

## RIDEM Farmland Access Program Fact Sheet

Farmland values in Rhode Island are among the **highest in the country and lack of access** to affordable farmland threatens the continued viability of local agriculture. Over the past several years, DEM has experienced a growing interest from both expanding and new farmers seeking affordable land to farm.

While DEM has participated in many efforts to connect farmers to land – LandLink Programs, contacting owners of preserved farmlands to find land for sale or lease, posting of available farmland for sale and making some of its State owned properties available for farming - many **farmers seek ownership** in land in order to plan long term and invest in land and soil improvements.

Modeled after programs in Vermont, Massachusetts and other states across the country, DEM is establishing its own **voluntary Farmland Access Program** to support the growth of RI's agricultural economy by providing **affordable access** to farmers. The Program will purchase farmland from willing sellers, protect it, and then affordably sell it to qualified farmers.

Funds for this program come from **2014 and 2018 voter approved bond referendums** which provided \$5 million to implement this program. Under the Program rules, DEM purchases unprotected farmland from a **willing seller**. The purchase price for the farmland – both when purchased by DEM and when sold to a farmer – is based on **appraised fair market value**.

A **public advisory committee**, made up of members of the farming community, along with DEM, accepts applications from prospective “farmer-buyers” and reviews applicants based on a series of criteria that include farming experience, farm business experience, and ability to finance the farm purchase.

DEM and the RI Agricultural Land Preservation Commission (ALPC) restrict the farmland (i.e. retain the development rights) and then sell the farm to a selected “farmer-buyer” **ensuring an agricultural future** for both the land and the buyer.

**Farmland is a finite natural resource.** Our existing Farmland Preservation Program, which purchases development rights from farmers, has helped over 100 farmers retain ownership of their farms and ensure that over 6700 acres of farmland will remain in agriculture.

The Farmland Access Program is another method of protecting farmland and insuring land is retained for future agricultural use. Participation in this Program is **completely voluntary**.

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