

A large black circle with a white double-line border. Inside the circle, the text "Climate Benefits of Permanently Protected Farmland" is written in a white, sans-serif font, centered and stacked in four lines.

# Climate Benefits of Permanently Protected Farmland



### Project Background

In 2022, The Conservation Fund and American Farmland Trust collaborated to calculate the climate benefits that accrue from permanently protecting an Illinois farm with an agricultural conservation easement. The project developed a science-based tool for estimating the greenhouse gas emissions that would be avoided by keeping farmland in agricultural production and avoiding new emissions from the anticipated residential development and use.

Agricultural conservation easements are voluntary legal agreements that protect agricultural land from conversion to development by permanently removing the development rights, thereby ensuring that the land remains available for farming.

### Bishop Farm at a Glance

COUNTY: Tazewell County, IL

FARM SIZE: 103 ac (65 ac in crops, 34 ac in woods, 4 ac in residential and road)

DEVELOPMENT: Pressure from East Peoria, IL

CROPS: Corn, soybeans, specialty crops

DOMINANT SOIL: fine-silty, mixed, superactive, mesic Typic Hapludalfs

ESTIMATED GHG BENEFIT FROM AVOIDED CONVERSION: 19,541 t CO<sub>2</sub>e in the first 30 yrs



With every acre of farm land we lose we not only lose the ability of that land to provide environmental benefits, we put more pressure on the remaining land to be farmed more intensely, further reducing environmental benefits.





## State Policy Responses to the Threats of Conversion

- Every state has taken some steps to protect their agricultural land, but they all could—and must—do more
- Important to have a comprehensive set of policies that respond to each of the three key drivers: development pressure, weak farm viability, and land transfer
- Coordination is key: the top 12 linked multiple programs and created state policy frameworks to harness local efforts





# Agricultural Land Protection Scorecard

- Assesses states' efforts to
  - Protect agricultural land
  - Support viability
  - Transfer land to the next generation
- Focuses on 6 approaches
  - PACE
  - Planning
  - Agricultural districts
  - Property tax relief
  - Farm Link
  - State leasing
- Rates each state's overall response



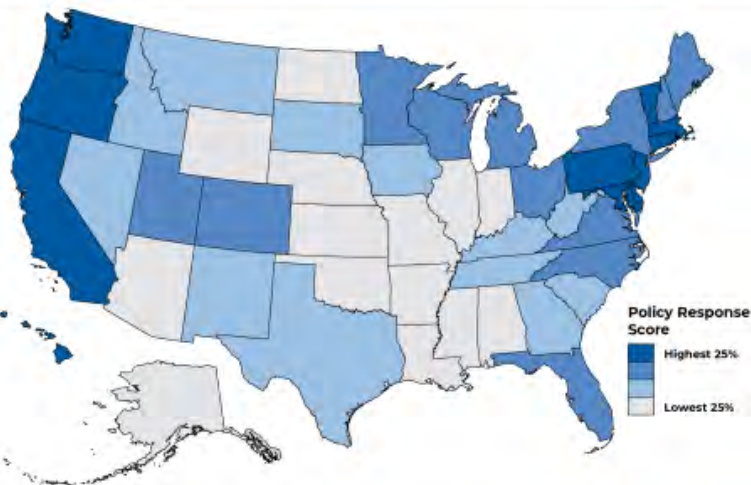


**THE STATE OF THE STATES**  
Agricultural Land Protection Scorecard Highlight Summary

# Michigan

**Farms Under Threat: The State of the States** mapped agricultural land conversion and evaluated state policy responses. The Agricultural Land Protection (ALP) Scorecard evaluated six policies and programs that protect agricultural land from development, promote farm viability, and facilitate the transfer of agricultural land. American Farmland Trust (AFT) conducted research between 2016 and 2019 and used quantitative and qualitative factors to compare approaches that are tied to the land in all 50 states. Results for each policy are summarized in *policy scoresheets*; scores from the scoresheets are combined into Policy Response Scores in the *ALP Scorecard*. The map shows state Policy Response Scores by quartile.

## EXTENT OF STATE POLICY RESPONSES TO THE THREAT OF CONVERSION



**RELATIVE CONVERSION THREAT**

**MEDIUM**

Michigan scored in the middle of all states for the conversion of agricultural land to urban and highly developed (UHD) and low-density residential (LLDR) uses.

**RELATIVE POLICY RESPONSE**

**MEDIUM**

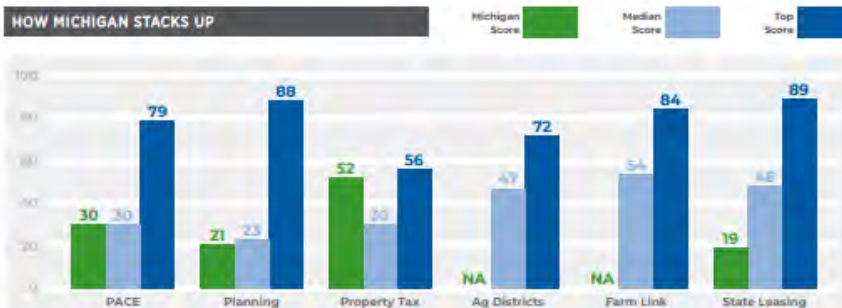
Michigan scored in the middle of all states for policies and programs that address the threat of conversion.

**HOW IS THIS STATE DOING?**

Michigan is in a green box because its policy response is aligned with its conversion threat, relative to other states. Learn more at [www.farmland.org/farmsunderthreat](http://www.farmland.org/farmsunderthreat)



**HOW MICHIGAN STACKS UP**



Policy scoresheet scores: Final policy scores compared to the median and the highest scores achieved by all states that have implemented each policy. Even among high-response states, no state received a perfect score for any individual policy; every state has the potential to do more.

## ABOUT THE POLICIES AND PROGRAMS

**PURCHASE OF AGRICULTURAL CONSERVATION EASEMENTS**

Purchase of agricultural conservation easement (PACE) programs permanently protect farmland and ranchland from non-farm development. They compensate landowners who voluntarily place an agricultural conservation easement on their property. Michigan's Department of Agriculture and Rural Development administers the Agricultural Preservation Fund, which awards grants to qualified local governments for easement purchases.

**LAND-USE PLANNING**

Land-use planning policies manage growth and stabilize the land base. Most states delegate planning authority to local governments, but some play a more active role, requiring localities to develop comprehensive plans, identify agricultural resources, and adopt policies to protect them. Michigan requires local governments to adopt a comprehensive plan if a planning commission is formed.

**PROPERTY TAX RELIEF**

Property tax relief (PTR) programs reduce property taxes paid on agricultural land. The most common approach is use-value assessment (UVA), which assesses farmland and ranchland at its current use value. Michigan's P.A. 116 provides property tax relief in the form of a state income tax credit. This program uses covenants to restrict enrolled lands to agricultural use.

**AGRICULTURAL DISTRICTS**

Agricultural district programs encourage landowners to form special areas to support agriculture. Farmers receive protections and incentives including: limits on annexation, limits on eminent domain, protection from the siting of public facilities and infrastructure, and tax incentives. Less common is requiring district enrollment to participate in state-administered PACE programs.

**FARM LINK**

Farm Link programs connect land seekers with landowners who want their land to stay in agriculture. Administered by public or private entities, they offer a range of services and resources, from online real estate postings to technical assistance, trainings, and educational resources. AFT only included publicly supported programs.

**STATE LEASING**

State leasing programs make state-owned land available to farmers and ranchers for agriculture. Sometimes their primary purpose is to make land available for agriculture. More often, agricultural use is secondary to generating income for a public purpose or protecting wildlife habitat. As of 2019, Michigan's Department of Natural Resources leases approximately 5,000 acres.

**MICHIGAN: KEY FACTS**

**\$0.15**

AMOUNT INVESTED PER CAPITA IN PERMANENTLY PROTECTING FARMLAND THROUGH 2017

Among states with PACE  
Smallest (TX): < \$0.01  
Largest (DE): \$6.03

**0.94**

ACRES DEVELOPED PER NEW PERSON ADDED TO THE STATE'S POPULATION BETWEEN 1982 AND 2012

Fewest (CT/MA): 0.11  
Most (ND): 4.07

**YES**

PENALTY IMPOSED WHEN LAND IS WITHDRAWN FROM THE PTR PROGRAM AND FUNDS DEDICATED TO LAND PROTECTION

States w/ penalty: 29  
States w/o penalty: 21



Farms Under Threat is American Farmland Trust's multi-year initiative to document the status of and threats to U.S. farmland and ranchland and to identify policy solutions to ensure the protection and conservation of America's diverse agricultural landscape. For more information about AFT, visit [www.farmland.org](http://www.farmland.org) if you have any questions about the analysis, methods or would like access to data, please contact AFT's Farmland Information Center: [www.farmlandinfo.org](http://www.farmlandinfo.org) or (800) 370-4879.

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Explore our scoresheet and scoresheets at [www.farmland.org/farmsunderthreat](http://www.farmland.org/farmsunderthreat)





# Policy Recommendations

- Encourage smart growth
- Protect agricultural land
- Advance smart solar siting
- Support farmland access





## State Actions to Protect Farmland

1. Map Agricultural Land
2. Adopt a Suite of Coordinated Policies to Protect Farmland
3. Support Farm Viability and Access to Land
4. Plan for Agriculture, Not Just Around It
5. Save the Best, but Don't Forget the Rest



# Programs & Policies

- Purchase of Agricultural Conservation Easement (PACE)
- Land Use Planning
- Agricultural Districts
- Real Property Tax Relief
- Farm Link
- State Leasing





# AFT's Smart Solar Principles

**Principle 1: Prioritize Solar Siting on Buildings and Land Not Well Suited for Farming**

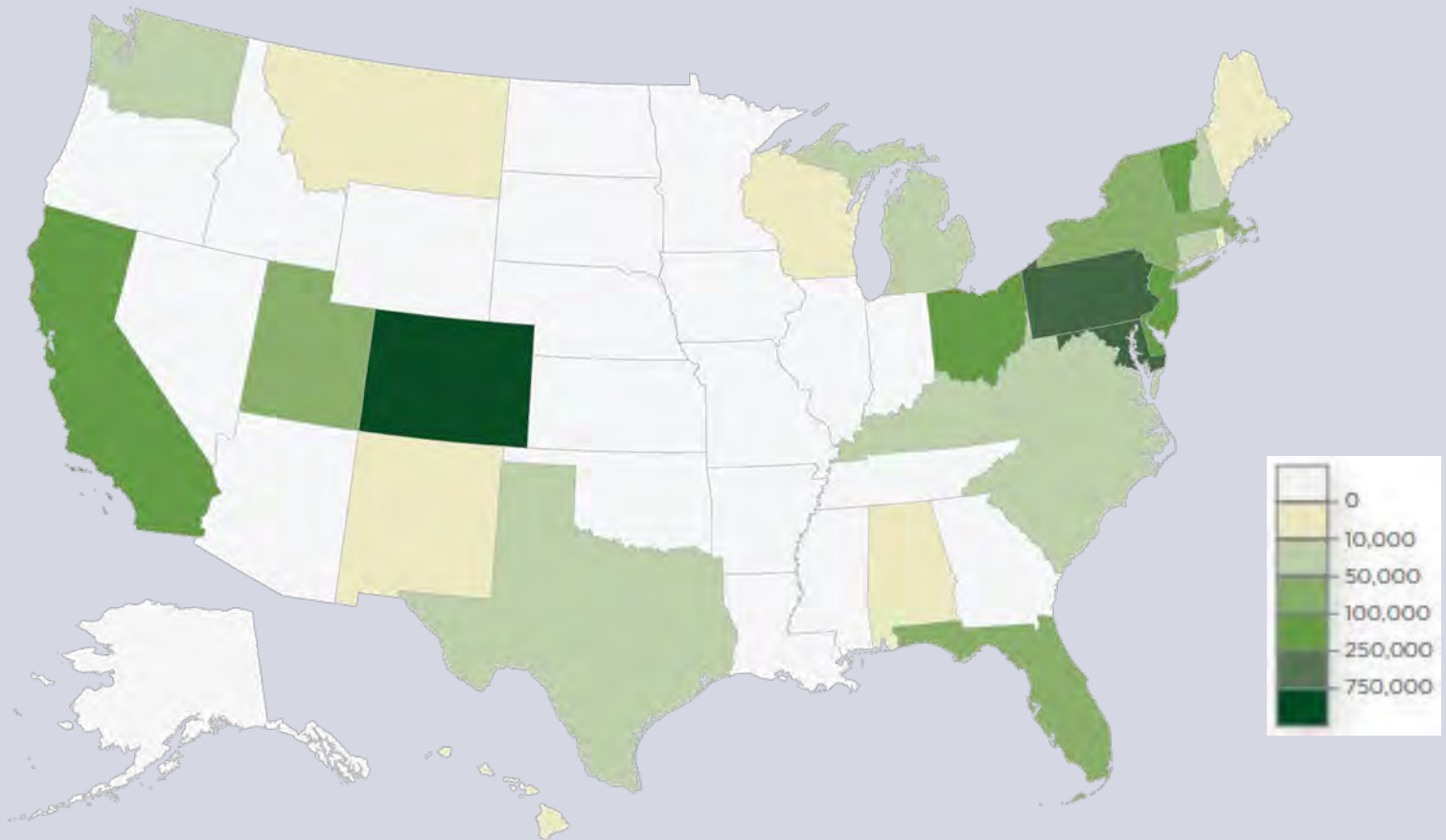
**Principle 2: Safeguard the Ability for Land to Be Used for Agriculture**

**Principle 3: Grow Agrivoltaics for Agricultural Production & Solar Energy**

**Principle 4: Promote Equity and Farm Viability**

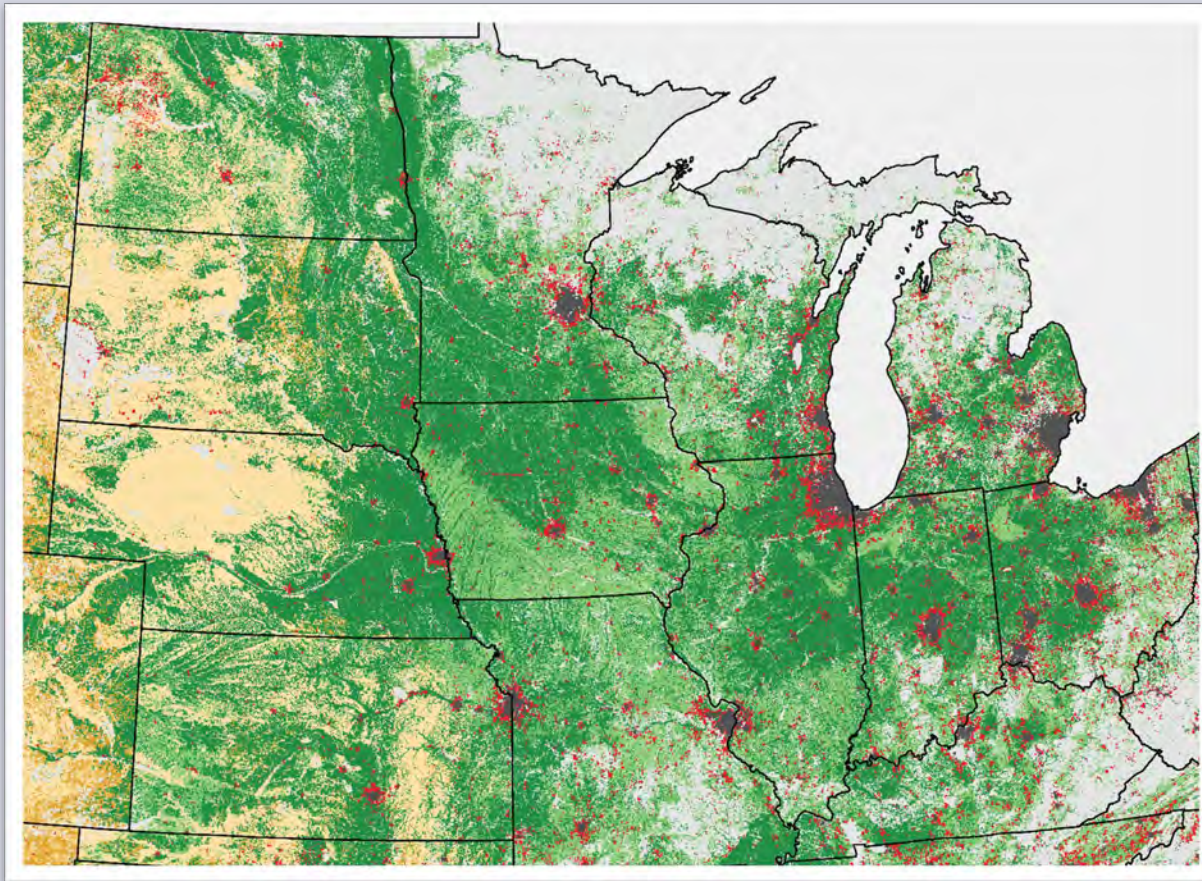
# Potential for Midwestern States

State PACE Program Activity  
Acres Protected as of January 2022





# Midwestern States by the Numbers



## Policy Choices Matter

By choosing the Better Built Cities scenario instead of Runaway Sprawl, Midwestern States can save:

**2,600,700 acres of Farmland**

**12,300 Farms**

**\$1.5 Billion in Farm Output**

**30,000 Jobs**



# Staff Resources: Materials

**Future Development Scenarios** HOME ABOUT VIEW REPORT REQUEST DATA

Select a Scenario

Map Satellite 2016 Land Cover

Legend

- Projected urban & highly developed
- Projected low-density residential
- Existing urban & highly developed
- Existing low-density residential
- Farmland
- Rangeland
- Federal land (w/ grazing)
- Federal land (no grazing)
- Forestland
- Projected sea-level rise
- Existing water bodies
- Transportation
- Other
- Projected farmland protection

2040 Better Built Cities

2040 Runaway

**2040 Future Scenarios Minnesota**

**On recent trends, from 2016 to 2040:**  
 Minnesotans will pave over, fragment, or compromise **369,500 acres** of farmland and rangelands.  
 That's the equivalent of losing **1,800 farms**, **\$253 million** in farm output, and **4,700 jobs** based on county averages!  
**58%** of the conversion will occur on Minnesota's Nationally Significant land!

Hardest hit counties:  
 ▶ Stearns  
 ▶ Scott  
 ▶ Washington

Projected agricultural land conversion from 2016-2040 in the Business as Usual scenario

Land Cover (2016):  
 Farmland, Rangeland, Forestland, Other lands, Urban areas, Transportation

**WHICH FUTURE WILL WE CHOOSE?**

**Business as Usual:** Development follows recent patterns. Priority placed on development and on timely conversion across counties to speed current farmland and rangeland.

**Better Built Cities:** Development becomes even less efficient than in Business as Usual. Locally driven growth across the countryside, displacing farms and ranches.

**Better Built Cities:** Development and other programs promote compact development and locate farmland, leaving productive farmland and rangeland more intact.

**CONVERTING LAND USE TABLE**

Scenario	Acres of Projected Conversion 2016-2040
Business as Usual	369,500
Better Built Cities	500,900
Runaway	205,200

**MINNESOTA'S FARMERS AND RANCHERS WILL BE CONVERTED TO:**  
 Urban and highly developed land  
 Agricultural land that will be lost in 2040  
 Low density residential (LDR) land use includes detached single-family homes and large lot housing, which represent the agricultural and rural, and land production, marketing and management systems for the working farms and ranches that remain.

**LOW PAVES THE WAY FOR FURTHER DEVELOPMENT**  
 38 TIMES MORE LIKELY TO BE CONVERTED TO LDR BY 2040, COMPARED TO OTHER AGRICULTURAL LAND.

**DEVELOPMENT CHOICES MATTER**  
 By choosing the Better Built Cities scenario instead of Business as Usual, Minnesotans can save **295,700 acres** of farmland and rangeland. That's the equivalent of saving **1,400 farms**, **\$202 million** in farm output, and **3,500 jobs** based on county averages!

**EXPLORE OUR INTERACTIVE MAPS AND READ THE FULL REPORT AT [www.farmlandinfo.org](http://www.farmlandinfo.org)**



<https://farmlandinfo.org/>





Saving the Land that Sustains Us

[www.farmland.org](http://www.farmland.org)