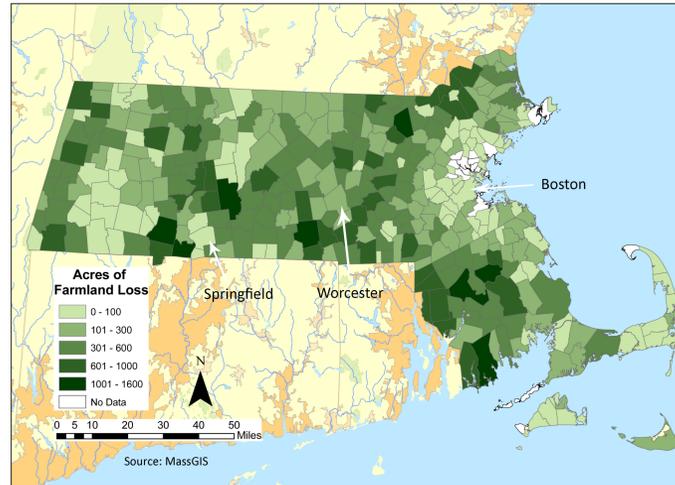
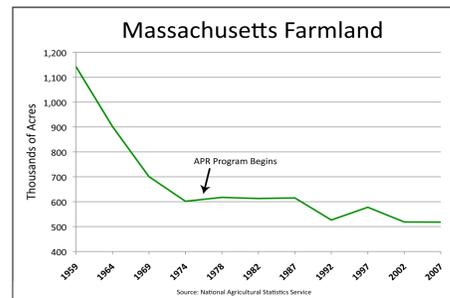


Farmland Preservation in Massachusetts

The APR Program

Massachusetts has lost thousands of acres of farmland to development. The Agricultural Preservation Restriction (APR) program began in 1976 as a mean to curb farmland loss. The APR program places permanent easements on farmland to keep it a part of the working landscape in perpetuity. Prospective parcels are assessed on a variety of criteria before they are accepted into the program (see program requirements).

The APR Program has preserved 725 farms and over 60,000 acres statewide.

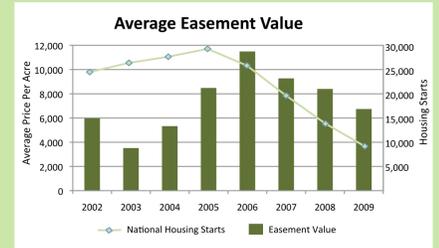


Above: This map shows acres of farmland in 1951 that were converted to other uses by 1999. The most significant losses are around the towns of Springfield, Worcester and the southern part of the state closest to Rhode Island.

Left: Less than half as many acres of farmland exist in today than there were in the 1950s. The APR program has helped to slow farmland loss.

Paying for Easements

Funding for easement payments typically involves contributions from the Massachusetts Department of Agricultural Resources (MDAR), the federal Farm and Ranchland Protection Program (FRPP), local land trusts and the town in which the farm exists. Sometimes landowners are take a “bargain sale,” in which they accept less than the property is worth in exchange for a tax deduction. FRPP reimburses up to 50 percent of the easement value. It is in the State’s best interest to protect land that meets FRPP criteria. Easement values have increased over the last 6 years, and tend to follow rises and falls in the economy.



Above: Easement values per acre over time compared to nationwide housing starts.

Abstract

The Agriculture Preservation Restriction program has permanently preserved over 725 farms in Massachusetts, but there are areas of the commonwealth that have significantly lower rates of participation. This poster discusses trends in the physical characteristics of farms enrolled in the APR program and the price of purchasing easements. Both were found to affect the type and quantity of farmland preserved.

Physical Characteristics

Soil

The FRPP program was overhauled during the 2002 farm bill to include stricter requirements on the types of land that could be considered for funding. Farmland must now contain at least 50 percent soil designated prime, unique, or of statewide importance. This has significantly altered the type of farmland admitted to the program. Prior to 2002 farmland was made up of only about 37% of prime or statewide important soil, but in 2002 and beyond it was 55.4%.

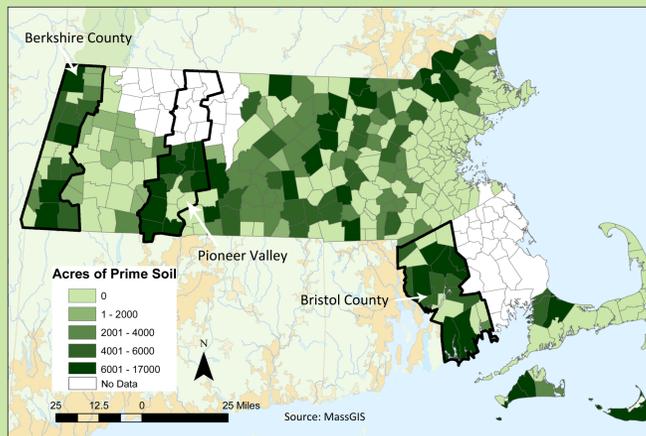
The spatial layout of protected prime soils is similar to the map of all Prime Soils above. However, there is no statistical significance between the amount of prime soils within a town and the acres of protected farmland ($p=.54$). This means that although the protection of prime soils is a stated program goal, towns with more prime farmland do not have higher rates of program participation.

Size

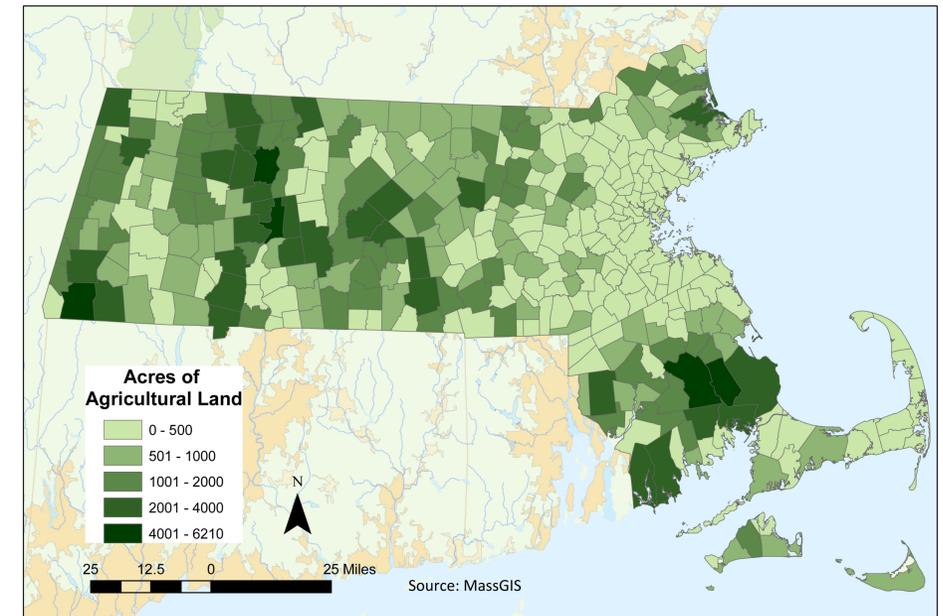
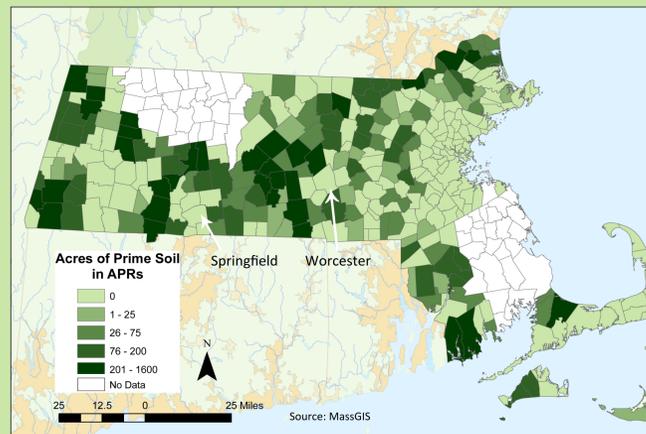
Farms must be at least 5 acres to be considered for the program. This analysis found that larger parcels were more likely to be a part of the program, and easements were worth more per acre ($p<.001$).

Location

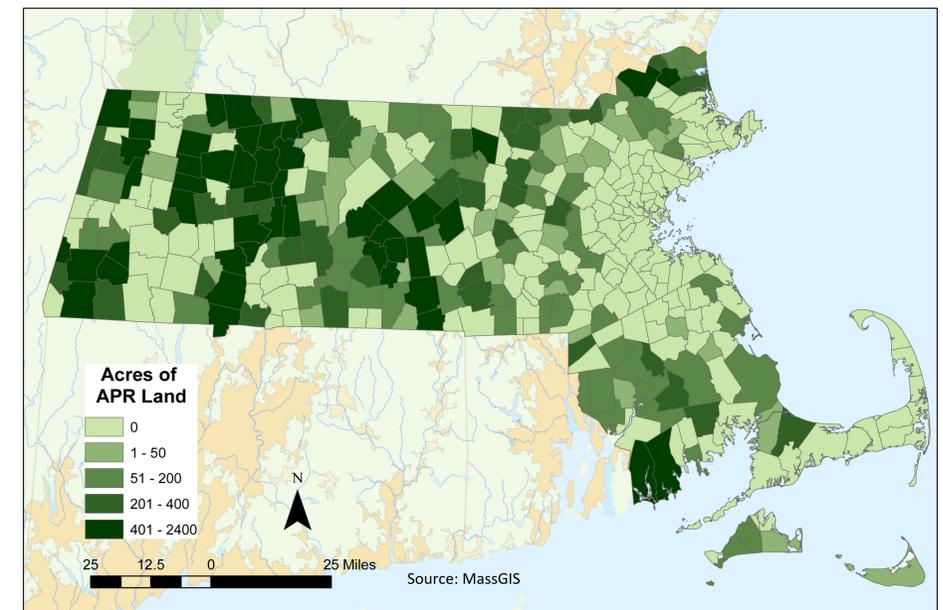
The APR program is intended to preserve farmland from the threat of development. One indicator for development pressure is the proximity to highway off ramps. There were more protected farms close to highway off ramps and these farms were larger in size than farmland further away ($p<.001$). This indicates that the program is doing a good job protecting farmland that is most at risk.



Above: Prime soils and soils of statewide importance.
 Below: Prime soils that have been permanently protected in APRs.



Above: Number of Acres of land in agricultural production
 Below: Number of Acres of land in an APR



Conclusion

As the two maps to the right show, APRs are not distributed equally across the Commonwealth. The discrepancy between the two maps do not indicate a failure of the program, however, for there are many factors that contribute to the purchase of conservation easements. As the rest of this poster has shown, the APR program is concentrated in areas where it is cheaper to purchase land, where parcels are larger, and where the development threat is most severe.