



You can save
*Rhode
Island's*
working farms

Why you should
& how you can

A precarious situation...

Rhode Island has lost more than 80% of our productive farmland since the 1940s, sharply hindering the agricultural economy – an economic engine; reducing our access to fresh, locally-grown foods; and threatening the character of Rhode Island's communities.

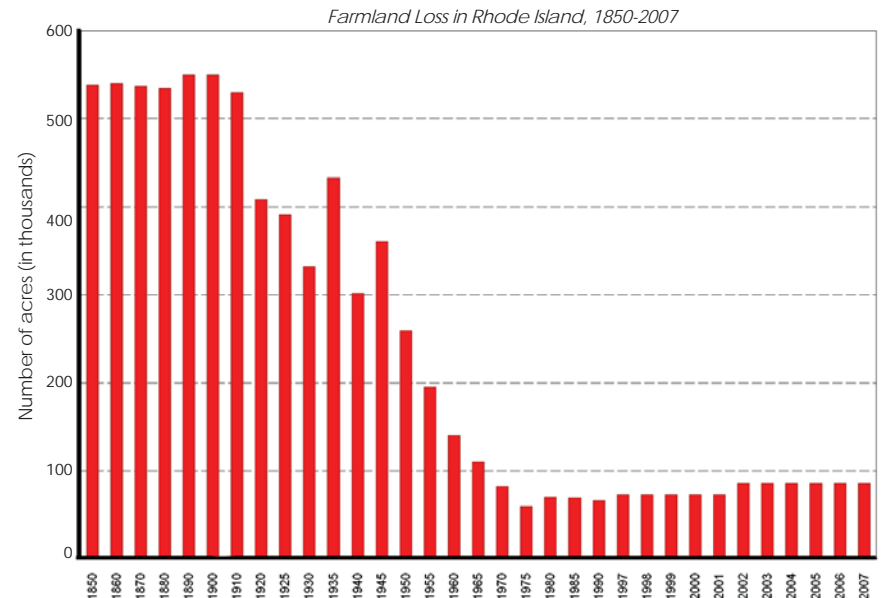


The future of working farms in Rhode Island is threatened

The challenges:

- Shortage of land and infrastructure
- The most expensive farmland in America
- Aging farmers
- Complex tangle of regulations
- Loss of support infrastructure

...and that's just a start!



Source: RIDEM Division of Agriculture, January, 2008

More than 80% of the state's farmland is gone

In 1940, Rhode Island had 300,000 acres in agriculture production. **Today, only 67,800 acres remain in farms** and less than 40,000 of that is in agricultural production (28,500 acres are in woodlands, wetlands, etc.). The state has lost more than 80% of its farmland to sprawling development and forests that have grown up on abandoned fields and pastures.

Farmland prices are the highest in the nation

In 2010, Rhode Island farmland averaged \$13,600 per acre, highest in the nation, almost triple the average value of \$4,690 for farmland in the Northeast, and more than six times higher than the national average value for farmland of \$2,140.

Rhode Island farmland is expensive because it is an attractive target for development for several reasons:

1. Farmland has few constraints and is the easiest land to develop.
2. Much of Rhode Island's prime farmland is near the shore with highly-desired waterfront, water-view properties, and/or with close proximity to beaches.
3. Costs per acre of farmland are extremely high from a farmer's perspective compared to its development value.

Rhode Island's farmers are aging, yet most do not have plans for transferring their farms to the next generation of farmers



Rhode Island's farmers are aging and many are nearing retirement age. In 2007, **more than one in four (28%) were older than 65 years old.**

Yet, based on surveys, few have made plans for the transition of their farm to the next generation or to another farmer when they retire or die.

Without planning, the transition becomes a crisis for their families and for the communities that are trying to preserve working farms. Some older farmers are forced to sell their farms to get the cash equity they need to fund their retirement. Other farmers can't afford to pay the market rate for the retiree's farmland.

In the case of death, estate taxes on high-value farmland often require a family to sell the farm or part of the farm to pay their inheritance taxes.

Regulations & easements can block innovation and adaptation

Some municipal regulations – and even language in some conservation easements – can prevent farmers from adopting new and innovative farming and business practices they need to maintain the economic viability of their farm.

We've lost farming infrastructure

During the past seventy years, while the state was losing the majority of its farmland, it also lost much of its support infrastructure, such as local suppliers for farm equipment, seed and fertilizer, and local processing facilities for produce.

As a result, it's more difficult for Rhode Island farmers to obtain services and they have higher costs for supplies and processing their produce than farmers in other states.



Farmers are "waiting in the wings," but...

Both current and many new farmers are looking for land to farm in Rhode Island. But they can't find any. When they do, it's too expensive.

Farming is a business: high land costs can keep a farm from being economically viable by raising the price of products so high that consumers simply won't buy them.

Leasing land, especially from supportive "landlords," is more affordable. However, leasing doesn't offer farmers the stability they get with ownership.





Three key reasons why we need to save Rhode Island's working farms

Agriculture is an essential part of Rhode Island. Farms add so much to the quality of life and define the very fabric and character of our communities. What would Rhode Island be without spring strawberries, summer corn, apple picking, fall pumpkins, roadside farmstands, maple sugar shacks, local dairy farms, native honey, and so much more?

1. A key economic engine



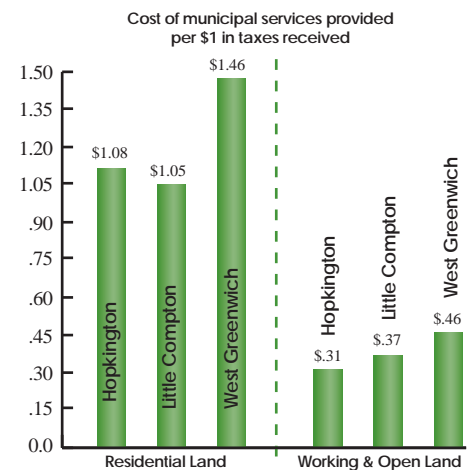
Agriculture and local foods are a growing segment of Rhode Island's economy. Young farmers are starting new farms and farmers' market sales are increasing. Agriculture generates over \$170 million in direct sales. About 85% comes from food crops and nursery products; the other 15% from animal and dairy products.

Working farms support an additional \$97 million in jobs, supplies, purchases, and other business expenditures related to agriculture.

2. A bargain in local taxes (vs. sprawling development)

Municipalities have strong incentives for keeping farms in operation. Farms are small businesses that provide jobs, pay taxes, and contribute to the community's economy and sense of place. Yet, farms require minimal municipal services.

A new residential subdivision, replacing a farm, costs towns more than \$1 in services for every \$1 in new tax revenue generated. In contrast, farms require less than 50¢ in services for every \$1 in taxes they pay.



3. Fresh, safe, locally grown products for Rhode Island families

Rhode Island grows less than 1% of the food we eat. The other 99% of our food is grown, mass produced and packaged thousands of miles away and is loaded with preservatives and transportation costs.

We can reverse this trend. Rhode Islanders can purchase everything locally, including: fruits and vegetables, dairy products, flowers, wool, hay, meat and honey, while knowing they are getting fresh, safe produce and growing a more sustainable economy.



Three ways that we are already making a difference

Rhode Island residents are voting “YES” with their wallets & at the ballot box

Rhode Islanders are already supporting local farmers in the best way they can: they’re buying their products and they vote for farm conservation bond issues – whenever possible.

Among the facts: The number of farmers’ markets in Rhode Island increased from two in 1985 to more than forty in 2011. Six are now open year round. Hundreds of Rhode Islanders visit local farmers’ markets every week.

Families are also buying “shares” in CSAs, Community Supported Agriculture operations. They pay a fee upfront for the farmer's investment in seeds, land preparation and cultivation; then they receive “shares” from the weekly harvest.

And Rhody Fresh is a model of success. Rather than ship their milk hundreds of miles to market, Rhode Island farmers formed the Rhode Island Dairy Farms Cooperative in 2004 to guarantee fresh, hormone-free milk produced just minutes away from the consumer.

Land and farm conservation bonds have been approved by voters since the first one in 1985. A 2010 voter opinion survey found that more voters support farmland bond issues than other bond issues for transportation, higher education, affordable housing, and historic preservation.

Local farm produce is supplying healthy school lunches

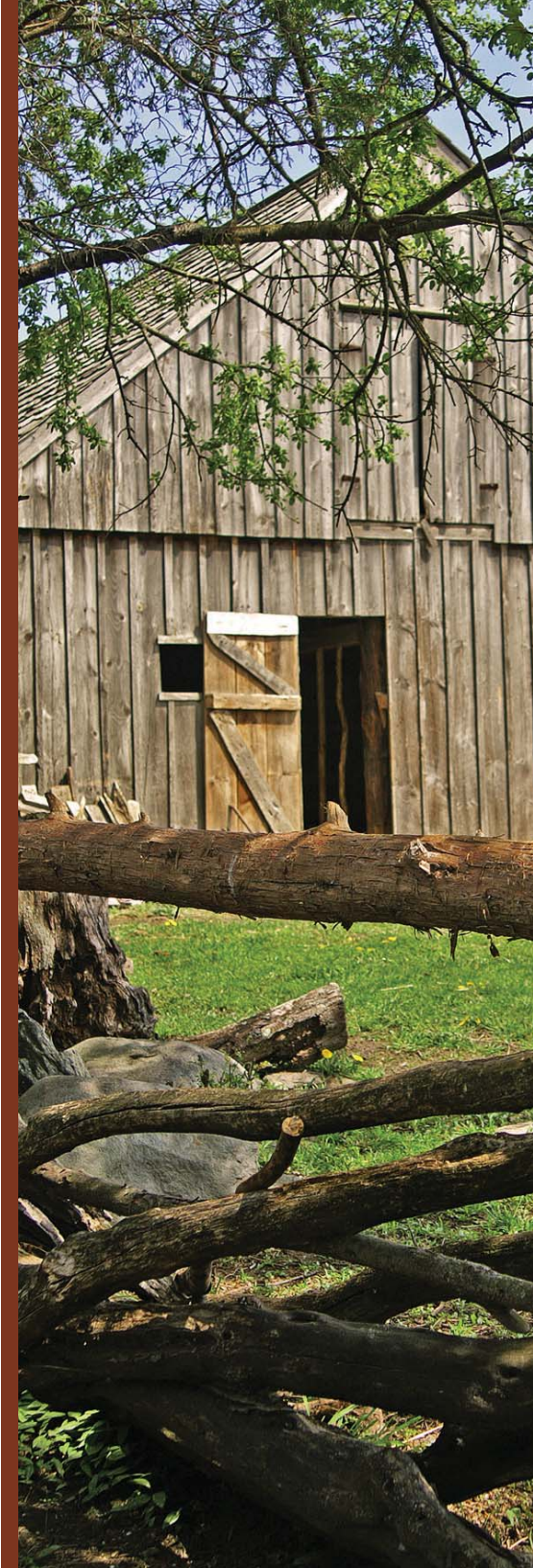
The Farm To School Project is a collaboration of state agencies, public and independent schools, and farmers. **All 36 Rhode Island school districts are purchasing and serving locally-grown fruits and vegetables to their students**, from potatoes and apples to eggs and purple cauliflower. Farm To School also provides field trips and chef demonstrations for students, teachers and food service staff.

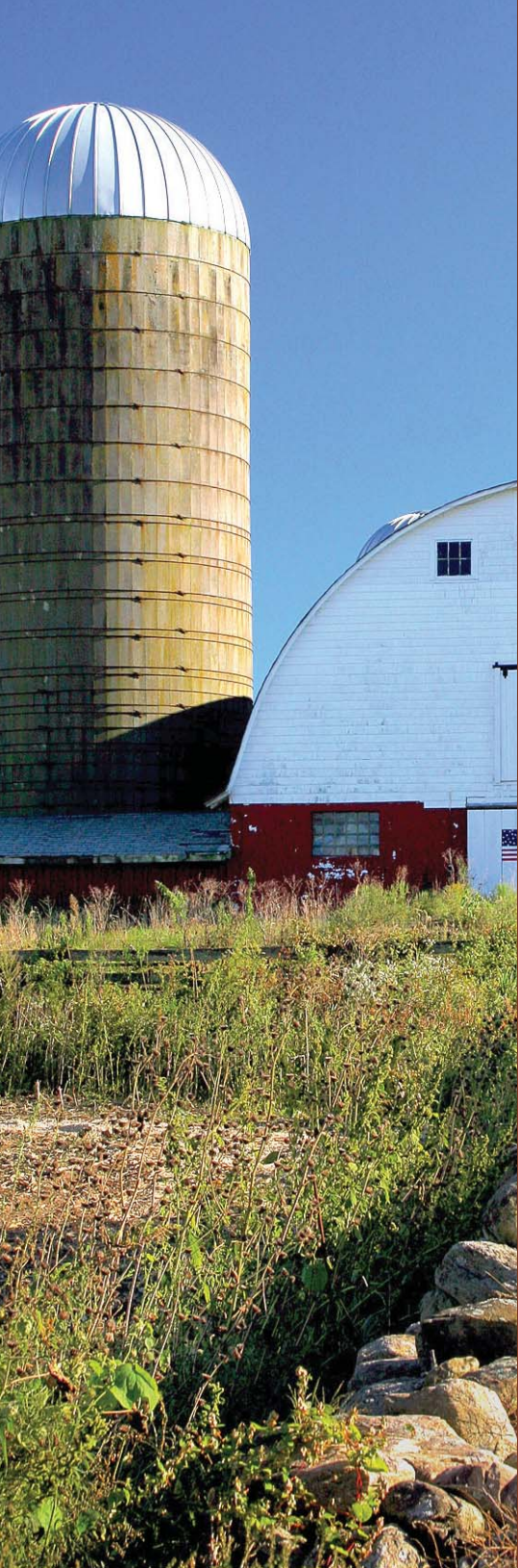
The winners? Everyone: children’s nutrition, sustainable agriculture, open space efforts and the quality of Rhode Island’s environment.

Land trusts help protect farms & keep them in production

Land trusts are working successfully with farmers, municipalities, and state and federal farmland conservation programs to protect farms in many communities. Farmland conservation programs purchase the farm’s development rights and provide farmers with equity for their land without having to sell the farm for development. The result: a conservation easement that guarantees farmers that the land they love and have farmed for years will always be used for agriculture. Some land trusts actually purchase farmland and lease it to farmers.

Since 1985, Rhode Island’s farmland protection program, land trusts and others have protected more than 10,000 acres of farmland. **Efforts continue to protect more of the remaining 30,000 acres of farmland that are still at risk.**





What you can do as a Policymaker to save Rhode Island's working farms

If you are an elected official, a municipal official, or sit on a board that deals with land and/or farm issues, you can play a key role saving farmland and the state's working farms.



Advocate for resources for the RI Island Division of Agriculture & the URI Cooperative Extension

Rhode Island's farmers rely on these agencies for technical assistance, education, marketing and other good advice.



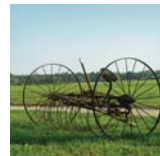
Initiate state and local bonds to protect our remaining farmland

Protecting farmland is a wise investment in the state's economy and quality of life. State and local funds provide the necessary match to take advantage of Federal farmland protection funds.



Support improvements to the state's Farmland Protection Program

It's not enough to protect farmland. We need to make sure it stays in production and is affordable for farmers.



Encourage farmers to plan for their successor & the future of their farms

As farmers approach retirement or death, their farm's future is at risk. Advance planning for a transition is essential to continue the farm's operation.



Adopt farm-friendly municipal regulations

Local regulations can be a barrier to farm viability. Councils, boards, commissions, and planning committees need to include the farmer's perspective to ensure pro-agriculture policies and ordinances. This is especially important for farmers growing produce in more urban municipalities.



Improve communications between farmers and the community

Help Rhode Islanders understand the business of farming. Municipalities can avoid conflicts and ensure greater understanding between farmers and their neighbors by proactively fostering dialogue.

Photographs throughout the brochure courtesy of Steve and Judi Wood.

Inset photograph of the vineyard, page 1; insets #2 and #4 on page 5; and insets # 2 and #3 on page 6 courtesy of Nat Rea.

What you can do as a *Consumer* to save Rhode Island's working farms

With every purchase you make, you support the local economy, encourage good nutrition, and protect the community's character created by working farms. We have to protect Rhode Island's farmland to guarantee a strong supply of local fruits, vegetables, dairy, and other key products. Your actions make a difference:



Buy locally whenever possible

You have so many opportunities to support the local economy and eat well! Buy from farmers' markets, join a CSA, frequent farmstands...the options are endless!



Support farm-friendly municipal ordinances

Sometimes, unintentionally, city and town ordinances can make it difficult for farms to stay in business. Ask your elected officials to review your community's laws to ensure they are farm friendly.



Visit local farms

Trips to farms are the best way to teach your kids where their food comes from. Go apple or berry picking, visit a corn maze, pumpkin patch, and Christmas tree farm. Help milk a cow or find eggs.



Ask your stores, schools & favorite restaurants to use local produce

Ensure you'll always have fresh, healthy food choices by telling the businesses you patronize and your children's schools that you prefer local produce. When enough customers speak up, you are heard.



Support state and local bonds for farmland protection

Public investment in farmland protection is an investment in the future. It ensures that farms will always be in your community and, at the same time, controls municipal costs and saves you tax dollars.



Support land trusts & Rhode Island's farmland protection program

Join and work with your local land trust to help farmers protect their farmland and keep it in production.



Time is running out...

*“The greatest challenge I face trying to farm in Rhode Island
is finding the land to farm.”*

- Young Rhode Island Farmer



Inside:

- **6 actions Policymakers & Consumers** can take to help save Rhode Island's working farms.



Learn more about farm issues & solutions:

Watch:

“Agriculture in Rhode Island” at www.RILandTrusts.org

Download free reports:

“FarmRI 2.0: Crafting the next generation of initiatives for saving Rhode Island's working farms” at www.RILandTrusts.org

Five-Year Strategic Plan for Rhode Island Agriculture at www.rhodyag.com