



KNOW YOUR FARMER KNOW YOUR FOOD

Locally grown food is one of the fastest growing segments of agriculture. Consumer demand in the U.S. is expected to rise from \$4 billion in 2002 to \$7 billion by 2012. But today, many mid-size family farms are disappearing. The USDA's new ***Know Your Farmer, Know Your Food*** Initiative focuses on cultivating new opportunities for these farms to help keep those families on the land and make sure the next generation of producers can find a career in agriculture. The Initiative is creating opportunities for producers, creating economic opportunities in rural communities, and strengthening the connection between farmers and consumers.

SUPPORTING THE DEVELOPMENT OF LOCAL AND REGIONAL FOOD SYSTEMS IN CONNECTICUT

The USDA-Natural Resources Conservation Service in Connecticut provides a wide range of technical and financial services that are integral to the redevelopment of sustainable food systems and strong local economies. Our services ...

- Build on current NRCS programs and initiatives
- Promote and support local food systems
- Ensure sustainable agriculture that can adapt to climate change and a growing marketplace
- Provide help to a new generation of farmers
- Work in partnership with state and local government, non-profits, producers, and other citizens

How is This Accomplished?

I. Providing Access to Farmland for Current and Future Generations

The loss of farmland to other uses and lack of affordable land continues to threaten the long-term viability of agriculture. NRCS is a major partner in the state's farmland preservation efforts, providing both technical and financial assistance.

Support includes:

- NRCS's Farm and Ranch Lands Protection Program (FRPP) partners with Connecticut's Departments of Agriculture (DOA) and Environmental Protection (DEP), land trusts, municipalities, and landowners to purchase conservation easements. Since 1996, \$34.8 million in funding has been used to help partners protect over 9,000 acres of farmland.



U.S. Department of Agriculture
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- NRCS serves as a technical advisor to the Working Lands Alliance (WLA), a 300+ member grassroots organization dedicated to farmland preservation. NRCS was the lead sponsor of the March 2010 statewide conference titled, *Plowing Ahead: Farmland Preservation in 2010 and Beyond*, attended by over 160 stakeholders. The conference resulted in a white paper and strategy for the future of farmland preservation in Connecticut.
- NRCS provides technical support to the state's 169 municipalities in the use of soils and other natural resource information to make informed land use decisions. NRCS has assisted eight towns to identify Farmland Soils of Local Importance to support local efforts in farmland preservation and farm viability.

II. Providing Support to Families and Communities to Keep Agriculture Viable and Growing

Rebuilding Connecticut's agricultural and local food infrastructures requires farm and local food friendly municipalities, and producers and landowners who understand the programs and assistance available to them. Support includes:



- The Resource Conservation and Development Program (RC&D) – through the Eastern RC&D Council – developed and obtained funding for the AGvocate Program, which provides an ombudsman/advocate to assist producers with municipal issues and regulations.
- Development of the publication *Planning for Agriculture: A Guide for Connecticut Municipalities*. NRCS staff served on the planning committee, wrote key sections, and assisted in outreach presentations. The guide outlines tools and resources available to help local governments plan for the future of agriculture in Connecticut.
- Development of the publication *Conservation Options for Connecticut Farmland: A Guide for Landowners, Land Trusts, and Municipalities*. NRCS staff wrote key sections and assisted in outreach and presentations. The guide explains key concepts of farmland preservation and conservation easements, and the resources available for land preservation and stewardship.



III. Providing Technical Assistance to Farmers to Manage Environmental Risk and Maintain Sustainability

Connecticut's farms are expected to provide a host of environmental goods and services in the nation's 4th most populated state. Many farms are in public water supply watersheds, provide critical habitat, and drain to Long Island Sound (an estuary of international importance). NRCS provides technical and financial assistance to help producers address natural resource concerns and remain economically viable. Stewardship support includes:

- In 2010, NRCS funded \$6.4 million in conservation practices on farms through the Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP) and the Agricultural Management Assistance (AMA) Program. The practices helped farmers reduce irrigation water use, improve water quality through soil testing and manure management, reduce pesticide use, and convert to organic farming.
- NRCS, Eastern Connecticut RC&D, the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA), the University of Connecticut, and DEP partnered with farms in East Canaan to develop an innovative, multi-farm composting facility. The project not only produces high-quality compost as an added value product for dairy farmers, it has proven to be a solution to export surplus nutrients from the watershed. In its first year, the operation removed 144,500± lbs. of nitrogen, 45,990± lbs. of phosphorous, and 83,220± lbs. of potassium from the farms.

IV. Increasing Efforts to Provide Consumer Access to Local Foods – Especially in Urban Areas

Connecticut is working to re-establish consumer and institution access to local foods. Access is of particular concern in cities. The number of community farms, Community Supported



V. Agriculture's (CSA), community gardens, and small acreage producers continue to increase. Support includes:

- NRCS serves on the steering committee for the website www.buyctgrown.com. The site not only provides sources of farm products to the public, but is also a support network and clearinghouse for purveyors, processors, farmer's market managers, and restaurants.



- Provide technical and financial assistance to a growing number of CSA farms. Massaro and Holcomb Farms, Community Farm of Simsbury, and Common Ground are a few of the non-profit and private producers who are now planning to implement conservation practices to be sustainable and economically viable. Many CSAs provide reduced price shares to low income residents and help supply food pantries and shelters.
- Developed soil quality and site assessment guide sheets for those developing community gardens and backyard production. The guides emphasize soil testing for contaminants and understanding soil properties. (Can be accessed at www.nrcs.usda.gov.)

IV. Support Beginning, Limited Resource, and Socially Disadvantaged Farmers in their Efforts to Grow Local Food Systems

Between 2002 and 2007, the number of Connecticut's farms increased by 17% (to 4,916), with a slightly higher rise (20%) in the number of smaller farms under 50 acres. Many of these are part-time producers with limited resources and expertise to farm in a sustainable manner. Support includes:



- In 2010, approximately 40% of the 150 EQIP and AMA contracts for conservation practices on farms were awarded to beginning, limited resource, and socially disadvantaged farmers. For some conservation practices, the percentage was higher. Fifty-seven percent of all contracts to install seasonal high tunnels were awarded to these farmers. Many were also either organic or transitioning-to-organic producers.
- NRCS has provided sponsorship and speakers to a number of partner-sponsored events that are of interest to this group of producers including the Annual Connecticut Northeast Organic Farmers Association (NOFA) Conference, Community Farms Conference, and Women in Agriculture events.
- The Eastern Connecticut RC&D Council is using a grant to assist a small slaughterhouse in evaluating and upgrading their environmental systems for regulatory compliance. A lack of meat processing facilities in the state especially limits a small producers' ability to compete in the marketplace.



V. Assist Farmers in Adapting to New Markets, Climate Change, and Marketing of Environmental Goods and Services

There are over 30 million people within a two hour drive of Connecticut. This provides a huge potential market for a wide variety of environmental goods and services. At the same time, climate change will create new challenges and opportunities for farmers to adapt. Support includes:

- Both RC&D Councils have developed a popular agro-tourism program called *Tour Des Farms*. The events promote local farm stands and markets by creating fall bicycling tours that stop at farms along a marked route to purchase products and learn about agriculture.
- In 2010, NRCS offered seasonal high tunnels as a conservation practice. These structures also create an opportunity to grow produce beyond the typical field season, thus extending the availability of local foods. Fifty-five participants will develop 95,060 sq. ft. of additional growing space.
- NRCS serves as a key member of the Connecticut Climate Change Agricultural Subcommittee (the website is located at www.ctclimatechange.com). The committee addressed the climate change risk to the agricultural industry and is currently developing adaptation strategies.



For more information, visit us on the web at www.ct.nrcs.usda.gov.