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# **New England Food Policy:** *Building a Sustainable Food System*

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**American Farmland Trust  
Conservation Law Foundation  
Northeast Sustainable Agriculture Working Group**

## **New England Food Policy: Building a Sustainable Food System**

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**M**any citizens, organizations and public agencies in the six-state New England region are working toward broadly shared goals of increased environmental, economic and social sustainability in our food system. A sustainable food and farming system in New England is key to creating a healthy region that is resilient, just, economically viable and environmentally sound. There is no one clear scenario, but several initiatives have identified opportunities for greater regional collaboration.

In 2010, the chief agricultural officers from each New England state identified, at the request of the region's governors, barriers to and opportunities for increased production and consumption of New England-grown farm and food products. The agricultural officers also considered ways to keep New England farmland in farming. A complementary initiative, the New England Food Vision, has already been developed.

The Food Vision suggests what a sustainable regional food system might look like by 2060 and lays out what is possible in terms of food production and sustainable seafood harvests. The research presented here considers policy changes that could increase the region's food production and consumption consistent with the Vision.

This report reflects the collaborative work of three partners: American Farmland Trust (AFT), Conservation Law Foundation (CLF) and Northeast Sustainable Agriculture Working Group (NESAWG). As co-leaders of this regional food system policy project, AFT, CLF and NESAWG undertook an analysis of policy barriers and gaps related to implementing the New England Food Vision.

The report focuses on public policy issues in five areas:

- Land;
- Food production;
- Food safety, processing, aggregation and distribution;
- Markets; and
- Waste streams.

Our analysis is based on research conducted by AFT and CLF staff. We conducted 23 interviews with leaders across the region's food system. We gathered input from several delegates to the 2013 Food Solutions New England Summit and invited the interviewees and other key stakeholders to comment on a draft of the report. This material was synthesized into the sections presented here. In some instances, more elaboration is contained in an appendix.

In each area, the authors identify key policy barriers and gaps at the state level, as well as federal programs and policies that affect our region. It is important to note that the report does not claim to include all policies and all programs in each topic area from every state. In each section, the authors present ideas and suggestions for supporting existing state and federal programs, areas where additional research and analysis is needed, and policy actions that are needed to address identified barriers and gaps.

Admittedly, there are distinct limitations to this investigation. The project did not cover the entire food system. Equally important topics such as food access, certain aspects of urban farming, farm and food-chain workers, seafood and aquaculture, and nutrition merit comparable investigation. We focus on commercial farming, and do not consider backyard and community gardening. Nor does this report delve into fundamental issues of equity, fairness and opportunity across the food system. Other groups are working on these topics and issues, and policy actions at all levels will need to integrate these additional elements and considerations. We also note that this report was researched, written and finalized before the 2014 Farm Bill was passed; references in our analysis to the “next farm bill” should be read with the understanding that the 2014 Farm Bill was passed while this report was in final production. Similarly, the 2012 Census of Agriculture was released while this report was in final production.

The authors recognize, as do food system leaders in each state, that implementing policy changes to create a more robust, resilient and sustainable regional food system will require multiple levels of engagement. Local and state efforts are necessary, but to be truly effective, they must connect to a broader regional framework and effectively leverage federal policies and resources. Perhaps more than any other multistate area of the country, New England has a history of cooperation. This offers promise for our states to work together on food system issues, using tools that range from informal and ad hoc to more formal and structured.

**To inform multistate approaches and solutions, we conducted a scan of regional models for states working together to achieve shared goals.** Each model has potential usefulness depending on the problem being addressed. This research is described, along with suggestions for action, in the final section of this report.

Taken together, the report sections comprise an agenda for action. We hope it will guide food system leaders in each New England state to identify, support and implement public policies that could have the most significant impact on strengthening our New England food system.



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