

SAVING AMERICA'S WORKING LANDS

A National Conference Hosted by American Farmland Trust

DALLAS, TEXAS | APRIL 23-25, 2025

Session: Planning for an Enduring Agricultural Landscape

SPEAKERS



Sam Smidt

National Land Use and Protection Research Initiative Director
American Farmland Trust

Sam Smidt joined American Farmland Trust as the National Land Use and Protection Research Initiative Director in May 2023. He most recently was an Assistant Professor at the University of Florida in the Institute of Food and Agricultural Sciences where he was the director of the Land and Water Lab and Early Career Faculty Fellow for the Water Institute. His lab was widely awarded for elite teaching and research related to sustainable agricultural and natural resources management. Sam is an experienced researcher and leader with specialties including GIS, data analytics, science communication, and data visualization. He has an extensive agricultural background and is particularly skilled at evaluating and modeling land transformation impacts on human and natural systems. His active partnerships include private, non-profit, governmental, and intergovernmental organizations, and he is currently funded by the United States Department of Agriculture and National Science Foundation. Sam is a Midwest native raised in the Pumpkin Capital of the World, and he has graduate degrees in earth and environmental science and policy from Michigan State University and the University of Iowa. He is located in Gainesville, FL, where he operates a small organic Christmas tree farm with his wife and two boys.



Julia Freedgood

Senior Fellow and Senior Program Advisor
American Farmland Trust

Julia is a prominent national expert in farmland protection, land tenure and access, agricultural viability, and food system planning. As Senior Fellow and Senior Program Advisor at American Farmland Trust, she focuses on the planning and policy framework required to support the livelihoods of farmers and ranchers, and to advance equitable and just regional food systems to increase food security and combat climate change. Currently writing a book on this subject, she also is involved in other research, extension, and community engagement projects at AFT. Julia is the author or co-author of many articles and reports, recent ones include “Cultivating the Next Generation: Resources and Policies to Help Beginning Farmers Succeed in Agriculture,” “Farms Under Threat: The State of the States,” “Fail to Include, Plan to Exclude: Reflections on Local Governments’ Readiness for Building Equitable Community Food Systems,” and “Growing Local: A Community Guide to Planning for Agriculture and Food Systems.” She has many professional affiliations. Among them, she is a long-time member of the American Planning Association, a founding member of North American Food Systems Network, and serves on the Advisory Board and Editorial Committee of the Journal of Agriculture Food Systems and Community Development. She has served on USDA’s Beginning Farmer and Rancher Development Program Grant Review Board and USDA-Secretary Vilsack’s Land Tenure Advisory Committee. She holds a M.A. in Urban and Environmental Planning and Policy from Tufts University.



Kelsey Johnson

Post Doctoral Researcher
Boise State University



Facilitator

David Anderson

Idaho Senior Program Manager
American Farmland Trust

David found a love for the land while working with his grandpa on the family ranch as a kid. He remembers his grandma telling stories about the generations of family that scratched a ranch out of the Lemhi Valley. After college in Arizona, David spent 25 years as a hydrogeologist providing land and water stewardship services to energy, mining, and real estate development clients. In 2019, AFT was asked by Idaho agriculture families to bring support to the state in response to a rapid loss of working lands. David joined AFT in 2021 as Idaho Program Manager and is based in Boise. He is the Board President of the Regenerative Agriculture Network of Idaho and a Board Supervisor for Ada Soil & Water Conservation District. He enjoys every minute outdoors and especially with family and friends.