

Maine Farmland Trust plans to protect Hancock Family Farm (~43 acres) with an agricultural conservation easement, making it a Forever Farm

Q What does this mean?

- An agricultural conservation easement is a legal document that extinguishes certain property rights to ensure that some features of the land (those that make it suitable for farming) can exist forever. As the “holder” of the easement, Maine Farmland Trust ensures that current and future owners of this land follow the rules of the easement. Some things that this easement will prevent are the subdivision of any lot(s), the fields reverting to forest, a house being built in the fields, and unsustainable timber harvesting.

Q Why is it important?

- Within the Town of Casco, there are ~480 acres of open fields underlain by prime farmland soils or farm soils of statewide importance. Fewer than 60 of those acres are currently conserved. Hancock Family Farm features ~12 acres of open fields underlain by those soils, meaning that conserving this farm will increase the acreage of conserved valuable farmland in Casco by 20%.
- Hancock Family Farm is a certified organic farm offering abundant produce and flowers for sale at its farmstand on Quaker Ridge Road, and also offering membership to a weekly CSA (community support agriculture) from June through September. Many Casco year-round and seasonal residents have relied on this as a source of fresh, organic produce since the farm was started just over a decade ago.
- An agricultural conservation easement is designed to be completely protective of the “conservation values” of the farm (agriculturally valuable soils, open fields, intact sustained-use forest, irrigation resources) while being flexible enough to accommodate the realistic needs of a working farm and future agricultural practices that we can’t currently envision
- Without a legal framework like an agricultural conservation easement, this farmland is especially vulnerable to residential development given its over 2,000 feet of gently sloped frontage on Quaker Ridge Road, and its clustered existing buildings.

Q Who does this benefit?

- The residents of Casco (and surrounding towns) have the assurance that the characteristics that make this property well-suited for farming today will be preserved for agricultural use regardless of who owns the property – and that it is less likely to be owned by a non-farmer in the future.
- Maine Farmland Trust will provide a one-time payment to the current landowner in exchange for his signing the easement and thereby extinguishing an array of rights that typically accompany property ownership, as described above.

Q How long does it last?

- The easement lasts forever. It is recorded in the registry of deeds and follows the property’s title regardless of who the property transfers to.

Q Why wouldn’t I support it?

- If you think this property **should** be left available for other uses in the future, like for housing development, tourism infrastructure, commercial, or industrial use, for example.
- If you think that Town funds should **not** support non-profit land trusts in paying private landowners for conservation easements for the benefit of neighbors, farm customers, farm workers, current and future farmland owners, and Maine’s farming economy.