

When American Farmland Trust started 30 years ago, most communities were just waking up to the dangers of farmland loss, and few had taken action. Now, farmland protection is a national movement. Public and private efforts to preserve farm and ranch land are underway from coast to coast—and have protected well over three million acres.

During the past three decades, American Farmland Trust has nurtured these burgeoning efforts across the country. Sharing resources and advice. Researching what works and why. Guiding the development of conservation programs. Using our megaphone to raise awareness and to call for more conservation funding. And in some cases, even launching new on-the-ground organizations to advance the cause.

Along the way, we learned there is no one-size-fits-all solution to the problem of farmland loss. In the pages that follow, we present you with ten pioneering people, places and partnerships of farmland protection—all with their own stories about how innovation and perseverance made all the difference. This represents just a small slice of the many farmers, leaders and citizens working tirelessly around the country to save the land that sustains us.

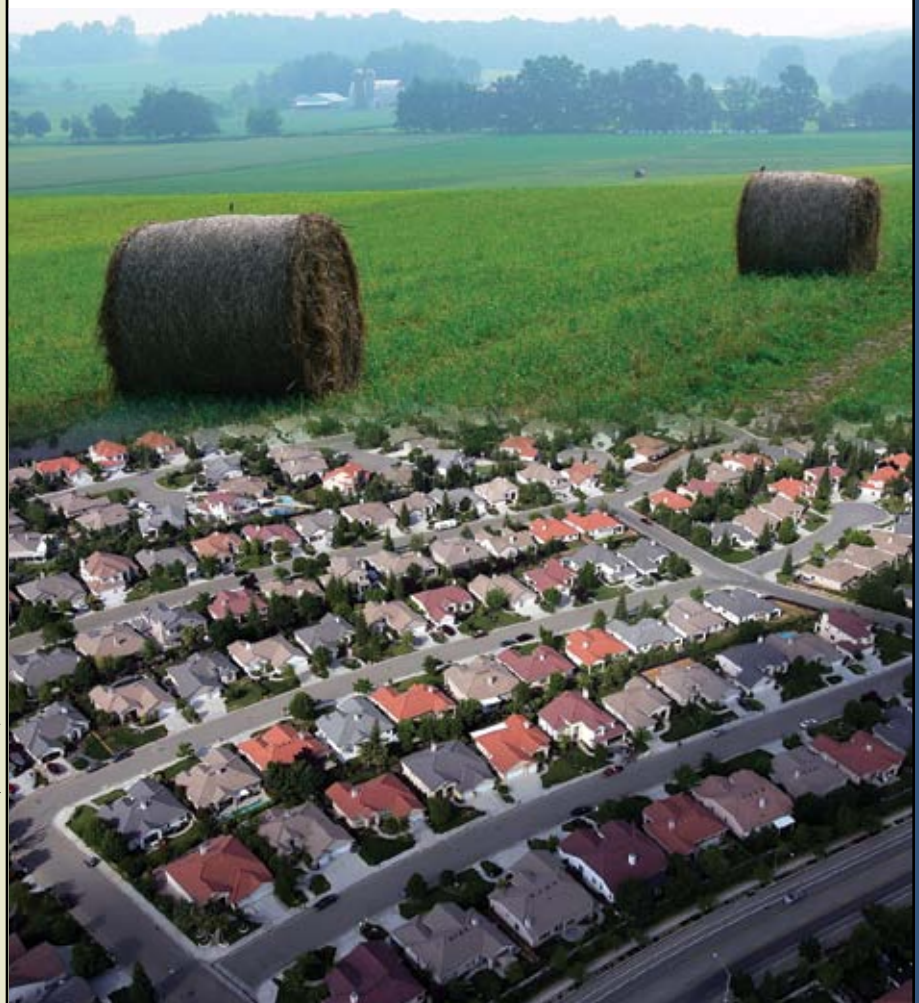
Top: Kline Farm, a preserved farm in Mt. Hope, Ohio

Bottom: A residential development cuts into farmland along the San Joaquin River, California.

FARMLAND PROTECTION TRAILBLAZERS

10 *People, Places & Partnerships Making a Difference*

BY KIRSTEN FERGUSON



BOTTOM: MARCIO JOSE SANCHEZ/AP PHOTO. TOP: ABRAM KAPLAN

1. DALE REINER AND TULALIP TRIBES

Snohomish, Washington

A partnership between a Native American tribe and Washington farmers is turning a challenge into an economic asset, with the ultimate goal of protecting water and farmland.

The health of his land, and the water that flows through it, has always been a big concern for Dale Reiner, a rancher in northwest Washington's Snohomish County, which lies between the Puget Sound and the snow-capped peaks of the Cascade Mountains. He's worked with American Farmland Trust on Pioneers of Conservation projects to protect endangered salmon in the Skykomish River, which runs through Reiner's 300-acre cattle ranch.

Protection of the environment is also vitally important to the neighboring Tulalip Tribes, who have long depended on salmon for their culture, sustenance and livelihood. Working with Reiner and local farmers, the tribe came up with the idea for a biomass digester to turn manure from local dairy farms into electricity for area homes. The power project helps struggling dairy farmers meet water regulations and cut down on commercial fertilizer by generating compost they can apply to their fields.



A traditional Native American canoe on Tulalip Bay near Marysville, Washington

TED WARREN/AP PHOTO

Reiner serves as president of Qualco Energy, a non-profit partnership between farmers, Tulalip Tribes and a salmon recovery group to run the biomass digester. "Qualco means 'joining of two rivers' in Tulalip," he explains. "That's symbolic because we're joining two cultures."

In addition to cleaner water, the project also captures methane, a powerful greenhouse gas. But it has another primary goal: helping area dairies stay in business by giving them a profitable way to meet environmental demands. "The only way to save farmland is to make it so valuable that farmers don't want to sell it," Reiner says.



Farmer Dale Reiner with some of the cows that fuel Qualco's biomass power plant

RAMI GRUNBAUM/THE SEATTLE TIMES



VERMONT FOODBANK

David Thurlow at the Vermont Foodbank's Kingsbury Farm

2. VERMONT FOODBANK FARM Warren, Vermont

In the Mad River Valley, where demand for local food often exceeds the supply, the Vermont Foodbank found a novel way to support farmland protection and bring more local food to the community.

When the Vermont Foodbank, which serves anti-hunger programs across the state, saw the opportunity to buy a 22-acre protected farm in central Vermont's Mad River Valley, the timing was right. Due to the economy, donations of non-perishable items were down. And Foodbank officials had been thinking about ways to increase their connection to local food and improve the nutritional value of the food they distribute.

"There's a lot of demand. When we do get fresh produce, it goes—people want it," says the Vermont Foodbank's David Thurlow. The Foodbank wrote the winning proposal to buy the historic farm, which had been purchased and protected in 2007 by Vermont Land Trust after community groups—who didn't want to see the prominent farm developed—rallied and helped raise

money for its conservation. The land trust then solicited offers from potential buyers who would use the protected farm property to advance the goals of the community.

"We embraced the Vermont Foodbank proposal because it captured so much of what the community wanted to see: to have a farm in the community to feed people in the community," says Liza Walker of Vermont Land Trust.

The Foodbank is now leasing the farm to vegetable growers Aaron Locker and Susanne Slomin, who will supply the Foodbank with a percentage of their organic produce—mainly heavy root crops that store well, such as onions and carrots, as well as fresh leafy greens. "People are thrilled. The cooks at the local senior center couldn't be happier," Thurlow says.

Located in a heavily trafficked area along busy Route 100, the farm will also serve as an educational facility, helping to raise awareness about three key issues, says Thurlow. "First, the importance of farmland protection—'no farms, no food.' Second, that we can help the small farmer with a unique business model like this. And third, the necessity of including low income people in the expansion of local food."

3. AMOS FUNK Lancaster County, Pennsylvania

Amos Funk brushed off criticism to promote farmland preservation at a time when people knew little about it—leading his county to develop one of the top farmland protection programs in the nation.

“Farmland’s savior” read the headline of an editorial in a Lancaster, Pennsylvania newspaper after vegetable farmer Amos Funk passed away in February at the age of 98. Savior he was: when developers tried to have funding for Lancaster County’s model farmland preservation program cut in 2005, Funk called a press conference on his farm to denounce the effort. That led the Lancaster County Board of Commissioners to commit even more money to preservation: \$100 million during the next decade.

When Funk first talked to people, decades prior, about the need for farmland preservation, he was called a communist or just plain crazy. In 1980, he finally succeeded in getting the Lancaster County Board of Commissioners to establish an agricultural preserve board, and he became the first chairman. And he later convinced the county to put farmland preservation funding up for a public referendum, which passed overwhelmingly and has been part of every Lancaster County budget since then.

Because Lancaster’s many Plain Sect farmers shunned government programs, Funk saw the need to create a private local organization to work with farmers to preserve their land, and so he helped found the Lancaster Farmland



RICHARD HERTZLER/LANCASTER NEWSPAPERS, INC.

Farm preservation leader Amos Funk outside his home in Millersville, Pennsylvania

Trust. More than 86,000 acres of county land have now been protected through public and private efforts.

“All of us that work to promote farmland protection on the East Coast owe a great deal to Amos for his energy and foresight,” says Bob Wagner, senior policy and program advisor of American Farmland Trust. “Lancaster County’s farmland preservation program has no peer. It’s one of the best nationwide and Pennsylvania’s state program is without a doubt the standard-bearer for the country.”



NICHOLAS T.

A farm in West Lampeter Township, Lancaster County, Pennsylvania

Why Save Farmland?

Every minute of every day, we lose two acres of agricultural land to sprawling development. Over the past 20 years, the average acreage per person for new housing almost doubled—with our best agricultural soils being developed the fastest.

National Economy and World Food Security

The U.S. food and farming system contributes nearly **\$1 trillion to our national economy**—more than 13 percent of the gross domestic product—and employs 17 percent of the labor force. World consumers of U.S. agricultural exports are expected to increase their purchases in the future. With a rapidly increasing world population and expanding global markets, saving American farmland is a prudent investment in the world food supply and the nation's economic future.



VETTA COLLECTION/ISTOCKPHOTO

Protection of the Environment

Well-managed agricultural land supplies important goods and services for our environment. Farm and ranch land provides food and cover for wildlife, helps control flooding, protects wetlands

and watersheds and maintains air quality. And new energy crops have the potential to replace some of our fossil fuels.

Fresh Local Food and Strong Communities

Farms closest to our cities, and directly in the path of development, produce much of our fresh food—**an astounding 91 percent of our fruit and 78 percent of our vegetables**. And for many Americans, compelling reasons for saving farmland have to do with protecting the quality of life in their communities—scenic and cultural landscapes, farmers markets, recreational opportunities, local jobs and community businesses.

Healthy Local Economies

New development requires services such as schools, roads and fire/police protection, while privately owned and managed agricultural land requires very few services. Cost of Community Services (COCS) studies show that—**nationwide—farm, forest and open lands more than pay for the municipal services they require**, while taxes on residential uses, on average, fail to cover costs.



JOHN CROSS/AP PHOTO/THE MANKATO FREE PRESS

Martin and Loretta Jaus on their organic dairy farm near Gibbon, Minnesota

4. PENINSULA TOWNSHIP Michigan

After launching 20 years ago, farmland protection efforts in Peninsula Township soared, transforming the agricultural industry in ways no one imagined.

The alarm sounded in the late 1980s for this skinny peninsula in Lake Michigan when a prominent farm was developed—its orchards ripped out for upscale homes and condos. Next, the 507-acre Murray Farm, located at the tip of Old Mission Peninsula—which has a micro-climate ideal for growing fruit like cherries, apples and grapes—came up for sale.

“Everyone thought if the Murray Farm went down, farms would fall like dominoes. It would have eroded confidence among the agricultural community,” says Brian Bourdages of the Grand Traverse Regional Land Conservancy.

Farmer and township board supervisor Rob Manigold turned to American Farmland Trust for help. AFT stepped in and bought the land, holding it until Michigan Department of Natural Resources could take it over.

Township officials then drafted AFT to help them create a purchase of development rights program to protect farmland. Thanks to the tireless efforts of Manigold and planner Gordon Hayward, Peninsula Township celebrated the 15th anniversary of its program last year. During that time, more than 5,000 acres of land have been protected—nearly one-third of the peninsula’s land mass.

“One of the benefits we’ve seen is a really vibrant, stable agricultural community,” says Bourdages. The increase in capital available to farmers from the program has allowed them to make investments in higher value



A grape harvester in a Pinot gris vineyard on Michigan’s Old Mission Peninsula

TYLER SIFE/AP PHOTO/TRaverse CITY RECORD/EALE

crops, such as wine grapes, fresh market apples and hand-picked sweet cherries.

The program also had a stimulating effect on farmland protection efforts throughout the region. “Given what’s going on with manufacturing, people in the Midwest are starting to realize the economic importance of agriculture,” Bourdages says. “Peninsula Township was a catalyst for many of the local farmland protection programs in Michigan. Farmers here who protected their land are still getting calls from farmers all over the region saying, ‘Tell me what you did.’”



A view of Lake Michigan’s Grand Traverse Bay from protected land growing Riesling grapes at Chateau Grand Traverse winery

GRAND TRAVERSE REGIONAL LAND CONSERVANCY

5. CAMPAIGN FOR WISCONSIN'S FARM AND FOREST LANDS

Three decades after launching their first farmland protection program, Wisconsin's conservation efforts get a boost with a comprehensive new plan for working lands.

Shortly after taking office in 2003, Wisconsin's newly appointed secretary of agriculture Rod Nilsestuen asked Tom Lyon, the retired CEO of a Wisconsin cattle cooperative, what should be done to protect the state's agricultural industry. Lyon, who had served on the board of American Farmland Trust in the 1980s, had an answer: better protect the state's beleaguered farmland.

Although Wisconsin's considerable agricultural industry generates 50 to 60 billion dollars a year, the state had not done enough over the years to help farmers protect their land from sprawl. "We were getting dotted with houses out in the country next to farmland, and we had some poor development occurring around urban areas like Milwaukee and the Twin Cities," Lyon says.

Nilsestuen put together a task force and spent a year developing a plan to create a new farmland protection



Wisconsin Agriculture Secretary Rod Nilsestuen (left) and Tom Lyon (right)

program along with "agricultural enterprise areas" where farmers would agree to not develop their land in exchange for tax incentives. The next step was to get the package of reforms—known as the Working Lands Initiative—through the legislature and signed into law. American Farmland Trust and project partners launched the campaign and blanketed the state, generating grassroots support for the initiative.

Months of hard work paid off: in early 2009, Governor James Doyle put the Working Lands Initiative in his budget message, and the legislature adopted it in July. With

\$12 million in state funding, the initiative is now being implemented—and not a moment too soon for the state's hard-hit farmers. "This was a model for how state policy should work," says Lyon. "We started at the grassroots, and we brought in AFT as an external force. The result serves as a model for how state policy can be developed."



PETER THOMSON/AFP PHOTO/LA CROSSE TRIBUNE

A rural Crawford County farm in Mount Sterling, Wisconsin



JEREMY GREEN

Protected farmland at Brotherhood Farms, Easton, New York

6. GEORGE HOUSER Washington County, New York

Upstate New York dairy farmer George Houser spent more than two decades preserving his farm piece by piece—sparking a local farmland protection movement in the process.

Someone has to be first. In many communities struggling to protect farmland, skepticism gradually turned to enthusiasm as farmers saw their neighbors protect their land and benefit from it—whether from the satisfaction of being able to pass their land onto future generations or the increased ability to invest back in their operations.

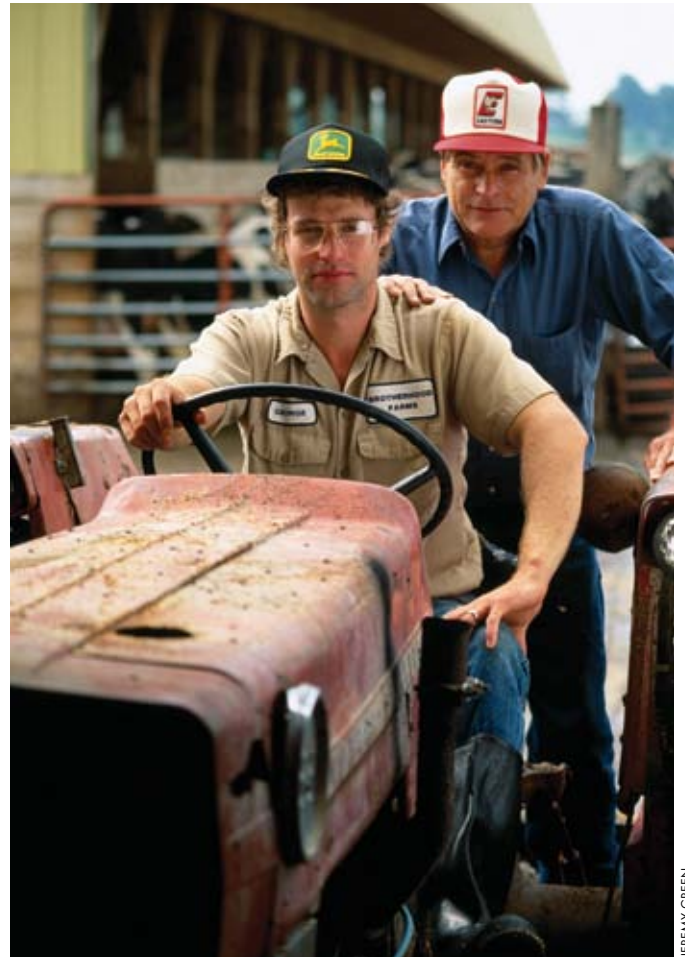
Dairy farmer George Houser Jr., who farms a good-sized chunk of fertile Hudson River bottom land in bucolic Washington County, New York, was first before many others were first. He became concerned early on, in the 1950s, that local governments were ignoring their farmland loss. “If you don’t set aside blocks of farms, conflicts can increase to the point where farmland always loses,” Houser says. “But ultimately everybody loses.”

Armed with a degree in government from Harvard, Houser spent the decades that followed working with fellow farmers and citizens, American Farmland Trust and his local planning board to develop guidelines that would save farmland. In 1990, he co-founded the Agricultural Stewardship Association, which became the first local land trust in New York dedicated solely to protecting agricultural land.

Houser’s own personal farmland protection journey began when he and his wife Earline donated an easement to American Farmland Trust in 1988, and it was finally completed last year when the family worked with the Agricultural Stewardship Association to conserve the final 302-acre portion of their 1,030-acre Brotherhood Farms.

His determination inspired many of his farm neighbors along Route 40 in the town of Easton to protect thousands of acres of their own land as well.

“It’s beyond personal,” Houser says. “People have to have food and the land to grow it. I feel like we accomplished a great thing.”



JEREMY GREEN

George Houser Jr., and his son George III

7. UPPER ELK RIVER VALLEY Colorado

Over kitchen table meetings with their neighbors, a group of Colorado ranchers took control of their own fate, creating a compact to limit growth.

When ranchers in western Colorado's Upper Elk River Valley realized that condos and vacation time shares, spilling over from popular nearby ski resorts, threatened to drive ranching from the fertile agricultural valley, they took matters into their own hands. Ranchers Steve Stranahan and Jay Fetcher approached their neighbors and found they shared a commitment to keeping ranching in the productive valley, where a lack of planning had led to haphazard growth that was irrevocably altering the valley's beautiful landscape and Western character.

Over meetings at the kitchen tables of their neighbors, the group of ranchers formed the Upper Elk River Valley compact, developing a vision for how ranching, recreational uses and carefully located development could fit together. They worked with American Farmland Trust to establish a set of voluntary principles that called for home construction only where it would not harm agricultural operations or valley views. It became the first private, community-wide agreement of its kind in the nation.

To show their commitment to keeping their land in ranching, several prominent valley ranchers—including Fetcher, Mary Mosher and Stranahan—donated conservation easements on their land, inspiring others to do the same.

The efforts of Upper Elk River Valley ranchers have protected 8,500 acres, with more in the works. "It's crucial that we protect our agricultural land. But it has to be done as a community, because one individual can't do it alone," says Stranahan, who owns The Home Ranch, a cattle operation and dude ranch, and is now a board member of American Farmland Trust. Fetcher went on to help form the Colorado Cattlemen's Agricultural Land Trust, which has preserved another 350,000 acres throughout the state.

In 1996, Routt County voters overwhelmingly approved a program to protect threatened agricultural land, influenced by the ranchers' vision. In all of Routt County, almost 10 percent of privately owned property is now preserved. "Efforts to preserve the Upper Elk River Valley are ongoing," Stranahan says. "But thanks to the work of many ranchers and community members, much of the valley is now safe from the developer's knife."



Ranchers Ann and Steve Stranahan





CRAIG HOLMAN/AP PHOTO/DISPATCH

Suburban sprawl surrounds farmland in Columbus, Ohio.

Securing the Nation's Future: The Case for a New National Agricultural Lands Study

Will the United States continue to have enough agricultural land to meet the needs of the nation and world?

BY BOB WAGNER, SENIOR POLICY AND PROGRAM ADVISOR, AMERICAN FARMLAND TRUST

Thirty years ago, the United States undertook the first National Agricultural Lands Study (NALS) to document the extent and causes of farmland loss. Released in 1981, the study found that large areas of agricultural land, and soils of the highest quality, were being permanently converted to non-agricultural use.

In response, Congress passed the Farmland Protection Policy Act in 1981, providing some farmland protection tools and a justification for federal funding to support efforts to protect high quality farmland. The study helped launch dozens of state and local farmland protection

programs and served as an impetus for the founding of American Farmland Trust.

In the three decades since, we have seen significant changes in the challenges and opportunities facing U.S. agriculture. We now know that well-managed agricultural lands could potentially help us address a changing climate, a growing population and serious concerns about our nation's food and energy security. Energy crops and crop residues could provide 14 percent of U.S. electricity use or 13 percent of the nation's motor fuel demands. Changes in agriculture practices and foresting of marginal

agricultural lands could offset 20 percent of current U.S. greenhouse gas emissions. Agricultural lands, at a fraction of the cost, could help offset billions of dollars worth of mandated upgrades at publicly owned water treatment plants. And having farms that can grow food close to cities could reduce the energy needs and greenhouse gas emissions associated with shipping food long distances, while increasing the availability of fresh local food for our citizens.

Despite efforts around the country to protect agricultural land, we continue to lose farm and ranch land at a rate of over one million acres a year. Can our nation survive that loss of our most basic food, fiber and fuel resource? Only a new National Agricultural Lands Study can determine the country's need for agricultural land as a national security asset and lay the groundwork for a robust strategy to secure this resource base for future generations.

8. FARMSCAPE SEMINAR Denison University, Ohio

In a unique class at Denison University, students are examining the many facets of farmland preservation through the lens of a camera.

Flocks of geese fly over a preserved Ohio field in winter. Historic farm buildings stand undisturbed after outlasting threats from developers. Farmers go about their work in barns and fields. These are all images captured by students in Denison University's Farmscape Seminar, a program that documents Ohio farmland preservation while teaching students about farming and photography.

Developed by environmental studies professor and photographer Abram Kaplan, the class teaches students about legal and economic tools that protect agricultural land from development. (They read American Farmland Trust's *Saving American Land: What Works* as a primer.) Kaplan came up with the idea when a farmer approached him at a conference and suggested he start documenting Ohio's protected farms. "We're taking an artistic look at this topic that is often not given a visual perspective," Kaplan says. "There's something deeply authentic about the images that result."

Students in the class visit protected farms, interviewing the farmers and photographing their operations. They compile their photographs into books of images portraying the farms and their stories and in some cases have presented their work to the public.



ABRAM KAPLAN

The students—few from farming backgrounds—come away with new insights about the industry and the importance of preservation. "Students often come into the class not very knowledgeable about farms and farming," Kaplan says. "But as they start talking to farmers and hear why they want to preserve their land, they are energized by the optimism that these farmers feel about the future of the land. Before, farmland was something students may have just driven past, but after the class it's something they actually feel a part of—some even start considering farming as a career."



ABRAM KAPLAN

Students in Denison's Farmscape Seminar



ABRAM KAPLAN

A barn window view of the preserved Hohmann farm in Pataskala, Ohio



9. TEXAS AGRICULTURAL LAND TRUST

In a state that's losing farm and ranch land faster than any other, the Texas Agricultural Land Trust is moving rapidly to make up for lost time.

At 142 million acres, Texas leads the nation in land devoted to private farms, ranches and forests—84 percent of the state's land base. Texas is also losing that land faster than just about anywhere: a study commissioned by American Farmland Trust found the state lost 2.1 million acres in the last 10 years alone.

But when conservation advocates first tried to pass legislation enacting a farm and ranch land protection program for the state, they failed, in part due to opposition from the agricultural community. Lessons were learned the second time around. American Farmland Trust hired rancher Blair Fitzsimons to alleviate rancher concerns and successfully shepherd the program through the Texas legislature.

"I was charged with bringing the agricultural community on board and forging a consensus between agricultural groups and conservationists," Fitzsimons says. "There were a lot of misconceptions surrounding conservation easements. There's still a lot of skepticism, but I definitely see brick walls coming down."



Blair Fitzsimons

Fitzsimons was then tasked with leading a new statewide organization, the Texas Agricultural Land Trust, to work directly with state farmers and ranchers. "Right out of the starting gate, we had people lining up for easements. By the end of the first year, 75,000 acres had been protected," Fitzsimons says.

American Farmland Trust led the effort to create the new organization, which was modeled after other range-land-focused groups such as the Colorado Cattlemen's Agricultural Land Trust. "We had the benefit of having this tremendous body of expertise behind us with AFT," says Fitzsimons. "It gave us significant credibility in the agricultural community and really helps us to this day."

The land trust is serving a vital function for the Lonestar State, where rapidly accelerating land values and low returns in livestock markets are placing tremendous pressure on ranchers to sell chunks of their land. This splitting of ranches into smaller pieces sets up a "massive chain reaction going down the line," Fitzsimons says. "When you've got this massive fragmentation going on in certain parts of the state, these properties can no longer support themselves. Then ranchers have no alternative between hold out and sell out."

Saving the Land that Sustains Us

American Farmland Trust continues the fight to make sure local communities and farmers have the tools they need to save the land that sustains us. Your support helps us:

Protect Farmland and Keep the Land Healthy. For more than 30 years, we've been the national leader in saving farmland and supporting conservation practices that protect the environment. Through our work promoting smart growth and helping state, federal and local governments design, implement and fund farmland protection programs, we will continue to lead the urgent drive to save farmland—an integral part of the "green infrastructure" needed for America's future.

Plan for Agriculture and Strengthen Regional Food Systems. Even in states like California, the demand for local food and farm



CHRISTOPHER LEAVELL

The rural and urban collide in Meridian, Idaho.

products exceeds the available supply, with many obstacles in the way for local products to reach nearby consumers. We're continuing our cutting-edge work with states and communities to develop farm-friendly plans, local food systems and farmland protection strategies.

Promote Changes in Food and Farm Policy. Many titles in the federal farm bill have implications for farmland protection, local food and the environment. In addition to achievements in conservation and farmland protection, our work on the 2008 Farm Bill and other federal legislation has succeeded in securing significantly increased funding and new programs to support farm profitability, environmental stewardship and working lands protection.

Provide Research and Advice for Farmers, Policymakers and Citizens. Our Farmland Information Center—a partnership between American Farmland Trust and the USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service—is a clearinghouse for information about farm and ranch land protection, environmental stewardship, and programs and policies that support the business of farming. Call (800) 370-4879 for free assistance or visit www.farmlandinfo.org.

American Farmland Trust needs your help to save the land that sustains us. To learn how you can make a donation to AFT today, please visit www.farmland.org/support or contact American Farmland Trust at (800) 431-1499.

The Apple as Planet Earth

Do you know how much of the Earth is suitable for farming? Watch our video about why protecting farmland is so important. Go to www.farmland.org/apple.



SAN JOAQUIN VALLEY California

A far-reaching campaign seeks to save farmland in the San Joaquin Valley, one of the most threatened—yet most productive—agricultural areas in the world.

The San Joaquin Valley, which extends from the Sacramento-San Joaquin Delta in the north to the Tehachapi Mountains in the south, is one of the world's most diverse and productive agricultural regions. Valley farmers produce 300 different crops—from grapes to nuts, citrus and vegetables—worth \$20 billion annually.

But much of this bounty comes from only five million acres of irrigated cropland that are under siege from urban development. American Farmland Trust documented that the region is now developing an entire acre of farmland for every eight new residents. At this rate, the valley is expected to lose more than 600,000 acres of highly productive farmland by 2050.



San Joaquin County farmer Richard Rodriguez

STEVE YEATER/AP PHOTO

“AFT first made the San Joaquin its top priority in California in the early 1990s,” says Ed Thompson Jr., AFT’s California director. “Until then, interest in and concern about farmland loss was confined largely to the state’s coastal areas, which had already experienced rapid population growth.”

AFT’s coordinated campaign in the region focuses on minimizing the loss of farmland through better management of urban growth. As a start, a group of valley officials recently voted to adopt a regional “blueprint” that would save 175,000 acres of farmland by 2050, although AFT had pushed for an even more ambitious goal. In addition, AFT’s campaign is working to make sure the proposed California high speed rail project has a positive, rather than negative impact on agriculture in the valley, while participating in a statewide “Ag Vision” planning process to address economic, food safety, environmental and other pressing issues impacting California’s farmers. (For more information, visit www.farmland.org/california.)

Know a farmland protection trailblazer in your community? Write us at Editor, *American Farmland*, 1200 18th Street, NW, Washington, D.C. 20036 or email kferguson@farmland.org.



MARCIO JOSE SANCHEZ/AP PHOTO

Harvey Bailey walks through his orange orchard in Orange Cove, California.