

New England Landscapes that Work: Conservation Supports Forestry and Farming

What's the Issue?

While land and natural resource conservation have long been recognized as environmentally and aesthetically important, these attributes represent only a fraction of conservation's full value. Conserving New England's forests and farmlands is not a luxury; rather, it is vital to our region's economy.

Forestry and agriculture generate a total of more than \$50 billion in economic output annually in New England, yet both of these key industries are threatened by the pressures of urban expansion. Even with great advances in the protection of open spaces—recent land protection rates are four times higher than in previous decades—24,000 acres of forest in our region are lost each year to poorly planned development. In order to ensure the long-term economic contributions of New England's vital rural industries, we must work even harder to conserve priority working forest and agricultural land in the region.



Photo: Spencer Meyer

Annual Economic Contributions

Forest products

62,486 jobs

\$13.5B in sales¹

Agriculture

225,668 jobs²

\$41.5B in sales

Land Permanently Conserved

8.8 million acres (26% of forestland)

359 thousand acres (12% of farmland)

Forestry Fuels Economies

Forestry and forest products are significant economic drivers. Together, they employ 62,500 people and create \$13.5 billion in direct economic output each year. In Vermont, New Hampshire, and Maine alone, indirect impacts of the forest industries create an additional 62,000 jobs and generate \$11.9 billion in economic output.

Land conservation can help New England forestry practices be sustainable. Helping landowners conserve their land can reduce their economic pressures to harvest unsustainably or to convert their land. Without these pressures, foresters can produce more sustainable timber products while maintaining the ecological benefits of managing healthy forests.

Forestry lands are also important for outdoor recreation. While forestry lands are predominantly privately owned, a recent study of 24 large working forests in New England

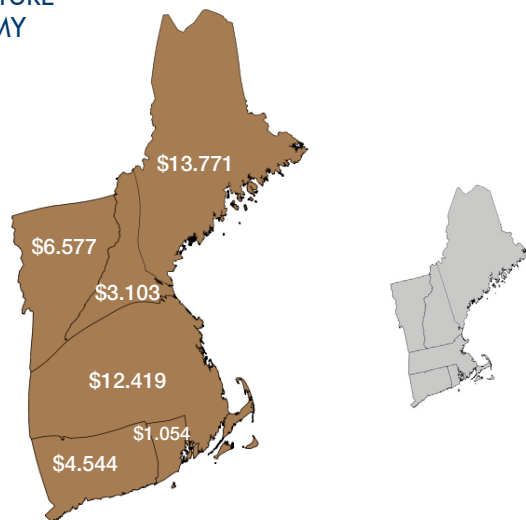
revealed that 75% of these private forestry lands provide public access for various recreation purposes. Outdoor recreation is also a growing industry, and a large contributor to New England's rural economy. Each year, many visitors hunt, fish, hike, snowmobile, and participate in other forms of recreation on land primarily managed for forest products. Public land managed for forest products, including local, state, and national forests, also contribute to recreation and tourism industries.

Eat Local

Agricultural lands produce around 12% of the food consumed in New England. Utilizing about 10% of New England's land area, these farms produce 50% of the vegetables, 25% of the fruit, and over half of the dairy products that New Englanders enjoy. New England's Food Vision calls on the region to reverse loss of farmlands and increase production, reaching 50% of food consumed in the region while still retaining 70% of the landscape as forests.

AGRICULTURE ECONOMY

(in billions)



FORESTRY ECONOMY

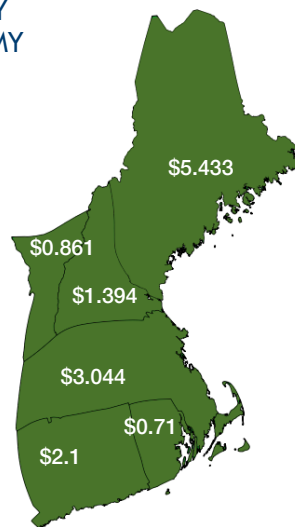


Figure 1: Cartogram representing the relative contributions to each state's economy from the agricultural (left) and forestry (right) industries, as measured in billions of dollars from total sales. The larger the state appears, the greater the contribution of that sector. Non-distorted map of New England appears in the middle. Table below shows employment in both sectors by state.³

Development pressure has resulted in decreased farm employment and income. As development raises property values, it becomes unprofitable for some farms to stay in business. Recent trends have demonstrated a decrease in both agricultural employment and net farm income. Alternatively, conservation of farmland through agricultural easements allows farmers to stay in business, providing lasting economic and environmental benefits.

Local sourcing of food benefits communities and the environment. New England farms support community building through Community Supported Agriculture (CSA) and farmers markets. In Massachusetts, 80% of farms are currently family owned, and the state ranks 6th in the nation for number of farms with CSA programs, a 95% increase from 2007. Eating local also decreases transport costs, greenhouse gas emissions, and food waste.

Agri-tourism may help support rural New England economies. As a currently growing industry, agri-tourism may provide an innovative route for continuing to rebuild farm vitality, as well as generating wider economic benefits for rural communities.

State	Persons Employed in Agriculture	Persons Employed in Forestry
Connecticut	24,842	8,200
Maine	78,656	19,433
Massachusetts	60,008	17,136
New Hampshire	18,743	7,756
Rhode Island	6,591	3,325
Vermont	36,828	6,636
New England	225,668	62,486

Conclusion

It is time to rethink how to approach investments in conservation, recognizing the importance of human livelihoods in addition to environmental values. The only way to ensure that agriculture and forestry continue to thrive in New England is to sharply increase the pace of land conservation to protect the resource upon which we all depend.

Notes

¹ The industry's indirect impacts generate double those amounts in the three northern states alone.

² 2012 agricultural census, includes forestry and fishing.

³ Agriculture sales and employment numbers from Lopez et al., 2015; Forestry sales and employment numbers from NESFA economic impacts of forestry reports.

For further discussion of these issues, complete sources for statistics and other resources, see Holland, I., Culbertson, K., and S.R. Meyer. 2018. The Economic Case for Conservation. Highstead Foundation, Redding, CT.