

# Bernardston Farmland Inventory

Bernardston is home to some of the most beautiful farms in our region. Bernardston's farmland contributes to the town's scenic landscape and rural character. However, many of these farm resources are not protected and could be lost to development or reforestation. Of all the farmland parcels in Bernardston, 90% are not permanently protected. Conservation of Bernardston's most important farmland is a critical first step to achieving the goals of the town's Open Space and Recreation Plan and expanding Bernardston's role in the regional food economy.

HENRY P. KENDALL FOUNDATION



Prepared for the Town of Bernardston in July 2016 by Mount Grace Land Conservation Trust with support from the Henry P. Kendall Foundation and the Massachusetts Land Initiative for Tomorrow (MassLIFT).

# About the inventory

## Purpose

This farmland inventory provides a snapshot of agriculture in Bernardston and can serve as a tool for towns, conservation organizations, and community members to build support for farming in the future.

## Key definitions

*Farmland parcels* are tax lots from town Assessor's data that have farm fields on them. Many farm parcels are partially wooded, with only some open fields being actively farmed.

The *primary farm product* is the main product produced on a given farm. Many farms produce multiple kinds of products apart from the primary farm product. Some farmers also rotate crops from year to year or swap land with other farmers, which is not captured here.

## Data sources

### Background information

- Franklin County Farm and Food Systems Project, published in 2015 by the Franklin Regional Council of Governments

### Community conversations

- Meetings with members of the Bernardston Agriculture Commission
- Interviews with other community members and farmers

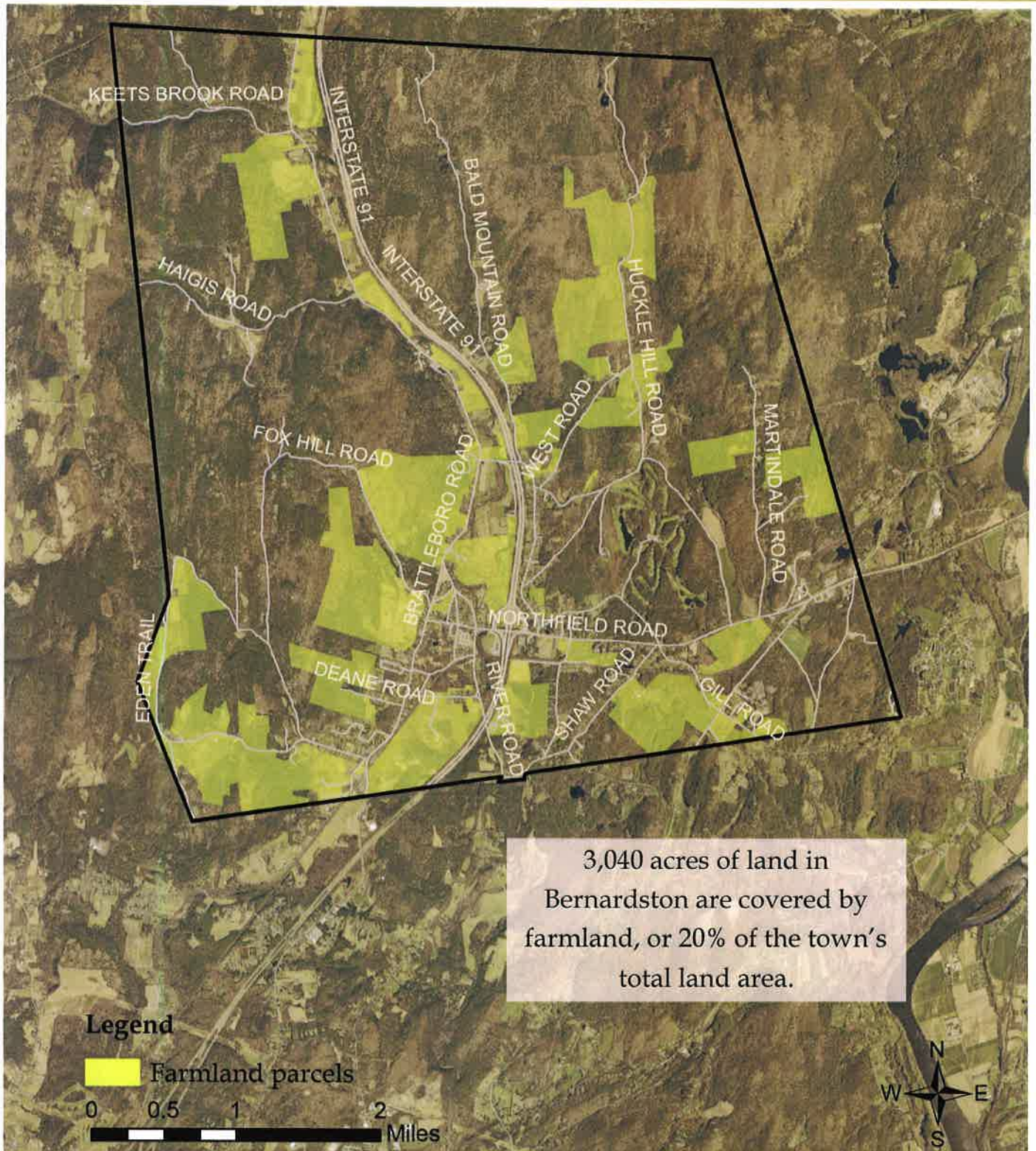
### MassGIS datalayers

- Land Use (2005)
- Level 3 Assessor's data
- Prime and statewide important farmland soils for Franklin County
- Protected open space

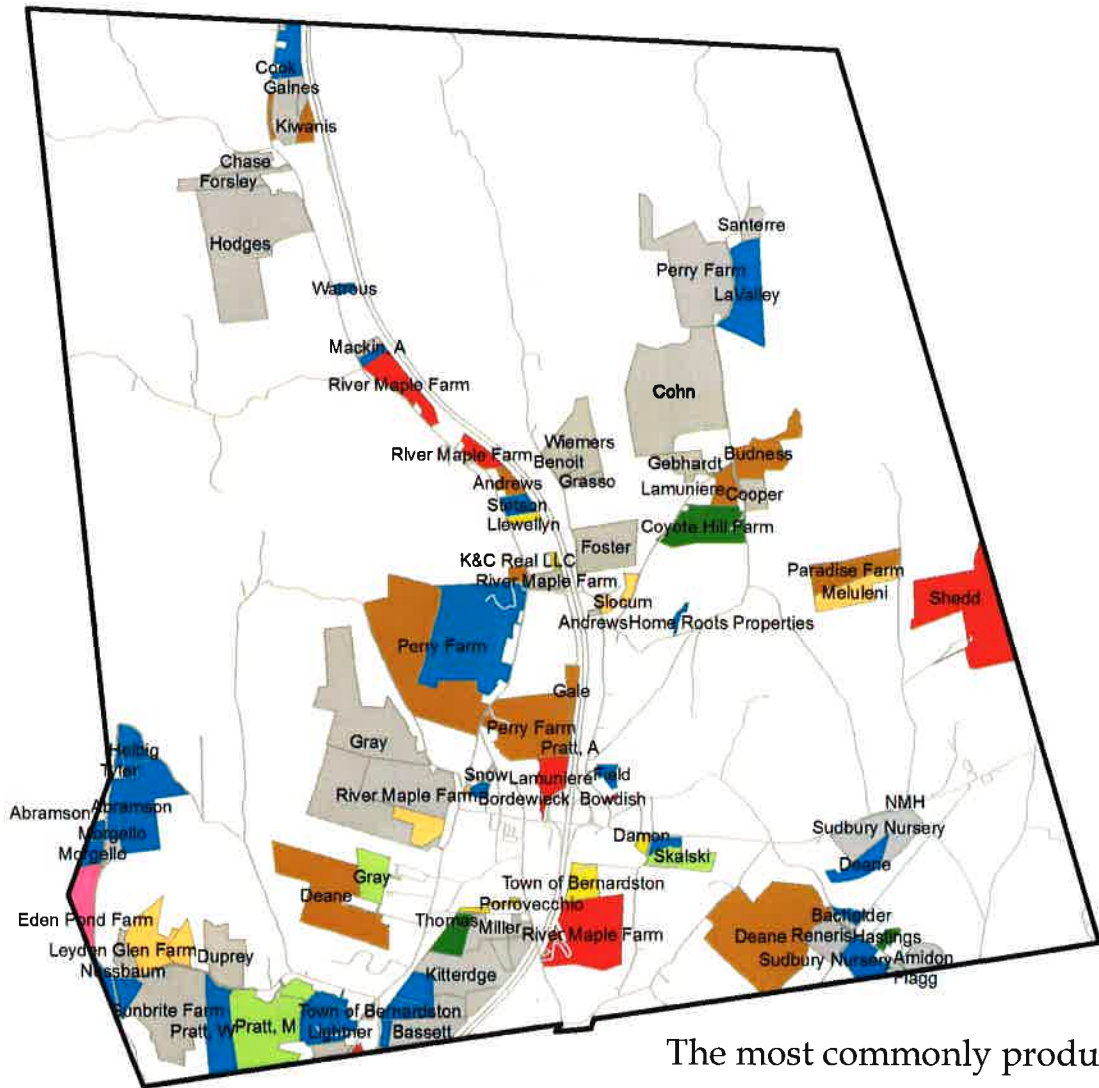
## Authors

The inventory is a project of Mount Grace Land Conservation Trust, with support from the Henry P. Kendall Foundation and the Massachusetts Land Initiative for Tomorrow (MassLIFT-AmeriCorps). This factsheet was prepared by Kathleen Doherty, MassLIFT-AmeriCorps 2015-2016, with help from Jamie Pottern, Mount Grace Land Conservation Trust, and Bradley Kennedy, MassLIFT-AmeriCorps 2014-2015.

# Farmland in Bernardston



# Bernardston's Farm Products



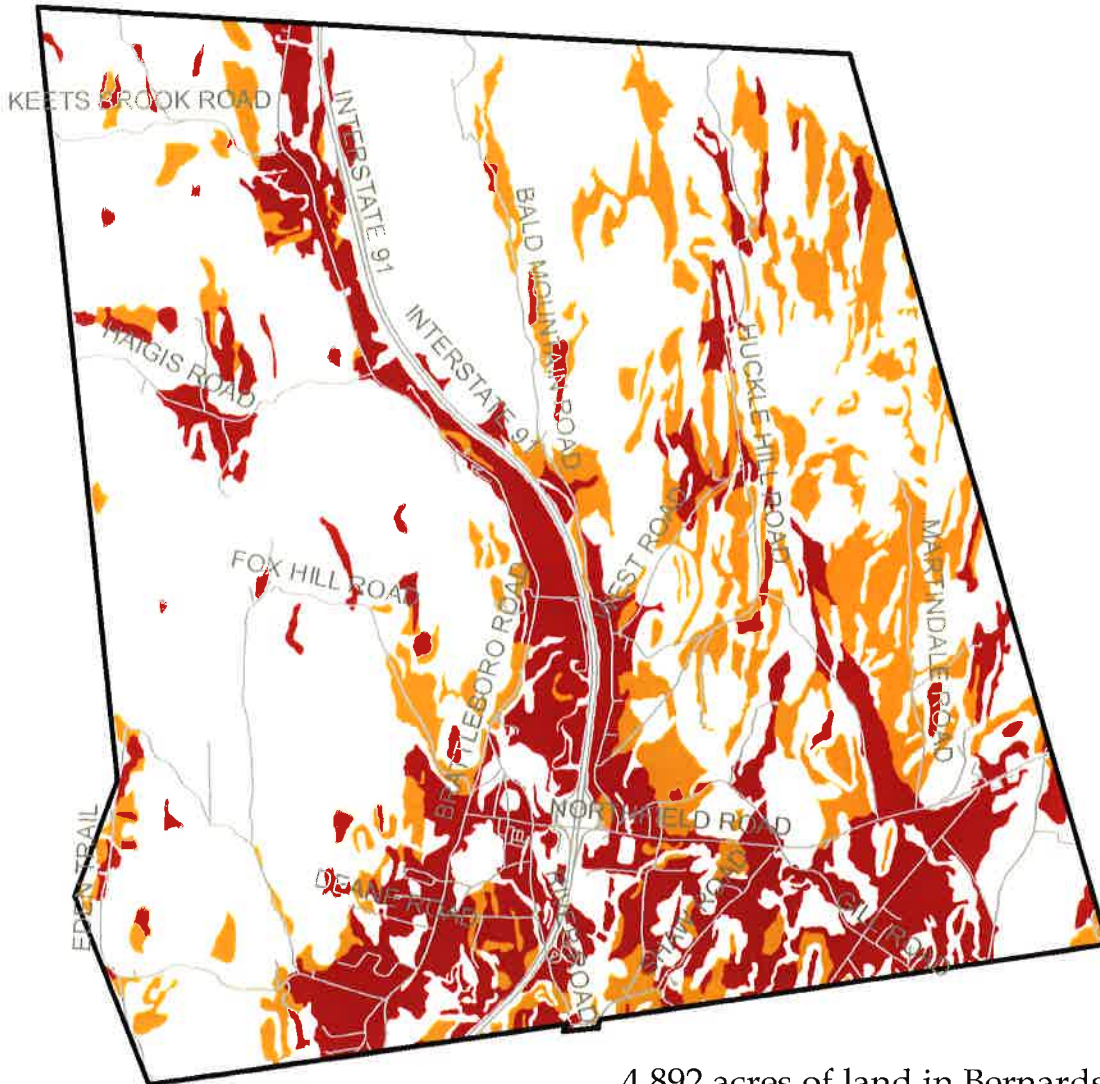
## Primary farm product

- |               |                          |
|---------------|--------------------------|
| Beef or Dairy | Other Animals            |
| Corn          | Trees, Plants, or Timber |
| Eggs          | Vegetables               |
| Hay           | No Data                  |
| Horses        |                          |



The most commonly produced farm product in Bernardston is hay, followed by horses. Many farmers also produce corn, vegetables, beef, dairy, and other products.



# Bernardston's Agricultural Soils



4,892 acres of land in Bernardston are covered by prime and statewide important farmland soils. However, 77% of those soils are not being utilized for crops or pasture.

## Legend

### Farmland soils



-  All areas are prime farmland
-  Farmland of statewide importance



# Unprotected Farms in Bernardston



## Legend

-  Protected farmland
-  Farmland parcels

90% of the farmland in Bernardston is NOT permanently protected and could be lost to development.



# Strategic farmland conservation plan: Suggested criteria to rank farms for conservation

		Suggested Criteria for Farm Conservation Priority Ranking					Rationale
Description		Criteria for Rank Number:					
		1	2	3	4	5	
Acreage	Total acreage of parcel	1-10 acres	11-50 acres	51-100 acres	101-200 acres	200+ acres	Larger farms will be prioritized in order to conserve more acres of farmland at once and improve regional food security.
Prime Soil - Total	Percent of total acreage covered by prime ag soil	1-20%	21-40%	41-60%	61-80%	81-100%	The presence of prime soil is an indicator of the land's potential capacity for food production, regardless of current land use.
Prime Soil - Fields	Percent of open fields covered by prime ag soil	1-20%	21-40%	41-60%	61-80%	81-100%	Farms whose prime soil is not covered by buildings or forest will be prioritized for conservation.
Development Threat	Likelihood land will be lost for commercial agricultural use, based on availability for development, ownership status, relationship to excluded parcels, rental/lease security and other specific factors	Threat is very low or non-existent	Threat is low	Threat is somewhat serious	Threat is high	Threat is imminent	Once farm fields are converted to building lots, their potential utility for food production is effectively destroyed forever. Farms that are imminently threatened by development should be prioritized for conservation.
Infrastructure	Presence of farmhouses, barns, and other buildings.	No infra. present	Minimal infra. in poor condition	Some infra. present, but condition is poor	Sufficient infra. for future farm operations	Infra. in good condition and more than sufficient for farm operations	Beginning farmers especially need infrastructure, including a farmhouse, to get their farm business started. Farms with at least one farmhouse and a sufficient number of barns and other farm structures in good condition will be prioritized for conservation.
Proximity to Protected Land	Distance from farm parcel to permanently protected land	>10 miles	>5 miles	>2 miles	>1/4 mile	Abutting	Clustering protected land promotes wildlife movement and landscape connectivity. Farms that abut other protected land will be prioritized for conservation.

**Suggested Criteria for Farm Conservation Priority Ranking**

	Description	Criteria for Rank Number:					Rationale
		1	2	3	4	5	
Historical/ community significance	A qualitative measure of the value placed on the farm by the community that accounts for the length of the farm's history and community connections to the land	Not at all significant	Not very significant	Somewhat significant	Very significant	Extremely significant	Community buy-in is an important piece of any conservation project. Farms that are significant to the community for historic or other reasons will be prioritized for conservation.
Scenic Value	The farm's aesthetic value as understood by community members	Not scenic or not visible	Not very scenic	Somewhat scenic	Scenic	Iconic	Certain farms are likely to be recognized by community members as iconic landmarks that tie them to the history of their town. These farms should be protected from development in order to preserve community identity.
Economic Significance	How much income the landowner makes from farming, and how much of that income comes from local sales	Minimal	-	Average	-	High	Farming can form an important facet of the regional economy. Farms that contribute significantly to the health of the local and regional economy should be prioritized for conservation.
Product	The types of products produced on the farm	Hay; eggs; forest products (1 point each)	Vegetables; meat; dairy; value-added products; orchard (2 points each)	Any combo. of products adding up to 3 points	Any combo. of products adding up to 4 points	Any combo. of products adding up to 5 points	Farms that produce a diversity of products that directly feed people will be prioritized for conservation.
Other	Other considerations that may affect the importance of a farm or farm cluster for development						The criteria listed above may not capture the whole picture for every farm; this category allows managers and community members to identify farms that wouldn't traditionally be prioritized for conservation but that have value in other respects.

These criteria were developed by Mount Grace staff as a method of ranking farms in terms of conservation priority. They are included here to provide guidance if the Town is interested in designing its own strategic planning process for farmland conservation. It should be noted that any ranking system is inherently subjective, and the Town should engage with farmers and residents to identify their own priorities for farmland conservation.