

Joint House/Senate Ag Committee Farm Bill Hearing
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Testimony from:

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Thank you for the opportunity to testify today. My name is Allen Karnatz, I live in New Haven, VT and for the past 23 years I have been intimately involved with farmland conservation in Vermont. My role with the Vermont Land Trust is to initiate and assist in the conservation of farmland and I've had the pleasure and privilege to work with over 250 farm families on the conservation of their land. The USDA funding that VHCB receives through the farm bill is a critical ingredient to this work and I am here to support the continued allocation of funding toward farmland conservation in Vermont and across the country.

Obviously time doesn't allow me to tell you the story of all 250 farms. But I'd like to highlight five because I think they are representative of our diverse work and the important role conservation plays in the future of Vermont's rural economy. Because in the end, the primary purpose of the US farm bill should be to strengthen our food system and to support the nation's rural economy.

The five farm conservation projects I'm highlighting are:

1. **DeVos — Ferrisburgh & Charlotte, VT** JD and his wife Cheryl and JD's parents conserved two farms and used the conservation proceeds to start their own organic milk bottling company (Kimball Brook Dairy) in Hinesburg, VT. This investment is having very positive impacts on the local economy.
2. **Bristol Gateway — Bristol, VT** Two small farms on the edge of Bristol were conserved and one farm is now owned by a young farm family with local roots (Trent and Abby Roleau). USDA funding was used but there was still a \$110,000 gap to conserve the farms. The Town contributed \$10,000 and over 200 neighbors donated \$100,000 to make the project happen. It shows how the USDA funds are leveraged and how a small rural town can take action to save land important to their community.
3. **Wood family — Shoreham, VT** Loren and Gail Wood and their sons, Lee, Lance and Leslie have conserved several parcels and they have established themselves as a key dairy farm in a key Vermont dairy and apple orchard region. In 1992 Loren's father, Leslie, Sr., started the conserved block that has grown to over 35 farms on 11,000 acres. It is perhaps the largest block of contiguous conserved farmland in New England. Conservation funding has also enabled the Woods to implement some impressive water quality improvements.
4. **Stearns — Ferrisburgh, VT** Wayne Stearns was renting 100 acres of farmland. When it came up for auction he knew it would be lost to development. 27 neighbors joined together, created an LLC holding company and were the high bidders at the auction. Then they conserved the land and sold it to Wayne for a very reduced price so he could continue to farm it.
5. **Norris Berry Farm — Monkton, VT** Norma Norris and her late husband Richard transitioned from dairy to fruit and vegetables and their farm became a much loved and profitable farm in town. When Norma decided to retire last year, VLT helped her find a young ambitious farm couple to keep the farm going. Like almost all projects, the USDA funding was critical for this project

In closing I like to say that although the farm bill is authorized for five years, it's important to point out that when we invest in farmland conservation it's not a five year farm bill or a 10 year farm bill or a 50 or a 100 year farm bill. It's a forever farm bill because the conservation easements do not have a life span. They are helping to keep America great - forever.