Areas where existing Act 250 thresholds for development still apply.
- Tier 3 (Natural Resource Areas): Future areas with critical natural resources... that will have additional Act 250 jurisdiction and protection.



	2025-2030		2025	-2050
Region	Lower	Upper	Lower	Upper
Vermont	27,867	41,185	79,018	172,044

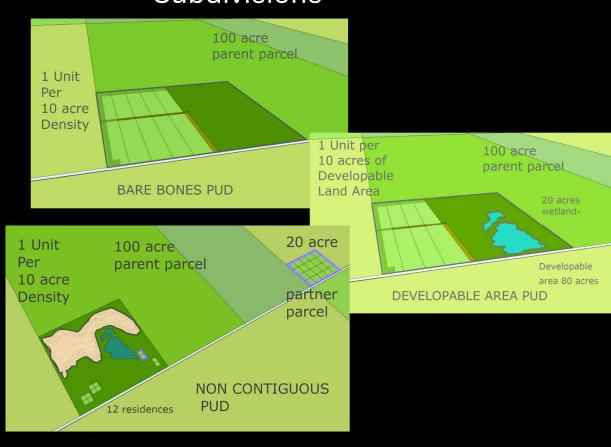
# Tools

## Conventional Subdivision



**Result:** 10 homes, but the entire 100-acre parcel is fragmented.

# PUDs or Conservation Subdivisions



**Result:** 10 homes, but portion of the parcel is protected to some degree.

Recommendations & Need for Action

- The biggest risk
  - Local actions are slow to respond to new state framework.
- Recommendations
  - Don't delay
  - Separate density from lot size
  - Consider the full range of tools
    - PUDs (Planned Unit Developments)
    - Maximum lot size/Sliding Scale Zoning
    - Subdivision definition and regs
    - New maps



**Event:** Vermont Farm to Plate, 2025 Annual Gathering

Session: Vermont Farmland Conversion: What's at Stake and What We Can Do About It

Panelist Slides: Ari Rockland-Miller, Senior Agricultural Development Coordinator, AAFM
Co-curator, F2P Land Access & Land Use Topic Exchange





\*\*To explore the Vermont Agency of Agriculture, Food and Markets, please visit: <a href="www.agriculture.vermont.gov">www.agriculture.vermont.gov</a>



# Vermont Farm to Plate, Land Access & Land Use Topic Exchange

Topic Exchange Co-Curators: Ari Rockland-Miller (AAFM) & Jess Rubin (MycoEvolve)

Farm to Plate Network Assistant: Jessica Poulin

Farm to Plate Network Manager: Hannah Baxter





# Vermont Farm to Plate, Land Access & Land Use Topic Exchange

**Description** (Excerpt from 2025 Workplan):

The Land Access and Land Use Topic Exchange helps to facilitate communication, exchange of information, and to build connectivity and relationships amongst members who share an interest and/or knowledge of land use issues that affect agriculture and food systems, including but not limited to access to farmland. This TE will work to build connectivity and find alignment across sectors. This group will identify topics of interest and explore potential solutions for the increasingly urgent issue of land access for BIPOC, new and aspiring farmers.

This group brings together the local planning community with organizations and professionals with expertise related to the financial and legal side of this issue. Members include researchers from colleges and universities, government agency staff, farmers and food producers, community leaders and other organizational representatives working to strengthen food security in Vermont.



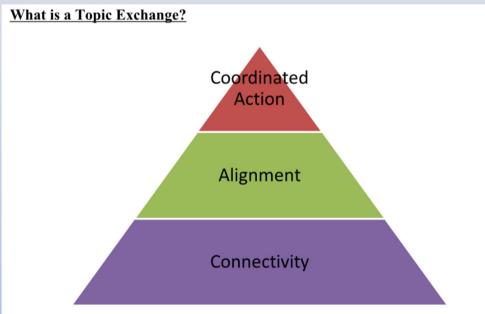
# Vermont Farm to Plate, Land Access & Land Use Topic Exchange

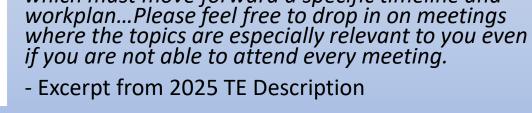
#### 2025 Vision:

The Land Access and Land Use Topic Exchange is an ongoing space that helps to facilitate communication, exchange of information, and to build connectivity and relationships amongst members who share an interest and/or knowledge of land related food system issues in Vermont. Individual members of the group will be able to place their own land use expertise and experiences within the context of broader socio-economic issues, cultural issues, regulatory issues, and other important land use considerations.



# Vermont Farm to Plate, Land Access & Land Use Topic Exchange





Having a Topic Exchange focused on connectivity and alignment without the expectation of generating "deliverables" is also intended to make

the Network more accessible to participants who

can and want to stay in the loop but cannot make commitments to specific projects or work between meetings. Membership is meant to be fluid, which

allows for drop-in participation in a way that would not be possible with the Priority Strategy teams

which must move forward a specific timeline and



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# Topic Exchanges Land Access and Land Use Topic Exchange

The Land Access and Land Use Topic Exchange helps to facilitate communication, exchange of information, and to build connectivity and relationships amongst members who share an interest and/or knowledge of land related issues in Vermont. This group will include issues previously addressed in issues previously addressed in the <a href="Financing for Farmland Access Priority Strategy Team.">Financing for Farmland Access Priority Strategy Team.</a>

Want to see more? Become a member!

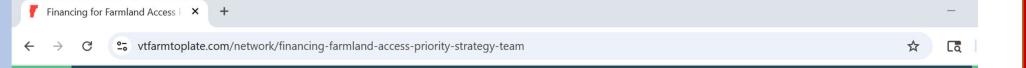
#### Curator(s)

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**All Members** 

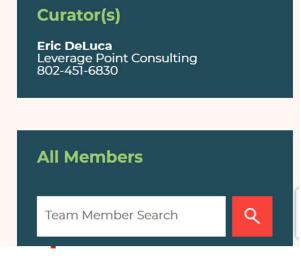
Team Member Search



# Priority Strategy Teams Financing for Farmland Access Priority Strategy Team

The Financing for Farmland Access PST (Priority Strategy Team) is focused on issues related to cost, accessibility and equity in relation to farmland in Vermont. They are tasked with implementing Priority Strategy 9 included in the **Vermont Agriculture and Food System Strategic Plan 2021-2030**: "Expand funding for existing programs dedicated to farmland access and conservation, and leverage this funding to increase land access through flexible and new ownership financing mechanisms, policies, and models....There must be a particular emphasis on the needs of beginning, socially disadvantaged, and BIPOC farmers."

Want to see more? Become a member!





# Vermont Farm to Plate, Land Access & Land Use Topic Exchange Overview of Programming to Date

- TE Kickoff meeting and collective brainstorm at 2022 F2P
   Gathering
- Virtual meeting with presentation from Samantha Langevin on Land Access & Opportunity Board (LAOB) Sunrise Report
  - Learn more about LAOB's important work and find its meeting schedule at the following link: https://vhcb.org/land-access-opportunity-board/
- In-person meeting at American Flatbread in Waitsfield with farm tour and farmworker housing focus, small panel
- Co-facilitated panel on land access, land use, climate change, food sovereignty at 2023 F2P Gathering Collaboration with Lechelle-Antonia Gray of F2P Food Security topic exchange and F2P Steering Committee

- Virtual meeting/webinar on Vermont Agriculture and Climate Change, regional food resiliency, with Ryan of VTAAFM and Brian Donahue of NEFNE
- Virtual meeting featuring guest speaker Jason Comcowich of Nuestras Raices (established in 1992) with focus on urban agriculture, community gardens, cultural foodways in Holyoke, MA
- 2025 in-person meeting and site visit in collaboration with Vermont Garden Network featuring tour of VGN's new Landry Park community greenhouse in Winooski, as well as tour of VGN's Family Room Collective Garden and New Farms for New Americans community farm at the Ethan Allen Homestead in Burlington.