



Testimony before the Rhode Island State Legislature House Finance Committee

By Andrea Solazzo, Senior Manager of External Affairs, American Farmland Trust

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RE: H8144 – Green Economy Bonds: Including Conservation and Farmland Preservation Funding

Dear Chairman Abney and members of the House Finance Committee,

My name is Andrea Solazzo, and I am the Senior Manager of External Affairs for American Farmland Trust's New England program. I appreciate this opportunity to testify on behalf of American Farmland Trust in **strong support** of H8144, which would add critical conservation funding to the governor's proposed Green Economy Bond. We urge the Committee to ensure that farmland preservation, open space protection, and outdoor recreation remain central to Rhode Island's Green Bond.

Specifically, AFT supports the following conservation additions proposed in H8144:

- **\$2 million** for the Agricultural Land Preservation Commission (ALPC) to support farmland preservation
- **\$3 million** for DEM's Open Space Program to protect forest lands, open spaces, and watersheds
- **\$2 million** for local open space grants
- **\$3 million** for outdoor recreation grants to provide matching funds to cities, towns, and Native American tribes

Our request echoes the Rhode Island Land Trust Council's recommendation to increase conservation funding in the Green Economy Bond. We have seen that when advocates fight to make the Green Bond greener, they win—as demonstrated by the successful addition of \$13 million in conservation funding to the 2024 bond, which voters overwhelmingly approved.

Rhode Island's Farmland Is at Stake

Rhode Island's farmland plays a vital role in our regional economy and food security. According to AFT's *Farms Under Threat: The State of the States*, Rhode Island is on track to lose 8,100 acres of farmland by 2040 under a "business as usual" development projection—representing a 13.7% loss in farmland, \$8 million in farm output, and 600 jobs. Since 1985, the state's Agricultural Land Preservation Commission has permanently protected 129 farms and roughly 8,252 acres of farmland with agricultural conservation easements. More must be done to address growing threats including development pressures, climate-driven land loss, and the highest farmland prices in the nation.

At an average of \$22,500 per acre according to the USDA NASS 2025 Land Values Summary, Rhode Island has the most expensive farmland in the country. The ALPC plays a crucial role by helping DEM identify and purchase farmland that is later transferred at its agricultural value to Rhode Island farmers, making land accessible to new and beginning farmers who otherwise face insurmountable barriers to entry.

A Smart Investment for Rhode Island

Every dollar invested in farmland protection delivers outsized returns. Human activity on an acre of farmland produces 66 times fewer greenhouse gas emissions than an acre of developed land. Farmland provides reliable environmental services including air pollution removal, wildlife habitat, flood mitigation, and carbon sequestration. Research from Highstead shows that every \$1 of state funding spent on land conservation in New England returns between \$4 and \$11 in economic value.

Additionally, state bond funding for farmland protection positions Rhode Island to leverage federal matching dollars through the USDA–NRCS Agricultural Conservation Easement Program (ACEP-ALE). From FY 2014–2018, Rhode Island leveraged approximately \$2.7 million in federal funds to protect 11 farms through this program. Without state investment, these federal dollars will go to other states.

Fund the Farmland for the Future

Thank you for the opportunity to testify in strong support of H8144. Protecting Rhode Island’s working lands is one step toward creating a resilient future for all. We strongly urge this Committee to include robust conservation and farmland preservation funding in the 2026 Green Economy Bond.

Please feel free to reach out to me at asolazzo@farmland.org if you have any questions about funding for farmland protection and access in Rhode Island.

American Farmland Trust is the nation’s leading conservation organization dedicated to protecting farmland, promoting sound farming practices, and keeping farmers on the land. Since 1980, AFT has helped protect over 6.5 million acres of farmland. Established in 1985, AFT’s New England office works to save the land that sustains us across the region.