

Protecting Michigan's Farmland



Land Conservancies: Protecting Critical Resources

Over 10 million acres of farmland provide scenic vistas, recreational opportunities, food and jobs that support this thriving land-based enterprise.

Land conservancies help landowners permanently protect the 80% of Michigan that is privately owned. Farmland is among a variety of land types that conservancies seek to protect within the matrix of Michigan's forests, grasslands, wetlands and coastal areas.



Focused Farmland Preservation

Not only have land conservancies protected thousands of acres of farmland in Michigan, they've done it with a variety of focused and region-specific strategies. Novel approaches to Farmland preservation in northwest Michigan such as Leelanau Conservancy's *Farmability* program, strategic mapping efforts in Southwest Michigan, and creative partnerships in Southeast Michigan all add up and complement the work of local, state and federal efforts to help landowners protect their valuable farmland.

Protecting Important Land and Water in Michigan

Core to land conservancy efforts is the understanding that farmland helps support and connect native ecosystems within a network of land and water across the state. Farmlands harbor productive soils, support wildlife, and connect habitat, migration routes, and food sources for native plants and animals.



Economic Value of Farmland

- Agriculture is a \$73 billion industry on 10 million acres
- Over 1 million citizens are employed in Michigan's agriculture industry
- Michigan crop diversity is ranked second nationally
- There are over 120 commodity crops produced in Michigan



Social Value of Farmland

- Nutritional value of food is highest when picked ripe and consumed locally
- Local food reduces transport time and lower fuel expenditures ensuring cleaner air
- Farmland is a vital piece of Michigan heritage and scenic views



Environmental Value of Farmland

- Farmland provides an opportunity for carbon offsets
- Farmland provides a land base for alternative energy production
- Groundwater recharge occurs on farmland
- Farmland provides wildlife habitat, shelter, and migration corridors

Farmland Protection and Investment

Region-Specific Strategies

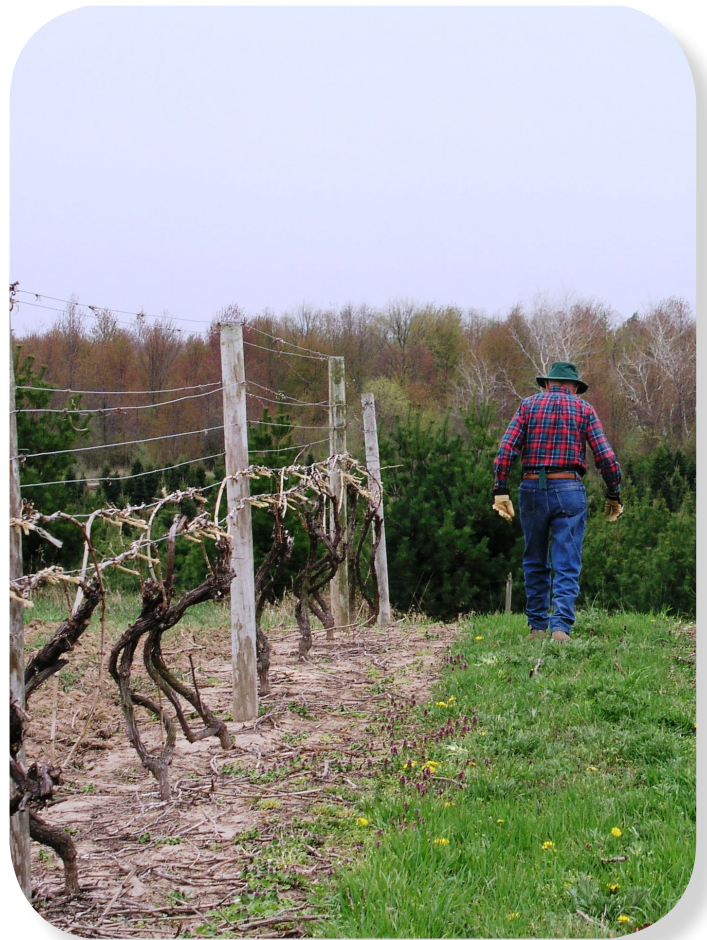
Varying soils and climate across the state determine Michigan's high crop diversity. Region-specific strategies for conservation and strong conservation partnerships and financing strategies collectively compliment the work of local, state and federal efforts to help landowners protect their valuable farmland.

Strategic Conservation Planning

Land conservancies help landowners protect Michigan's critical working lands. Conservancies use strategic conservation planning to identify and prioritize lands for future protection.

Strategic Partnerships

There is strength in numbers. Conservancies work with a diverse network of state, federal and nonprofit partners to address their shared conservation goals. Together, they protect and restore Michigan's working lands and water resources.



Recommended Actions

While Michigan has the opportunity to leverage more federal farmland preservation funding, one of the biggest challenges remains the lack of state and local funds required to match the federal dollars.

Opportunity for short-term funding for farmland preservation

The state's Agriculture Preservation Fund is seeded through withdrawals from the state's PA 116 program, a temporary agriculture preservation program. Currently, over \$12 million in funds are owed the program through unpaid withdrawal fees and no penalties or incentives are in place to encourage repayment of these funds. Legislation to create a voluntary, discounted repayment period and establish penalties for future PA 116 withdrawals that go unpaid could provide additional funds to enable farmers to capture more federal and local dollars.

A long-term investment strategy for farmland preservation

Michigan needs to develop an investment strategy for the long-term preservation of our natural resources, including farmland, which are critical to the economic future of our state. As the Michigan Natural Resources Trust Fund approaches its endowment cap and oil & gas revenues begin to flow into the State Park Endowment Fund, now is an opportune time to develop strategies to ensure future revenues support conservation.

Heart of the Lakes aims to work collaboratively with other conservation organizations and the new administration to seek opportunities to leverage these funding sources and explore how at least a portion of the revenues could support farmland preservation.