LP5 Land Assessment
Resource List

Site assessment involves several steps and some detective work. Beginning farmers and ranchers can start by collecting information, but it is just as important to visit the site and keep track of what they find. Land seekers also may need experts to help them assess specific issues such as the condition of buildings, soils or water quality. Here are tools and resources to support land assessment. Most are included in the LP 5 Land Assessment Information Sheet, which will be handed out to participants.

DATA SOURCES

***2017 Census of Agriculture,* USDA National Agricultural Statistics Service, 2019**
https://www.nass.usda.gov/Publications/AgCensus/2017/Full_Report/Volume_1,_Chapter_1_US/usv1.pdf
The Census of Agriculture provides a comprehensive summary of agricultural activity nationwide. It is the only source of uniform, comprehensive data about U.S. farms and ranches at the state and county level, including information about types of farm and ranch operations in different geographies.

***Population Web Page,* United States Census Bureau**
https://www.census.gov/topics/population.html
The Census Bureau provides information about the nation's population. Statistics come from the decennial censuses, which count the entire U.S. population every ten years, along with several other surveys. This page includes links to population estimates and projections for different geographies.

ONLINE TOOLS

***Climate Data Web Page,* National Resources Conservation Service**
https://www.nrcs.usda.gov/wps/portal/wcc/home/
This Web page provides information about climate patterns, water and soil moisture conditions.

Google Earth
https://google.com/earth/
Google Earth provides recent and past satellite imagery of Earth.

***Plant Hardiness Zone Map,* USDA Agricultural Research Service**
https://planthardiness.ars.usda.gov/
This site provides information about plant hardiness zones nationwide. The interactive maps enable users to find their own plant hardiness zone.

***USDA Geospatial Data Gateway,* Natural Resources Conservation Service, Farm Service Agency and Rural Development**
https://datagateway.nrcs.usda.gov/
The Geospatial Data Gateway (GDG) provides access to a map library of over 100 high resolution vector and raster layers in the Geospatial Data Warehouse. It allows you to choose your area of interest, browse and select data, customize the format, then review and download.

***Web Soil Survey,* USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service**
https://websoilsurvey.sc.egov.usda.gov/App/HomePage.htm
The Web Soil Survey (WSS) provides soil data and information produced by the National Cooperative Soil Survey. NRCS provides soil maps and data online for more than 95 percent of the nation's counties. Soil

surveys can be used for general farm, local, and wider area planning. Onsite investigation is needed in some cases, such as soil quality assessments and certain conservation and engineering applications.

OTHER RESOURCES

Conservation Districts

Conservation districts are local units of government established under state law to carry out natural resource management programs. District staff can give land seekers maps, help beginning farmers and ranchers evaluate soils and develop conservation plans. The National Association of Conservation Districts has a directory of the 3,000 districts across the country. To find a conservation district visit: http://www.nacdnet.org/general-resources/conservation-district-directory/

Cooperative Extension System

https://nifa.usda.gov/land-grant-colleges-and-universities-partner-website-directory

The Cooperative Extension System is a nationwide, non-credit educational network. Each state and U.S. territory has a state office at its land-grant university and a network of field offices with specialists who provide useful, research-based information about local agriculture, agricultural services and markets and may assist with soil testing. Use this link to find Extension specialists.

Local Government Offices

County and municipal offices house a wealth of information on local land use policy as well as individual parcels. They also have experts who can talk to land seekers about community conditions or site-specific issues, such as an assessor, building inspector or planner. Many have information available online, but it is also a good idea to visit in person. Here is a list of the kinds of information land seekers can collect from a county or municipal office:

- Ownership
- Property taxes
- Easements, liens and other restrictions
- Maps and photos
- Local comprehensive/master plan and other community plans
- Zoning maps
- Ordinances, zoning and other local policies that affect agriculture

Real Estate Agents

Real estate agents are licensed to help customers buy, sell and rent properties. They can provide parcel specific information and data about sale prices, local tax rates and community amenities.

Society of Rural Appraisers and Farm Managers

http://www.asfmra.org/directory/find-experts2

This link provides a directory of members of the American Society of Farm Managers and Rural Appraisers is a professional association for rural property land experts, with more than 2,100 members nationwide. Members can help beginning farmers and ranchers evaluate land, develop a management plan and determine if the price is reasonable.

USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service

https://www.nrcs.usda.gov/wps/portal/nrcs/detail/national/contact/local/?cid=nrcsdev11_000242

NRCS is an agency within the United States Department of Agriculture that helps farmers and ranchers manage and conserve natural resources. NRCS conservationists can offer land seekers technical and

financial assistance including help developing and implementing conservation plans. They usually can be found in USDA service centers. This link provides a service center locator.

Water Quality Testing

If the site receives water from a public water system, land seekers can obtain a water quality report from the local water authority. These reports are produced annually and contain information on contaminants found, possible health effects and the water's source. If the site has a private water source, a local health department may help beginning farmers and ranchers test for bacteria or nitrates. If not, land seekers can have your water tested by a state certified laboratory: http://www.epa.gov/safewater/labs.

PRINT MATERIALS

***Farm Rental Assessment Checklist,* University of Vermont Extension, 2010**

http://www.uvm.edu/newfarmer/land/checklist.pdf

This fact sheet includes a checklist with items to consider when evaluating a site to lease, additional information about some of the items on the checklist and a list of related resources. Many of the items also would apply to site assessment for a land purchase.

***Farmland Assessment Checklist,* Penn State Extension**

https://extension.psu.edu/farmland-assessment-checklist

This checklist includes a list of considerations for farmers to think about when evaluating properties to lease, a comprehensive description of each item and why it is important and list of additional resources. Many of the items also would apply to site assessment for a land purchase.

***Finding Good Farmland: How to Evaluate and Acquire Land for Raising Crops and Animals,* Ann Larkin Hansen, 2013**

http://www.storey.com/books/finding-good-farmland/

This practical guide contains information you need to have before purchasing farmland, covering everything from the characteristics of the land (soil type, slope, water sources, drainage) and the surrounding area to permits, codes, taxes, roads, loans, mortgages, government assistance programs and more. Checklists and questionnaires are included.

***Growing Local: A Community Guide to Planning for Agriculture and Food Systems,* American Farmland Trust, 2017**

https://farmlandinfo.org/publications/growing-local-a-community-guide-to-planning-for-agriculture-and-food-systems/

The Guide provides a history of food system planning, offers principles and practices and a comprehensive toolbox of programs and policies. It can help individuals recognize community support for agriculture.

***Vineyard Site Assessment Checklist*, Rutgers Cooperative Extension, 2012**

http://sustainable-farming.rutgers.edu/vineyard-site-assessment-checklist/

This checklist includes factors that affect site selection for successful wine grape growing and provides a short list of additional resources.