



# Introduction to Rural Land Access

“Access to land is the number one challenge facing the next generation of farmers in the United States, and centuries of discrimination and dispossession have put this resource out of reach of farmers who are Black, Indigenous, and People of Color (BIPOC) in particular.”

–National Young Farmer Coalition

## TEACHING OBJECTIVES: WHY DO THIS?

- Assess where your group is on its journey into land access
- Explore factors affecting your groups Land Access decision (refer to whole farm visioning and plan)

## BEST TIME OF YEAR

This workshop is designed to be delivered at any time of the year, but the time of year could impact how well the land can be assessed.

## BEST LOCATION

Any comfortable space!

- Classroom
- On-farm space with tables and chairs, such as a hoop house or on picnic tables under a shade tree.
- Online
- Other? Be creative!

## LEARNING OBJECTIVES: WHAT CAN PARTICIPANTS LEARN?

- Describe different paths to gain access to land and the considerations that go with each
- Identify personal, financial, and lifestyle factors that affect land access opportunities (e.g., financial considerations, type of operation, location)
- Assess land access options as they relate to your personal and business goals and financial position
- Identify what resources exist in your city and/or what resources to look for

# Introduction to Rural Land Access

## IMPORTANCE FOR BEGINNING FARMERS

A 2022 report by the National Young Farmers Coalition (NYFC) showed that accessing land is the biggest challenge for young farmers.

**Finding affordable land was ranked as “very or extremely challenging” by:**

- **68% of Indigenous respondents**
- **66% of Black farmers surveyed**
- **59% of all farmers surveyed**

Land access may be an opportunity to connect these young farmers with land, but rural land access has its own unique barriers, such as:

- Cost and barriers to loans
- Unclear or bureaucratic land purchase or lease process
- Systemic racism and classism in rural communities
- Water access

## UNIQUE ASPECTS OF THE CURRICULUM

Finding and accessing rural farmland requires a unique set of skills and resources. This curriculum will address a lack of training options for farm educators and farmers to meet that real need.



## Technical Content

### KEY WORDS:

#### Land access:

Land access is the way farmers and ranchers acquire land to support their operations

- It involves land seekers and land owners plus real estate agents, service providers, community members, etc.
- 3 basic paths to land access:
- Buying land
- Inheriting/accepting gifts of land
- Leasing land

#### Leasing Land:

Can be a more affordable, Flexible and less risk when starting an operation

- Leases can be oral or written
- Short or long term
- Different payment arrangements:
  - Cash leases
  - Share agreements
  - Ground leases
  - Leases with option to purchase
  - 1st Right of Refusal

#### Purchasing Land:

Provides the rights of land ownership and permanent access to land. You can build equity in the land with fewer restrictions on how the land is used.

#### Accepting Gifts / Inheriting Land:

Sometimes people receive a direct gift or inherit land outright

- Often inheriting land or receiving it as a gift includes:
- Gradual transfer of land and/or assets
- Leasing some or all of the land
- Purchasing some or all of the land and other assets

#### Agricultural Loan Options:

- Farm Credit Network
- State Agricultural Loan Programs
- USDA Farm Service Agency
- Local Commercial Banks
- Community Development Financial Institutions

#### Land Assessment:

A land assessment is a way to evaluate a property in the context of its neighbors and community

- It inventories natural resources, physical characteristics and existing infrastructure.
- It documents historic and current land use.
- It evaluates a specific site and setting including owner, property and community considerations.
- It analyzes carrying costs.



## Technical Content

### KEY WORDS (*cont.*):

#### **Zoning:**

Community rules for land uses that vary by area. Zoning districts include Residential, Commercial, Industrial, Agricultural

#### **Right to Farm:**

Work to protect qualifying farmers and ranchers from nuisance lawsuits related to farming practices. Laws vary by state, city and towns.

#### **Group Land Tenure:**

Modules that are not focused on individual ownership of land.

- Collectives: Ownership of a property by all members of the group
- Cooperatives: A Corporation owns the property and members buy shares
- Agrarian Commons Model: Collaborative community land ownership
- Incubator farms: Land based multi grower project that can talk on many different ownership styles.

#### **Land Trusts:**

Buy development rights to protect farmland or nature.

#### **Home steading:**

Growing or producing food for yourself, your family or community not for profitability more for self-sufficiency, connection with the land and living on the land

### FACILITATOR BACKGROUND INFORMATION:

#### **Facilitators should:**

- Center the experience and knowledge of participants
- Prioritize participants needs and questions
- Respect participants of all backgrounds
- Educate themselves on the impacts of systemic racism, economic oppression and patriarchy on individuals, neighborhoods, cities and the food & farm system
- Educate themselves on local resources for land access, local farming and beginning farmer barriers
- Be ready to learn from participants and guest speakers



## KWL Process

*Know, Want to Know, Learn*

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### **Suggested prompting questions for farmers to share from their experience:**

- What is your current farm or organization?
- How did you access your land?
- What opportunities were available in your area?
- What challenges did you face?
- How did you get support?
- What is something you wish you knew when you started that you now know?



### **Suggested prompting questions to find out what participants want to learn:**

- Do you know how to find listings of available vacant lots in your city?
- Does your city or land bank have a process for how to lease or buy vacant lots or side lots adjacent to your home? Is the price for vacant lots known?
- What kind of farm or educational garden do you plan to start once you access land?
- Do you already have vacant lots chosen that you are seeking to access?
- What barriers to accessing land do you expect?



## Primary Activities

*Overview of the main activities in this module*

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### Activity 1

#### Get to know your group!

Sharing your Goals! Spend some time sharing what you are currently doing and hopes for the future!

### Activity 2

#### What is my ideal farmsite?

Think about where you'd like to farm and the land and community features you value. Use a checklist to decide what you want and need and what you want to avoid.

### Activity 3

#### Learn from the Farmers

Learn from people's experience through a presenter or case studies and apply that knowledge to your own experience.

### Activity 4

#### Create a Land Access Guide

Fill out a Guide for Land Access for your region with a small group. This will help you find and assess farmland and think through how to buy or lease it. It may also connect you helpful resources.

### Activity 5

#### Site Assessment

Rural Soil Scorecard  
Mapping Soils, History, Climate & Topography

### Activity 6

#### How can I afford farmland?

**PART 1:** Farm Credit Options  
**PART 2:** Leasing



# 1. Get to know your group!

## OVERVIEW

Get to know your group!  
Introductions are SO IMPORTANT.  
This is where everyone learns to trust each other. We encourage you to take the time you need.

- Share your name and a bit about the location, size or type of land you would like to access. What type of farm are you planning to start on the land?
- Working with a partner, describe your current land situation.
- Do you have land?
- What sites are you considering?
- What challenges or barriers have you run into?
- What advice would you share with others that are looking for land?
- Share out 2 questions and answers with the full group using stickie notes.

## PROCEDURE

Review Lesson

### Set-up

Divide the class into pairs or small groups.

### Ask them:

- Discuss their current land tenure situation
- Identify opportunities and challenges.
- Have each pair/group post sticky notes and/or verbally share their land story
- Record key aspects of their land tenure situations on a flip chart, white board or slide.

Be sure to acknowledge the role that land costs, racism, patriarchy and economic inequality have that make the barriers to land access higher for some people than others. See Resources if you need support in this conversation.



# 1. Get to know your group! (cont.)

## EXTENSIONS

Building group trust is important for the interactive activities to come! Try to offer plenty of time for introductions.

### If time:

- Ask participants if they have experience with any of the key words.
- Other ideas? Be creative



## VARIATIONS

### If teaching online:

- Use breakout rooms for introductions
- Use a shared online document to share questions and answers with the group

### If teaching on a farm:

- Pairs can each find a space on the farm where they prefer to talk before returning to share questions and answers

## CONNECTIONS

- Whole Farm Values & Goals
- Financials Curriculum





## 2. What is my Ideal Farmsite?

Facilitate a Think-Pair-Share Activity a collaborative learning strategy where students work together to solve a problem. This strategy requires students to think individually about a topic or answer to a question; and share ideas with their peers.

### OVERVIEW

- **Think:**
  - **Write or illustrate your ideal future farmsite.**
  - If you already have a farmsite, describe it and how you plan to improve it to meet your farm goals.
  - **Fill out:** My Dream Farm and Farm Evaluation Checklist
- **Pair:**
  - Partners can share about their ideal farmsite and what features are “must-haves”.
- **Share:**
  - Share some details with the full group

### MATERIALS NEEDED

- Paper and pens/markers/ crayons
- Online you could use the whiteboard on zoom, or Padlet
- 5 x 8 index cards & masking tape or post-it notes

### FACILITATOR BACKGROUND INFORMATION

Have the group participated in a Think - pair – share! activity.

Steps for educators for ANY think-pair-share:

#### Think

Starting points! Have participants write for 5-10 minutes on a topic. They don't need to have a definite answer. For this activity you can have the group write or illustrate how you envision their future farm site.

#### Pair

Discuss with one person. Give participants 5 to 15 minutes to discuss in pairs. Pairs can be random, self-chosen or based on similarities/differences. Pairs can meet in-person in a classroom or on the farm, or they can meet virtually in zoom breakout rooms

#### Share

Share some details with the full group if there is time and if the topic is not sensitive.



## 3. Learn From the Farmers: Introduction to Case Studies & Videos

### OVERVIEW

We encourage you to engage in conversation about land ownership with farmers and center the ideas and thoughts of the participants in your group.

### MATERIALS NEEDED

- Schedule a time and location that works for your guest speaker(s) and participants
- Projector and a wall if the guest speaker wants to share pictures of their farm
- If organizing a farm tour, you may need to have comfortable places to sit in the shade, a porch, etc.

Case Studies- You can show these if you don't have in person speaker:

- Schrader Ranch-Kansas
- Resilient Growers Farm-Oklahoma
- Henry Webb and Old Road Farm

### FACILITATOR BACKGROUND INFORMATION

Invite a beginner farmer or panel. Participants in the session might also be a good choice to speak with the class or join the panel if they have relevant experience.

How to find a farmer:

How to find farmers in any region:

- Farmers' markets! Talk to growers!
- [www.localharvest.org](http://www.localharvest.org) (national, sustainable/organic/local, self-listed & not always updated)
- National Young Farmers Coalition
- Organic Integrity Database  
<https://organic.ams.usda.gov/integrity> (national, organic only, all organic farms listed!)
- <https://www.moffa.net/farm-guide.html> (Michigan, self-listed, organic only, not complete, but annually updated)
- <https://www.localdifference.org/find-food-farms/> (Michigan, self-listed, organic/sustainable/local, self-listed)
- <https://www.woof.net/> WWOOF – World Wide Opportunities on Organic Farms
- <https://www.miffs.org/jobs> - MIFFS jobs list



## 3. Learn From the Farmers: Introduction to Case Studies & Videos (cont.)

### EXTENSIONS

Rural Farmland Profiles

- National Young Farmer Coalition, [Young Farmer Voices](#)
- [AFT Case Studies](#)
  - [Women for the Land](#) videos
  - [Land Transfer Case Studies](#)
    - [Farm Transfer](#)
    - [History of your Land](#)
    - [Team, Resources and Business Models](#)
    - and many more....

If teaching online - Guest speakers are a great option for online learning. Be sure to allow screen sharing if the guest speaker has slides or images to share. Ask guest speakers if they consent to video of their talk.

### VARIATIONS

In a small group or class discussion read through the Case Studies or watch a video and ask participants about the opportunities and challenges beginning farmers face as they seek a secure land tenure situation.

We encourage you to engage in conversation about land ownership and center the ideas and thoughts of the participants in your group.

### CONNECTIONS

- Finance and Business and how it pertains to Land Access
- Black Farmers Group as an extension or variation
- Resources
  - <https://mifarmlink.org/resources/land-management-and-access>
- Urban Land Access: How to find a farmer.



## 4. Create a Land Access Guide

### OVERVIEW

This will help you to find local resources to find available land and take the steps needed to lease or buy it.

### MATERIALS NEEDED

- Blue, green and yellow push pins
- A corkboard with regional map (or map of the region participants are from)
- Print out handouts with blank land access guides
- Print out extra blank land access guides for each group or region

### FACILITATOR BACKGROUND INFORMATION

#### Introductions:

- Have everyone write their name on a small piece of paper and pin it to a map on corkboard:
  - Green pins = farmland they have.
  - Blue pins = their home or apartment.
  - Yellow pins = land they would like to access.
- Have people point out their pin(s) and share 1-2 sentences about their land or neighborhood.

#### Land Access Guides:

- Explain the activity
- Divide into groups by region or land access preference (eg leasing, buying or succession)
- In small groups look through example Land Access Guides and the resource list. Focus on YOUR region and write notes that are helpful to:
  - find land for sale
  - find land to lease
  - apply for a loan for farmland from FSA, Greenstone or other lenders
  - understand the steps to buy land
  - think about what to include in a lease
- Create a Land Access Guide or add to an existing one depending on the location of the training.
- Have each group share their guide with the full group to get insights and feedback and to answer questions about what they found.



## 5. Site Assessment

### OVERVIEW

This will help you to figure out if a site is right for you. It will also help you find out about the history of your site and the climate, topography and community.

### MATERIALS NEEDED

If meeting in-person

- Soil Scorecard Handouts and an outdoor space to assess soils
- Mapping Handouts and computers for mapping

If meeting online:

- Online meeting space (Zoom, Meet, etc.) with breakout rooms
- Links to handouts
- Shared documents for discussions

### FACILITATOR BACKGROUND INFORMATION

#### PRACTICE ACTIVITY:

Rural Soil Scorecard

- Walk a farmsite
  - Demonstrate a few characteristics with the full group
  - Have small groups finish several other sections of the soil scorecard

#### Mapping Activities:

- Look at printouts of maps
- Demonstrate how to create a map with one of the mapping tools by asking for an address from someone in the group
- Have people try to make a map of their own on their computer or phone
  - Discuss how this map could be used
    - draw a site plan over a google maps screenshot
    - use info from the USDA Food Access Research Atlas in a grant application
    - manage excess water using a topography map
- If time and interest demonstrate how to create a second or third map



## Mapping Links:

- Finding Land
  - Zillow [www.zillow.com](http://www.zillow.com)
  - MI FarmLink - <https://mifarmlink.org/find-farmland>
  - Realtor.com
  - Plat maps [fhn.com/acre-vision/plat-map/MI](http://fhn.com/acre-vision/plat-map/MI)
  - Google maps <https://maps.google.com/>
- USDA Web Soil Survey <https://websoilsurvey.nrcs.usda.gov/app/>
  - How-to video [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IKFc\\_96UZ7Q](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IKFc_96UZ7Q)
  - NOTE: Soil Survey maps are NOT accurate in areas where construction or soil moving equipment has been used
- Google maps <https://maps.google.com/>
  - History (choose 1 or 2)
    - Land Grab <https://www.landgrab.org/lands>
    - Native Lands map <https://native-land.ca/>
    - Circa 1800 map <https://mnfi.anr.msu.edu/resources/vegetation-circa-1800>
    - [bplant.org/region/1366](http://bplant.org/region/1366)
    - Redlining Map <https://dsl.richmond.edu/panorama/redlining/> for urban and suburban farmsites
  - Weather (choose 1 or 2)
    - USDA Plant hardiness zones <https://planthardiness.ars.usda.gov>
    - Freeze Date and Growing season Tool - <http://mrcc.purdue.edu/freeze/freezedatetool> quick demo for Wayne county
    - <https://www.usclimatedata.com/>
    - <https://www.drought.gov/>
    - <https://enviroweather.msu.edu/>
  - If your site is hilly or in a low-lying area or flood zone....
    - Topography Map [apps.nationalmap.gov/downloader/](http://apps.nationalmap.gov/downloader/)
    - Flood Map <https://msc.fema.gov/portal/home>
  - Community
    - USDA Food Access Research Atlas <https://www.ers.usda.gov/data-products/food-access-research-atlas/go-to-the-atlas/>
    - Local Zoning
  - Create a site plan!

## THANK YOU!

- Charles Cross at the Detroit Collaborative Design Center and Jacqueline Lindsey of Imaginative Minds, LLC for sharing the plan for Jackie's original farmsite
- Nell Pratt of My Neighbor's Keeper for sharing her plan for her farmsite



## 6. Can I afford farmland: Loans

### OVERVIEW

Think through where to find loans for farmland and discuss the multiple Farm Credit Options.

### MATERIALS NEEDED

- Whiteboard & dry erase markers
- OR Poster paper and markers
- Printed handouts
- A space with good cell phone reception or wi-fi
- Laptops can be helpful, but working on phones is fine
- If teaching online, have a shared document for sharing notes and ability to make breakout rooms

### FACILITATOR BACKGROUND INFORMATION

#### Introductions:

- Have everyone share their name and whether or not they feel comfortable having a loan to buy farmland. Has anyone had a loan for farmland now or in the past? If so, have them describe their experience if they would like to.

#### Farm Credit Options:

- Explain the activity
- Have people spend about 5 minutes looking through the Farm Credit Options sheet and putting an X next to the options they want to try
- Then have them choose their favorite option to research on their phone for 5 minutes
- Write a list of the favorites on a white board or poster paper and try to pair people in groups of 2 or 3 with the same or similar interests
- Pairs/ Small Groups can then discuss what they found in their research:
  - Qualifications for the loans
  - Loan process
  - Maximum loan amounts & other rules
  - Interest rates
  - Etc.
- Then, ask the group to think of 2 questions to ask the group. These can be general or specific!
- Have each group share what they discovered and 1 of their questions with the full group.



## 6. Can I afford farmland: Leasing

### OVERVIEW

Explore your values and goals when leasing land. Practice having mock-conversations with landowners. Review standard components of a lease to and reflect on whether or not it covers everything you want to cover with a potential landowner.

### MATERIALS NEEDED

- Whiteboard & dry erase markers
- OR Poster paper and markers
- Printed handouts
- A space with good cell phone reception or wi-fi
- Laptops can be helpful, but working on phones is fine
- If teaching online, have a shared document for sharing notes and ability to make breakout rooms

### FACILITATOR BACKGROUND INFORMATION

#### Introductions:

- Ask group to share stories about leasing land or rented/shared housing space

Practice talking to landowners about a lease:

- Have people pair up
- Give the group 5-10 minutes to brainstorm and read through the examples.
- Spend 5 minutes each as the new farmer looking to lease land then switch and as the landowner leasing land. Try to be kind and understanding in both roles.
- If you have more time the group can practice again with a different scenario
- Have the group read through Elements of a good Farm Lease in pairs, individually or as a full group. Reflect on whether there are any components that they identified wanting to address that are not list on the worksheet or in the examples of ease agreements.





## Review and Encouraging Further Learning

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### Evaluation Questions:

- What next steps do you plan to take to find, access or assess land for your farm or garden?
- What questions do you have about accessing land?
- Which activities were most useful to you?
  - Sharing your goals with the group
  - Hearing from a guest speaker
  - Case study videos and profiles
  - Making a land access guide for my location
  - Learning about leasing land

### Activities for Review:

- What questions do you still have around farmland access.
  - Write them down
  - Talk them out with another participant in the workshop
- Research a farm or organization in your area and reach out to them and ask!
  - A farmer
  - A non-profit that works with farmers
  - A realtor
  - Individuals, businesses or non-profits that own vacant land



### Review and Encouraging Further Learning (cont.)

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#### **Actions to take on their own farm/garden to further understanding:**

Ask the group what next actions they plan to take. If they need prompts to begin brainstorming, try some of the following:

- Explore Zillow and realtor Websites
- Look at Land Link sites
- Find a farm site
- Visit and assess the potential site
- Begin the process of accessing land
- Make a site plan
- Plan for water
- Plan for electricity, gas/propane or other utilities you need

Other useful actions might be.....

- Writing down my values and goals for my farm
- Discussing my farm values and goals with friends, family, mentors and local farmers
- Building growing skills by working or volunteering on a local farm or by starting or expanding a garden
- Finding a mentor
- Other



## Review and Encouraging Further Learning (cont.)

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### Additional Resources:

#### Incubator Farms:

- Farm Business Incubator (Upper Peninsula Research & Ed. Center, Chatham) <https://www.canr.msu.edu/uprc/farm-business-incubator>
- Tollgate Farm (Novi) <https://www.canr.msu.edu/tollgate/sustainable-ag/>
- GrowBenzie (Benzonia) <https://www.growbenzie.org/>
- GLIF - Great Lakes Incubator Farm (Traverse City) <https://natureiscalling.org/glif>
- SEEDS Historic Barns Park (Traverse City) <https://ecoseeds.org/historic-barns-park/>
- Michigan Permaculture Incubator (Mt. Pleasant) <https://www.climatechangepermacultureproject.org/pip/>

#### Land Listings and Advocacy Organizations:

- DNR Land Sales <https://www.michigan.gov/dnr/managing-resources/real-estate/auctions-sales>
- MI FarmLink <https://mifarmlink.org/find-farmland>
- National Young Farmers Coalition <https://www.youngfarmers.org/>
- West Michigan Farmers of Color Land Fund

#### Land Trusts & Land Conservancies:

- Equity Trust <https://equitytrust.org/>
- Legacy Land Trust
- Legacy Land Conservancy (Washtenaw, Jackson & Lenawee counties) <https://legacylandconservancy.org/>
- Leelanau Land Conservancy <https://leelanauconservancy.org/>
- American Farmland Trust: <https://farmlandinfo.org/find-farmland>
- American Farmland Trust: Land Access Curriculum



## Review and Encouraging Further Learning (cont.)

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### **Additional Resources:**

#### **Lenders:**

[Farm Service Agency](#)

[Greenstone](#)

[Good Food Fund](#)

[KivaZip](#)

#### **BIPOC Land Funds:**

[Detroit Black Farmer Land Fund](#)

[Washtenaw County Black Farmers Fund](#)

[West Michigan Farmers of Color Land Fund](#)

#### **Online Info & Documents:**

[MI FarmLink Michigan Land Access Info](#)

[Lease Templates](#)

[Michigan Farmland Lease Rates](#)

[Accessing Land Together Decision Tool](#)

#### **Organizations:**

[Land for Good](#)

[Farm Commons](#)

[Soul Fire Farm](#)

[American Farmland Trust](#)