

Farm Link Programs



REBECCA DROBIS

Decades of intense competition for land have resulted in very high land values, especially for cropland. In the past, most farmland transferred between generations within a farm family. Today, many farmers do not inherit their land. With little land available to rent or buy, land access has become a significant challenge. Many states and some local governments have created policies and programs to address these issues (see [Other Programs to Support the Next Generation](#) fact sheet). Farm Link programs are one of the most common.

Farm Link programs facilitate land access by connecting farmland seekers with retiring farmers and other farmland owners. Most provide a matchmaking website with a searchable database to facilitate connections. Some go further to include educational resources, mixers, mentoring, referrals, and technical assistance.

Most programs are operated by nonprofit organizations, but 11 states implement and/or invest public dollars in these programs. Virginia is one of them.

Virginia Program Description

Virginia Farm Link is a program of the Virginia Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services (VDACS). Established in [Virginia Code § 10.1-1119.4](#), it was authorized in 2008 to help facilitate transfers of agricultural properties and operations. It has a searchable, online database and provides staff to help prepare business plans and provide research and information on innovative farming methods and techniques, financial, marketing, and other matters.

PURPOSE

The program is designed to help retiring farmers and landowners transfer their farms to beginning and expanding farmers who want to acquire land, equipment, and information on innovative farming methods and farm business management.

HOW IT WORKS

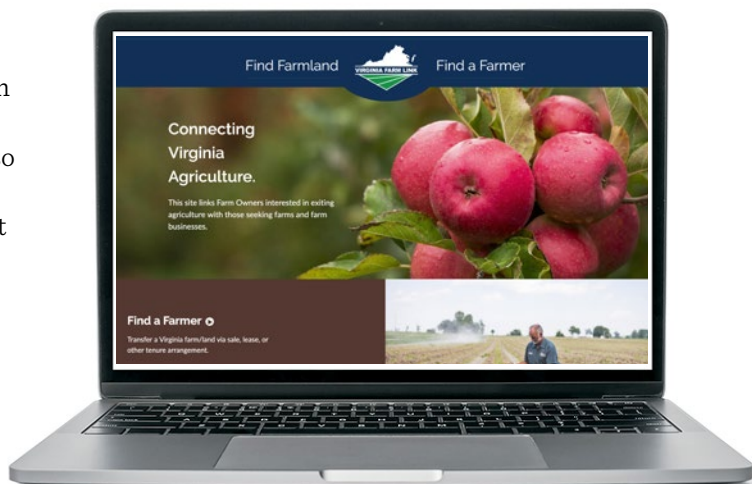
The Farm Link program has a free website to link existing farm owners with farm seekers. Farm seekers

click the “[Find Farmland](#)” link and farm owners click the “[Find a Farmer](#)” link to sign up for accounts. The website offers a resources tab with relevant information on topics including farm leases, business planning, conservation, farm transition, resource providers, and so on. It also includes listings of upcoming workshops on topics ranging from filing farm taxes to farm equipment and safety to heirs’ property.

Based on feedback from users, in 2012, the program created a Certified Farm Seeker (CFS) program to help farm seekers demonstrate their knowledge and skills to farm owners. In partnership with Virginia Farm Bureau and the Virginia Beginning Farmer and Rancher Coalition, the CFS program helps seekers demonstrate that they have on-farm experience, a resume to show their experience level, and a farm business plan. While all seekers are free to use the site, CFS seekers display the CFS logo on their user profile, which gives them a leg up.

CONSIDERATIONS

Farm Link programs are a response to the urgent need to transition farms to a new generation. They serve many functions, from listing properties on a website to providing education and technical assistance. Most operate on a shoestring, but to be really effective, they need dedicated staff and sustained funding. To support the future of agriculture in their areas, local leaders can promote Virginia Farm Link among aspiring and retiring farmers and advocate for more support for staff to provide technical assistance to facilitate farm succession and transfer.



To Learn More

- › [Virginia Code § 10.1-1119.4. Virginia Farm Link Program](#)
- › [Virginia Farm Link](#)
- › [American Farmland Trust: “Virginia Farm Link Program Enabling Statute”](#)
- › [Leslie Pillen and Clare Hinrichs, “Land Link Programs in the Northeast U.S.: A Program Assessment and Lessons Learned”](#)
- › [Land for Good: “Developing & Strengthening Farm Link Programs”](#)
- › [FARM VA: Farm Agricultural Resources and Mediation of Virginia](#)