



# Afoot in the Field:

## A Resource for Conservation Landowners in the Finger Lakes Region

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The majority of the Finger Lakes region, like much of central and western New York, is defined by agriculture. Tractors and combines roll across thousands of acres of corn and soybean fields. Live-stock graze in pastures large and small. Milk trucks roll in and out of dairies, and the NY yogurt business is booming to unprecedented levels. Families visit orchards and fruit fields to pick delicious treats. Vineyards provide the raw material for a growing and acclaimed wine industry. Vegetables appear in local farm stands, in shares at local community supported agriculture (CSA) farms, and on big trucks headed to processing plants owned by major food companies. Young adults home on summer vacation stack hay bales with their parents or neighbors; and even younger kids groom their favorite cow, horse, chicken, or rabbit for the county fair.

Despite the overall decline in the number of farms in America, and the loss of important farmland to development, agriculture remains a huge component of our economy, and a way of life for millions of people. The bumper sticker proclaiming “No Farms, No Food” says it all, as does the road sign on Rt. 14A in Yates County that shows a picture of a farmer on a tractor and says “These people feed you three times a day.” But farmers can be credited with more than just creating food and jobs. Most farmers are also excellent stewards of the soils they depend on, and farm properties often account for substantial acreages that contain other natural resources such as watercourses and woodlots. And don’t forget that residents and visitors alike grin while taking in the magnificent scenery that is afforded over the spread of wide-open agricultural lands across our landscape.

Thinking about how to prioritize and protect some of the many working farms in our very large region is a somewhat daunting prospect. Fortunately, there are state and federal sources of funding for the purchase of conservation easements from farmers, who often are not in a financial position to donate such easements, and towns and counties with agricultural land protection boards in place to help identify participating farmers. Before the NY State funding program for farmland protection stalled a few years ago, the Finger Lakes Land Trust partnered with local government and accepted easements on six farms in Ontario and Yates Counties. As FLLT Land Protection Specialist Elizabeth Newbold explains in this issue of Afoot in the Field, the funding for the state Farmland Protection Implementation Grant Program has finally been restored for this year, and the Finger Lakes Land Trust is gearing up for more important farmland protection projects. We are also grateful to Jim Hicks, who committed to a conservation easement on his farm in Canandaigua, for sharing his perspectives as a farmer in an area with high land values and high development pressure.

Chris Olney  
Director of Stewardship



## Conservation Landowner Profile: Jim Hicks

**Q: Please tell us a little bit about how long your family has owned and operated your family farm in the Town of Canandaigua, and what types of crops and products have been produced over the years.**



*Jim Hicks at his vineyard  
Photo by Elizabeth Newbold*

A: Our family on my mother's side has lived on the farm for six generations and I am the 7th to work the farm. As far as crops are concerned, we have all types of livestock such as cows, sheep, horses and hogs, as well as fruit orchards, grapes and feed crops for the livestock.

**Q: You grow grapes on your farm. What varieties do you grow? Do you think more farmers in the region will shift some or all of their production and marketing toward the burgeoning wine and beer making industry in the Finger Lakes? Are there other non-traditional or niche crops that you think will be up and coming in our area?**

A: I grow concord and riesling grapes. I believe that the grape industry will stay strong throughout the Finger Lakes region but I believe that the smaller vineyards and growers will eventually fall to the wayside do to the age of the growers and lack of interest from the next generation. It will follow what happened to the dairy industry over the last 25 to 30 years: go big or get out. Hops will come back around, but I don't think to the scale some people are projecting. Any niche crops that come along would have to take labor into account. It's very difficult now to find decent reliable people and I'm sure it will get even worse in the future.

**Q: Do you see it as a challenge or an opportunity to own a farm in an area where there is high land values and significant development pressure?**

A: It is definitely a love/hate relationship. I am very proud to be doing what I am doing to be the caretaker for the next generation. But I get very frustrated when developers want to take advantage of situations for a resort or housing



*Hicks Farm*

*Photo by Nigel Kent*

development in our backyard. People forget that we all need to be stewards of the land for the next generations; there is not that much good farmland left in our area.

**Q: The Finger Lakes Land Trust has been accepting donated conservation easements since 1990, but in 2009 the Land Trust also began participating in the New York State Purchase of Development Rights (PDR) Program, using state and local funds to buy conservation easements on working farmland. Having been a participant in this program, what do you think its value is to the farming community in NY, and how important do you think it is to continue in Canandaigua and the western Finger Lakes region?**

A: I feel this is a great program for farmers. Too bad it wasn't around 30 years ago.

**Q: Any words of wisdom for farm families who are confronted with the challenges and hard decisions regarding the process of passing along farmland and farm businesses to the next generation?**

A: Think it through and leave as many options open as possible. Every family farm situation is different so there is no cookie cutter solution. We were able to work it out because I was the only one of four kids that was willing to take on the responsibility but we all agreed that it should be protected. It worked out great for us, we protected ourselves from ourselves.



*Hicks Farm*

*Photo by Nigel Kent*

## PDR Funding Reinstated

By Elizabeth Newbold

After 5 years without funding, on May 14th Governor Cuomo announced the availability of \$20.5 million to aid farmland protection efforts and help prevent viable agricultural land from being converted to non-agricultural use through the Farmland Protection Implementation Grant program. Often referred to as PDR (purchase of development rights), this program allows farmers to protect their farmland with a perpetual conservation easement and receive a portion of the value of their development rights from the Department of Ag and Markets. By realizing the value of their development rights, farmers are able to reinvest that money into their farming operations and ensure that they can pass on or sell their farm to the next generation at agricultural value.

The Finger Lakes Land Trust has worked with several partners across the region to protect seven farms through the PDR program. In Yates County, four farms have been protected, totalling over 1,200 acres. All four farms grow cash crops (corn, soybean, wheat) with some cabbage and grape production. Next door in Ontario County, two farms have been protected for a total of 218 acres. Both Ontario County farms have beef cattle and one grows grapes which go to a local winery as well as enough produce for a roadside vegetable stand. Finally, in Schuyler County, a 70 acre grape farm has been protected.

Since 2005, the Farmland Protection Implementation Grant Program has disbursed almost \$90 million to more than 140 projects across New York State, protecting over 45,000 acres of viable agricultural land, including more than 18,000 acres of prime soils and another 7,000 acres of soils of statewide importance.

We are excited that funding for PDR has returned and are working to protect additional farms across the region through this program.



*Gillette Farm (top) and Hallpine Farm (bottom), Yates County  
Both protected by Land Trust conservation easements.*

# National Statistics on Farmland Loss and Protection

*Provided by the Farmland Information Center and the National Resources Inventory*

## Census of Agriculture

	2002	2007	2012
Farms	2,128,982	2,204,792	2,109,303
Land in farms (acres)	938,279,056	922,095,840	914,527,657
Total land area (acres)	2,263,960,501	2,260,994,361	2,260,583,852
Principal operators	2,128,982	2,204,792	2,109,303
Total operators	3,115,172	3,337,450	3,180,074
Principal operators 34 and younger	123,059	118,613	119,833
Principal operators 65 and older	557,830	655,654	701,276
Land owned by principal operators 65 and older (acres)			
Beginning farmers	593,109	583,286	469,098
Market value of agricultural products sold (\$1,000)	200,646,355	297,220,491	394,646,980

## Purchase of Agricultural Conservation Easement Programs

State-Level Program Activity Totals	2010	2011	2012	2013
Easements or Restrictions Acquired	11,899	12,415	12,970	13,450
Acres Protected	2,023,230	2,185,996	2,284,005	2,373,470
Program Funds Spent to Date	\$3,058,480,491	\$3,243,684,871	\$3,416,498,572	\$3,622,372,474

## 2010 National Resources Inventory

	1997-2002	2002-2007	2007-2010	1982-2010
Agricultural land converted to developed land (acres)	4,923,100	3,560,800	1,331,200	24,125,400
Agricultural land at the beginning of the reporting period (acres)	938,285,000	927,385,600	920,149,600	970,887,200
Prime agricultural land converted to developed land (acres)	1,815,700	1,431,100	N/A	N/A
Prime agricultural land at the beginning of the reporting period (acres)	271,728,800	267,560,700	264,442,000	281,418,800
Rural land converted to developed land (acres)	9,255,100	6,374,900	2,482,600	42,591,000
Rural land at the beginning of the reporting period (acres)	1,396,065,400	1,386,310,800	1,379,821,100	1,424,008,100
Prime rural land converted to developed land (acres)	2,555,500	2,036,300	N/A	N/A
Prime rural land available at the beginning of the reporting period (acres)	321,761,500	318,903,200	316,742,100	329,337,700
Total surface area (acres)	1,944,129,700	1,944,129,700	1,944,129,700	1,944,129

# New York State's Farmland

By **Robin M. Blakely-Armitage** and **Jan Vink**, Cornell University

According to the National Agriculture Statistics Service, there were 36,300 farms in New York State (NYS) in 2010 – the equivalent of 7 million acres of land - 23.2% of the total land area of NYS. The share of land area devoted to farming varies significantly between counties, ranging from essentially 0% in the New York City area to just over 60% in Seneca County in the upstate region. Many people may be surprised to learn that several upstate metropolitan counties also have a significant share of their land in farms, such as Monroe County (31%) and Niagara County (42%). While NYS as a whole witnessed a 9% decrease in farmland in the last decade, not all counties experienced declines, and some even posted gains. For data on all 62 NYS counties, please visit: <http://pad.human.cornell.edu/NYMinutes/NYMinute53stats.cfm>

## Land in Farms\*, by New York County, 2000-2010

(size of internal polygon proportionate to land area of county)

### Legend

#### Color of the whole county:

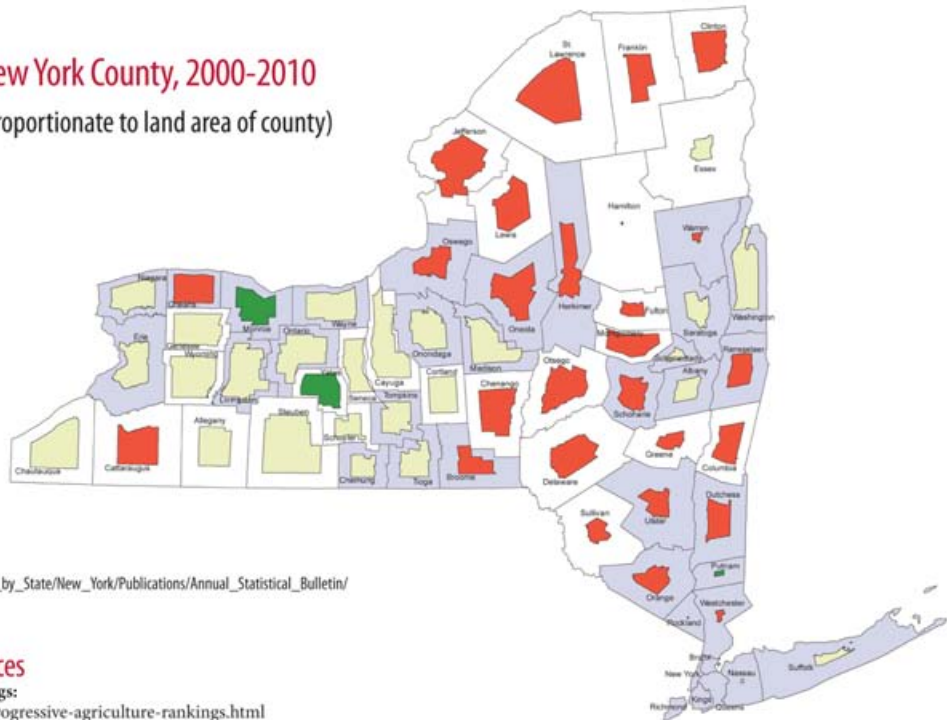
Metropolitan Areas  
Metropolitan  
Non Metropolitan

#### Size of the internal shape:

Equal to the acreage of the land in farms in the county

#### Color of the internal shape:

% Change in farmland from 2000 to 2010  
More than 10% decrease  
Between 10% decrease and 10% increase  
More than 10% increase



Source: [http://www.nass.usda.gov/Statistics\\_by\\_State/New\\_York/Publications/Annual\\_Statistical\\_Bulletin/](http://www.nass.usda.gov/Statistics_by_State/New_York/Publications/Annual_Statistical_Bulletin/)

## Additional Data & Resources

### Progressive Agricultural Rankings:

<http://www.agdevonline.com/progressive-agriculture-rankings.html>

### USDA, National Agricultural Statistics Service, NYS Data:

[http://www.nass.usda.gov/Statistics\\_by\\_State/New\\_York/index.asp](http://www.nass.usda.gov/Statistics_by_State/New_York/index.asp)

### USDA Census of Agriculture: <http://www.agcensus.usda.gov/>

### ERS Organic Production Data:

<http://www.ers.usda.gov/Data/Organic/>

### Farmland Information Center:

[http://www.farmlandinfo.org/agricultural\\_statistics/index.cfm?function=statistics\\_view&stateID=NY](http://www.farmlandinfo.org/agricultural_statistics/index.cfm?function=statistics_view&stateID=NY)

### American Farmland Trust publications:

<http://www.farmland.org/resources/publications/default2.asp>

\* For a definition of "land in farms", see page 19 in:

[http://usda01.library.cornell.edu/usda/nass/FarmLandIn/2010s/2010/FarmLandIn-02-12-2010\\_revision.pdf](http://usda01.library.cornell.edu/usda/nass/FarmLandIn/2010s/2010/FarmLandIn-02-12-2010_revision.pdf)



*Henderson Farm, Yates County - protected by a Land Trust conservation easement.*

*Photo by M. Fenton*

*The Finger Lakes Land Trust is a membership-supported, not-for-profit land conservation organization dedicated to protecting the lands that define the character of the Finger Lakes region. Since its founding in 1989, the Land Trust has protected over 16,000 acres of the area's forests, farms, lakeshore, and gorges.*

*Afoot in the Field is a newsletter provided by the Land Trust for landowners in the Finger Lakes who own properties that are permanently protected with a conservation easement, or who are otherwise committed to, or interested in, land conservation and wildlife habitat protection and improvement. For more information about the Finger Lakes Land Trust and its conservation programs visit [www.fllt.org](http://www.fllt.org) or call our Ithaca office at 607-275-9487.*

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