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Learn how to lease your land to a farmer at workshop Oct. 22

A workshop will take place at Alfalfa Farm (267 Rowley Bridge Road) on Monday, Oct. 22 from 6-8 p.m. Please RSVP at tinyurl.com/TopsfieldLandLease. Contact Becca Weaver (bweaver@comteam.org, 978-654-6745 for more information.

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Massachusetts is experiencing a resurgence of interest in local food and farming, but locating accessible farmland is a formidable barrier to young and beginning farmers in the region. Much of Massachusetts' prime agricultural sites have been developed for residential use. The state has lost over 100,000 acres of farmland since 1982. And at upwards of \$12,000 per acre, Massachusetts land is among the most expensive in the nation.

Thanks to the popularity of the local food movement, however, skilled farmers can grow vegetables profitably on as little as 1-4 acres. But how can they find such small plots of land to lease?

The Topsfield Agricultural Commission is partnering with New Entry Sustainable Farming Project, a beginning farmer-training program that runs a farmland matching service. Together they are thinking creatively about Topsfield farmland. Through innovative spatial analysis using Geographic Information Systems (GIS), they mapped their existing farmland and discovered potential farmland that is not being utilized for agriculture right now. Much of this land is privately owned, but leasing farmland to farmers is becoming a popular option for landowners who wish to support agriculture in their community.

But how will these private landowners know where to start if they want to make their land available to a farmer? The Agricultural Commission and New Entry are co-hosting a workshop for landowners on how to lease land to a farmer. At the workshop, they will cover basic topics, such as finding and working with a farmer, information on leases, legal aspects, and community considerations. The workshop is also being co-sponsored by Essex County Greenbelt and Land For Good.

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PHOTO/ WICKED LOCAL PHOTO BY SUZANNE SNELL.

Alfalfa Farm Winery grows a variety of grapes, including these Saval grapes pictured here.

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