



American Farmland Trust  
SAVING THE LAND THAT SUSTAINS US

June 15, 2008

Dear Representative:

On behalf of American Farmland Trust, I write to urge your immediate attention to an issue of significant concern to agriculture and farmland protection advocates in Rhode Island: the failure to include the Administration's proposed 2008 Bond for farmland and open space protection funding in the FY 2009 Budget. Without a 2008 Bond, state land conservation programs will end.

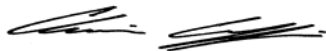
American Farmland Trust (AFT) has been active in national and New England farmland protection efforts since 1980. Through its Purchase of Farmland Development Rights Program, Rhode Island has permanently protected over 5,300 acres of the state's most productive farmland since 1985. However, less than 20% of the state's 45,800 acres of land in farms is permanently protected, and agricultural land is still being lost to residential and commercial development. A shrinking base of farmland threatens the long-term viability of the state's agricultural industry and its food production capacity.

Without state funding for farmland protection, Rhode Island will be unable to leverage millions of federal dollars through the federal Farmland Protection Program and many millions more through local and private contributions. Since 1985, Rhode Island has leveraged state spending of \$22.5 million on farmland protection with \$28.6 million in federal, local and private contributions. In the past five years alone, RI has received \$8.8 million from the federal Farmland Protection Program—an average of \$2.8 million a year.

The 2008 Farm Bill significantly increased funding for the federal Farmland Protection Program and extended for two years a popular conservation tax deduction that will encourage landowners to sell the development rights to their farms at less than their fair market value. As a result, there will be additional opportunities to leverage federal and private dollars for farmland protection in the next two years. Failure to fund the state program at a time when there is both additional federal matching funds and additional incentives for landowners to participate in the program seems penny wise and pound foolish.

American Farmland Trust urges you to support a \$15 million bond referendum for farmland and open space conservation in the FY 2009 Budget, and to do your part to help protect the twenty farms currently on the state program's waiting list.

With regards,



Cris Coffin  
New England Director

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