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Helping Farmers Access Farmland: New Jersey's New Land Link Website

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Abstract

Access to land is a common obstacle for beginning farmers and established farmers seeking to expand their operations. Particularly in urban-influenced areas, leasing farmland is often more financially feasible than fee ownership. Locating available land or the right leasing situation, however, can be difficult. NJ Land Link (<http://njlandlink.org>) is a new interactive website created to improve access to farmland and farming opportunities in New Jersey. The website allows farmland owners to list characteristics of their properties and terms of availability (e.g., sale, lease). Individuals seeking farmland or farm work opportunities can post their farming goals, resource needs, and farming experience.

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Introduction

The intergenerational transfer of farm assets is an important challenge facing the American farm sector. Access to land is an obstacle for both beginning farmers and established farmers seeking to expand their existing operations, especially in urban-influenced areas. Easement-based farmland preservation programs seek to help make farmland more affordable to farmers by removing the development value from the land; however, even deed-restricted farmland may be expensive for

farmers in markets where there is competition from non-farmers interested in the land for lifestyle reasons. Farmers unable to purchase land often turn to short-term leasing or other land tenure arrangements. Particularly in the Northeast, leasing farmland is often more financially feasible than fee ownership (Nickerson et al., 2012).

Locating available land or the right leasing situation can be difficult. Many states have variations of Farm Link programs designed to match farmland owners with those seeking access to farmland. However, the process of identifying suitable land—and appropriate land tenure arrangements—can be time consuming. Further, Farm Link programs are generally limited to static tabular land listings that can become dated and inaccurate.

NJ Land Link Website

In New Jersey, where farmland is among the most expensive in the nation and subject to intense competition, a substantial amount of the state's land devoted to agricultural production is leased. Many linkages between land holders and potential farmland lessors happen only on an ad hoc basis and are rife with uncertainty over the long term. Online, GIS-based technology can help landowners, as well as Extension and other agricultural professionals, meet this challenge (Milla, Lorenzo, & Brown, 2005).

NJ Land Link (<http://njlandlink.org>) is a new interactive Web portal designed to improve access to farmland and farming opportunities in New Jersey. The website allows farmland owners to list characteristics of their properties and terms of availability (e.g., sale, lease). Individuals seeking farmland—or opportunities to work on a farm—are similarly able to post their farming goals, resource needs, and farming experience.

Find Farmland

Owners of farmland can register on the website without charge and enter detailed information on their properties by navigating through six tabbed data entry forms.

- *Property Information*: physical location, tax map block and lot information, whether the land is enrolled in farmland preservation, and a GIS map showing the spatial context of the farm;
- *Opportunity Details*: lease and/or sale terms, whether an opportunity exists for an individual to work on the farm (e.g., as an employee, farm manager, partner, apprentice, etc.) and whether the owner would consider a beginning farmer;
- *Farm Details*: farm acreage, types of crops and/or livestock currently raised on the land, whether the land is farmed conventionally or certified organic, housing availability, and other available farm infrastructure (e.g., barns, irrigation, etc.);
- *Land Details*: a description of soils, access to water, and conservation plan details (if present);
- *Listing Information*: a detailed summary description of the farm and owner contact information; and

- *Uploads*: photos of the farm, farmland preservation deed of easement, farm conservation plan, and other useful documentation.

Information entered by landowners populates a searchable database. Individuals seeking farmland can enter specific search criteria through the "Find Farmland" link within a user-friendly public interface (Figure 1). A sample query highlighting the availability of a 138-acre farm for purchase is shown in Figure 2.

Figure 1.

The NJ Land Link Homepage Allows Farmland Seekers to Easily Navigate Through Farm Listings by Entering Geographic and Property Criteria.

Most Recent Listings	
Somerset	Acres: 60.00 Opportunity types: Leasing, Partnership
Warren	Acres: 138.00 Opportunity types: Farm for Sale
Warren	Acres: 88.45 Opportunity types: Farm for Sale
Salem	Acres: 22.00 Opportunity types: Partnership
Hunterdon	Acres: 150.00 Opportunity types: Leasing, Partnership

Farmland Listing Results: 18

Welcome to New Jersey Land Link!

This land access website is designed to help farmers and landowners connect through a database of farmland available, farming opportunities sought, and land characteristics and production goals. Use the map and listings to help you find the opportunity you've been looking for!

Looking for land to farm?

Have land available and looking for a farmer?

Search the listings, and create a listing for yourself.

Figure 2.

NJ Land Link Entries Matching User-Defined Selection Criteria Are Displayed with a Farm

Description, Specific Property Details, and Photographs.

Farming Opportunity Details

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Land:

County	Municipality	Block	Lot	Preserved
Warren	Hope Township	1400	100	Yes
Warren	Hope Township	1400	100	Yes
Warren	Hope Township	1400	100	Yes

Legal Property Owner:

Farm Property Address: 100 Johnsonburg Road, Hope Township, New Jersey 07833



Farming Opportunities Available:

- Purchase - Asking Price: \$749,500

Farm Size: 138.00 acres

- Crop Acres: 65.00
- Woodland Acres: 33.00

Land Status:

- Conventional

Farm Details:

Farm currently in operation: No

Farm Conservation Plan: No

Soils description: The farm has about 70 acres of tillable soils. There is about 13 acres of soils of statewide importance. There are areas of wetlands along Beaver Brook.

Farm buildings, infrastructure, and equipment available:

- Other

Water sources available:

- River - Beaver Brook

Housing available on farm: No

Description:

Beaver Brook Farm is a beautiful 137 acre preserved farm owned by [redacted]. The farm is conveniently located just five minutes from exit 12 on Route 80 in the Hope Township Historic District. The farm has 65 acres of tillable land. Currently there are about 55 acres in corn production, and 10 acres of hay fields. The farm is very picturesque, with rolling fields and stunning views of Jenny Jump Mountain. The Beaver Brook runs through the rear of the farm, providing excellent wildlife habitat for fish, water fowl and other species. The farm has two "exception areas" that provide opportunities to develop a farmhouse/residence on the farm. One exception area captures the partially converted barn. The second exception area could also be used for a home.

Click to view photos:



Find a Farmer

Individuals seeking opportunities to farm are able to create entries outlining their interest in leasing

or purchasing land. Individuals seeking land for farming can specify:

- The desired size and location of the farm;
- Types of agricultural production being planned;
- Preferences for land certified for organic production;
- Preferred farm infrastructure (e.g., irrigation equipment, deer fencing, barns, equipment, housing); and
- Farming experience and goals, with an option of sharing a business plan.

Website registrants can also list an interest in working on a farm in a specified capacity (for example, as an apprentice, farm manager, or under, an arrangement that allows the opportunity to build equity in the farm).

Resource Links

Resources for farmland owners and farmland seekers are available on NJ Land Link, including farmland leasing guides (including model leases and planning worksheets), a site evaluation guide to aid in evaluating a farm's production potential, and a link to the USDA-NRCS web soil survey. Several resources and agency links are provided to assist beginning farmers.

Summary

New Jersey agriculturalists, policy makers, and the public have long been concerned with the retention and development of a viable agricultural industry. Significant public funding (in excess of \$1.6 billion) has been devoted to the purchase of agricultural conservation easements to ensure land resources remain available for farming into the future. Today, nearly 30% of the state's farmland base is preserved. However, to be effective, land preservation efforts need to be synergistic with strategies to facilitate land access and stable land tenure arrangements for future generations of farmers. This need is further highlighted by the facts that 31% of New Jersey's agricultural land is operated by individuals 65 years of age or older, and 37% of current farmland is leased by farmers (USDA-NASS, 2014). The statutory authority behind the state's farmland preservation program also explicitly includes agricultural development, not simply easement acquisitions effectuated to prevent farmland conversion.

The NJ Land Link website is one component of New Jersey's recent efforts to support the viability of agriculture. It was developed as part of a Northeast Organic Farming Association of New Jersey (NOFA-NJ) and State Agriculture Development Committee collaborative grant project, with Rutgers Cooperative Extension providing the website design. Other elements include the development of a farmland leasing guidebook, landowner-farmer networking meetings and seminars, and a NOFA-NJ farm incubator program. Additional website functionality is planned in the future, including GIS layers with more detailed information on soil types and topography.

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