



# Planning for An Enduring Agricultural Landscape

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**We can do better!**





# Our Aglands are Threatened by Conversion and More:

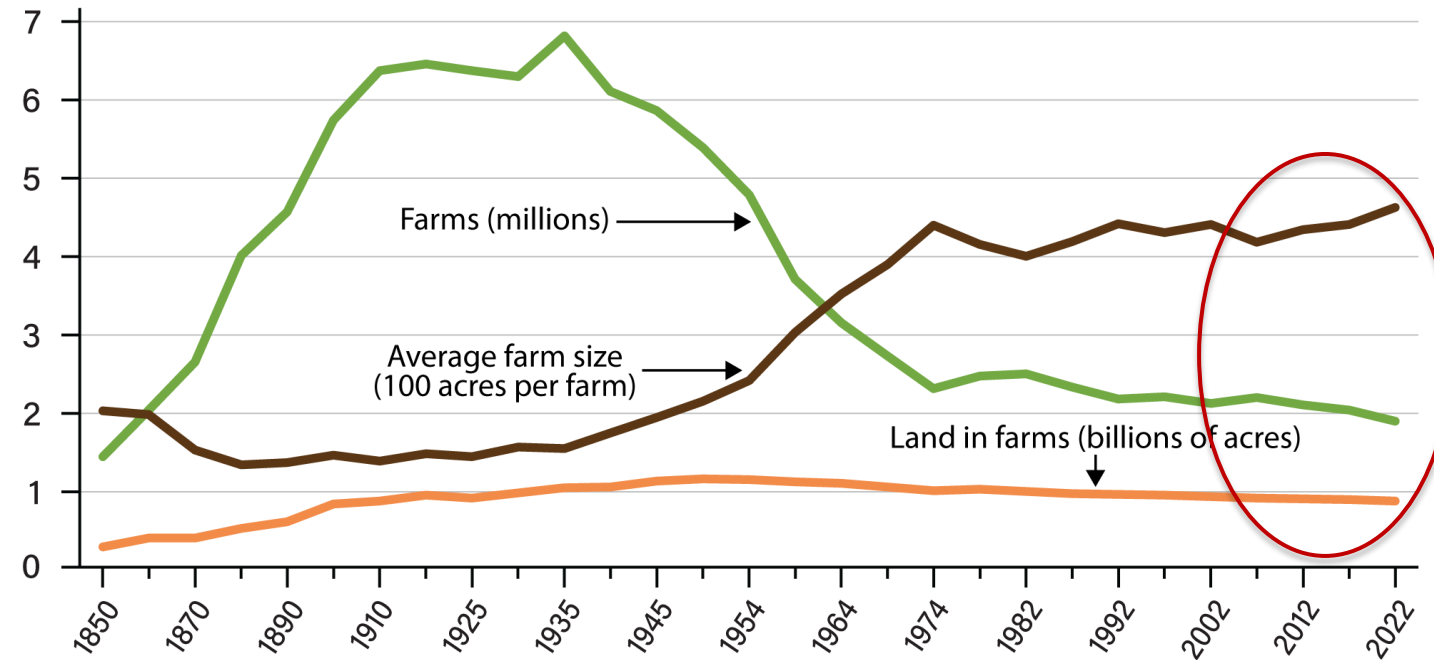
- Consolidation  
(→) barrier to entry
- Escalating land prices  
(→) challenge to ag viability
- A “gray tsunami”  
(→) bottleneck to land access
- Volatile Weather  
(→) increased instability



Decades of “Get Big or Get Out” policies led to increasing consolidation of operations and cropland

## Farms, land in farms, and average acres per farm, 1850–2022

USDA Economic Research Service  
U.S. DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE



2022 CENSUS OF AGRICULTURE



American Farmland Trust



# <10% of U.S. farms are large but they're the only sector that's growing – up 32% in a decade

## Small family farms (GCFI less than \$350,000)

- **Retirement farms:** Farms whose principal operators report having retired from farming while continuing to farm on a small scale.
- **Off-farm-occupation farms:** Farms whose principal operators report a primary occupation other than farming.
- **Farming-occupation farms:** Farms whose principal operators report farming as their primary occupation. Farming-occupation farms are further sorted into two classes:
  - **Low sales:** Farms with a GCFI of less than \$150,000.
  - **Moderate sales:** Farms with a GCFI between \$150,000 and \$349,999.

## Midsize family farms (GCFI between \$350,000 and \$999,999)

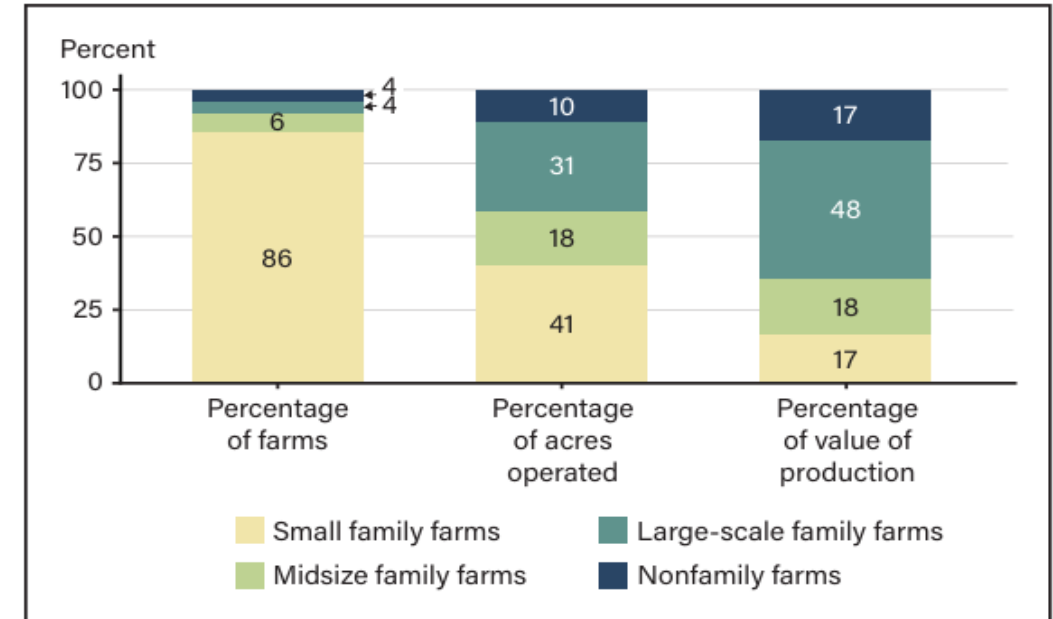
## Large-scale family farms (GCFI of \$1,000,000 or more)

- **Large farms:** Farms with a GCFI between \$1,000,000 and \$4,999,999.
- **Very large farms:** Farms with a GCFI of \$5,000,000 or more.

## Nonfamily farms

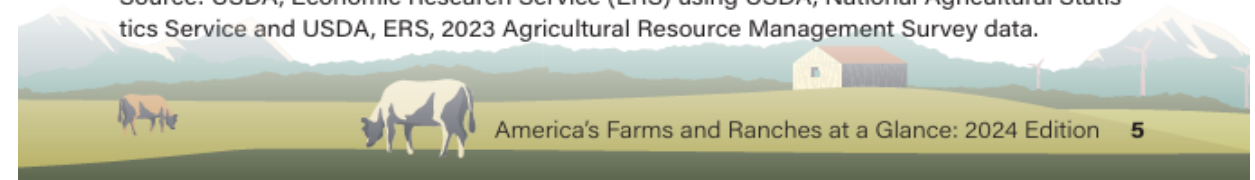
- Any farm where any operator and any related individuals do not own a majority (50 percent) of the business.

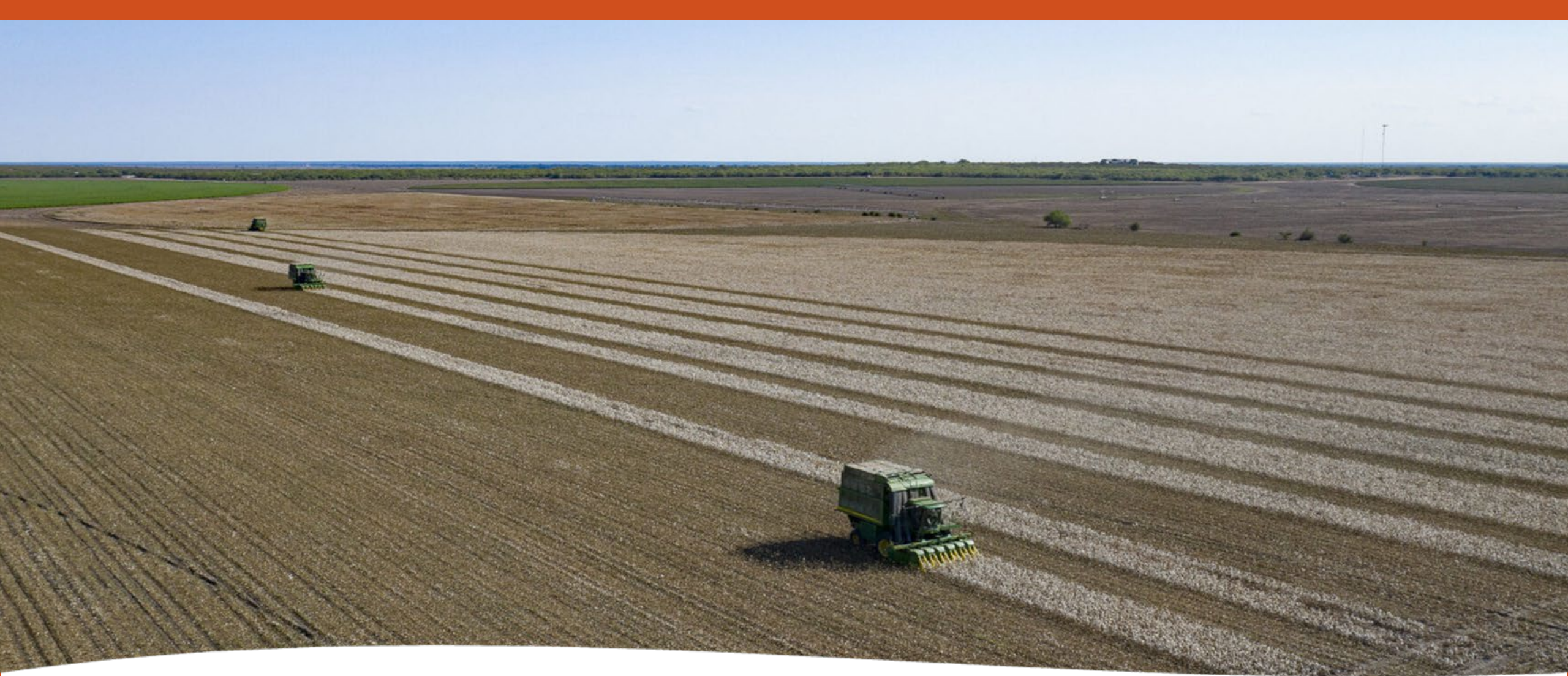
Distribution of farms, acres operated, and value of production by farm type, 2023



Note: Acres operated is equal to owned land plus leased land minus leased land to others.

Source: USDA, Economic Research Service (ERS) using USDA, National Agricultural Statistics Service and USDA, ERS, 2023 Agricultural Resource Management Survey data.



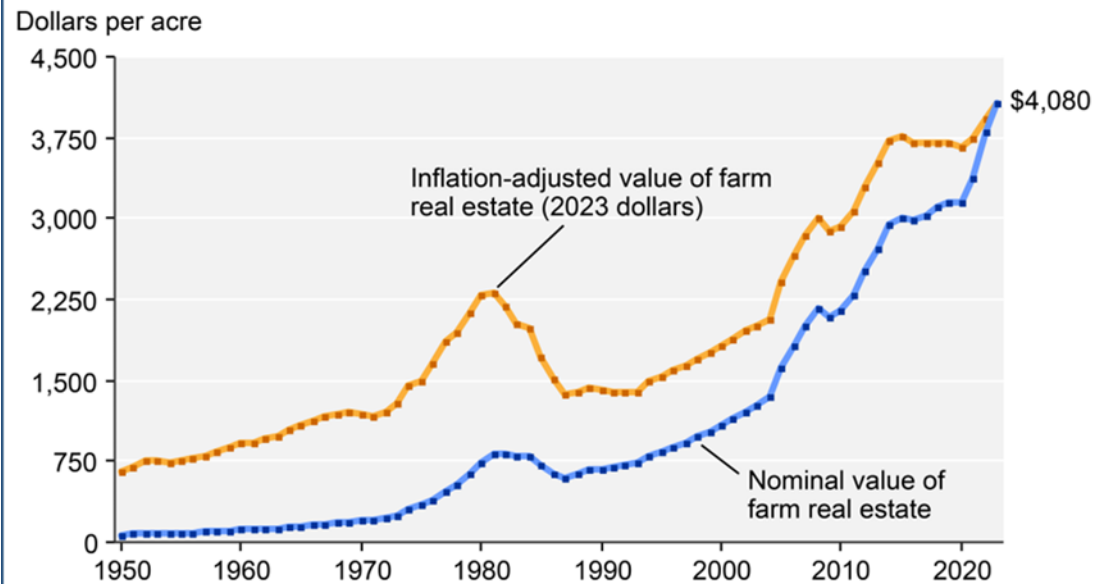


- Over 30 years, cropland shifted from midsize to large farms with 2,000 or more acres and
- The share of crops from farms with at least 10,000 acres quadrupled



# Since 2010: ~40% increase in farm real estate value and 106% increase in cropland values

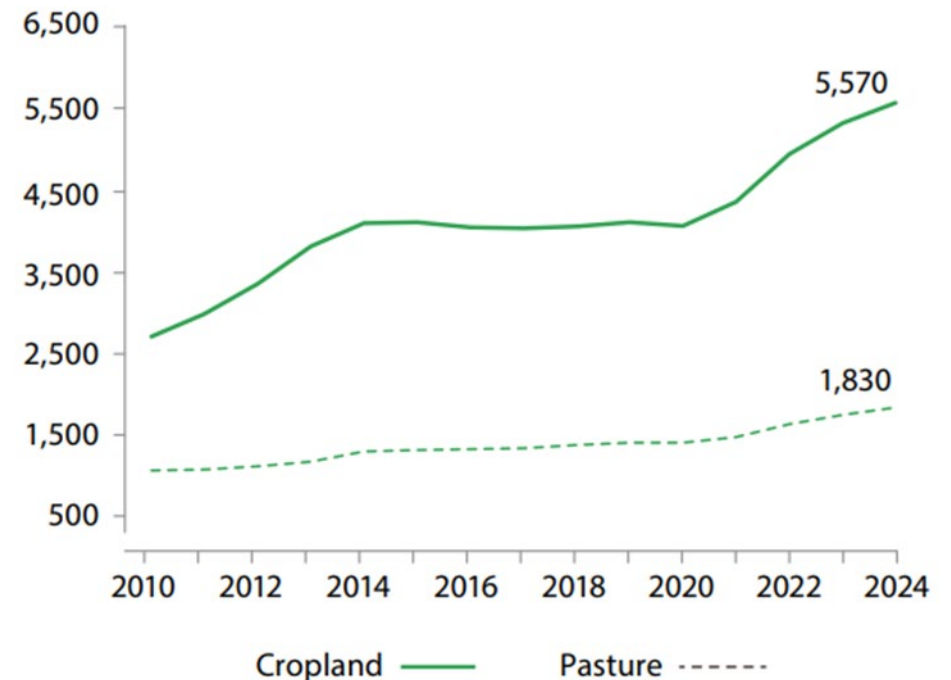
**Average U.S. farm real estate value, nominal and real (inflation adjusted), 1950–2023**



Note: Farm real estate includes land and buildings. Data reflect values as of June 1 of each year. The annual Gross Domestic Product implicit price deflator is used to convert nominal values to 2023 U.S. dollars (U.S. Department of Commerce, Bureau of Economic Analysis). U.S. estimates exclude Alaska and Hawaii.

Source: USDA, Economic Research Service using annual national agricultural land value estimates from USDA, National Agricultural Statistics Service, *QuickStats*.

**Fig. 1. Value of U.S. Cropland and Pasture, 2010–2024 (\$ per acre)**



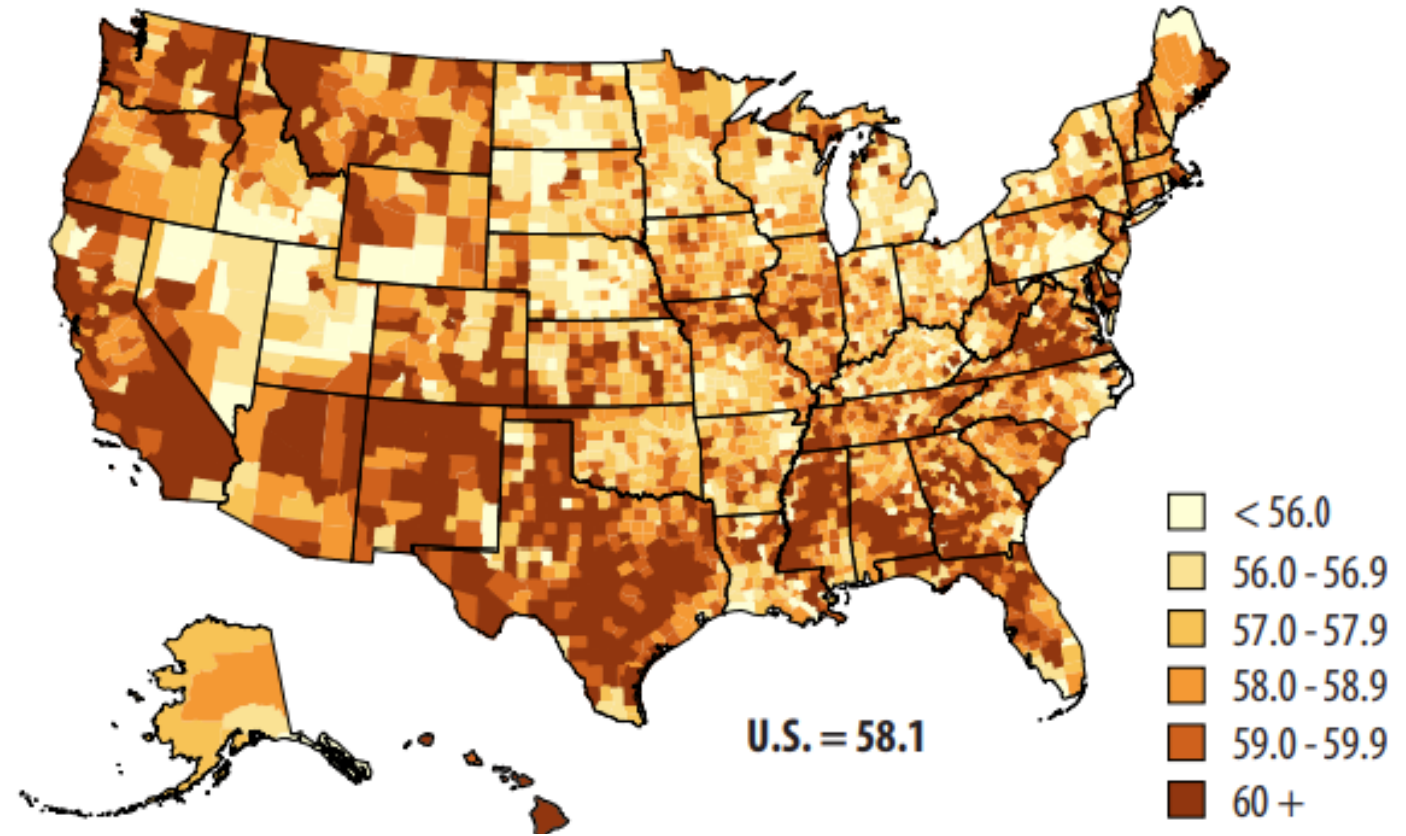
Source: USDA NASS.

# Farmers are the oldest workforce

- > A third are age 65 and older:
  - Up 12% since 2017
  - Many are aging in place



Average Age of Producers by County, 2022





# Weather is increasingly volatile





# Let's Plan for Agriculture!





A failure to plan is a plan to fail!







# Planning for Ag Supports

- Economic opportunity
- Environmental quality
- Food security
- Fiscal stability
- Rural character
- Thriving farms and ranches
- And more ...

So much more!



# There's No Silver Bullet!

Strategies must be tailored for each community, state, or region





# Two Main Approaches

Chicken Little:

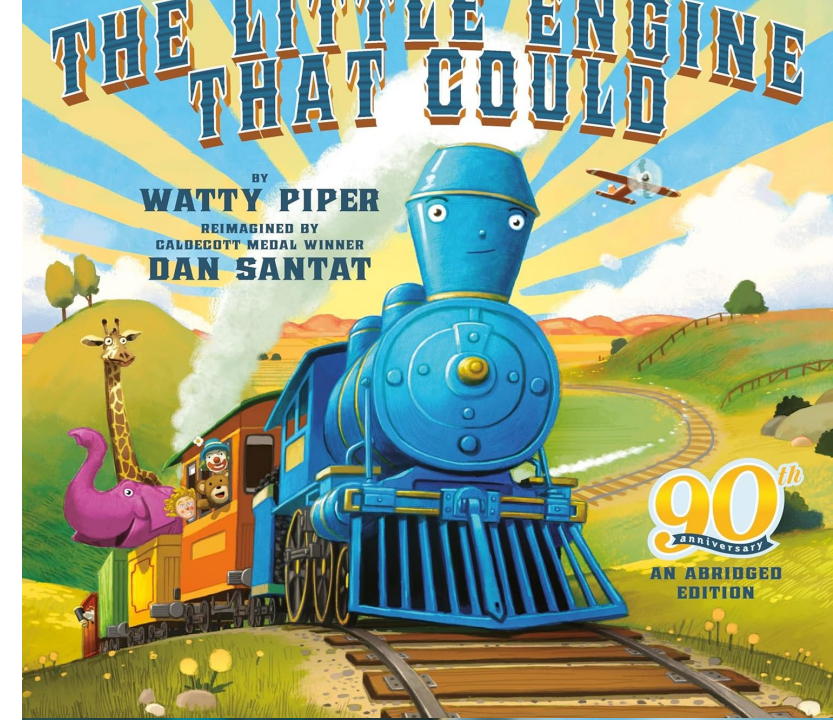
“The sky is falling”

Problem solving approach

Little Engine That Could:

“I think I can; I think I can”

Asset-based approach





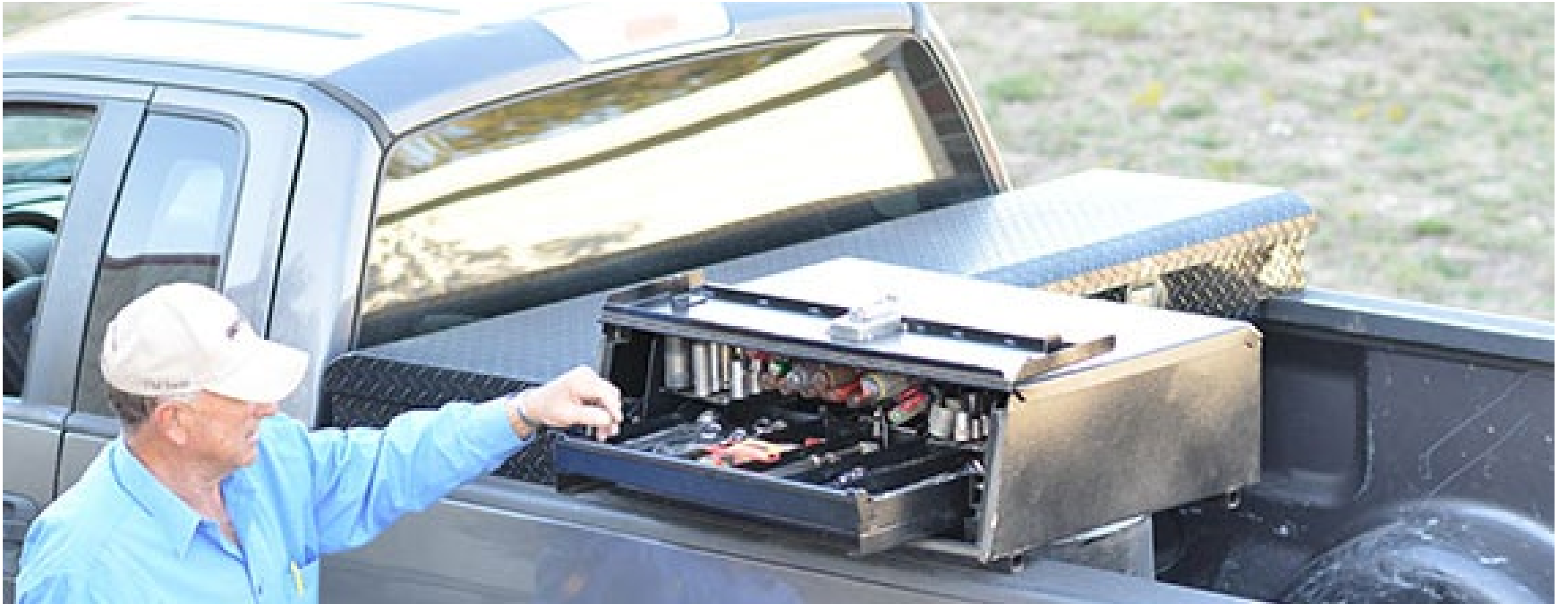
# Core Principles and Practices



- Engage early, often, and throughout
- Focus on assets not deficits
- Use consistent, reliable data
- Plan with implementation in mind



# Toolbox





# Protect and Retain Ag Lands

- Include ag in comp plans
- Promote smart growth and compact development
- Designate where ag is the preferred land use and protected from encroachment
- Fund a PACE program
- Create a TDR program
- Draw Urban Growth/Service Boundaries
- Mitigate Development on Farmland
- Provide property tax relief
- Support succession planning and land access





# Sustain the Viability of Local Farms and Ranches

- Allow nontraditional uses
  - Agritourism
  - On-farm marketing and value-added processing
  - Renewable energy ...
- Create voluntary ag districts with incentives to support ag viability
- Invest in middle infrastructure: processing, packing, cooling, distribution, etc.
- Promote farm-to-institution, farmers markets, and other buy-local opportunities
- Ensure zoning supports and does not thwart ag economic development
- Fund ag development staff





# Promote Natural Resource Conservation

- Fund local conservation district staff and conservation planning
- Facilitate use of state and federal conservation programs
- Help producers navigate environmental regulations
- Create composting programs
- Include agriculture in environmental, sustainability and resilience plans
- Maintain integrity of natural systems





## Is Your Community Farm Friendly?

A Checklist to Gauge Local Support for Agriculture in Your Community

### DOES YOUR COMMUNITY...

#### Prioritize natural resource conservation

...have policies or regulations to support access to water for food production (e.g., traditional agriculture, urban agriculture, and/or community gardens)? YES ☐ NO ☐

...have policies to address food waste and recovery (through strategies such as composting, gleaning programs, and/or food product recycling programs)? YES ☐ NO ☐

#### Encourage agriculture and food production

...have a section on agriculture and food production in your comprehensive plan or other community plans (e.g., economic development, strategic, or sustainability plan)? YES ☐ NO ☐

...support agricultural leadership (e.g., an agricultural ombudsman, advisory board, or commission to represent farmers and ranchers in local decision making)? YES ☐ NO ☐

...provide public land for farming and food production (e.g., lease land to farmers, provide space for community gardens or urban agriculture)? YES ☐ NO ☐

...encourage connections between agriculture and residents (e.g., through agritourism, direct marketing, and/or promotion of local farms)? YES ☐ NO ☐

#### Protect farmland

...create agricultural protection zones specifically to support working farms and ranches? YES ☐ NO ☐

...purchase conservation easements (development rights) on agricultural land? YES ☐ NO ☐

...have urban growth boundaries? YES ☐ NO ☐

...have a transfer of development rights program or mitigation ordinance to engage private developers in protection activities? YES ☐ NO ☐

#### Improve agricultural viability

...have a local right-to-farm ordinance? YES ☐ NO ☐

...provide tax credits and exemptions (e.g., property tax relief, school tax credits, sales tax exemptions)? YES ☐ NO ☐

...have ordinances to support agriculture and food production (e.g., accessory use allowances, farm labor housing policies, setbacks and buffers, on-farm processing)? YES ☐ NO ☐

...create voluntary districts where agriculture is encouraged and protected? YES ☐ NO ☐

...have livestock regulations to address nuisance, environment, and welfare issues (e.g., regulate number of animals per acre, manure and nutrient management)? YES ☐ NO ☐

#### Support markets and infrastructure

...have regulations scaled appropriately to address on-farm marketing and direct-to-consumer systems (e.g., agritourism, CSAs, farm and roadside stands)? YES ☐ NO ☐

...support marketing infrastructure for local farmers (e.g., farmers markets, food hubs)? YES ☐ NO ☐

...support value-added processing (e.g., slaughter facilities, cold storage, packing sheds)? YES ☐ NO ☐

...support farm to school and other institutions' procurement policies? YES ☐ NO ☐

#### Promote local farms

...have a "Buy Local" campaign? YES ☐ NO ☐

...provide promotion materials such as maps, resource guides, and interactive websites? YES ☐ NO ☐

CLEAR FORM

Adapted from New Hampshire Coalition for Sustaining Agriculture and UNH Cooperative Extension's  
"Is Your Town Farm Friendly? — A Checklist for Sustaining Rural Character"

# See How Well Your Community is Doing:

[farmland.org/project/planning-for-agriculture/](http://farmland.org/project/planning-for-agriculture/)





# Thank You!



**American Farmland Trust**  
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