

# Farmland Conversion Trends in Vermont



**American Farmland Trust**  
SAVING THE LAND THAT SUSTAINS US

**VT House Agriculture Committee**

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No Farms  
No Food®



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American Farmland Trust

# American Farmland Trust

SAVING THE LAND THAT SUSTAINS US



## PROTECT FARMLAND

We lose 2,000 acres of farmland a day across the US: this has serious implications for food production, our environment, and the next generation of farmers. Climate change and extreme weather are compounding risks to farmland and soil health.



## PROMOTE SOUND FARMING PRACTICES

We help farmers with the difficult transition to more regenerative farming practices that rebuild soil health, sequester carbon, protect our waterways, and boost income.

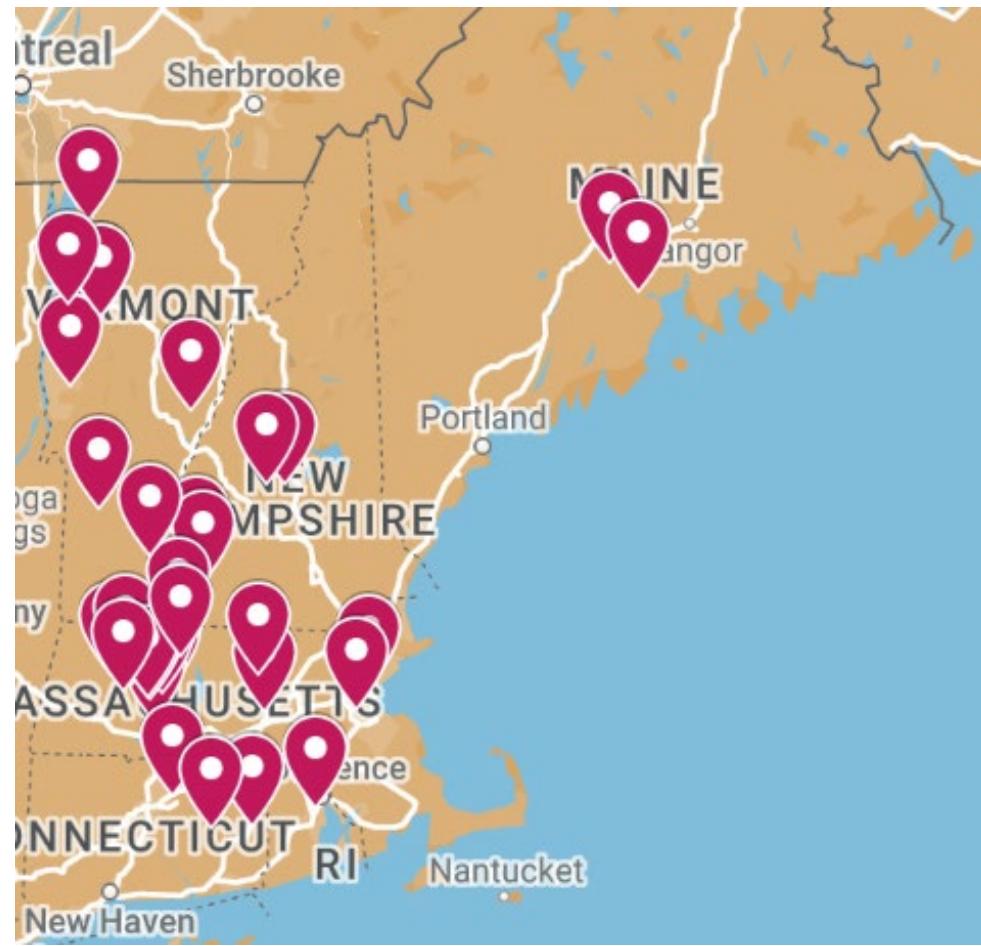


## KEEP FARMERS ON THE LAND

A seismic transfer of farmland is looming. More than 40% of American farmland is owned by seniors aged 65 and older. AFT provides guidance, tools, and partnerships that connect current landowners with diverse, new farmers to ensure a sustainable farming future.



# New England



# Highlights of AFT's Work in Vermont

- Advancing climate resilience & adaptation planning
- Offering on-farm, peer-learning opportunities for farmers
- Providing financial & technical assistance
- Advocacy & partnering on policy research

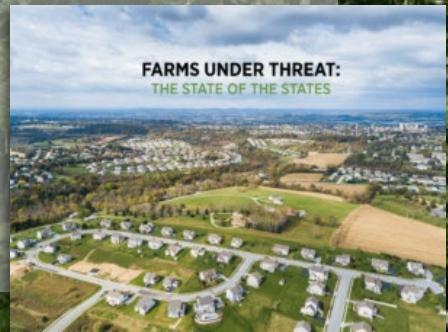




From 2001-2016, 11 million acres of farmland were fragmented or lost across the country.

That's 2,000 acres per day.

**FARMS  
UNDER  
THREAT**



FARMS UNDER THREAT:  
THE STATE OF THE STATES



**Figure 2.** Urban and highly developed (UHD), low-density residential (LDR), and rural land uses exist on a continuum from high-density urban areas to low-density rural areas. The UHD category encompasses dense urban cores, suburbs, and highly developed areas like warehouses. UHD transitions into LDR in residential areas where house lots exceed 1-2 acres. The LDR category also encompasses very large-lot residential areas, which might appear rural at first glance but are primarily used for housing, not for production agriculture.

## AGRICULTURAL LAND CONVERSION 2001-2016



### LDR PAVES THE WAY FOR FURTHER DEVELOPMENT

Agricultural land in LDR areas in 2001 was

**5 TIMES  
MORE LIKELY**

to be converted to UHD by 2016, compared to other agricultural land.

**3,600 acres**

**17%**

of conversion was to  
UHD

**17,800 acres**

**83%**

of conversion was to  
LDR

### CONVERSION AFFECTED ALL TYPES OF AGRICULTURAL LAND



**CROPLAND:** **8,400 acres**

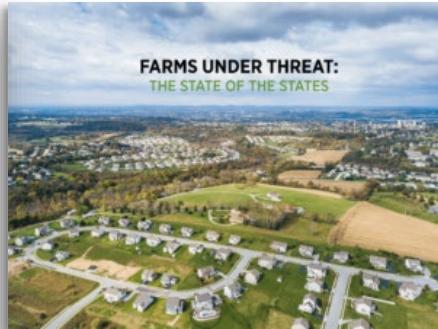
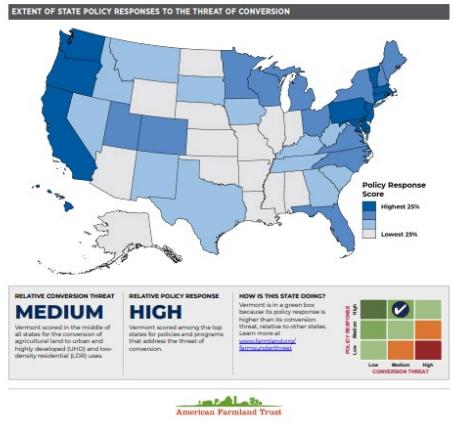
**PASTURELAND:** **5,600 acres**

**WOODLAND:** **7,300 acres**

**From 2001-2016, 21,400 acres of VT agricultural land were developed or compromised.**



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 scorecards; scores from the scorecards are used to calculate Policy Response Scores in the ALP Scorecard. The map shows state Policy Response Scores by quartile.



Vermont ranks **5<sup>th</sup>** nationally in terms of its policy responses to farmland conversion threat.

### RELATIVE CONVERSION THREAT

# MEDIUM

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

### RELATIVE POLICY RESPONSE

# HIGH

Vermont scored among the top states for policies and programs that address the threat of conversion.

### HOW IS THIS STATE DOING?

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



## PROJECTED AGRICULTURAL LAND CONVERSION 2016-2040



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

Projected Conversion (2040)

Urban and highly developed (UHD) and low-density residential (LDR)

### Land Cover (2016)

Farmland*	Other lands	Urban areas
Forestland	Federal (no grazing)	Water

\*Farmland is composed of cropland, pastureland, and woodland associated with farms.

# Farms Under Threat 2040: Choosing an Abundant Future: 2016-2040

## WHICH FUTURE WILL WE CHOOSE?

How Vermonters choose to develop will shape the future of farming. The scenarios in *Farms Under Threat 2040* show the impacts:



**Business as Usual:** Development follows recent patterns. Poorly planned development and low-density residential sprawl continue to rapidly convert farmland and ranchland.

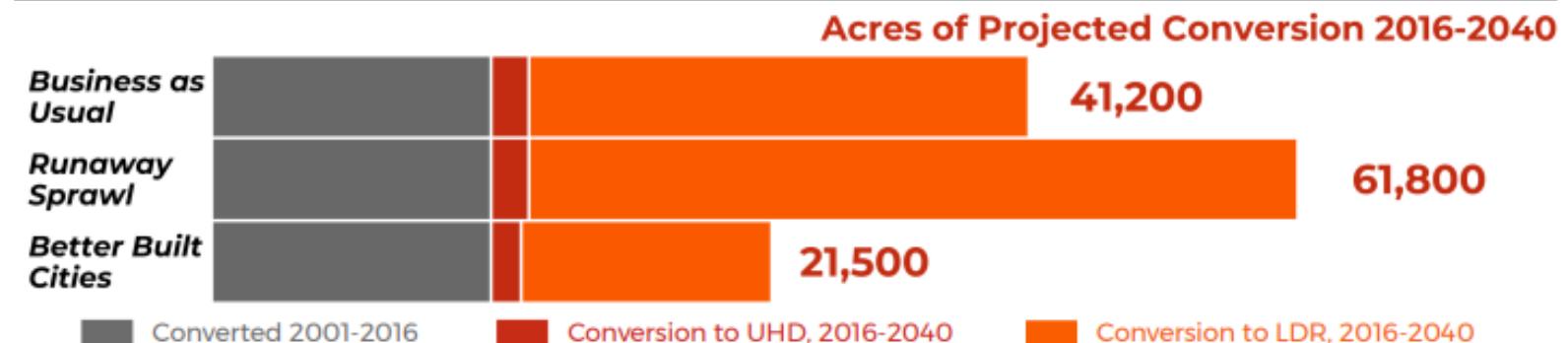


**Runaway Sprawl:** Development becomes even less efficient than in *Business as Usual*. Low-density housing sweeps across the countryside, displacing farmers and ranchers.



**Better Built Cities:** Policymakers and land-use planners promote compact development and reduce sprawl, saving irreplaceable farmland and ranchland from conversion.

## COMPACT GROWTH CAN SAVE FARMS



## Acres of agriculture in 2016

### Business as Usual

#### ACRES

#### %

### Runaway Sprawl

#### ACRES

#### %

### Better Built Cities

#### ACRES

#### %

#### State

State	Acres of agriculture in 2016	Business as Usual		Runaway Sprawl		Better Built Cities	
		ACRES	%	ACRES	%	ACRES	%
Vermont	1,320,300	41,200	3.1	61,800	4.7	21,500	1.6



## 2040 Future Scenarios Vermont

Farms Under Threat 2040: Choosing an Abundant Future mapped three scenarios of development between 2016 and 2040. If recent trends continue, **41,200 acres** of Vermont's farmland will be paved over, fragmented, or converted to uses that jeopardize agriculture. **That's 3%.** Vermonters can slash conversion, save farmland, and safeguard the future of agriculture and the environment by choosing compact development.

PROJECTED AGRICULTURAL LAND CONVERSION 2016-2040



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

Projected Conversion (2040)

■ Urban and highly developed (UHD) and low-density residential (LDR)

Land Cover (2016)

Farmland*	Other lands	Urban areas
Forestland	Federal (no grazing)	Water

\*Farmland is composed of cropland, pastureland, and woodland associated with farms.

### On recent trends, from 2016 to 2040:

Vermonters will pave over, fragment, or compromise

**41,200 acres**

of farmland.

That's the equivalent of losing

**200 farms,**

**\$24 million**

in farm output, and

**700 jobs**

based on county averages.<sup>1</sup>

**60%** of the conversion will occur on Vermont's best land.<sup>2</sup>

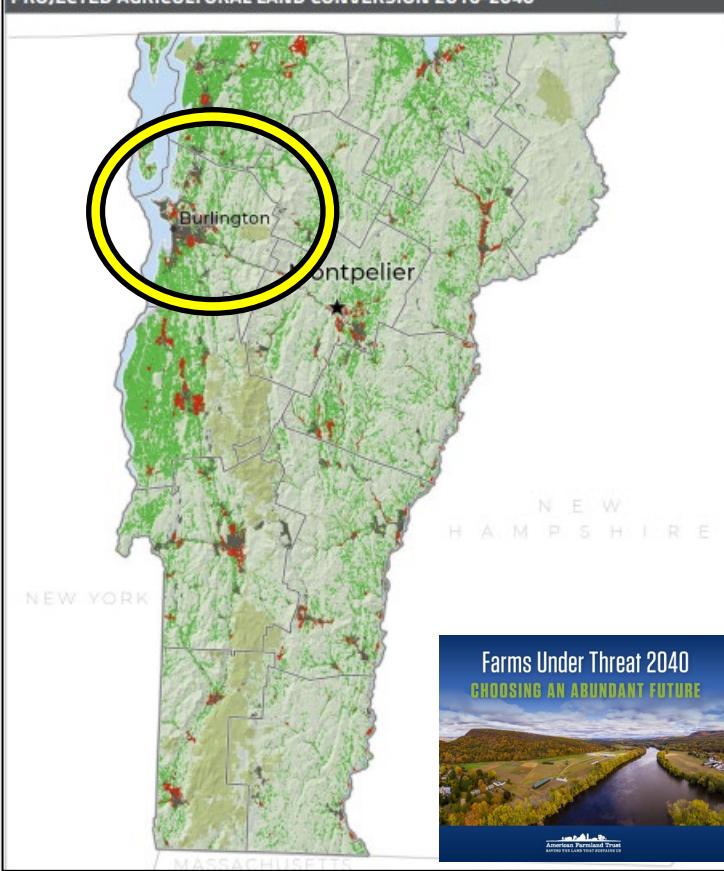
Hardest-hit counties:

- ▶ **Addison**
- ▶ **Franklin**
- ▶ **Rutland**

<sup>1</sup>Census of Agriculture 2017

<sup>2</sup>Freedgood et al. 2020

#### PROJECTED AGRICULTURAL LAND CONVERSION 2016-2040



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

Projected Conversion (2040)

Red: Urban and highly developed (UHD) and low-density residential (LDR)

Land Cover (2016)

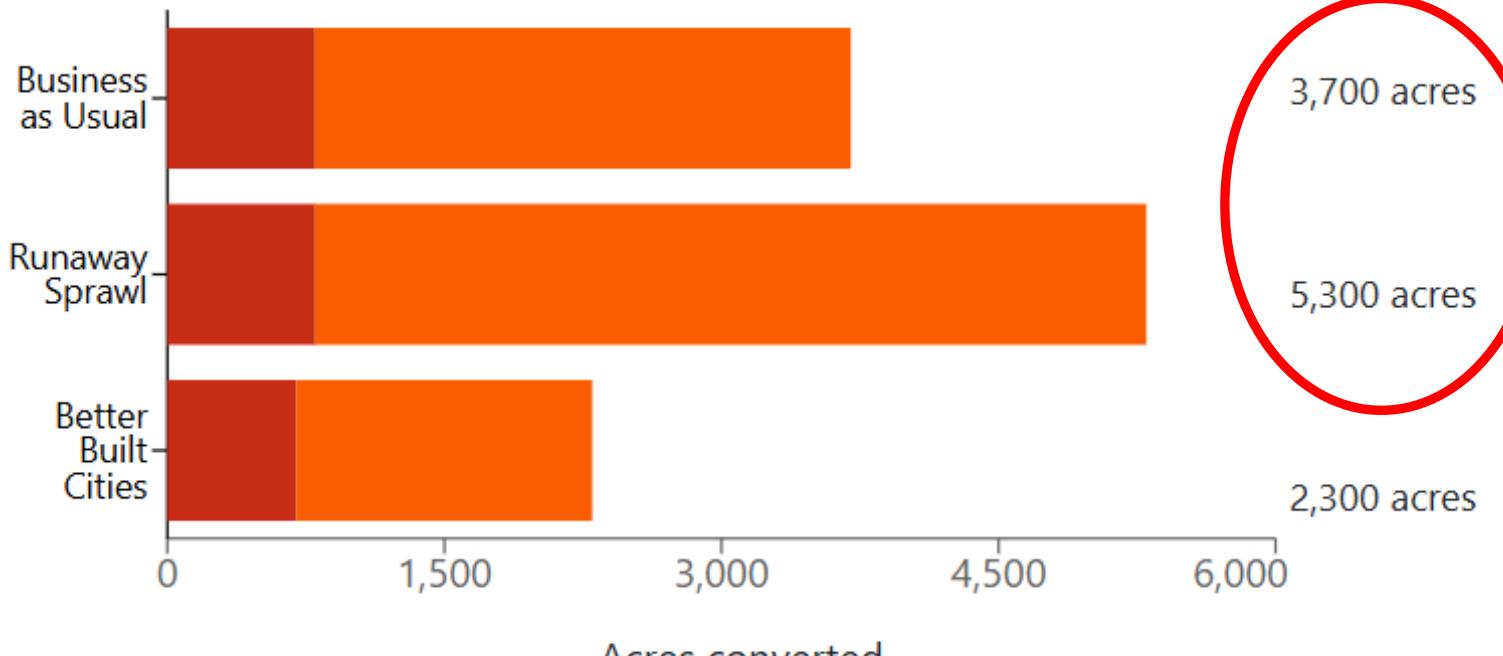
Farmland*	Other lands	Urban areas
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#### Projected Conversion of Farmland<sup>1</sup> from 2016-2040

##### Chittenden County



**3,700 - 5,300 acres of Chittenden County farmland are projected to be converted by 2040 (mostly to LDR).**

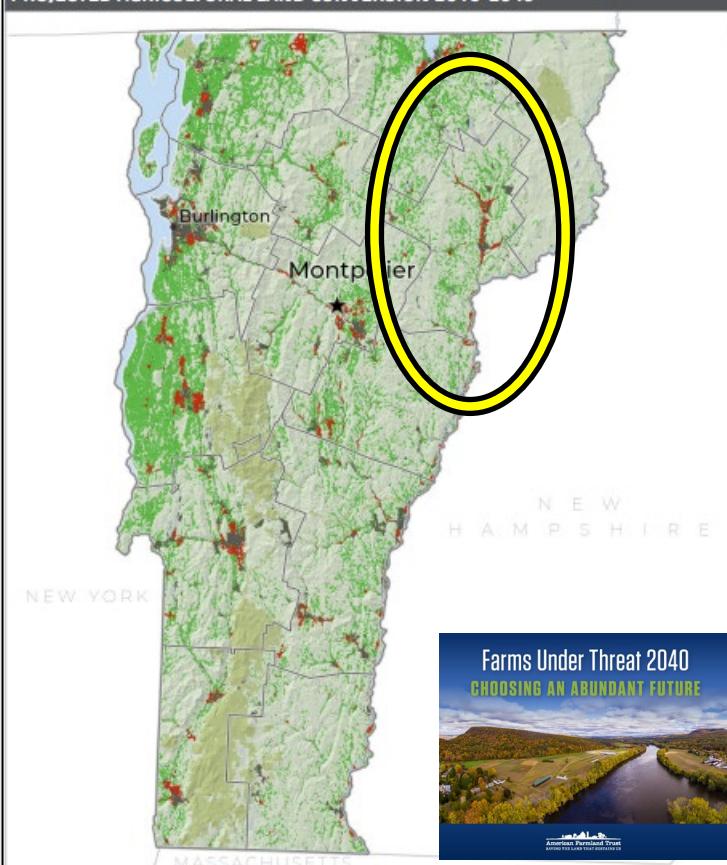


Urban and highly developed



Low-density residential

## PROJECTED AGRICULTURAL LAND CONVERSION 2016-2040



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

Projected Conversion (2040)

Red: Urban and highly developed (UHD) and low-density residential (LDR)

Land Cover (2016)

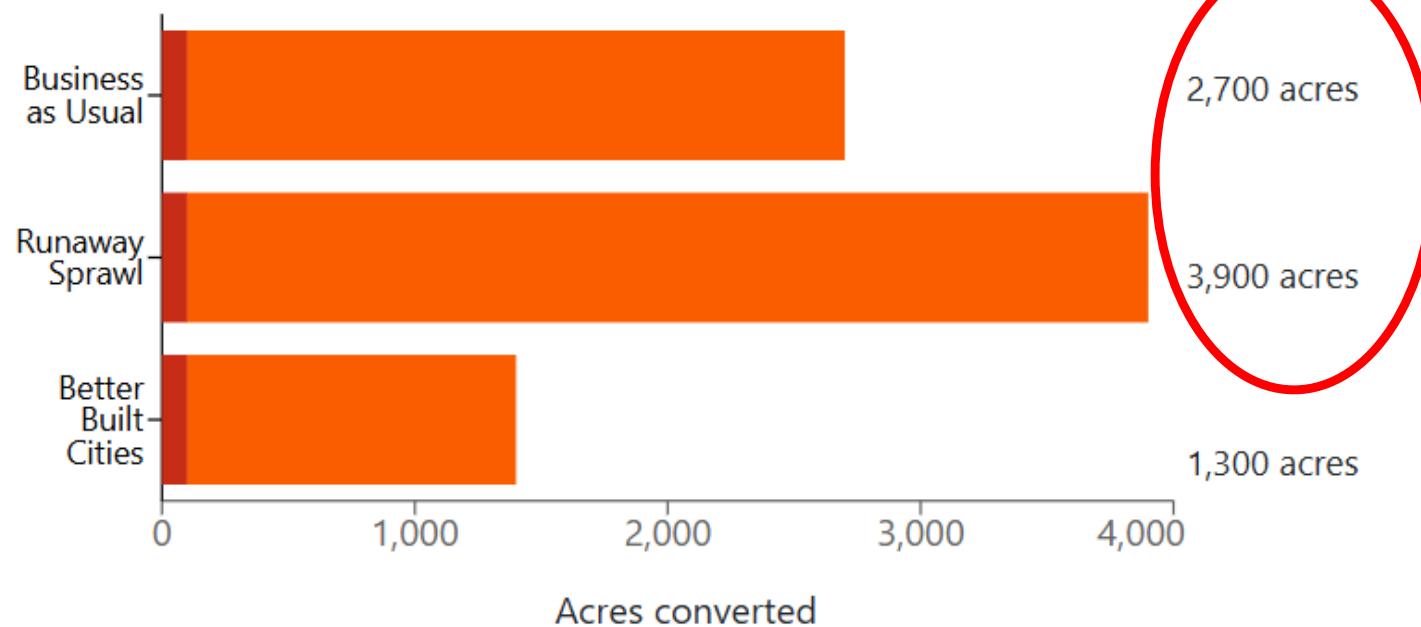
Farmland*	Other lands	Urban areas
Forestland	Federal (no grazing)	Water

\*Farmland is composed of cropland, pastureland, and woodland associated with farms.



## Projected Conversion of Farmland<sup>1</sup> from 2016-2040

### Caledonia County



**2,700 - 3,900 acres of**  
**Caledonia County farmland**  
**are projected to be converted**  
**by 2040 (mostly to LDR).**

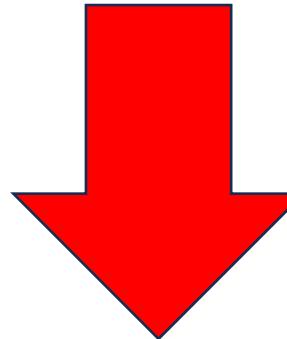


Urban and highly developed



Low-density residential

# 2022 Census of Agriculture



From 2017 to 2022, Vermont lost **19,547** acres in farms (or **1.6%**)



# Agricultural Land Converted to Developed Land 2016-2023

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## Agricultural Conversion

Observed Conversion 2016-2023

Projected Conversion 2016-2040

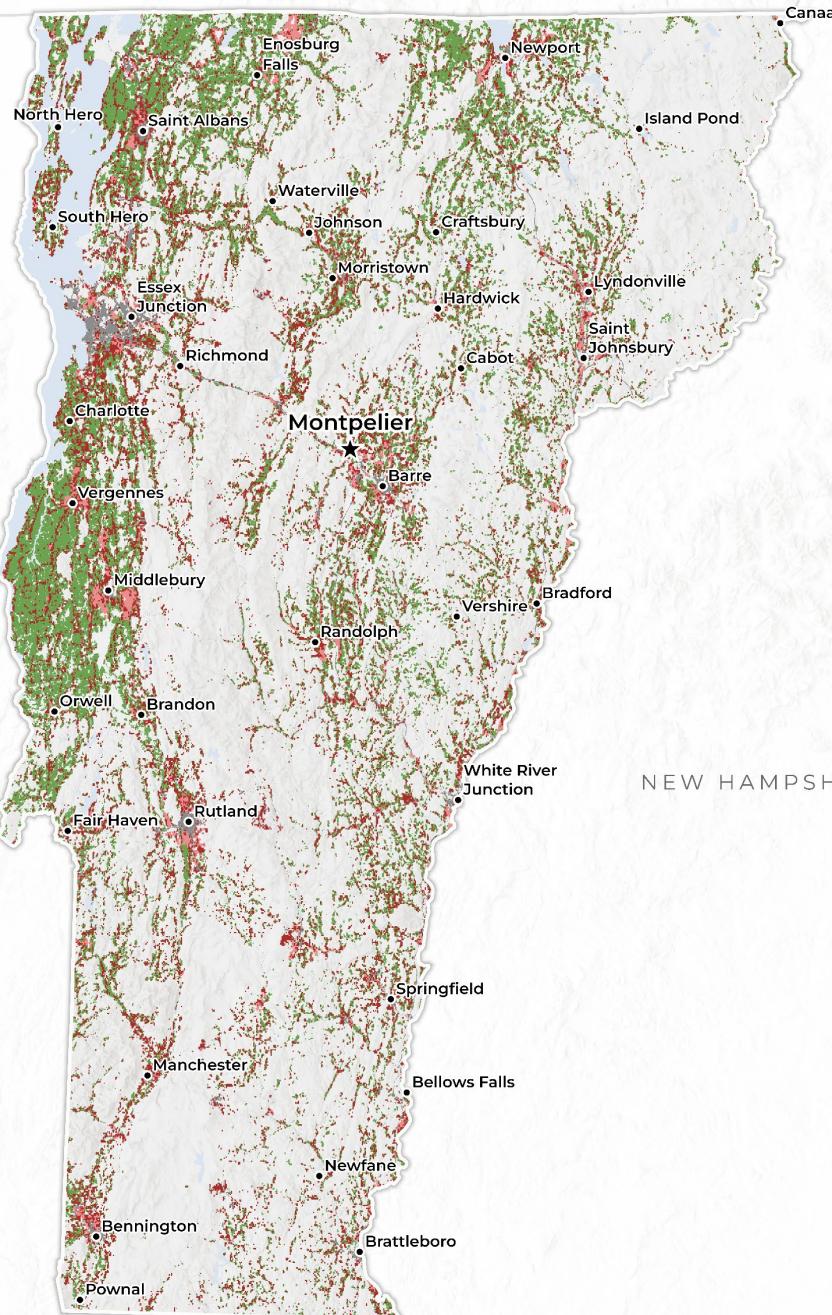
## 2016 Land Cover and Use

Farmland

Federal, Forest, and Other Lands

Urban and Transportation

Water



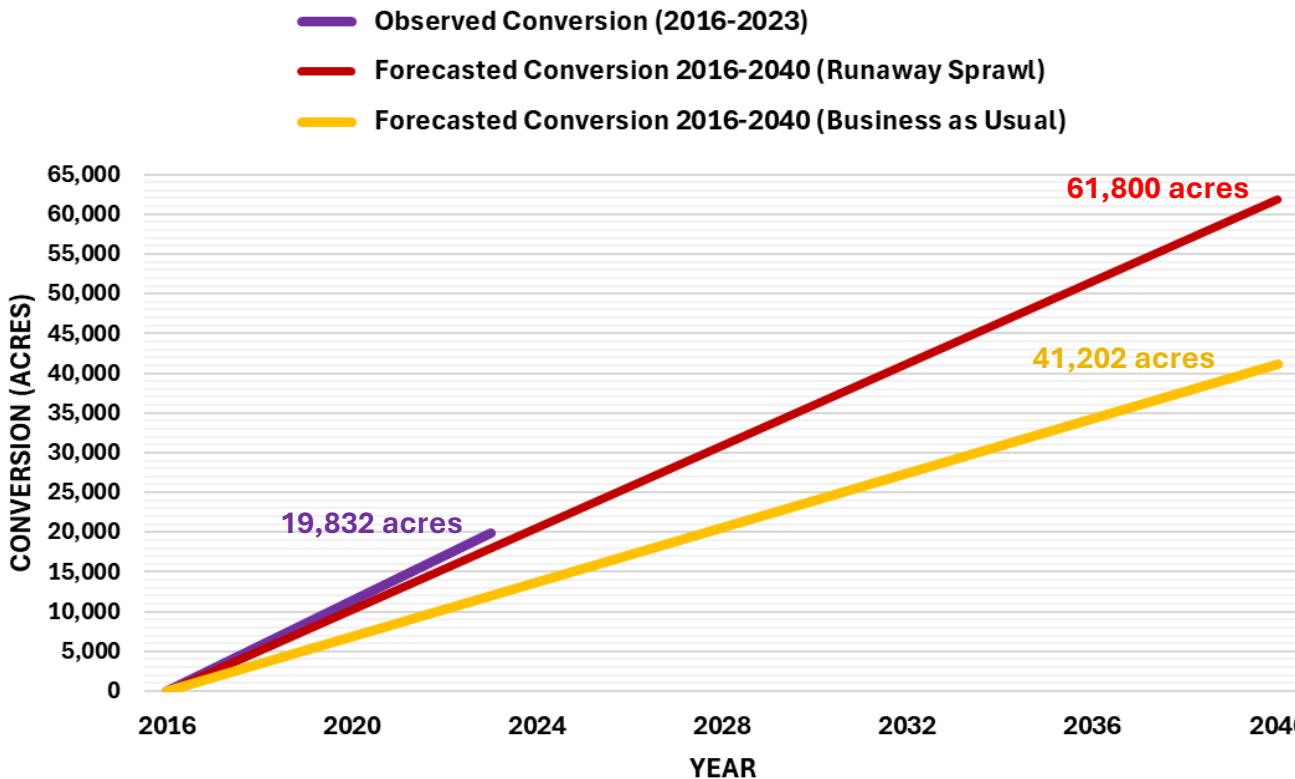
County	Acres Converted
Essex	154
Grand Isle	544
Caledonia	903
Lamoille	991
Bennington	1153
Windham	1198
Orleans	1237
Orange	1339
Washington	1344
Windsor	1900
Rutland	1993
Franklin	2010
Addison	2392
Chittenden	2674

## Data sources:

2016 & 2023 Cropland Data Layer,  
National Land Cover Database,  
2016 AFT Land Cover Layer

Sources: AFT, Esri, U.S. Census, CDL, NLCD

## Farmland Conversion in Vermont



Forecasted Conversion (BAU, 2016-2040)	-1,717 acres/year
Forecasted Conversion (RS, 2016-2040)	-2,575 acres/year
Observed Conversion (2016-2023)	-2,833 acres/year

Observed Farmland Conversion (2016-2023)	Forecasted Farmland Conversion (2016-2040)	% Forecasted Conversion Already Converted
19,832 acres	BAU: 41,202 acres	48%
	RS: 61,800 acres	32%

State	Acres of agriculture in 2016	Business as Usual		Runaway Sprawl		Better Built Cities	
		ACRES	%	ACRES	%	ACRES	%
Vermont	1,320,300	41,200	3.1	61,800	4.7	21,500	1.6

### Talking Points:

- We have already converted 48% of what we forecasted to lose by 2040 under Business as Usual (1.5% of all VT farmland).
- This conversion is happening **65% faster than forecasted under the BAU scenario, and 10% faster than under the Runaway Sprawl scenario.**
- As of 2023, Vermont was hitting conversion projections ~5 years ahead of the BAU schedule.

## What type of farmland is getting converted?

Top 5 Categories	Acres of Farmland Converted 2016-2023
Other Hay / Non-Alfalfa	12,227
Deciduous, Evergreen, and Mixed Forest (Associated with Farmland)	3,751
Grassland/Pasture	1,835
Corn	917
Fallow/Idle Cropland	339
All other categories	763
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>19,832</b>

## What type of development is farmland getting converted to?

Category of Conversion	Acres of Farmland Converted 2016-2023	Percent of Conversion
Developed - Open Space	9,430	47%
Developed - Low Intensity	5,672	29%
Developed - Medium Intensity	3,623	18%
Developed - High Intensity	1,107	6%
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>19,832</b>	<b>100%</b>

~76%  
LDR

~24%  
UHD

### “Developed” Categories from National Land Cover Database

21 **Developed, Open Space**- areas with a mixture of some constructed materials, but mostly vegetation in the form of lawn grasses. Impervious surfaces account for less than 20% of total cover. These areas most commonly include large-lot single-family housing units, parks, golf courses, and vegetation planted in developed settings for recreation, erosion control, or aesthetic purposes.

22 **Developed, Low Intensity**- areas with a mixture of constructed materials and vegetation. Impervious surfaces account for 20% to 49% percent of total cover. These areas most commonly include single-family housing units.

23 **Developed, Medium Intensity** -areas with a mixture of constructed materials and vegetation. Impervious surfaces account for 50% to 79% of the total cover. These areas most commonly include single-family housing units.

24 **Developed High Intensity**- highly developed areas where people reside or work in high numbers. Examples include apartment complexes, row houses and commercial/industrial. Impervious surfaces account for 80% to 100% of the total cover.

**Data sources:** 2016 & 2023 Cropland Data Layer, National Land Cover Database, 2016 AFT Land Cover Layer

# Why are we losing farmland faster than projected?

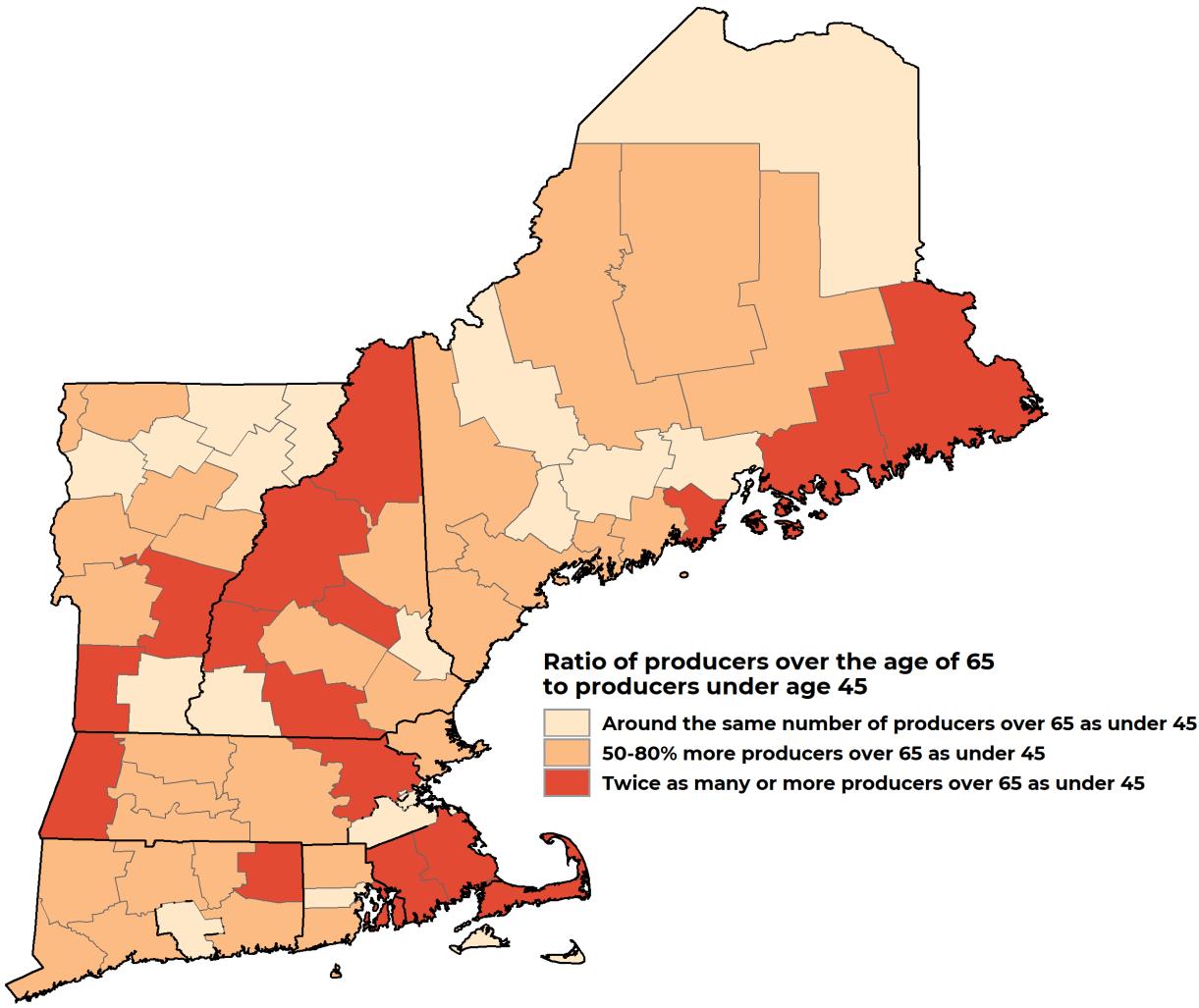
*Projections are based on conversion trends from 2001-2016 (projected out to 2040), during which there was:*

1. **Housing Recession**: A housing recession between ~2007-2010, so development trends projected forward would have under-forecasted the amount of development.
2. **Housing Boom & Covid-19**: A housing boom and an unanticipated move of people from urban areas to rural areas took place from 2020-2022
3. **Return to cities**: “Post”-Covid, many people are moving back to cities. Development trends may even out with time.

## **TAKEAWAY:**

Farmland was developed more quickly and significantly in the first 7 years of the study than was projected. Given how much land was consumed so quickly, farmland conversion rates are likely to exceed our forecasts.

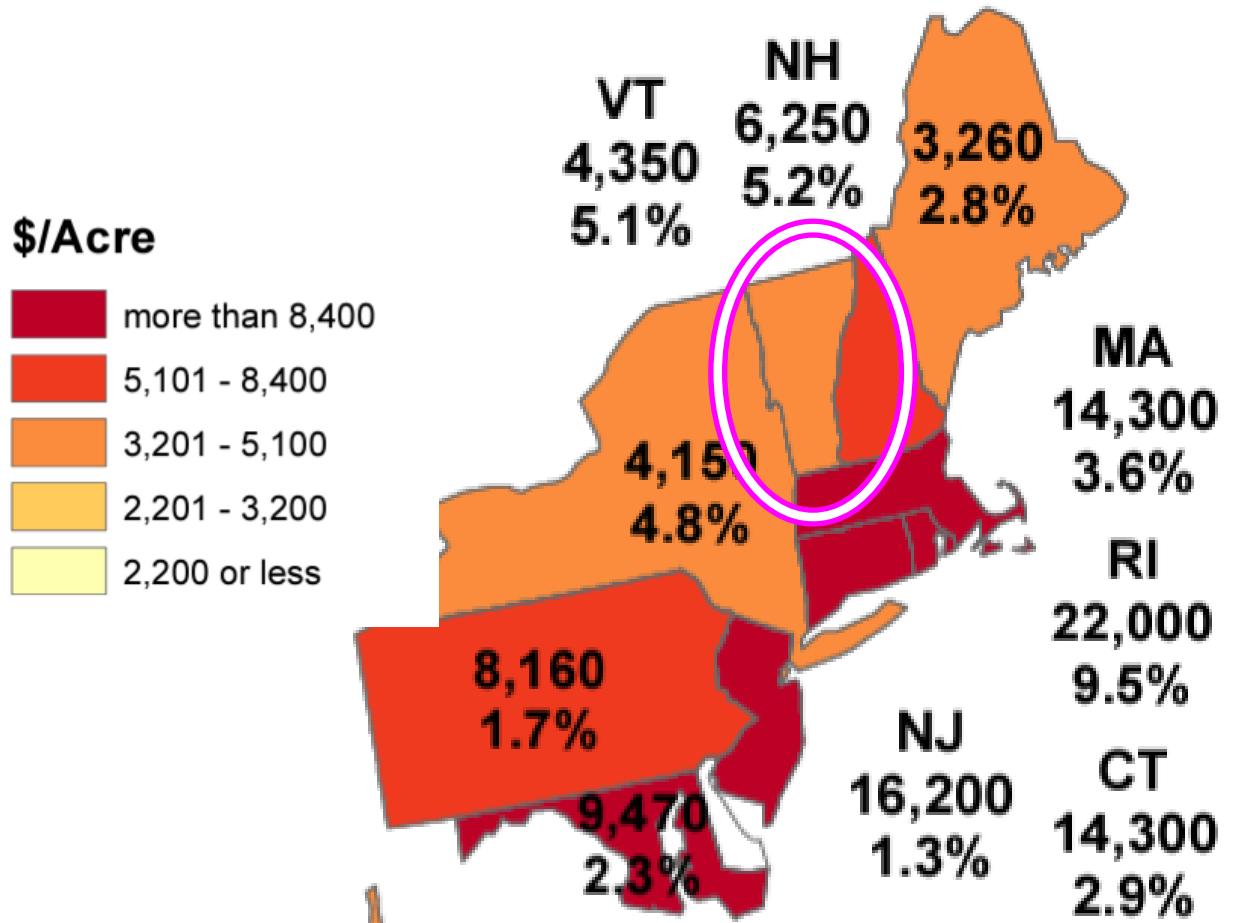
# Aging Farmland Owners & Lack of Succession Planning



**39% of VT producers are over 65, but many have not undertaken estate or succession planning**

2022 CENSUS OF  
AGRICULTURE  
YOUR VOICE. YOUR FUTURE. YOUR OPPORTUNITY.

# High Cost of Farmland & Housing for Next Generation Farmers



VT farm real estate values are \$4,350 per acre  
(up 5.1% since last year). (NASS, 2024)

→ 32% of producers are new & beginning farmers

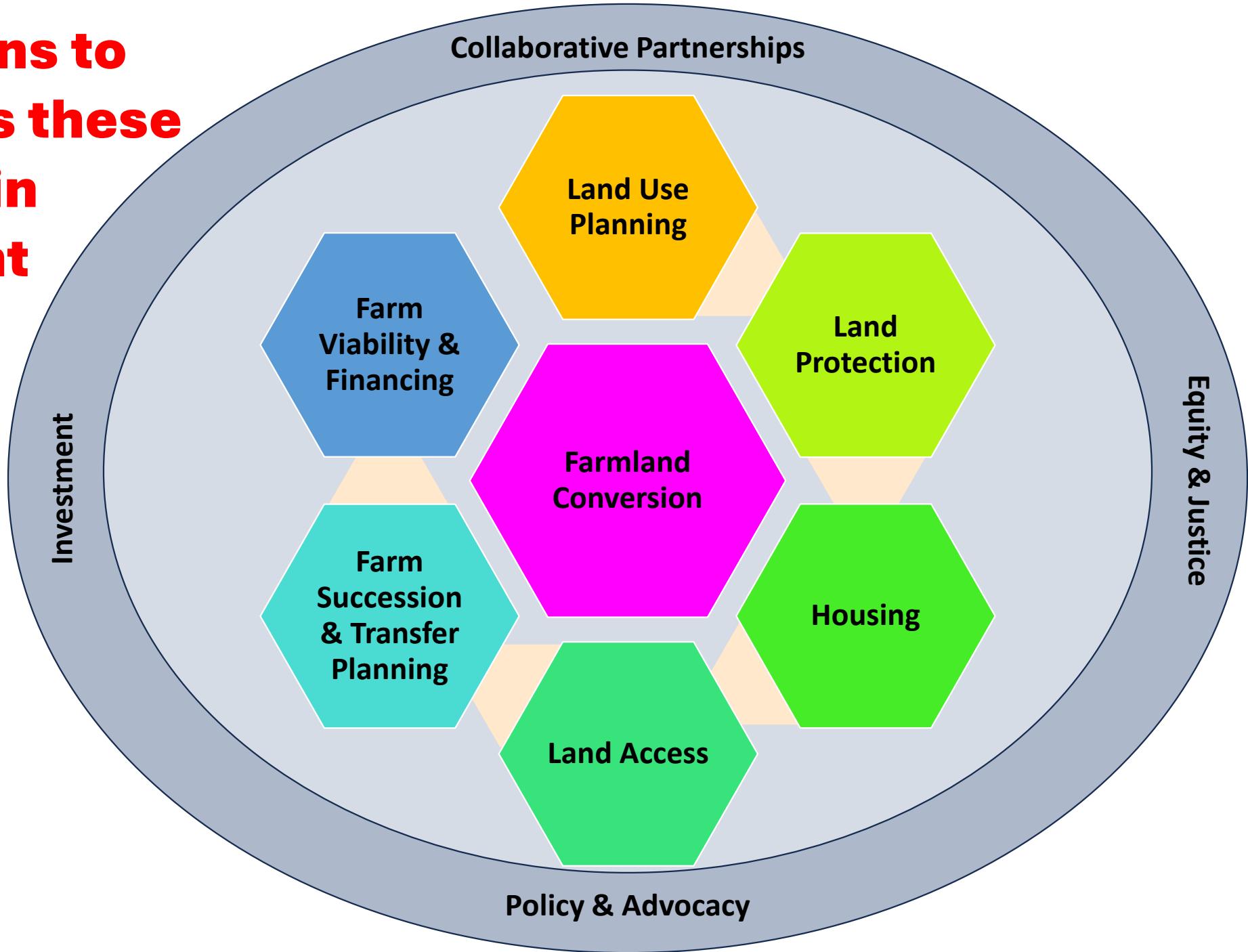
→ 9.7% of producers are young farmers



# **Takeaways from data & trends**

- 1. Farmland conversion is happening faster than projected**
  - The vast majority of conversion is to Low Density Residential (LDR)-type development
  - It is happening on the outskirts of cities and towns, primarily on hayfields, woodlands associated with farmland, and pastureland.
- 2. Farmers are aging and many don't have successors lined up**
- 3. Next generation farmers struggle to afford farmland and housing**
- 4. Increasing economic and climate threats further impact farm viability**
- 5. Only ~15-20% of VT agricultural land is permanently protected**

# Solutions to address these trends in Vermont





**CONTACT  
INFORMATION**

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