

Session 11: Farmland Conservation: Model for Beginning Farmers and Local Food Networks

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Heart of the Lakes:

Michigan's Eroding Farm Land
Between 2007-2012 we've lost 83,243 acres of farmland (2 acres per hour)
56,014-52,194 farms

Biggest challenge that beginning farmers face: finding and accessing land

Preserving Farm Land

- Conservation easements
- Local government purchase of development rights programs
- Term easements
 - o Farmland development right agreement (PA 116)
 - o FarmAbility

Michigan's Farmland & Open Space Preservation Program

- Ag Preservation Fund

Innovation in Northwest Michigan:

Work on private farmland conservation by facilitating conservation easements
Voluntary, incentive-based approaches to permanent land protection
Perpetual deed restrictions
Keep land open and available for agriculture

Largely federal funded: agricultural conservation easement program; regional conservation partnership program

FarmAbility:

Emerged through trial and failure to pass county farmland preservation bond
Served as vital source for outreach and engagement with community
Approximately 900 FarmAbility acres eventually permanently protected

Beyond Conservation Easements:

Conservation easements are expensive, require a generous and flexible timeframe, and need willing participants

Farm Transitions:

Over 90% of principal farm operators don't have an exit strategy or knowledge of how to develop one as they look towards transitioning out of farm ownership

Semi-structured cost-share program

Farmer to Farmer (F2F):

Finding available land is one of the greatest challenges facing beginning farmers

- Online platform for buyers and sellers, lessors, lessees, and employers and employees to meet
- Serve as a database for other resources: financial services; federal, state, and local ag grants; regional events, etc.

Tamarack Holdings- "Building Community Through Better Food"

- Cherry capital foods
- Earthy delights
- TLC hydroponics
- Up North Distributing
- 1) Develop and manage programs that build capacity
- 2) Focus- programs related to the preservation of farmland and farming
 - a. Promoting and advancing efforts related to new agribusiness

Farmland Investment Program

- Increasingly private investors are investing in farms and farmland
- More and more of these efforts are employing a "triple bottom line" framework
 - o Not just financial returns, but social and environmental returns as well
- This type of program has been discussed in the Grand Traverse Region for more than 15 years as a means to aid in utilizing farmland preservation as a succession tool.

West MI Fruitbelt Farmland Investment Program

- Purchase farms that have no succession plan or heirs
- Focus on most threatened land (orchards)
- Protect land with conservation easement- improve with high-value crops
- Works hand-in-hand with "farmer to farmer" and other regional efforts to sell land back to farmer after investments are recouped.

Regional Collaboration: NW MI Food and Farming Network

Vehicle for people in the food and farming system to:

- Collectively support one another
- Share ideas and projects
- Create synergy towards advancing the health of our regional food system