

# *New England Food Policy: Building a Sustainable Food System*

**Webinar #1: Report Overview**  
**May 14, 2014**



Northeast  
Sustainable  
Agriculture  
Working Group



**American Farmland Trust**  
SAVING THE LAND THAT SUSTAINS US



➤ ***American Farmland Trust***

- AFT works to save the land that sustains us by protecting farmland, promoting sound farming practices and keeping farmers on the land.

➤ ***Conservation Law Foundation***

- CLF uses law, science, and the market to create solutions that preserve our natural resources, build healthy communities, and sustain a vibrant economy.

➤ ***Northeast Sustainable Agriculture Working Group***

- NESAWG is a 12-state network uniting farm and food system practitioners and allies to build a sustainable, just and economically vibrant region.



## Goals:

- Currently NE produces:
  - 50% of the dairy products we eat
  - 40% of our vegetables
  - 10% of our fruit
  - 1% of our meat
  
- Foster the development of a vibrant NE regional food system.
  
- Shift: As much food as possible is produced, processed, distributed, and purchased within the region.
  
- Result = maximum resilience, minimum importation, significant economic and social return to region.



## Why Policy?

- Some existing policies create real barriers – need remedies
- Opportunities for policies to move us in the right direction state by state
  - e.g. Can direct funding and other resources toward priorities
- Creative thinking can yield opportunities for regional collaboration in policy realm

## Why New England?

- Agricultural heritage
- Six states can achieve more as a region than separately
- Precedent for working together on policy issues



Existing efforts to increase sustainability of our food system:

➤ ***Chief NE Agricultural Officers***

- 2010: Identified barriers/opportunities for increased production, maintaining farmland.

➤ ***State Food System Planning Processes***

- State Food Policy Councils: MA, CT, RI
- Food planning entities: ME, VT, NH

➤ ***NE Food Vision***

- Sketches a future, through a set of assumptions and calculations, in which the region could produce at least 50% of its food needs by 2060.
- Spring report release.



## *Policy Support for Planning Efforts:*

- As state planning efforts continue, key need for regulatory and policy change that will facilitate necessary changes.
- Examined policies that will be important in moving the region in the direction of the NE Food Vision.
- Focus on federal, regional, and state policies.



## *Research and Analysis:*

- Nearly two years of research and analysis.
- Primary research:
  - Interviews with food, agriculture and environmental policy experts throughout the region.
- Policy research and analysis:
  - Relevant state and federal laws, regulations, and other policies.
  - Regional models for states to work together to achieve shared goals.



- Land
  - Reducing conversion; increasing protection; expanding access
- Food production
  - Human resources; natural resources; business development and challenges
- Food safety, processing, aggregation & distribution/processing
  - Produce; dairy; meat and poultry; seafood
- Markets
  - Branding/market promotion; purchasing and procurement preferences; retail; institutional
- Waste streams
  - Beneficial reuse of organics
- Frameworks for Regional Food System Coordination
  - Models for regional coordination; existing regional networks; state plans, charters and food policy councils



## Land

- Access to affordable farmland is significant barrier
  - POLICY NEEDS: New tools to encourage farm succession and farmland leasing
  
- Continued loss of productive farmland
  - POLICY NEEDS: Increased fed and state investments in farmland protection; better smart growth strategies
  
- Opportunity to expand urban land access
  - POLICY NEEDS: Less restrictive and ambiguous local zoning regulations
  - POLICY EXAMPLE: City of Boston Article 89



## Food Production

- Farm labor availability and cost is significantly affecting farm viability
  - POLICY NEEDS: New federal guest worker program; state workforce development around food and agriculture
  
- Climate change is making farming more challenging
  - POLICY NEEDS: Better risk mgt tools; increased state and fed investments in research, extension and conservation, including controlled environment farming
  
- Public investments in farm enterprise development have helped farmers expand markets and improve efficiency
  - POLICY NEEDS: Continued support for these programs



## Food Safety, Processing, Aggregation, Distribution

- Food Safety Modernization Act may chill expansion of fruit and veg production in the region
  - POLICY NEEDS: Changes in FSMA regulations; fed and state investments in food safety training and certification
  
- New models of food “hubs” are helping farmers access large retail and institutional markets
  - POLICY NEEDS: Continued fed and state investments in business model development
  - POLICY EXAMPLE: Maine LD 1431
  
- Bottlenecks in meat and poultry slaughter/processing limit expansion of regional livestock production
  - POLICY NEEDS: Business training and support



## Markets

- Direct to consumer marketing has improved farm profitability
  - POLICY NEEDS: Review state & local public health, retail market, and food processing regulations to reduce barriers to direct to consumer opportunities
  
- State procurement policies could help drive institutional demand
  - POLICY NEEDS: Strengthen state policies, and consider two-tiered approach that prefers state first, then regional
  
- State and federal nutrition programs can help to improve both healthy food access and economic opportunities for farmers
  - POLICY EXAMPLE: 2014 Farm Bill's Food Insecurity Nutrition Incentive grants offer new opportunity



## Waste streams:

- Beneficial reuse of organics can (1) reduce methane emissions from landfills; (2) improve soil health; and (3) provide economic opportunities for farmers, through both composting and energy generation from anaerobic digesters
  - POLICY NEEDS: Phased-in statewide bans on landfilling food scraps (Connecticut, Massachusetts and Vermont have all adopted)
  - POLICY NEEDS: Reform state regulations to eliminate barriers to composting infrastructure, while ensuring quality and protecting health
  - POLICY NEEDS: Expand incentives for on-farm anaerobic digesters



## Regional Food System Coordination

- History and current collaborations to build on
- Barriers to multi-state cooperation
- Effective regional structures and processes depend on the problem being addressed: *what is needed?*
- Explore regional food system planning structures (entity?) and processes



## Regional Food System Coordination: Model Structures

- Interstate compacts, commissions and authorities
  - *Example: Northeast Interstate Dairy Compact*
  - *Example: Chesapeake Bay Commission*
  
- Memoranda of Understanding
  - *Example: Regional Greenhouse Gas Initiative*
  
- Regulatory harmonizing and reciprocity
  - *Example: Renewable Portfolio Standards*
  - *Example: Pesticide applicator licensing (defunct)*
  
- Intergovernmental councils
  - *Example: Northeastern Association of State Departments of Agriculture*



## **Areas for Greater Regional Coordination**

*Examples:*

- FSMA
- “Cross-pollination” on tax policy, state land use
- Institutional Procurement
- Meat processing
- Regional branding



- Dialogue, planning and actions at events
  - *Example: Food Solutions New England Summit*
  - *Briefings and presentations upon request*
  - *What else??*
  
- Further research and analyses
  
- Webinars
  - *Introductory (this one)*
  - *On a selected topic from each report chapter*



- Teleconferences: *initiate or join*
  - By state or locale
  - By topic or issue
  - Regional coordination
  
- In-person meetings: *resources to support*
  - July 26<sup>th</sup> (tentative)
  - Other as requested
  
- Technical assistance to groups: *ask for it!*
  - Mark Winne & Amy Little
  - Issue experts



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**Full report can be downloaded at:**

**[www.newenglandfoodpolicy.org](http://www.newenglandfoodpolicy.org)**

