

Farmland Access for New/Beginning Farmers through Land Grant Universities

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This narrative outlines a strategy for Land Grant Universities to play a leading role in helping retiring farmers keep their land in farming when they retire AND provide a strategy for new/beginning farmers to get access to appropriate land without tremendous up-front cost. The strategy was developed as one potential thread of a capital campaign at Michigan State University but has not yet come to fruition. It is provided as a possible model for others.

The strategy is as follows:

- As part of its capital campaign Michigan State University (MSU) considers accepting prospective land donation. Depending on location, footprint of land relative to utilities and roads, quality, and other characteristics, the prospective land donation may be appropriate to consider accepting for the farmland access program.
- MSU develops an arrangement with the owner/donor whereby MSU takes ownership of the land with the intent to lease (at low rates) to new/beginning farmers for the purpose of establishing a farm business. The agreement would also include the option to sell the land as in-perpetuity farmland in the future. The size would be dependent on intended use and intended scaling in future years.
- Farmers would initially get a lease of 5-6 years with an understanding that ,if the farm business is successful and grows, there will be an additional lease with an option to purchase the land at 'farmland value' rates.
- There will be an attempt to put the land into a formal farmland preservation program with a house building site and ability to put up agricultural buildings preserved for each farm lot.
 - Where possible, the development rights would be sold to a land conservancy with the proceeds put into an endowment for future beginning farmer development, land purchases, etc.
 - If development rights cannot be sold, MSU can still consider putting the land into a preservation program so that the original intent of the donors is preserved as it moves out of MSU hands.
- A number of issues would require resolution for the acceptance of any land in this program. The issues may vary case-by-case and include:
 - Site location. Farmland sites should be relatively close to good markets for direct and wholesale marketing. Direct marketing opportunities are especially important for the early stages of farm development.
 - Usage regulation. Some farm operators may want or need the farm to be certified as organic, which could bring into neighbor issues related to farming practices.

- Housing sites. Each farmland parcel would need to include a housing site as part of the property or have housing options in very close proximity.
 - Utility services (gas, electric, etc.). If breaking up a large piece of land into smaller farmland parcels, it would be important that utilities can be provided to each farm site relatively cheaply.
 - Site access. Unless each farmland parcel has appropriate frontage on a road to meet local zoning requirements, an access arrangement would be required.
- It is suggested that this be kept by the Development Office as one option to discuss with those discussing land donations with MSU.