

# SAVING AMERICA'S WORKING LANDS

A National Conference Hosted by American Farmland Trust

**DALLAS, TEXAS | APRIL 23-25, 2025**

## Session: Confronting the Affordability Challenge

### SPEAKERS



**Mike Ghia**

Vermont Field Agent  
Land For Good

Mike grew up on farm and has been involved with agriculture since childhood. He farmed full-time for 10 years on leased land, and continues to run a part-time maple syrup operation. In addition to doing work for Land For Good for over 15 years, Mike also contracts to do work for the University of Vermont Extension Farm Viability Program as a Farm Business Planner and consults for other UVM programs. In addition to his extensive experience working with farmers and property owners on farm tenure, succession and transfer, Mike's expertise also includes grazing, soil, and pest management. Mike is also a trained mediator and does mediation for the VT Agricultural Mediation Program.



**Alison Volk**

Director of BPS and Easement Acquisitions  
American Farmland Trust

Alison coordinates all aspects of new easement acquisitions across the country. Prior to joining AFT, Alison worked at the Wisconsin Department of Agriculture, Trade and Consumer Protection for ten years. For five of those years she oversaw the Department's farmland preservation program, which included the state's agricultural conservation easement program. She earned a Juris Doctorate from the University of Wisconsin-Madison, where she studied land use law and policy and focused on agricultural land preservation tools including conservation easements.



**Krisztian Varsa**

Farms Fund Director

The Conservation Fund

Krisztian is the Georgia Farms Fund Program Manager with The Conservation Fund, investing in the local food system by transitioning farmland to next-generation farm businesses. Krisztian works in partnership with numerous organizations, farmers, and farmland owners to ensure the success of farm businesses while permanently protecting farmland and building regenerative farm systems that grow healthy, fresh food for Georgians.



**Hilary Aten, WA OFP**

Office of Farmland Preservation Coordinator

Washington State Conservation Commission

Hilary joined the Washington State Conservation Commission in 2024 after leading farmland preservation and stewardship efforts for a Washington nonprofit land trust since 2011. A native of Northern Michigan, Hilary has worked on land conservation and community land stewardship efforts

in Washington State and across the US for more than two decades. She brings experience with land conservation transactions, conservation planning, and policy development to her role at the Office of Farmland Preservation. Hilary holds a BA in Political Science from Kalamazoo College and a Master's in Public Administration from the University of Texas.



*Facilitator*

**Cris Coffin**

Senior Policy Advisor; Director, National Agricultural Land Network  
American Farmland Trust

Cris helps guide AFT's federal and state policy engagement. She also directs the National Agricultural Land Network, which supports state and local governments, land trusts, agricultural service providers, planners, and conservation organizations and builds their capacity to advance farmland protection. From 2015 to 2018, Cris served as policy director for Land For Good, a New England-based organization with which AFT often collaborates. But before that, Cris served as AFT's New England director for fourteen years. She has held several positions in the U.S. Senate, including as professional staff on the Senate Committee on Agriculture, Nutrition, and Forestry and as chief of staff to Senator Herb Kohl. She has worked for Resources for the Future and the Vermont Department of Agriculture. Cris co-chairs the Massachusetts Food System Collaborative and serves on her town's Agriculture Commission. Cris farms part-time with her husband, running a small, pastured poultry operation in western Massachusetts. She is an alumna of the University of Massachusetts-Amherst and holds a Juris Doctor from Georgetown University.