




farmland

it's complicated!

No Farms, No Food® — this tagline from American Farmland Trust says it all. We all need to care about protecting farmland — and help to get a next generation of farmers on the land. Our future depends on it.

In the last 20 years, over 179,900 acres of Minnesota's agricultural lands have been paved over, fragmented, or converted to uses that remove them from agricultural use. If we continue along the same trajectory, we'll lose another 369,500 acres in the next 20 years.¹



When farmland is bulldozed for buildings and parking lots, it is permanently lost for growing food. The conversion of this land impacts: soil health, water quality, and wildlife and pollinator habitat. It also prevents emerging farmers from accessing land to run successful farm businesses.

¹America Farmland Trust's -
Farms Under Threat Report

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why we need to protect it

Protecting farmland provides multiple benefits, including:

ensuring a regional food supply



improving environmental quality



supporting the local economy



protecting wildlife habitats and open space



providing historic preservation



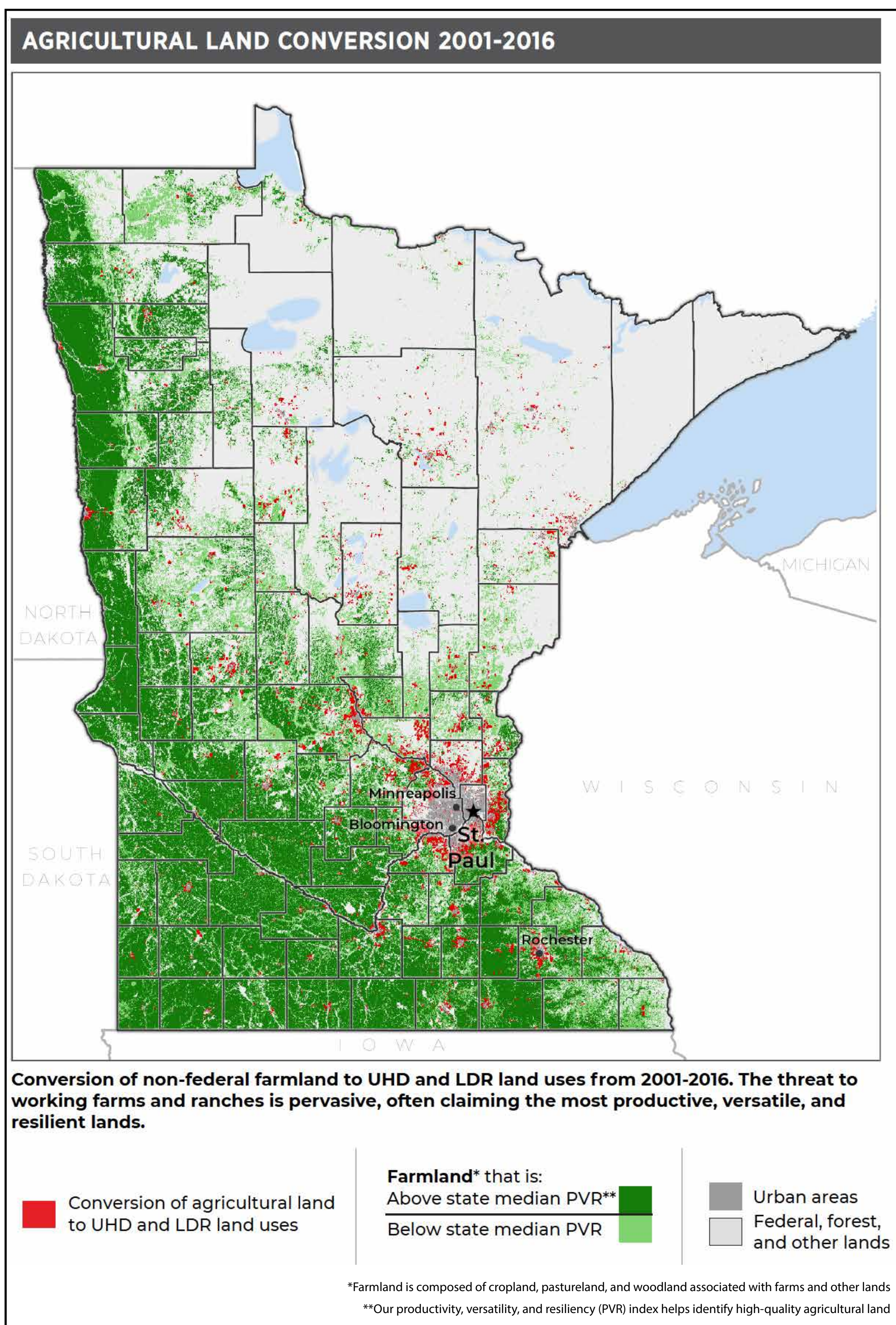
making land more affordable for emerging farmers



minnesota

state of the state

In 2020, American Farmland Trust completed a comprehensive study to understand what was happening to farmland across the country. In their *Farms Under Threat State of the States* report - they summarize the current situation for each state and make predictions of what 2040 will look like if we stay on the same trajectory. The following panels summarize their findings for Minnesota.



In MN, 179,900 acres were developed or compromised from 2001-2016. This spatial analysis shows the extent, diversity, and quality of agricultural land—and where this land has been converted to both urban and highly developed (UHD) and low-density residential (LDR) land uses. .

Urban and highly developed (UHD) land use, including commercial, industrial, and moderate-to-high-density residential areas.

Low-density residential (LDR) land use, where scattered large lot development fragments the agricultural land base and limits production, marketing, and management options for the working farms and ranches that remain.

70,200 acres

39%

of conversion was to UHD

70,200 acres

61%

of conversion was to LDR



Farms Under Threat is American Farmland Trust's multi-year initiative to document the status of and threats to U.S. farmland and ranchland and to identify policy solutions to ensure the protection and conservation of America's diverse agricultural landscape. For more information about AFT, visit www.farmland.org. If you have any questions about the analysis methods or would like access to data, please contact AFT's Farmland Information Center: www.farmlandinfo.org or (800) 370-4879.

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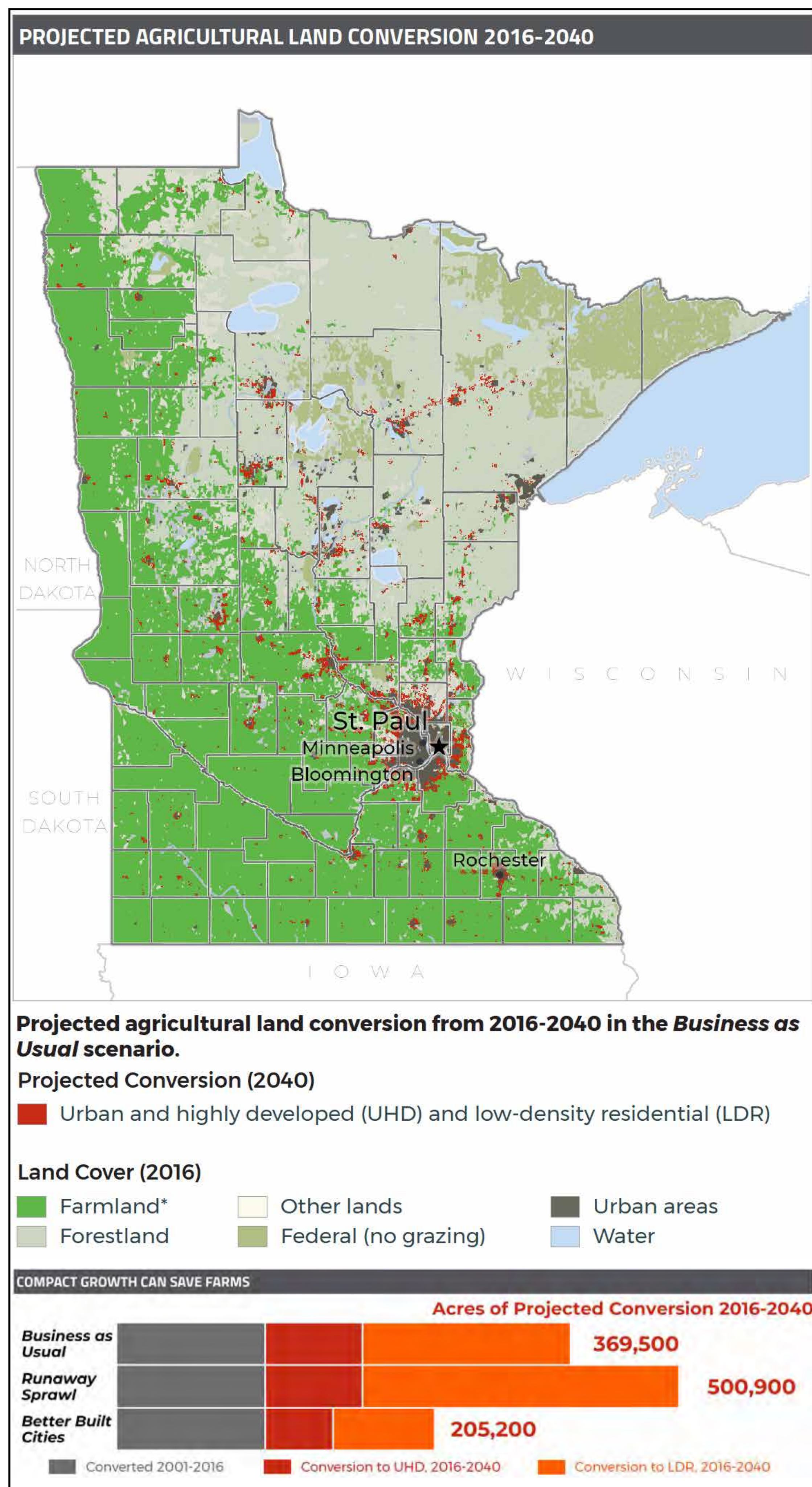


Explore our interactive maps at www.farmland.org/farmsunderthreat

minnesota

2040 future scenarios

This map identifies three scenarios of development between 2016 and 2040. Which will we choose? Minnesotans can stick to "business as usual" or slash conversion, save farmland, and safeguard the future of agriculture and the environment by making smart choices.



RECENT TRENDS

Minnesotans will pave over, fragment, or compromise **369,500 acres** of farmland.

That's the equivalent of losing **1,800 farms**, **\$253 million** in farm output, and **4,700 jobs** based on county averages.¹

WHICH FUTURE WILL WE CHOOSE?

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.



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¹ Census of Agriculture 2017

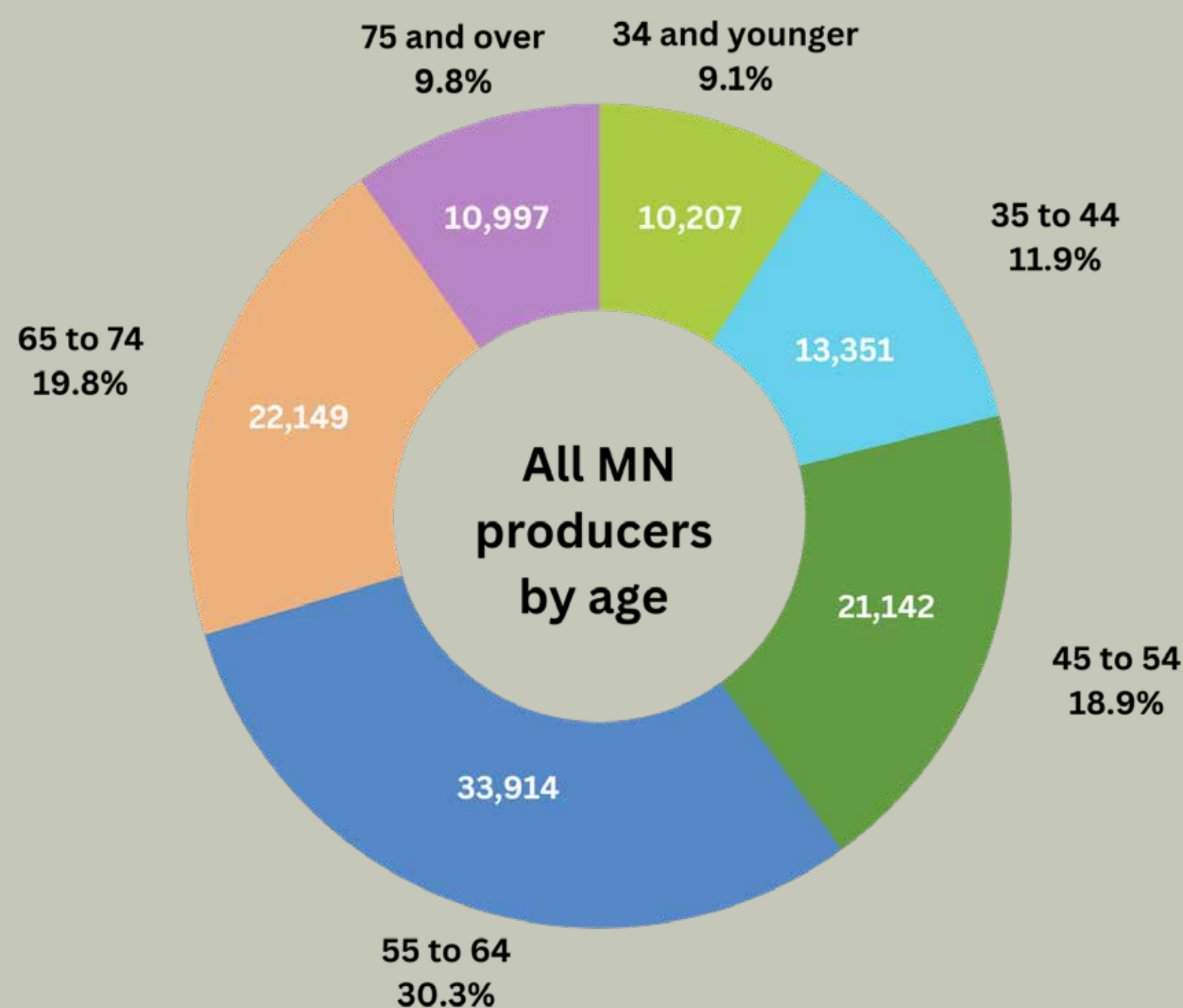
* Farmland is composed of cropland, pastureland, and woodland associated with farms and other lands

losing ground *gaining ground*

Not only do we need to preserve farmland — we need pathways to get a Next Generation of farmers on the land.

Did you know:

- The average age of a MN farmer is 57.
- The estimated age of a MN farmland owner is over 70
- 29% of MN farmers are over 65 years old
- only 9% are under 35 years old



Source: USDA National Agricultural Statistics Service, 2017 Census of Agriculture.

What is the biggest challenge for young and emerging farmers? Access to Farmland!

A 2022 survey conducted by the National Young Farmers Coalition found:

- 59% of all young farmers named finding affordable land to buy as “very or extremely” challenging.
- 65% of BIPOC (Black, Indigenous, People of Color) farmers ranked finding affordable land to buy as “very or extremely” challenging.

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why it is so hard

Land is a limited resource. Because of that, there are many entities actively looking to buy farmland. A few examples includes:

- Developers, who often have access to resources that enables them to easily purchase land to build million dollar homes.
- Investors, who know that land is unlikely to go down in value and, therefore, are willing to purchase at competitive rates.
- Large farms - who are big enough, and have deep enough pockets, that they can pay market rates because their risk is spread over thousands of acres of farmland.



These pressures make it extremely difficult for emerging farmers to access affordable, productive farmland where they can build and maintain viable businesses.

We can stick with the status quo or work towards a systems that:

- gets more farmers on the land
- prioritize farmers growing food
- supports sustainable and regenerative farming systems
- assists emerging farmers (i.e. young, beginning, Black, Indigenous, People of Color, and women farmers)

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promising solutions

Across the following kiosks, we share promising solutions for protecting farmland and helping the Next Generation of farmers access land.

Some examples include:

- Older farmers negotiating innovative transitions to young farmers
- New pathways to get farmers on the land while increasing conservation
- Groups of farmers working collaboratively to access farmland and grow their businesses
- Resources and programs that are helping to make it easier for emerging farmers to access land



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it takes a village *to transition a farm*



The Dilemma

How do farmers and landowners navigate the disparities between the need to preserve farmland and the high cost of farmland?

An Example:

For 25 years, Lynne Reeck nurtured Singing Hills Farm: 26 acres of rolling hills, prairie grasslands, and 400-year-old oaks near Northfield, MN where she raised goats and made delicious goat cheese. As she grew older, Lynne knew she had to transition out of farming and made the difficult decision to sell her beloved farm.

The property would have been an easy sell—if Lynne didn't care what happened to the land. But after decades of devoted stewardship, she wanted to transition the land to emerging farmers who would feed the community and love the land as she had.

But how would she find the right buyer? And how could they afford to pay her what she needed to pay off her farm debts and retire?



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it takes a village *to transition a farm*

The Answer

For Singing Hills Farm, the answer was the community - the community of organizations and individuals committed to transitioning land to emerging farmers, and the community of individuals who want to see farmland preserved and transitioned to emerging farmers.



Meet the Lors

Kue Lor and Bao Xiong were successful, experienced vegetable farmers. After moving to Minnesota from Laos, they farmed on rented acres for over 30 years, often driving 50+ miles between parcels. They dreamed of owning their own land, but the high prices of farmland kept that dream out of reach.

Getting back to the village:

Lynne was connected to Renewing the Countryside a Farmland Access Hub partner with connections to American Farmland Trust - who was launching a Buy/Protect/Sell program and thought they could help. The Good Acre - another partner in the Farmland Access Hub - purchased produce from the Lors and knew they were ready and interested in purchasing their own land. To make this happen - the community - including Mill City Farmers' Market, Cannon Valley Grown, and Renewing the Countryside - launched a campaign and raised the \$150,000 that was needed to place an agricultural conservation easement on the land.

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it takes a village

to transition a farm

How it worked

BUY

American Farmland Trust purchased the farm from Lynne at fair market value.

PROTECT

An agricultural easement was placed on the land which prevents it from being developed and ensures it will stay in farmland.

SELL

The Lors purchased the land at the lowered price, which helps their farm remain viable.

Now Kue and Bao live at the farm in the summer, and their daughter, son-in-law, and their kids live there year round. Lynne is retired from farming and has moved on to her next chapter of life. And the land is protected for generations.



"I really liked the option of putting an easement on the land for two big reasons. First, it makes it more affordable for an emerging farmer to come in and get started. That was a huge barrier for me and it's an even bigger barrier for small farmers now. Beyond that, the easement lives on after I'm gone, after everyone who's here is gone. That is the beauty of it. We really are trying to protect resources for the future, and we have to do that in every way that we possibly can right now."

—Lynne Reeck

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agricultural conservation easements

What is an agricultural conservation easement?

It is a legal instrument that keeps land available for farming. A landowner voluntarily places an easement on their land to protect its agricultural status.

What does the easement do?

An agricultural easement purchases the development rights from the land, limiting nonagricultural development and other uses that are likely to make the future of farming on that land economically unfeasible. An easement can also help conserve soil and water resources by encouraging the adoption of regenerative farming practices.



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agricultural conservation easements

How does it work?



A landowner voluntarily enters into an agreement with an authorized easement holder, which might be a land trust, a county, or a state agency. The landowner retains the title and management of their farm. The easement holder monitors the farm annually, ensuring the owners are following the agreed upon terms. The value of the easement is either donated by the landholder or purchased with funds from philanthropic or government sources. The easement then becomes permanently tied to the farm's deed.

The value of the easement is the difference between the market value of the land without the easement and that value once the restrictions are placed on it. Easements often serve as a financial tool that can aid in transitioning a farm to the next generation.

How do easements protect the environment?



Agricultural easements benefit the environment, and communities, by preventing conversion of productive working lands to non-agricultural uses. Easements can be written to ensure additional public benefits, such as protecting wildlife and pollinator habitat, improving soil health, and improving water quality.

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farming together

collaborative models



Accessing and caring for farmland requires significant resources and work. Back in the day (and still in some places) many farms included extended family who would show up at key times of the year when the workload got too much for a single family or when there was a really big project that required many hands.

We now live in a different era, and emerging farmers often don't have those deep-rooted community connections - but they still see the value of farming together.

Farming together allows farmers to:

- Share the cost of farmland and access larger acreages
- Save money by investing in tools, equipment and materials together
- Establish profitable markets by selling product in larger quantities
- Share resources, knowledge, responsibilities, and risk
- Increase stability and sustainability in their farming practices
- Build a resilient social network and community

Many groups have found collaboration to be a useful way to both develop farm businesses, and work towards preserving farmland.

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collaborative models

Sharing Our Roots—Community Land Share Initiative



Sharing Our Root is an educational farm in Northfield that transitioned 100 acres of mono-cropped farmland to a regenerative, commons-based incubator farm. Farmland is leased to emerging farmers who receive training and support related to climate change, markets, and regulations, and in return share their immense knowledge and experience.

www.sharing-our-roots.org

Hmong American Farmers Association - HAFA Farm



Hmong American farmers have long comprised a majority of growers at Twin Cities farmers' markets. Part of this continued success comes from the efforts of HAFA, a group of Hmong American farming families who organized to support each other through cooperative endeavors, capacity building, and advocacy. HAFA acquired land and dedicated it to a 155-acre incubator and research farm in Dakota County. Together, members have the ability to lease land close to the metro area, sell their produce in a joint CSA, build wealth, and apply a wide variety of sustainable agricultural practices.

www.hmongfarmers.com

Big River Farms - Farmer Education Program



Big River Farms is an incubator farm near Marine on St. Croix, MN that focuses on education for beginning farmers. The organization provides farmers with access to a wide array of learning options, from classes about organic production and sessions about business planning, to practicing on small plots or managing whole farm operations. Not only is the farm itself serving as much-needed accessible protected farmland, but it's also creating a space where farmers can co-learn and grow together, setting them up to spread their organic and collaborative farming practices elsewhere when they leave Big River Farms.

www.thefoodgroupmn.org

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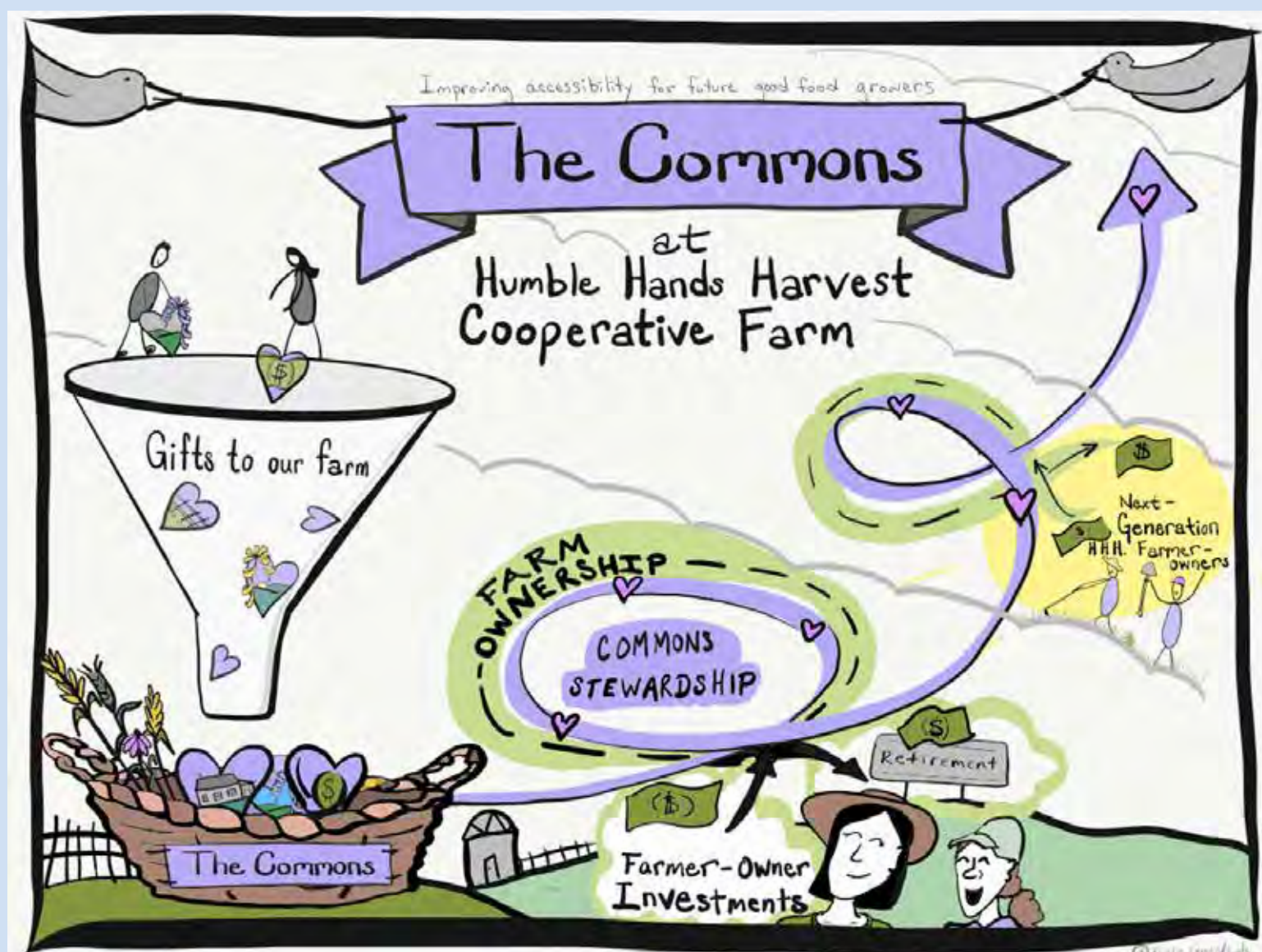
Kilimo Minnesota - Farm and Empower



Kilimo Minnesota is an organic incubator farm with a mission to empower emerging farmers of African descent, socially and economically through mentorship, farmland access navigation and community building. Kilimo Minnesota offers a three to five year hands-on training program that includes organic vegetable farming experience, group classes, networking and one-on-one business mentoring. The program, founded by and for farmers of African descent, is uniquely situated to give emerging farmers an opportunity to learn growing techniques and business skills in a new climate, country and culture while in a comfortable peer setting.

www.kilimominnesota.org

Humble Hands Harvest



Humble Hands Harvest in Decorah, Iowa is a worker-owned cooperative that grows organic vegetables, rotationally grazed sheep, and tree crops including apples and chestnuts. They accessed ownership of 22 acres of land by buying it acre by acre from a group of shareholders who had purchased the conventional cropland in order to regenerate it. When some of the shareholders gifted their shares to Humble Hands Harvest, the Commons was born: equity that

has been gifted to Humble Hands Harvest, rather than contributed by its worker-owners, is accounted for as the Commons and will be gifted to the next generation of farmers on that land. It is a step toward decommodifying the land and instead treating it as a shared resource to feed a local community.

www.humblehandsharvest.com

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farm transitions

getting a new generation on the farm

Harvey Benson Farm

Harvey Benson's 160-acre farm, south of Harmony, MN, had been in his family since the late 1800s. In his 90s, and with no children to inherit the farm, Harvey had a dilemma.



The traditional plan to auction the land to the highest bidder would have been easiest, but Harvey wanted to consider more than the bottom line. He wanted to see the land farmed in a more holistic way. His partner, Bonita, connected him to Land Stewardship Project's farm transitions resources which helped him think through his options.



Aaron and Amy Bishop, Harvey's neighbors and friends, had been looking for a small farm to rent or purchase—but they also had a dilemma: Small farms in their area rarely came up for sale and when they did they were prohibitively expensive.

Harvey, Bonita, Aaron, and Amy had shared conversations on land access and transition challenges over a number of years. As their relationship evolved, their visions intertwined and eventually they found the ideal solution in each other.

Harvey is now making it possible for Aaron and Amy to purchase his farm without taking on crippling debt. In their legally contracted plan, Harvey sold his farm to them for about half the going rate and agreed to receive payments over time rather than the full amount upfront. In return, the Bishops agree to manage the land in the more holistic way that Harvey hoped for. Harvey will remain in his house, while Amy and Aaron build another home on the property.

"Because of Harvey, we've come up with a creative way to be on the land without the capital outlay we didn't have," says Amy.

Story adapted from an article by Julie Little published in the Root River Current.

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Photo by Renee Bergstrom

farm transitions

getting a new generation on the farm



A-Frame Farm

Carmen and Sally Fernholz established A-Frame Farm in Madison, MN in 1972. Over four decades, A-frame became one of the most respected organic cropping operations in the Midwest. In 2005, they received the Organic Farmer of the Year Award from MOSES (now Marbleseed) and they've worked with the University of Minnesota with test plots for perennial crops such as Kernza.

In 2016, the Fernholzes began thinking about retirement and who might continue their legacy. Their children weren't interested in taking over the farm, but Carmen and Sally had invested a lot in the farm—it was important to them that A-Frame continue to be stewarded in regenerative ways.

Serendipitously, that spring, neighbor Luke Peterson approached Carmen about mentoring him on transitioning his own farm to organic. Carmen not only agreed, but made Luke an offer: Intern at A-Frame for 2 years and—if all goes well—take over managing the farm through a lease agreement.

Luke and his wife, Ali, are now partners in A-Frame Farm, managing 500 certified organic acres, employing practices such as cover cropping, minimal tillage, and crop livestock rotation. Their overall goal is to become self-sustaining and truly regenerative.



Photos provided by Carmen Fernholz. Luke Peterson

[Excerpts from LSP's article: <https://landstewardshipproject.org/farm-transitions-that-farm-on-highway-40/> By Brian DeVore]

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“America’s irreplaceable farmland grows our food. It also supports a trillion dollar/year agriculture economy. Farmland is the foundation of our rural communities, providing jobs, recreational opportunities, and a deep connection to the land. Farmland nurtures our spirits and souls. Well-managed farmland supports wildlife and biodiversity, cleans our water, increases resilience to natural disasters like floods and fires, and helps combat climate change. It’s now clear that we can’t realize global climate goals only by reducing emissions, that we also need to retain farmland and actively manage it to draw down carbon from the air.

In all senses of the word, farmland sustains us.”

– American Farmland Trust



Renewing the Countryside thanks our Partners



PowerUp is a community wellness initiative from HealthPartners. It improves the health of members, patients and families with programs, tools and resources to promote eating better, moving more and feeling good, including healthy recipes, activities and games for kids and educational videos.



The Farmland Access Hub is a consortium of partners including non-profits, government agencies, local companies, and private citizens dedicated to assisting beginning farmers with their quest for land tenure.

and for the support from

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Illustrations by Khou Vue