



2023 Impact Report

Community and collaboration rang throughout our work this year at Maine Farmland Trust. From convening researchers, farmers, and advocates to grow nationwide collaboration to address the PFAS crisis, to protecting the expansive wild blueberry barrens at Clarry Hill through the power of our community, to fostering peer-to-peer resource sharing among farmers in our Farm Network: we all contribute to growing the future of farming. Thank you to the thousands of members, funders, farmers, and partners who collaborated with MFT this year to build support for farming so that farmers and our communities can thrive.



In this report, we are excited to share the impact we made in 2023 through our Farmland Protection & Access, Farm Network, and Policy & Research efforts. And throughout our efforts in each of these program areas, we continued to make progress toward longer-term solutions to the PFAS crisis.

\$345,870+ in PFAS emergency relief funds delivered to **26** farms



...plus the purchase of the former Songbird Farm property for PFAS research

MFT continued to work with individual farms to deliver emergency relief funds, offer resources and technical assistance to help farmers mitigate contamination and pivot their businesses, and partner with farmers on protected farms to navigate the terms of their easements with as much flexibility as possible. Based on our experiences supporting farmers, MFT staff participated on three subcommittees to shape how the State's PFAS Fund can be spent and supported the finalization of the \$70 million Plan for Administration of the Fund to Address PFAS Contamination in July. And in September, MFT purchased the 45-acre former Songbird Farm property in Unity to make its highly-contaminated farmland available for research partners who are interested in exploring how PFAS contamination affects agricultural production and identifying soil remediation possibilities.

1,665+ acres of farmland protected with conservation easements across **13** farms



...keeping farmland available for generations to come

Clarry Hill is a regionally-known hilltop property in Union & Waldoboro that has been in wild blueberry production since the 1930s. Productive blueberry barrens cover 70% of the property – but when Clarry Hill went up for sale, its spectacular 360-degree views of the Camden Hills to the east and Mount Washington to the west made it especially vulnerable to non-agricultural development. Once wild blueberry lands are lost, it can take a decade or more to bring these wild plants back into commercial production. In September, with the support of dozens of generous donors who pitched in toward this special campaign, we protected Clarry Hill, closing on the easement at the same time Midcoast Conservancy purchased the property in a parallel conservation effort.

800+ acres of Maine's best agricultural soils protected



...so our most productive farmland stays in farming



With its deep, well-drained soils, its gentle slopes, and its position above two significant freshwater aquifers, New Leaf Farm in Durham is ideal farmland. One of the first commercial organic farms in Maine, farmer (and MFT Board Chair) Dave Colson and his wife Chris cultivated these rich soils from 1983-2011 for their vegetable business and fruit orchard, and today a neighboring livestock farmer hays its fields. In December, MFT partnered with the Royal River Conservation Trust and the Land for Maine's Future program to protect the 75-acre farm with an easement and Option to Purchase at Agricultural Value (OPAV). With 2,500+ feet of roadside frontage that would be attractive to potential developers, the easement protects the farm from subdivision, and the OPAV prevents single lot estate development by ensuring future sales of this rich farmland are to a working farmer.

380+ acres with an Option to Purchase at Agricultural Value (OPAV) across **6** farms



...helping working farmers access land in competitive markets

The 78 acres at Wormell Farms in Cumberland have been in Brendon Wormell's family for three generations, and in 2016 the family protected the farm with an easement so that it would stay a farm forever. After losing their contract with Horizon Organic in 2021, Brendon and his wife Brianna sought to purchase the dairy farm from their grandparents, Lee and Carole Wormell, and re-establish as a beef cattle operation – but in spite of the easement, the price of the scenic property just 20 minutes outside Portland was out of reach. If the farm were to hit the open market in a hot real estate market like Cumberland, it would be likely to attract competition from non-farmers who might view the farm as a desirable estate property. In March, Brendon and Bri worked with MFT to add an Option to Purchase at Agricultural Value (OPAV) to the already-existing easement, unlocking additional equity which helped them afford the purchase, while establishing new legal means to ensure any future sale outside the family will be to another active farmer. Brendon and Bri are now the third generation to own the farm and hope their young kids will eventually become the fourth.

92 acres of farmland in transition remained in active agriculture through links to new farmers



...who need land to establish or grow their farm business

After studying agriculture in school, working for farms out west, and eventually managing a farm operation, Michaela Downing was ready to move back to New England to invest in her own farm. Through Maine FarmLink, Michaela found 1/4 acre in Brunswick and began leasing from landowners Craig Freshley and Carol Nelson in April. She worked hard to bring the land into production and by early June was already harvesting greens, herbs, and radishes (with more on the way!) to sell at her farmstand. Michaela had decided not to sell at farmers markets in her first season, but given her early success, she brought Fric & Frac's Farm to the new Woodford's Corner Farmers Market in Portland. She hopes to continue to scale up, eventually purchase land, and hire a team that shares her vision.

281

easement-protected farms spanning all 16 counties supported by MFT's Land Stewards



...listening to farmers' needs, challenges, and offering resources

MFT Land Stewards assist farmers with the stewardship of their easements...and so much more! When a Steward visits a farm, they're building relationships with the farmers to learn more about their business, the challenges they're facing on their farm and in the industry, and their goals for the future. If a farmer mentions that they're getting ready to retire, Stewards can connect them with succession planning resources and Maine FarmLink. If a farmer needs a better drainage or irrigation system, Stewards can connect them with MFT's climate resilience planning supports and grant opportunities. Through these relationships, Stewards support farmers' needs on an individual level – and help MFT identify and advocate for solutions to broader challenges that affect Maine farmers as a whole.

58

farm businesses supported with workshops, technical assistance, and grants



...to grow their resilience to a changing economy and climate

Whether they are establishing, growing, or thinking about transitioning their farm, farmers are focused on sustaining a business – and MFT offers workshops, individualized technical assistance, peer-to-peer knowledge-sharing, and grants to support their goals. In January (left), the Business of Farming livestock cohort tackled questions like how to address the processing bottleneck and increase sales for livestock producers. In October (right), farmers gathered for a pasture walk at Balfour Farm to discuss what resilience in farming means to them in both the climate and financial sense, joined by forage and business management experts from UMaine and UVM. And all year long, MFT supported 26 farms with PFAS emergency relief funding and technical assistance to remain in business where possible.

\$197,000

in business and seed grants
awarded to **7** farm businesses
to support their financial goals



...and make larger-scale investments in our farming economy

After completing MFT's two-year Farming for the Long Haul program, three farms were each awarded a \$65,000 Implementation Grant this year. Dharma Farm in Washington was able to increase their year-round supply of produce to meet higher customer demand by installing two high tunnels and a wash/pack facility. Balfour Farm in Pittsfield purchased a cheese portioning machine to increase efficiency and offer custom sized pieces to meet the needs of new wholesale customers. And Sap Hound Maple Company in Brownfield purchased a reverse osmosis system and generators for their off-the-grid maple syruping operation so they can increase production to compete in the wholesale market. These farms are investing in the long-term sustainability of their businesses – and the sustainability of the suppliers, retailers, and communities who depend on the goods they produce.

612+

hours of technical assistance
delivered to **46** farm businesses



...helping farmers develop solutions specific to their farm

Through MFT's Climate Resilience program, Ben and Taryn Marcus at Sheepscot General Store and Farm in Whitefield are working with farm designer and site planner Ben Falk to analyze their farm's water management in light of more extreme drought and precipitation events, and improve the farm's resilience and ecosystem function in the Sheepscot River watershed. In November, more than 40 farmers joined us for a workshop at the farm to learn from their experience and see real-life examples.

MFT provided testimony on **27** bills in the State Legislature, with **14** bills we supported signed into law



This year, MFT provided testimony and worked directly with legislators on 27 bills to advance the future of farming in Maine. Key among our legislative victories are bills that ensure that solar energy projects avoid or minimize impacts to Maine's valuable, productive farmland. LD 1881 adds agriculture to the list of natural resources protected under solar siting laws and disincentivizes solar projects proposed on 5+ acres of high-value farmland. LD 1591 promotes renewable energy projects on land with significant PFAS contamination, encouraging solar development away from still-productive agricultural lands while offering options for landowners to realize value from land taken out of production indefinitely. Other victories include bills that increase funding and training to expand our in-state agricultural infrastructure and processing capacity, provide emergency aid for dairy farmers affected by the crisis in production costs, and fund the Maine Healthy Soils Program and the Farmers Drought Relief Grant Program to help farms become more resilient to the effects of climate change.

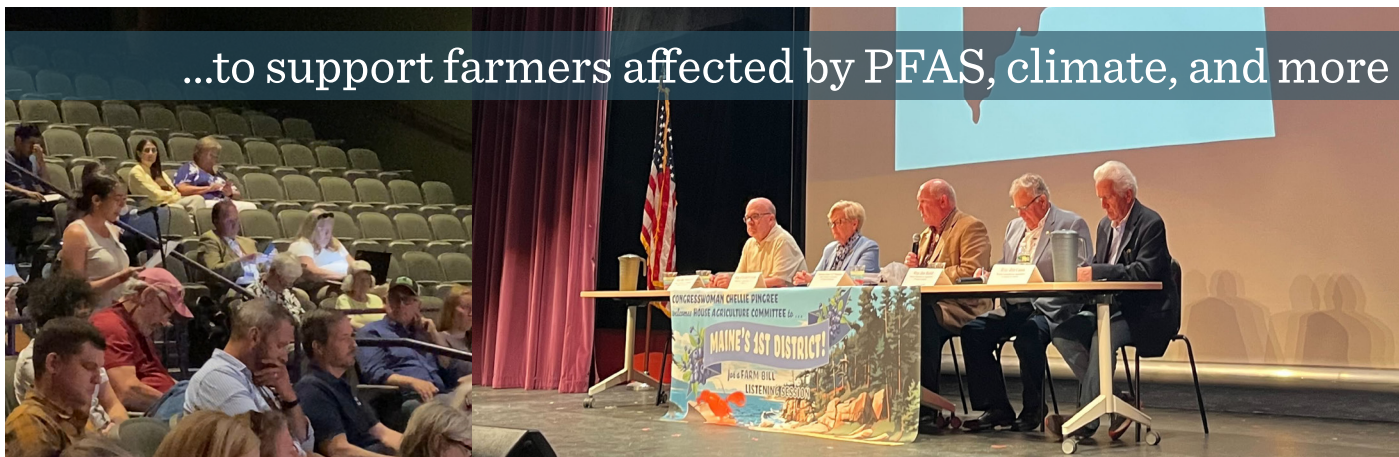
12 municipalities supported with technical assistance to develop more farm-friendly policies & planning



MFT works across the state to give public testimony at town meetings, speak at committee meetings, and engage with community groups and events to grow support for farms at the local level. This year, we expanded our municipal policy work and began offering specialized technical assistance directly to towns to advance farm-friendly ordinance and plan development. We helped municipal committees in Warren and Monmouth to craft and enact solar ordinances to protect important agricultural resources. We collaborated with the town of Lincolnville's Comprehensive Plan Review Committee to survey local farmers and wrote a report to share ideas on strategies to consider in their multi-year planning process, like establishing a town Agricultural Commission, implementing an agricultural district, and leveraging creative land use strategies to maintain open farmland. And throughout the year, we gathered examples from 50 Maine towns to include in the second edition of "Cultivating Maine's Agricultural Future," the farm-friendly municipal policy guide we're producing with Maine DACF (to be released early 2024).

500+ policymakers, farmers, and advocates engaged through national research and policy efforts

...to support farmers affected by PFAS, climate, and more



Drafted every five years, the 2023 Farm Bill was a big policy focus this year. MFT held farmer listening sessions and engaged with local groups to shape our top priorities: farmland protection and access, local and regional food systems development, climate-smart agriculture, and a federal safety net for PFAS-impacted farms. We worked with Maine's Congressional delegation and many partners to drive these priorities, with Maine's full Congressional delegation sponsoring the Relief for Farmers Hit with PFAS Act and Rep. Pingree sponsoring the Agriculture Resilience Act. In July, we also testified at a Farm Bill field hearing hosted by Chairman Glenn Thompson, Rep. Chellie Pingree, and members of the U.S. House Agriculture Committee. With the 2018 Farm Bill extended through next September, MFT will continue to advocate for these Farm Bill provisions throughout 2024.

350+ scientists, farmers, and advocates connected to research and address PFAS in agriculture



...making progress toward long-term PFAS solutions nationwide

As other states begin to grapple with PFAS contamination on farms, we all need to collaborate across state lines and sectors to develop nationwide solutions. In September, we led an interactive workshop on how to support PFAS-impacted farmers with peers from 50+ conservation organizations at the Land Trust Alliance's 2023 Rally conference. In October, we co-organized a national symposium held in Michigan, "PFAS: Current Knowledge and Applications for Agricultural Production," gathering nearly 200 scientists, farmers, and advocates who are on the leading edge of PFAS research – or on the front lines of PFAS contamination – to share knowledge and spark collaborations. In November, we co-organized the "PFAS in Agriculture: Maine Regional Meeting" to continue these discussions with over 100 researchers, farmers, and advocates in the Northeast, including a tour of current on-farm research projects on biocontainment, crop uptake, and soil remediation. PFAS contamination doesn't have to be "forever" if we invest in research and supports for impacted farmers in Maine and across the country.

Who We Are

1500+ individuals in MFT's member community

550+ farms in MFT's Farm Network

35+ staff members

Board of Directors

Dave Colson Chair

Justin Jamison Treasurer

Margot Kelley Secretary

Nick Armentrout

Jason Bolton

Steve Crane

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