

SAVING AMERICA'S WORKING LANDS

A National Conference Hosted by American Farmland Trust

DALLAS, TEXAS | APRIL 23-25, 2025

Session: State Policies to Support Access & Transfer

SPEAKERS



Marie O'Neill

Research Scientist

IU Food and Agrarian Systems Program

Marie O'Neill is a Research Scientist with the Indiana University Food and Agrarian Systems Program. She is currently researching the creation and facilitation of state and federal Land Access Policy Incentives that address land access challenges for new and beginning producers. Marie's previous research addressed adoption of sustainable agricultural practices, local and regional food access, and value chain coordination. She holds a BA in Environmental and Sustainability Studies from Indiana University with a concentration in sustainable food systems. Alongside researching food and farming systems, Marie co-owns and operates a direct market vegetable farm in South Central Indiana that is now in its 6th season.



Julia Valliant

Associate Research Scientist, Sustainable Food Systems Science

Indiana University

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.



Tammy Nebola

Agricultural Development Program Specialist
Iowa Finance Authority

Tammy Nebola is a Program Specialist for the Iowa Agricultural Development Division of the Iowa Finance Authority. She started with the Division in 2008 and manages the two loan programs, the Beginning Farmer Loan Program (Aggie Bond Program) and the Loan Participation Program. Iowa continues to have the most active Aggie Bond program in the nation. Tammy has assisted many other states with best practices when creating or enhancing their Aggie Bond programs. Tammy serves as a Board Member and Treasurer for the National Council of State Agricultural Finance Programs. They are an association of public and private agricultural financing entities working passionately for the promotion and financing of agricultural development. Tammy attended the University of Iowa and Iowa State University, pursuing a Degree in Accounting. She has over 23 years of banking and finance experience, specializing in agricultural and commercial lending, and agricultural bond financing.



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.