American Farmland Trust
SAVING THE LAND THAT SUSTAINS US

Massachusetts Farmland of Local Importance (FLI) Screening Tool
Uses, Restrictions, and Metadata

*Note: **Bolded terms** are defined in the "Definitions" section at the end of this document.*

Background

The Massachusetts Farmland of Local Importance Screening Tool ("FLI Screening Tool") was developed by American Farmland Trust (AFT), in partnership with the **USDA-NRCS**.

Uses

The intended use of the FLI Screening Tool and associated data is to help **partner entities** and researchers to screen farmland parcels in Massachusetts for eligibility for farmland protection programs, especially the federal Agricultural Conservation Easement Program – Agricultural Land Easement (**ACEP-ALE)** program.

Restrictions & Limitations

The FLI Screening Tool and associated data are not intended for any regulatory use, site-specific permitting decisions, or any use case related to land development or speculation.

Not all municipalities in Massachusetts have designated **Farmland of Local Importance.** The FLI Screening Tool includes only those towns that have designated FLI and will be updated periodically as additional municipalities designate FLI.

Soils mapped in the FLI Screening Tool as **"Possible FLI"** or **"Likely FLI"** are not a representation of soils that will be considered FLI by the **USDA-NRCS** for the purpose of **ACEP-ALE** or other land protection programs. For eligibility for NRCS funding programs, MA NRCS must review **"Likely FLI"** soils at the parcel level to verify that **FLI qualifiers** are met.

Note that soils must be assessed at the parcel level to verify that FLI qualifiers have been met. Please review the **Determining Acreage of FLI factsheet** from NRCS.

Production & Maintenance

Two spatial data layers were overlayed to create the **"Likely FLI"** layer:

1. **"Possible FLI"** (may be shown in some places as "Potential FLI") – A dataset that includes all **soil survey map units** designated by each Town as **Farmland of Local Importance**, without accounting for **FLI qualifiers**. FLI qualifiers must be met in order for a soil survey map unit to be considered Farmland of Local Importance.

2. Cropland and pastureland – Lands identified as cropland and pastureland as shown on MassGIS 2005 Land Use and MassGIS 2016 Land Cover/Land Use data layers.

   Note: Land cover and land use data, like all remotely sensed data, is subject to limitations and may not accurately reflect on-the-ground conditions. Please review

the metadata for these layers (linked above). For the purposes of the FLI Screening Tool, the land cover/land use categories used to identify "cropland and pastureland" were: Cultivated Land, Pasture/Hay, Cropland, Pasture, and Orchard.

Attributes for the **"Likely FLI"** layer include:

Map Unit Name: Name of the **soil survey map unit**
Map Unit Symbol (MUSYM): The symbol used to uniquely identify the **soil survey map unit**
FLI Qualifier: Conditions assigned to FLI **soil survey map units** that distinguish areas that are suited for **crop production**. *Note: **FLI qualifiers** are further defined below.*
Date Designated: Date when the **soil survey map unit** was designated as **Farmland of Local Importance** by the Town, dependent on meeting **FLI qualifiers.**
Acres: The acreage of the selected polygon.

In producing the **"Likely FLI"** layer, an assumption was made that where the land cover layer shows "cropland" or "pastureland," there is evidence of historic agricultural land use, which may serve as a proxy for that land meeting the **FLI qualifiers**. Other layers included in the FLI Screening Tool (including land cover, wetlands, and elevation) are provided to further assist with an initial assessment of whether **FLI qualifiers** may be met on a particular parcel.

The FLI Screening Tool and associated data are maintained by American Farmland Trust and will be updated periodically.

Accessing the Data

Click here to request access to the Massachusetts Farmland of Local Importance Screening Tool and associated data.

For general questions about FLI, or for questions about AFT's Massachusetts FLI Screening Tool, please contact Kathleen Doherty (kdoherty@farmland.org) or Jamie Pottern (jpottern@farmland.org).

Disclaimers:
The actual acreage of FLI may differ from that shown on this data layer. Refer to town lists of FLI soil survey map units along with the FLI qualifiers located on the **Massachusetts NRCS Field Office Technical Guide.**

Soils mapped in the FLI Screening Tool as "Possible FLI" or "Likely FLI" are not a representation of soils that will be considered FLI by the USDA-NRCS for the purpose of ACEP-ALE or other land protection programs. For eligibility for NRCS funding programs, MA NRCS must review "Likely FLI" soils at the parcel level to verify that FLI qualifiers are met. Please review the **Determining Acreage of FLI factsheet** from NRCS.

Except for the National Soil Characterization Database, soil surveys seldom contain detailed site-specific information and are not designed for use as primary regulatory tools in site-specific permitting decisions, but they are useful for broad regulatory planning and application. Official Soil Survey Information is public information and may be interpreted by organizations, agencies, units of government, or others based on their own needs; however, users are responsible for the appropriate application of soil survey information.

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Definitions

Agricultural Conservation Easement Program-Agricultural Land Easement (ACEP-ALE) – A program of the **USDA-NRCS** that protects the agricultural viability of eligible land. In compensation for limiting nonagricultural uses, the landowner receives the market value, less the agricultural value of the land. **USDA-NRCS** provides matching funding with a **partner entity**. Program eligibility is based in part on soil suitability for **crop production**. Click here to view ACEP-ALE program page. Click here for more guidance about ACEP-ALE eligibility.

Crop production – The process of managing land to grow and harvest food, feed, fiber, forage, and/or oilseed crops including fertilizing, pest control, irrigation, cultivating, and preparation for planting as applicable to the crop, and harvesting to maintain viable yields without causing excessive erosion. In addition to row crops, crop production includes hay and other feed crops, perennial fruit and nut crops, and improved pasture.

Entity/partner entity/eligible entity – For **ACEP-ALE** purposes, an eligible partner entity may be an American Indian tribe, a state or local government, or a non-governmental organization that has a farmland, rangeland or grassland protection program (such as a land trust).

Farmland class – The **soil survey** assigns farmland class based on characteristics representative of each **soil survey map unit**. Click here for more information about farmland class. Farmland class is applied to **ACEP-ALE** eligibility. The farmland classes in Massachusetts soil surveys are:

- **Prime farmland** – soils well suited for crop production as defined by national soil property and climatic criteria.
- **Farmland of statewide importance** – soils suited for crop production but lacking all the criteria required for prime farmland soils.
- **Farmland of unique importance** – soils other than prime farmland and farmland of statewide importance with characteristics distinctive to the production of a specific crop. In Massachusetts, farmland of unique importance are those soils suited for cranberry production.
- **Not prime farmland** – soils that do not meet the criteria for prime farmland, farmland of statewide importance, or farmland of unique importance.

Farmland of local importance (FLI) – A **farmland class** assigned to **soil survey map unit** delineations (or portions of a map unit) that are suited for **crop production** but are not classed in Massachusetts **soil surveys** as prime farmland, unique farmland, or farmland of statewide importance. Massachusetts municipalities, in coordination with the **USDA-NRCS**, identify FLI. FLI has the same value as the other important **farmland classes** regarding **ACEP-ALE** eligibility. Click here to view a list of towns that have designated FLI (note: there may be a delay between when a Town has designated FLI and when the list is updated). Click here to learn more about designating FLI in Massachusetts.

FLI qualifiers/qualifying conditions – Conditions assigned to FLI **soil survey map units** that distinguish areas that are suited for **crop production**. FLI qualifiers also take into consideration the highly erodible land and wetland compliance provisions of the Food Security Act of 1985. Click here to learn more about compliance with the **Food Security Act of 1985**. Click here to view the

Determining Acreage of FLI factsheet from NRCS.

Improved pasture – Grazing lands that are not in crop rotation and are planted primarily to forage species that receive periodic renovation and/or cultural treatments such as tillage, fertilization, mowing, and weed control.

"Likely FLI" – A dataset developed by American Farmland Trust to help **partner entities** assess whether a particular FLI **soil survey map unit** is likely to meet the **FLI qualifiers**. The "Likely FLI" layer overlays **"Possible FLI"** data with land cover data indicating historic agricultural use, which serves as a proxy for meeting **FLI qualifiers**. "Likely FLI" is not a representation of soils that will be considered FLI for the purpose of **USDA-NRCS** programs.

"Possible FLI" (may be labeled in some places as "Potential FLI") – A dataset that includes all **soil survey map units** designated by the Town as **Farmland of Local Importance**, without accounting for **FLI qualifiers**. **FLI qualifiers** must be met in order for a **soil survey map unit** to be considered **Farmland of Local Importance**. This data is only available for Towns that have designated **Farmland of Local Importance**.

Soil survey – The mapping and classification of the nation's soil resources. **USDA-NRCS** has the leadership role for soil survey. Massachusetts soil survey areas are separated by county, or parts of county boundaries. Click here to open Web Soil Survey.

Soil survey map unit – A collection of map delineations within a **soil survey** area defined and named based on their dominant soil components.

USDA-Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) - Federal agency that provides technical and financial assistance to agricultural producers to protect natural resources.