Farmland Preservation in Massachusetts

The APR Program
Massachusetts has lost thousands of acres of farmland to development over the last few decades. The Agricultural Preservation Reserve (APR) program began in 1978 as a means to curb farmland loss. The APR program places permanent restrictions on farmland to keep it in a state of the working landscape to preserve it. Prescriptive parcel of farmland is regulated by a variety of criteria, and includes easements that require concrete restrictions before it is accepted into the program (see program requirements).

This program has preserved 72 farms and over 60,000 acres of farmland.

Program Requirements
Primary Requirements:
- Farms must be at least five acres.
- Land use has to have been actively farmed for the last ten years.
- Farms must produce at least $500 in gross sales per year for the five-acre farm and $100 for each additional farmed acre.

Other Criteria Considered:
- Soil identification and farm location
- Development potential
- Farm size, visibility, and the likelihood that it will remain in agriculture for the foreseeable future.

This map shows the number of acres that were agricultural in 1991 but were converted to other uses by 1998. The most significant losses are around the towns of Springfield, Worcester, and the western part of the state closest to Rhode Island.

Abstract
The Agricultural Preservation Reserve (APR) program has permanently protected over 72 farms in Massachusetts, but there are areas of the commonwealth that have significantly lower rates of participation. This paper discusses trends in the physical characteristics of farms enrolled in the APR program and the price of purchasing easements. Both were found to affect the type and quantity of farmland preserved.

Soil
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Physical Characteristics
- Name: Location of prime soils and soils of statewide importance.
- Number of Acres of Land in Agricultural Production
- Number of Acres of land farmland

Funding Sources for Easements by County

Conclusion
At the two maps in the right shows, APRs are not distributed equally across the Commonwealth. The discrepancy between these maps does not indicate a failure of the program, however, for there are many factors that contribute to farmland loss and its protection availability. As of the time this paper was written, the APR program is in place to keep the land on the table and other opportunities for the future. Not only does the APR program help to keep the land on the table, but it is also helping to keep the farmland as farmland.

Although protecting prime soils is one of the main goals of the program, this goal is not backed on the lives of farmers. In order to protect the quality of our farmland, it is important that landowners are given the opportunity to sell their land to the program.

The APR program has permanently protected thousands of acres of farmland in the 35-year history, but has large and important parcels directly. This program may be the best way to protect the land for future generations. The program can keep the land open to the public and can help to increase the amount of prime soils preserved. NADILL should engage in targeted advocacy campaigns that focus on the most productive regions of the Commonwealth.

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