

## **Farms for the Future Initiative: Farmland Leasing Program Information and Application Packet**



Deborah Light Preserve, Amagansett, NY

## **The Peconic Land Trust and the Farms for the Future Initiative**

The mission of the Peconic Land Trust is to conserve Long Island's working farms, natural lands, and heritage for our communities now and in the future. Since 1983, the Trust has worked diligently with landowners, communities, municipalities, and partner organizations to protect more than 10,000 acres of land, conserving more working farms on Long Island than any other private conservation organization, and securing millions of dollars from the public and private sectors for land protection.

At the same time, Long Island's agricultural industry and economy has changed considerably. Economic trends over the past 30 years have had a negative impact on the availability of agricultural land and the business of farming on Long Island. Due primarily to development, the amount of available farmland is vanishing. According to the latest census, there are 36,000 acres of farmland left in Suffolk County. This is down from 123,346 acres in 1950. Although the rate at which Suffolk County is losing farmland has slowed—thanks in large part to efforts by the County, Towns, and private conservation organizations like the Peconic Land Trust—conserving land is only part of the solution. For instance, the value of farmland on Long Island, even without development rights, has seen more than a 100% increase in the last decade. Today, it is not uncommon to see conserved farmland selling for as much as \$200,000 per acre on the South Fork and \$50,000 per acre on the North Fork—land values that are totally out of reach for the working farmer.

Faced with intense development pressures, escalating real estate values, a decline in food production farming, a scarcity of new and startup farmers, and a lack of affordable farmland for both new and established farmers, the Trust is working to ensure that Long Island's farms and farming communities remain viable and productive now and in the future. "Farms for the Future" is a special initiative that the board and staff of the Trust have undertaken to explore these challenges in depth and problem-solve using pragmatic approaches. The Initiative's primary objectives are as follows:

- I. Explore and refine a new set of conservation tools and techniques that address the issues of farmland accessibility, affordability, and sustainability
- II. Buy, protect, rebuild and resell farms to farmers
- III. Develop and expand our Farmland Leasing Program

Although the Trust has leased farmland to farmers since its inception, as part of our ongoing Initiative the Trust has developed and formalized a Farmland Leasing Program for both new and established farmers.

## **Farmland Leasing Program: New Farmers**

The goal of our Farmland Leasing Program for new farmers is to provide beginner farmers that have an emphasis on food production and who are looking to start their commercial agricultural operations with access to productive farmland. In order to help new farmers establish viable agricultural operations, the Trust offers advice, guidance, and educational opportunities. In some instances, the Trust is able to provide farmers with access to other important agricultural infrastructure including barn space, greenhouse space, and retail space.

### **Application Requirements and Process**

Below is a description of the application requirements and process for new farmers interested in leasing farmland. After reviewing the information below, applicants should submit an application with the following components:

- Either answer the following questions OR submit a business plan that incorporates answers to the following:
  - Describe the farm operation you plan on establishing and/or expanding. Include information on the kind of crop(s) or livestock you plan to grow, ideal size you think it should be, etc.
  - What and where is your market for your product(s)?
  - What is your farming experience?
  - Where do you see your operation in 3 to 5 years?
  - Anything else you think is important for us to know about you.
- Applications should also include the contact information of the farmer(s) and/or farm operation including name, address, phone number and email.

Please note that we will not be taking applications for start-up nursery operations as our program only offers 1-year leases and we do not currently have any properties suitable for that type of agricultural operation.

Specific questions and completed applications can be addressed to Dan Heston, Senior Manager of Agricultural Programs, at (631) 734-5630 or (516) 381-4489, [DHeston@peconiclandtrust.org](mailto:DHeston@peconiclandtrust.org) or Jessie McSwane, Sr. Stewardship Manager, at (631) 283-3195, ext. 130, [JMcswane@peconiclandtrust.org](mailto:JMcswane@peconiclandtrust.org).

### **Application Timeframe and Criteria**

- Applications will be accepted until **August 31<sup>st</sup>** for the upcoming growing season.
  - Applications received after August 31st will be considered depending on:
    - land availability,
    - the proposed operation,
    - the availability of staff and the Farms for the Future Advisory Team to review and process the application

- The Trust reserves the right to hold applications received AFTER August 31<sup>st</sup> until the next round of applications
- Depending on farmland availability, our Farms for the Future Advisory Team made up of staff, board members, and local commercial farmers will review the applications and, if necessary, meet with applicants within 3 months of the application deadline.
- The Team will assess applications based on the following criteria:
  - Sound business plan that demonstrates good market opportunity and measurable financial goals
  - Minimal 1-3 years of farm experience
  - Strong awareness of sustainable agricultural practices
  - Emphasis on food production farming
  - Compatibility of resource and equipment needs with existing farm operations
  - Market focus and competition with existing farms
  - Openness to feedback and recommendations
  - Connection to community
  - Land capacity
  - Alignment with the overall mission and goals of the Peconic Land Trust and the Farms for the Future Initiative
- The Farms for the Future Advisory Team will make recommendations to Peconic Land Trust's Board of Directors prior to the Board's December Meeting. The Board of Directors will make a final determination.
- Trust staff will announce the Board's decision by the end of the calendar year
- In January, Trust staff will meet with accepted applicants to:
  - Explain and sign the Lease and Agreement
  - Answer any questions about expectations from the farmer
  - Explain the Farms for the Future Orientation
- Those accepted will attend the Farms for the Future Orientation.
  - Orientation will consist of a variety of classes (listed below) over the months of February and March (prior to the beginning of the growing season)
  - Training will include:
    - Business planning & Marketing
    - Tractor training and safety
    - Best management practices
    - Field layout
    - Irrigation system design
- Farmers will be strongly encouraged to attend classes and seminars provided by Cornell Cooperative Extension (including the Ag Forum, Amagansett Food Institute's CRAFT Program and others)
  - Participation in these ongoing training could affect Staff's decision to extend the farmer's lease another year.

## Farm Tenure

If accepted to our Farmland Leasing Program, new farmers will be asked to attend an orientation about the Trust, the Farms for the Future Initiative, and the farmland to be leased. During the orientation, the lease is signed.

- The lease is granted for a 1-year term for ALL “New Farmers”.
- Leases begin on the first of the year and are renewable for up to 5 years.

After the lease term and once established, farmers enrolled in the Farmland Leasing Program for New Farmers may be asked to relocate their farm operation off farmland designated for beginner farmers. In such instances, these farmers may be able to enter into a new lease agreement with the Trust as part of its Farmland Leasing Program for established farmers or work with the Trust and other farmers/landowners to buy/lease another farm.

## Farming Practices

Farm operations will need to abide by sustainable farming methods in order to maintain and improve the health of the existing soil, neighboring farm operations, and the larger community. Farmers will work with the Peconic Land Trust to incorporate the following best management practices into their farm operations:

- Soil testing
- Cover cropping\*
- Crop rotation and soil management
- Insect and disease management

*\*If a farmer chooses not to cover crop by October 1<sup>st</sup> of the growing season, the Peconic Land Trust has the right to plant a cover crop at the farmer's expense.*

## Farmland Availability

If farmland is available, the Peconic Land Trust will work with accepted applicants to place them on a first come first serve basis. Most of the farmland available for new farmers will be located at the Trust’s Agricultural Center at Charnews in Southold and the Deborah Light Preserve in Amagansett, though there may be other opportunities on other Trust owned land or with other landowners and/or partner organizations. In an effort to maximize farmland productivity, the Trust will make every effort to provide farmers with access to farmland that has irrigation and deer fencing.

## **Available Infrastructure and Annual Rates**

The annual lease rate ranges from \$150-\$470 per acre depending on improvements such as irrigation and deer fencing. Depending on location and availability, barn and greenhouse space may also be leased. Please inquire for availability and lease rates.

## **Deposits**

All lessees will be required to pay a security deposit at the time of executing the lease. The deposit will be in addition to lease payments also due at the time of signing.

Deposit fees will range from \$500.00 to \$5,000.00 and will be recommended by the Advisory Team and Staff and determined by the Board of Directors. Deposits will be determined based on the business plan, the amount of land, the amount of infrastructure, and the presence of livestock.

When a deposit fee is determined, applicants will receive a written explanation of the decision .

Deposits will be returned in full after the termination of the lease and after an inspection of the Premises by Staff. Inspection will be completed within 30 days of termination of lease.

## **Agreement**

In addition to the terms of the Lease Agreement, there will be a Farms for the Future Agreement which will include, but not be limited to, the following:

- In addition to the initial meeting with staff, and orientation after execution of the lease, Lessee(s) and staff will meet three times “on field” to discuss progress and any problems that have come up. These meetings will take place:
  - At the beginning of the growing season
  - During the growing season
  - At the end of the growing season
- Lessee(s) and Staff may have more frequent, less formal meetings throughout the growing season
- If the Lessee(s) should desire assistance from the Trust in carrying out their business plan (plowing, seeding, building, etc.), it will be at the Lessee(s) expense
  - Staff will provide a written estimate of the work
  - Lessee(s) will pay for the work in full prior to the onset of the work
- Lessee(s) agree to attend educational sessions and conferences throughout the year
  - They will be notified of such programs as they become available

## **Farmer Training/Continued Education**

The Peconic Land Trust will host ongoing training and educational opportunities for new farmers enrolled in our Farmland Leasing Program. Individuals from organizations such as the Long Island Farm Bureau, Farm Credit East, Cornell Cooperative Extension, and already established farms and farmers will present on topics such as:

- Tractor training and safety
- Best management practices
- Soil Health
- DEC Regulations
- Pest Control
- Field layout
- Irrigation system design

## **Farmland Leasing Program: Established Farmers**

Although it can be especially challenging for new farmers to start commercial agricultural operations, challenges exist for established and experienced farmers as well. Recognizing that established farmers looking to expand their commercial agricultural operations on Long Island are constrained by the loss of farmland to development and rising real estate values, the Peconic Land Trust leases farmland to experienced farmers.

For selecting established farmers to lease to, the Trust and its Farms for the Future Advisory Team will use the following criteria:

- Greater than 5 years of farm experience
- Sound business plan that demonstrates good market opportunity and measurable financial goals
- Strong track record of sustainable agricultural practices
- Emphasis on food production farming
- Earns at least 50% of their income from farming
- Lives in and is connected to the community where the farmland available for lease is located
- Uses existing farmland (i.e., “home farm”—if any—to its full sustainable capacity
- Alignment with the overall mission and goals of the Peconic Land Trust and the Farms for the Future Initiative

The Farms for the Future Advisory Team will make recommendations to the Peconic Land Trust’s Board of Directors which will make a final determination. If farmland for established farmers is currently unavailable, the Trust will attempt to match farmers with other landowners who have farmland available.

To inquire about available farmland for established farmers, please contact Dan Heston, Director of Agricultural Programs, at (631) 734-5630 or (516) 381-4489, [DHeston@peconiclandtrust.org](mailto:DHeston@peconiclandtrust.org).

Farms for the Future Initiative  
Farm Leasing Program Application for New Farmers

Name:

Farm Name:

Address:

Phone #:

Email:

**Please answer the following questions or submit a business plan that includes the following information**

- 1) Describe the farm operation you plan on establishing and/or expanding. Include information on the kind of crop(s) or livestock you plan to grow, ideal size you think it should be, etc. (Please attach your business plan)
- 2) What and where is your market for your product(s)?
- 3) What is your farming experience?
- 4) Where do you see your operation in 3 to 5 years?
- 5) Anything else you think is important for us to know about you.