

ACQUIRING LAND TO FARM

WHERE DO I START?



INTRODUCTION

Are you interested in acquiring land to farm? This “Where Do I Start?” guide will help you move forward. The guide begins with what you already know: what you want and your current situation. Many farmers looking for land will find out that they already have a solid start. By writing down your thoughts and questions you can take stock of what you know and become better prepared to communicate what you are seeking with others.

Next you can think about the bigger picture. The guide offers a list of considerations, and you can add your own.

Then you may feel ready to act. You will have the momentum to proceed with action steps, resources and advisors.



Use this “Where Do I Start?” guide in ways that are most useful to you. You don’t have to follow any particular order. You may use full sentences or shorthand, draw pictures or make mental notes. Please do add your own ideas, questions and concerns. You will feel good knowing that you’ve taken your first steps toward acquiring your farm.

NOTES:

GOALS

My farming goals are...

The farming operation I want is...

This is my vision for my farm property:

The farming practices I want to use include:

I anticipate these requirements for my farm (for example, water for irrigation, parking for farm stand, milking parlor):

Additional notes:

CURRENT SITUATION

I am farming on land owned by others (such as family, private landowner, organization, land trust, town, other). Who owns the land?

The arrangement I have for the land I currently farm is:

short-term rental (< 3 years) longer-term lease ground lease

intern/apprentice employee

handshake (verbal) agreement written agreement

The terms of my agreement are (for example, what is included (land, buildings, business), uses and restrictions, responsibilities, cost, length, renewal):

What is working well:

What is not working well:

I am not farming now

Here's what I've done about acquiring land:

Here's what I now know (my current thinking and decisions):

CONSIDERATIONS

What do you need to think about as you prepare to acquire land? Here are some important considerations. You may think of others.

- Ownership versus tenancy (Do I want to own farm property now or at some point in the future? What do I think are the pros and cons of land ownership versus tenancy?)
- How land purchase or leasing fits into my business plan
- Landowners and landlords (Private? Public? Absentee? Conservation organization?)
- Leasing arrangements (What kinds of leases? Payment options? What's in a good lease?)
- Landlord – tenant relations (How involved? Sharing responsibilities? Communications?)
- Property attributes (e.g., natural features, location, residence, community)
- Finding property (locating, assessing, negotiating)
- Financing (What do I need? What's available?)
- Timeline (What needs to happen soon? Down the road?)
- Other considerations:

NEXT STEPS

Congratulations. You've taken two important steps. You've identified what you know and begun thinking about several important considerations. Next, you may take action steps like those below.

Action Steps:

- * **Learn about options** (ownership, leasing, and landlords).
- * **Compare owning versus leasing in your business plan.**
- * **Draft a "practice" lease.**
- * **Pre-qualify for a farm loan.** Compile your financial information and discuss it with a lender.
- * **Refine your land preferences.** Ask peers, talk to landowners.
- * **See what properties are available.** Check land linking programs, classifieds.

Make use of resources and reach out to advisors.

This is a partial list. You will find more on SEMAP's website and the links below.

Southeast Massachusetts Agricultural Partnership (SEMAP) is your first point of contact to help you get established in farming. Phone: (508) 295-2212 x50 <http://www.umassd.edu/semap/>

- **Farm Credit.** Farm loans and financial planning assistance. www.firstpioneer.com
- **Farm Leasing Course.** An online tutorial and resources about leases and leasing from Land For Good. <http://www.landforgood.org/leasing/>
- **Holding Ground: A Guide to Northeast Farmland Tenure and Stewardship.** Non-ownership tenure with sample lease provisions, worksheets, and case studies <http://smallfarm.org/bookstore/index.htm#nesfi>
- **Land For Good.** Consulting on land acquisition, resources, educational programs. www.landforgood.org
- **Massachusetts Department of Agricultural Resources.** General information and links. <http://www.mass.gov/agr/>
- **New England LAND LINK.** A list of available farm properties. <http://smallfarm.org/nell/index.htm>
- **USDA Farm Service Agency.** Subsidized real estate loans for beginning and other farmers. www.fsa.usda.gov/FSA/stateOffices?area=stoffice&subject=landing&topic=landing
- **USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service.** <http://websoilsurvey.nrcs.usda.gov/app/HomePage.htm>
- **Local bank.** Discuss your borrowing capability and how best to prepare.



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