



Trends in Agricultural Preservation Restriction Program Acquisitions: What Is (and Is Not) Being Protected

Survey of Massachusetts Farm Bureau Members

In July, 2009 AFT and the Massachusetts Farm Bureau Federation developed a survey to gauge landowner interest in the Agricultural Preservation Restriction (APR) program and to better understand the reasons why some landowners do not apply to the program. The survey was mailed to 2,000 full members of Massachusetts Farm Bureau.

Respondents

341 individuals representing all 13 Massachusetts counties responded. Worcester County had the greatest number of respondents, with 63 surveys returned. Suffolk, Norfolk, Nantucket and Dukes counties had 7 or fewer respondents each. The average farm size reported by respondents is 137 acres, with a range of 1 to 2,000 acres. Seventeen percent of respondents own some land enrolled in the APR program; 4% have all of their land enrolled.

Applications and Eligibility The vast majority—over 92%—had not applied to the APR program in the last 5 years. Of those who have not applied, 67% reported that their land is eligible for the program. Number of respondents who reported their land ineligible for the program cited the following reasons:

- The primary use of the land is for equestrian boarding/recreation riding (30 respondents)
- The parcels is less than the 5 acre minimum (24)
- The parcel is more than 66% wooded (15)
- Majority of land is in cranberry production (14)
- Less than half the parcel is prime or statewide important farmland soils (6)

Why Landowners Do Not Apply

Landowners were asked to rate the importance of 15 factors that contributed to their decision not to apply to the program. Landowners used a scale of one to five, one being “not important,” and 5 being “very important.” The top five factors cited are as follows:

- “APR program rules might change or additional constraints may be imposed on my land once it is enrolled in the program.”
- “The APR program is unlikely to pay what the restriction would be worth.”
- “I don’t know enough about the program to consider enrolling”.

- “My land is likely to escalate in value, and I want the option to sell it at full market value in the future.”
- “The restriction might limit my ability to change or expand my farm operation in the future.”

For a breakdown of factors cited by landowners by county, please see the table at the end of this document.

Landowner Awareness of APR Program Details

As indicated above, many farmland owners feel they do not know enough about the program to considering enrolling their land in it. Respondents were asked about 5 details of the program; percentages below indicate the percentage of respondents who replied “yes” to the question.

- “Are you aware that the APR program has a spending cap of \$10,000 per acre?” **(25%)**
- “Are you aware that in particular circumstances the APR program can pay up to \$20,000 per acre, if your land meets certain requirements?” **(13%)**
- “Are you aware that through local match or other funding sources the price paid for restricting your land can be higher than that paid by the Department’s APR program itself?” **(22%)**
- “Are you aware that there is a federal tax incentive that allows you to write-off, in certain cases, up to 100% of any donated value of the APR?” **(29%)**
- “If you decided in the future to apply for the APR program, would you know who to contact?” **(43%)**

Why Landowners Do Not Apply: Top Reasons Cited by County

| County | # of Responses | Most Important | Second Most Important | Third Most Important |
|------------|----------------|--|--|--|
| Barnstable | 13 | Rule changes may impose additional constraints | May limit changes or expansions of farm | Unlikely to pay what restriction is worth. |
| Berkshire | 26 | Land is likely to escalate in value | Rule changes may impose additional constraints | More difficult to find a buyer |
| Bristol | 37 | Rule changes may impose additional constraints | May limit changes or expansions of farm | Don't know enough about the program |
| Dukes | 5 | Not enough responses | | |
| Essex | 33 | Land is likely to escalate in value | Unlikely to pay what restriction is worth | Finding local match may be difficult |
| Franklin | 32 | Rule changes may impose additional constraints | Land is likely to escalate in value | Unlikely to pay what restriction is worth |
| Hampden | 17 | More difficult to find a buyer | Rule changes may impose additional constraints | Unlikely to pay what restriction is worth |
| Hampshire | 22 | Rule changes may impose additional constraints | Unlikely to pay what restriction is worth | Don't know enough about the program |
| Middlesex | 35 | Unlikely to pay what restriction is worth | Rule changes may impose additional constraints | Land is likely to escalate in value |
| Nantucket | 2 | Not enough responses | | |
| Norfolk | 7 | Not enough responses | | |
| Plymouth | 48 | Unlikely to pay what restriction is worth | Rule changes may impose additional constraints | Don't know enough about the program |
| Suffolk | 2 | Not enough responses | | |
| Worcester | 62 | Unlikely to pay what restriction is worth | Rule changes may impose additional constraints | Land is likely to escalate in value |