

When American Farmland Trust started 30 years ago, most communities were just waking up to the dangers of farmland loss, and few had taken action. Now, farmland protection is a national movement. Public and private efforts to preserve farm and ranch land are underway from coast to coast—and have protected well over three million acres.

During the past three decades, American Farmland Trust has nurtured these burgeoning efforts across the country. Sharing resources and advice. Researching what works and why. Guiding the development of conservation programs. Using our megaphone to raise awareness and to call for more conservation funding. And in some cases, even launching new on-the-ground organizations to advance the cause.

Along the way, we learned there is no one-size-fits-all solution to the problem of farmland loss. In the pages that follow, we present you with ten pioneering people, places and partnerships of farmland protection—all with their own stories about how innovation and perseverance made all the difference. This represents just a small slice of the many farmers, leaders and citizens working tirelessly around the country to save the land that sustains us.

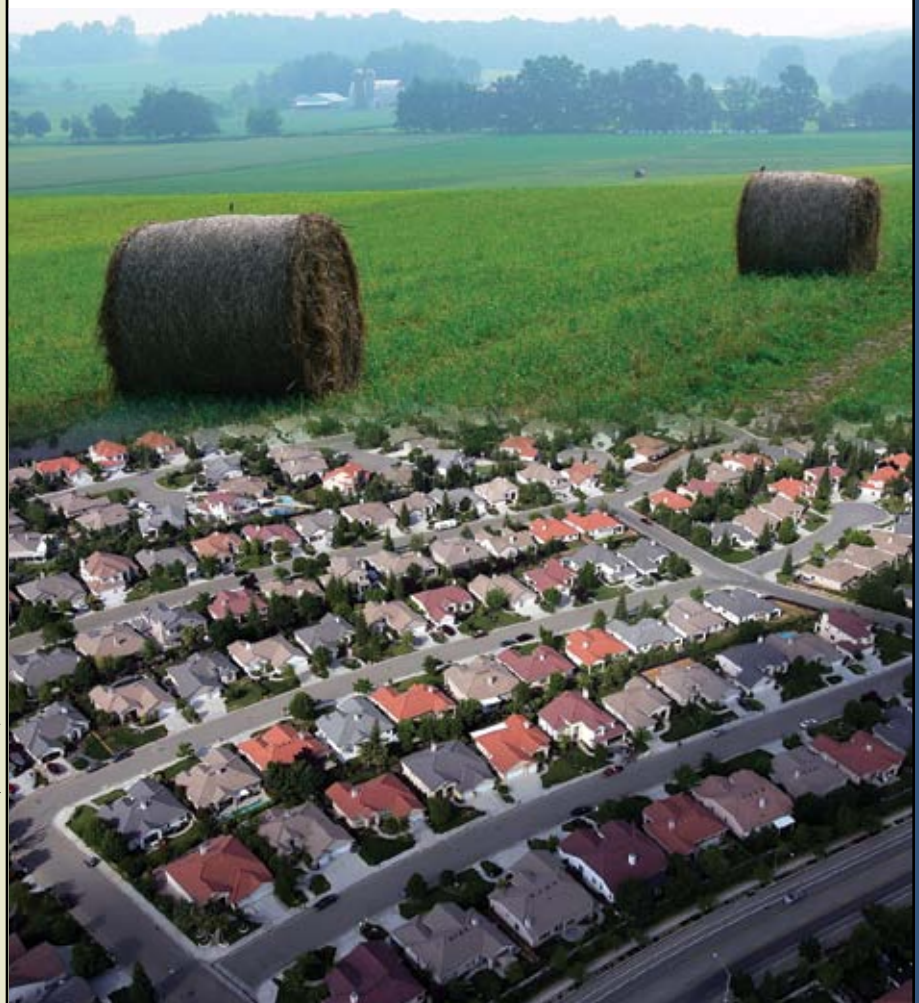
Top: Kline Farm, a preserved farm in Mt. Hope, Ohio

Bottom: A residential development cuts into farmland along the San Joaquin River, California.

FARMLAND PROTECTION TRAILBLAZERS

10 *People, Places & Partnerships Making a Difference*

BY KIRSTEN FERGUSON



BOTTOM: MARCIO JOSE SANCHEZ/AP PHOTO. TOP: ABRAM KAPLAN

Why Save Farmland?

Every minute of every day, we lose two acres of agricultural land to sprawling development. Over the past 20 years, the average acreage per person for new housing almost doubled—with our best agricultural soils being developed the fastest.

National Economy and World Food Security

The U.S. food and farming system contributes nearly **\$1 trillion to our national economy**—more than 13 percent of the gross domestic product—and employs 17 percent of the labor force. World consumers of U.S. agricultural exports are expected to increase their purchases in the future. With a rapidly increasing world population and expanding global markets, saving American farmland is a prudent investment in the world food supply and the nation's economic future.



VETTA COLLECTION/ISTOCKPHOTO

Protection of the Environment

Well-managed agricultural land supplies important goods and services for our environment. Farm and ranch land provides food and cover for wildlife, helps control flooding, protects wetlands

and watersheds and maintains air quality. And new energy crops have the potential to replace some of our fossil fuels.

Fresh Local Food and Strong Communities

Farms closest to our cities, and directly in the path of development, produce much of our fresh food—**an astounding 91 percent of our fruit and 78 percent of our vegetables**. And for many Americans, compelling reasons for saving farmland have to do with protecting the quality of life in their communities—scenic and cultural landscapes, farmers markets, recreational opportunities, local jobs and community businesses.

Healthy Local Economies

New development requires services such as schools, roads and fire/police protection, while privately owned and managed agricultural land requires very few services. Cost of Community Services (COCS) studies show that—**nationwide—farm, forest and open lands more than pay for the municipal services they require**, while taxes on residential uses, on average, fail to cover costs.



JOHN CROSS/AP PHOTO/THE MANKATO FREE PRESS

Martin and Loretta Jaus on their organic dairy farm near Gibbon, Minnesota

4. PENINSULA TOWNSHIP Michigan

After launching 20 years ago, farmland protection efforts in Peninsula Township soared, transforming the agricultural industry in ways no one imagined.

The alarm sounded in the late 1980s for this skinny peninsula in Lake Michigan when a prominent farm was developed—its orchards ripped out for upscale homes and condos. Next, the 507-acre Murray Farm, located at the tip of Old Mission Peninsula—which has a micro-climate ideal for growing fruit like cherries, apples and grapes—came up for sale.

“Everyone thought if the Murray Farm went down, farms would fall like dominoes. It would have eroded confidence among the agricultural community,” says Brian Bourdages of the Grand Traverse Regional Land Conservancy.

Farmer and township board supervisor Rob Manigold turned to American Farmland Trust for help. AFT stepped in and bought the land, holding it until Michigan Department of Natural Resources could take it over.

Township officials then drafted AFT to help them create a purchase of development rights program to protect farmland. Thanks to the tireless efforts of Manigold and planner Gordon Hayward, Peninsula Township celebrated the 15th anniversary of its program last year. During that time, more than 5,000 acres of land have been protected—nearly one-third of the peninsula’s land mass.

“One of the benefits we’ve seen is a really vibrant, stable agricultural community,” says Bourdages. The increase in capital available to farmers from the program has allowed them to make investments in higher value



A grape harvester in a Pinot gris vineyard on Michigan’s Old Mission Peninsula

TYLER SIFE/AP PHOTO/TRaverse CITY RECORD/EALE

crops, such as wine grapes, fresh market apples and hand-picked sweet cherries.

The program also had a stimulating effect on farmland protection efforts throughout the region. “Given what’s going on with manufacturing, people in the Midwest are starting to realize the economic importance of agriculture,” Bourdages says. “Peninsula Township was a catalyst for many of the local farmland protection programs in Michigan. Farmers here who protected their land are still getting calls from farmers all over the region saying, ‘Tell me what you did.’”



A view of Lake Michigan’s Grand Traverse Bay from protected land growing Riesling grapes at Chateau Grand Traverse winery

GRAND TRAVERSE REGIONAL LAND CONSERVANCY