



Challenges and Opportunities to Increasing Conservation on Leased Farmland in the Chesapeake

Stakeholder Workshop Summary

MEETING IN BRIEF

On February 3, 2021, The Nature Conservancy (TNC), with support of partners from American Farmland Trust (AFT), Harry Hughes Center for Agro-Ecology, University of Maryland Carey Law, Agriculture Law Education Initiative, and Trust in Food (TIF) hosted an interactive workshop engaging stakeholders involved in agricultural conservation in Pennsylvania and Maryland. Participants included farmers, landowners, agriculture organizations, agencies, conservation organizations, and private businesses.

The workshop was the second in a two-meeting series, following a January 11, 2021 webinar, during which TNC and AFT presented findings from two separate surveys of non-operating landowners (NOLs) and farmers that lease land in Pennsylvania and Maryland. Research findings included: (1) demographics of NOLs and leasing farmers in Pennsylvania and Maryland; (2) decision-making processes of NOLs and leasing farmers in managing their lands; (3) barriers to adopting conservation practices on leased lands; and (4) interest in potential incentive mechanisms and policies that could be used to promote conservation. To access the recording of the January 11 webinar, [click here](#) (passcode: rFxcW6&2). To access a report published in partnership between TNC and TIF, which summarizes their Pennsylvania and Maryland survey results, [click here](#). To access a report published by AFT, which summarizes their Pennsylvania survey results, [click here](#).

The objectives of the workshop were to:

- Discuss opportunities in the areas of policy, outreach, education, and incentives for strengthening leasing relationships of NOLs and leasing farmers and for supporting the implementation of conservation practices.
- Identify actionable next steps and partners that are interested in collaborating on future efforts.

Recommendations from the workshop focused on additional needs for education and outreach resources, outreach strategies, and policy and program opportunities.

Education and Outreach Recommendations

	<p>Develop information for farmers to support conservation and leasing conversations with landowners, including:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Create a list of questions for farmers to ask their landowner to start a conversation about lease terms and conservation practices.• Compile best practices for farmers to use when negotiating with landowners about lease terms and conservation practices that have mutual benefits.• Provide examples of how to convey the benefits of soil health practices to landowners.• Share model leases that farmers can adapt and share with landowners.
	<p>Develop information for landowners to learn about the value and co-benefits of conservation on leased lands, including:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Share information that highlights the value and importance of longer-term leases with farmers.• Develop case study examples on the financial and economic benefits of conservation practices for both NOLs and farmers.• Provide guidance on how to access both legal support for leasing, and technical support for conservation practices (e.g., guides).• Share model leases and other documents to assist with lease creation.• Compile information on the benefits of conservation practices for NOLs without farming experience.

Outreach Strategy Recommendations

	<p>Provide tailored information for farmers and NOLs.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Disseminate through technical service providers (TSPs) to share amongst their farmer and NOL clients. • Share with farmers and NOLs through direct online and mail outlets. • Host educational webinars for farmers and NOLs focused on information-sharing and safe learning spaces.
	<p>Integrate resources into existing and ongoing efforts.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Bolster the technical knowledge and understanding of available resources for farmers, NOLs, and TSPs. • Share information with NOLs and farmers when supporting conservation planning. • Include resources in curricula development and targeted on-boarding specifically for TSPs. • Integrate conservation leasing information into meetings on other relevant topics like estate planning or recreational usage of leased lands. • Distribute example written materials at farmer gathering spots (e.g., coffee shops, restaurants, etc.).
	<p>Foster relationship building.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Facilitate peer-to-peer opportunities to foster consistent information and networking among NOLs and leasing farmers. • Coordinate field-days or farm visits for NOLs. • Sponsor networking and learning opportunities through external partnerships (e.g. AFTs Women for the Land Learning Circles).

Policy and Program Recommendations



Encourage longer lease terms.

- Longer-term leases (including those 5 years+) create more opportunities for conservation, including those practices that promote environmental health and healthy soils. Determine where there are opportunities for existing policies and programs to encourage longer leases.



Assess barriers and incentives in existing state programs and policies.

- Perform a review of state policies and programs to determine if barriers prevent implementation on leased lands.
- Perform a review of state policies and programs to determine if incentives meet the needs of leasing farmers and NOLs to implement practices on leased lands.

Create new or enhanced tax incentives.

- Evaluate the use of state tax incentives to encourage longer-term written leases and tax incentives that match sponsorship, similar to the Pennsylvania Resource Enhancement and Protection Program, to transfer credits to those who can make the best use of them.

Create new or enhanced cost-share programs.

- Develop new options to support implementation of practices by both farmers and NOLs that could include a state buffer program that offers more flexibility than the federal CRP program, flexible easements that encompass an entire parcel but allow adjustments to buffer locations as driven by environmental conditions.

Create new program to support legal services/ costs.

- Provide free support to farmers and NOLs that includes support for developing written leases, mediation assistance for preventing and resolving conflict, earmarking incentives specifically for leasing farmers, offering more assistance to under-served NOLs and farmers.

Workshop Planning Team Members

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