



## ***It Takes A FARM***

# **Land For Good: Finding Innovative Ways to Create and Preserve New England Farms**

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For farmers who are just starting out, gaining access to land that fits their needs is often incredibly challenging. Not only is finding available land an issue, but other factors including affordability, location, and housing also come into play. On the other end of the spectrum, there are farmers who have been working their land for years and are ready to pass it on. But succession planning can be extremely overwhelming. Enter Land for Good, a 10-year old organization based in Keene that creates opportunities by connecting farmers with land. They provide online guides, host educational workshops and events, and offer donation or grantfunded one-on-one consulting that ranges from over-the-phone advising to long-term collaborations. Land for Good's new Executive Director, Jim Hafner, says, "We're on the front edge of this land access issue."

For new farmers, Hafner pointed out that it's "like any small business." He says the most important part is that people "really understand and have a plan for what kind of farm they want to start." He typically asks how big the operation will be, what crops will be grown, and how products will be marketed. He also asks farmers what kind of lifestyle they're looking for. Once there is a clear vision, Land for Good can help find creative

options. For instance, many farmers think they're limited to purchasing land, but leasing can be a more affordable alternative. Hafner says that when it comes to good farm land, "competition is pretty fierce." Land for Good has field agents throughout New England who aid individuals, families, and groups in tracking down the right properties.

Land for Good also provides coaching for existing farmers who are navigating the process of passing on their land and land owners who are looking to better utilize theirs. The organization gives insights into how to present property, where to advertise it, and how to go through the process of interviewing candidates. It's essential to find the right farmer for each property, and Hafner says they try to "help make that match happen." Land for Good's focus isn't limited to just individuals either. One example is their work with the Dominican Sisters of Mercy, a religious group located outside of Boston. The Sisters wanted to protect their land and keep it affordable for farming, but as their numbers diminished, they were finding it more difficult to uphold that vision. Land for Good helped the Sisters negotiate a lease with a young farmer who was thrilled to dig in and start transforming the land into a flourishing farm.

Hafner says that Land for Good's "approach is really to try to work at multiple levels but also with multiple audiences." Through education and outreach, the organization informs people about why land access, transfer, and tenure are so critical. It may not seem relevant to people who work outside the realm of agriculture. However, figuring out how to best support a thriving local farm culture is actually a conversation that should be taking place across the wider community. Farming doesn't just benefit farmers and their families; its impacts reach a whole lot further. Growing a healthy network of farms also preserves the working landscape and fosters environmental stewardship. In addition, Hafner says it's about "ensuring adequate, healthy food for all." That's why Land for Good encourages land owners to think

about how they might be able to lend support. He said there is lots of “untapped potential” if people are willing to consider the possibilities.

Going forward, Land for Good is hoping to partner with more organizations nationwide to pass on expertise and expand the number of resources for farmers. Within New England, their goals include increasing the visibility of property listings and exploring innovative solutions to benefit farm seekers, farm and land owners, and communities. If you’re interested in learning more or making a contribution, visit [landforgood.org](http://landforgood.org).



*Gaining ground for farmers*

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