

Keep Berkshires Farming Sub-regional Action Plan South Berkshire Region

A product of the *Sustainable Berkshires*,
Long-Range Plan for Berkshire County and the Glynwood Keep Farming
program



Sustainable Berkshires is a project of the
Berkshire Regional Planning Commission.



The work that provided the basis for this publication was supported by funding under an award with the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development. The substance and findings of the work are dedicated to the public. The author and publisher are solely responsible for the accuracy of the statements and interpretations contained in this publication. Such interpretations do not necessarily reflect the views of the Government.



Keep Berkshires Farming: South Berkshire Region Action Plan

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Acknowledgements

Keep Berkshires Farming is a volunteer-run initiative and would not have happened without the commitment and active involvement of community members. Special thanks to the following individuals for their valuable contributions:

MaryBeth Merritt

Nick Stanton

Luke Pryjma

Barbara Zheutlin

Kathy Orlando

Tim Geller

Alexandra Phillips

Amanda Dalzell

Vivian Orłowski

Barbara Sblendorio

Ashley Leuders

Dennis Mareb

Shep Evans

Ben Barrett

Deborah Dauscher

Penelope Lord

Ray Crowley

Elizabeth Keen

John Root

Lawrence Davis-Hollander

Martin Mitsoff

Matt Novik

Michael Maguire

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Peter Barrett

Steve Borns

Vito Vitrano

* Those in bold are team chairs or leaders in the initiative who were instrumental in coordinating community meetings, completing data collection work, outreach & communication, analyzing findings and developing strategies for the action plan.

MADE POSSIBLE THROUGH THE FOLLOWING SUPPORT



HUD Sustainable Communities Regional Planning Grant

The creation of the three Action Plans, including the entire regional Keep Berkshires Farming process was supported through funding from this new grant program. BRPC received a three-year grant in 2010 to complete a new regional plan, of which food and agriculture is one component.

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Glynwood Center

Glynwood's Keep Farming® program served as the basis for the Keep Berkshires Farming planning process and a good portion of Glynwood's staff time over the three-year effort was contributed as in-kind support. Glynwood provided overall guidance throughout, facilitated and presented at team meetings and community events and will remain in touch with community volunteers to support implementation moving forward.



Berkshire Taconic Community Foundation

The Berkshire Taconic Community foundation provided a Green Pastures Fund grant in support of the larger initiative.



Town of Great Barrington/Great Barrington Agricultural Commission

This effort began through the initiative of the Great Barrington Agricultural Commission who made that first call to Glynwood in their search and commitment to supporting a vibrant local food system. They secured funding from the Town early in the process which supported the south region effort and leveraged the HUD funding to invest in taking the effort countywide.

Additional Funding and In-Kind Support Provided By:

Small donations were provided by the following entities to support the regional initiative, including space rental, refreshments, and media advertising.

- Sheffield Land Trust
- Food Bank of Western Massachusetts

In-kind support was generously provided by:

- Berkshire Co-op (Great Barrington)
- Wild Oats Market (Williamstown)
- Williams College Center for Environmental Studies

Introduction

Keep Berkshires Farming is a community-driven initiative aimed at supporting and strengthening local agriculture to build a strong and healthy regional food system. This planning process involves engaging a diverse set of stakeholders in gathering and analyzing data about the current state of agriculture in order to better understand existing production conditions, demand dynamics for local agricultural products or commodities, and related barriers or challenges. The data is then used to inform decision-making and prioritize specific strategies the community may undertake to support a vibrant agricultural economy.

This action plan contains key findings from this data gathering process and the resulting strategies for the five towns in the South County KBF group: Alford, Egremont, Great Barrington, Mount Washington, and Sheffield.



Agriculture has a deep history in the Berkshires and is still prominent in the local landscape and culture. In 1985, Indian Line Farm in Egremont became one of the two first CSA farms to start that year.

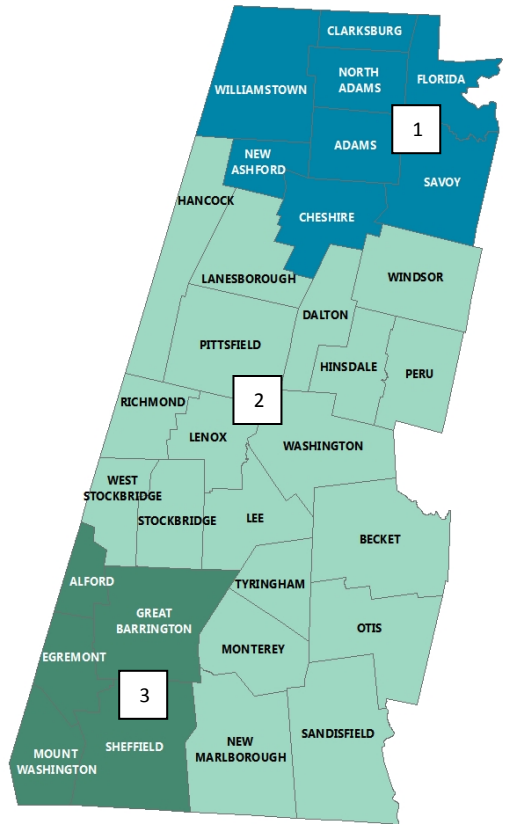
BACKGROUND

The countywide Keep Berkshires Farming initiative began with a phone call. The Great Barrington Agricultural Commission contacted Glynwood to learn about their community-based Keep Farming program as the town sought ways to better support their local food and farming. It was quickly recognized, however, that farm fields don't start and stop at municipal boundaries, and that while markets for farm products may be concentrated in some towns, like Great Barrington, the farms that supply these markets are located in nearby towns.

Development of a new regional plan for the Berkshires, Sustainable Berkshires, was just getting underway by the Berkshires Regional Planning Commission (BRPC). The plan establishes long-range regional goals and strategies in a comprehensive list of topics, including land use, economy, natural resources, social conditions, housing, and infrastructure. One objective of the plan is to better understand local food and agriculture in the Berkshires and how we can best support agricultural profitability and enhanced access to local, healthy food now and in the future.

Since agriculture had already been identified as an important topic for the regional plan, the

decision was made to coordinate efforts. In order to include this work in the Sustainable Berkshires plan, the Keep Farming initiative was expanded countywide and Keep Berkshires Farming was born. BRPC and Glynwood worked with communities in four sub regions, as shown on the map to the right.



Community Working Groups

The 32 communities of Berkshire County were divided into three working groups.

1. North
2. Central
3. South

The towns of Alford, Egremont, Great Barrington, Mount Washington, and Sheffield are in the South group or region.

THE KEEP BERKSHIRES FARMING PROCESS

Keep Berkshires Farming is based on the Keep Farming® process developed by Glynwood, adapted into a regional approach for the Berkshires. The county was divided up into three regions, each with a team of representatives from towns with the region.

The process consists of three phases:

- Phase I – Mobilize Your Community for Success
- Phase II – Data and Analysis
- Phase III – Strategies for a Healthy Food System

The Keep Farming methodology is different than other planning processes in the following key ways:

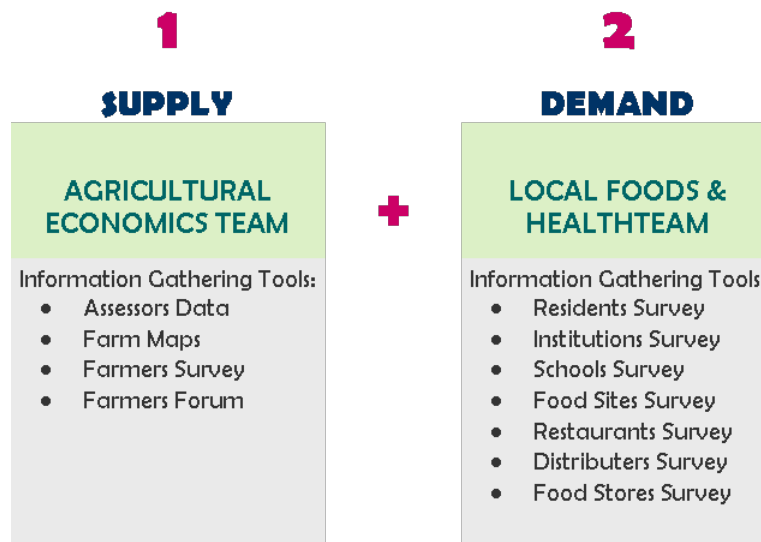
- ✓ Provides local data to the community that is not otherwise readily available
- ✓ Involves diverse stakeholders throughout the process, including farmers
- ✓ Supports the agricultural economy by connecting producers to local markets
- ✓ Communities develop their own strategies to support farms in their area by choosing tools and actions most appropriate to their situation
- ✓ Community-based process creates relationships and dialogue that result in implementation

OUR PROCESS

The Keep Berkshires Farming process is based in two main components:

Gathering Original Data

Original data is gathered using a variety of survey, map, and interview tools in order to enhance knowledge of local food production and distribution with the aim of improving market connections. This is achieved through the hard work and dedication of community volunteers working in two teams to gather existing and original data on supply and demand dynamics within the local food system.



Building Community Capital

Building community capital – the connections, relationships, and common understanding among those who use and consume local food is a key attribute of the process. This is achieved through the design of the process itself. At the most basic level, the fact that the work is largely completed by community volunteers means that there is already teamwork and collaboration inherent to the process. Volunteers came to the process with a wide range of interests and backgrounds from farmers to chefs, health professionals to land trusts. Volunteers helped spread the word, tailored the process and events in ways that would resonate with others in their communities and presented at the community events.



Open meetings were held throughout each of the three phases of the planning process – from initial information meetings to gather volunteers and spread the word about the initiative to the final community forum designed to share the draft action plan and strategies.

Volunteer Motivation

At the outset of the project, community conversations focused on the reasons volunteers wanted to contribute their time to the project. Some common motivations, which also help illustrate the range of people involved in the process, included:

- Old and new farmers wanting to ensure conversations on the subject represented their interests in an accurate way
- Old and new farmers who believe in their products and know some of the regulatory, market, and infrastructure challenges facing small farmers
- Desire to see local agriculture better represented in economic development discussions
- Commitment to community health and a belief in slow foods and whole foods
- Businesses that know the market potential of local food and want to see more food available
- A belief that local food is an essential component of long-term local resiliency in the context of climate change and transitioning energy landscape
- An understanding that both hunger and poor nutrition are health challenges in our communities
- A love of the rural landscape and desire to see farms remain a prominent feature of that landscape
- A love of all that is local in the Berkshires, including its yummy food

Current State of Agriculture in South Berkshire

The following sections highlight some of the key findings from the agricultural economics (supply) and local foods and health (demand) teams.

The South Berkshire region's agriculture is largely concentrated in three communities: Sheffield, Great Barrington and Egremont. Forty percent of agricultural land in South Berkshire is permanently protected in the Massachusetts's Agriculture Preservation Restriction (APR) program. A greater percentage of acres are conserved under the Chapter 61/61a programs. Farmers produce a variety of products, including milk, eggs, hay, mixed vegetables and mixed fruit. Farmers are challenged by issues of land access and availability, and the lack of value added processing infrastructure in the Berkshire region.

In terms of demand, there is strong, local demand for the food farmers are producing. Residents, restaurants, institutions and community meal sites all express desire to access and use more local food. A challenge of the South Berkshire food and agriculture system is connection between farmers with consumers, and this is especially the case between farmers and institutions.

The Keep Berkshires Farming process identified an action plan for the South region which includes goals, policies and action steps to better support farmers and connect them to consumers throughout the year through collaborative infrastructure, enhanced land access, enhanced agricultural land conservation or preservation and networking among farmers and consumers.

SUPPLY: CURRENT AGRICULTURAL PRODUCTION

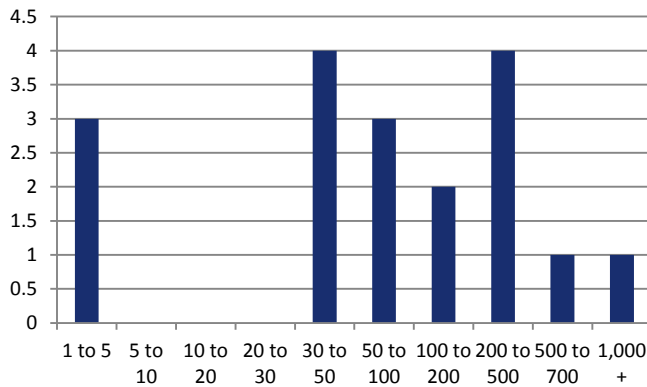
The Agricultural Economics team conducted surveys of farmers to gather local data on what farmers are producing on their land, how much of their land is being actively used, and future business development areas farmers would like to explore. The twenty-nine farmers represented in the survey effort provide important insight into the existing conditions, challenges and opportunities of planning for and maintaining a vibrant food system in both the Southwest region as well as the larger Berkshire region as a whole.

Table 1: Profile of Farmers Responding to the Survey

Average # of years farming	51
Average # of years farm in family	141
Average # acres owned	66
Average # acres farmed	131

Source: Keep Berkshires Farming Surveys

Figure 1: Farm Size by Number of Farms

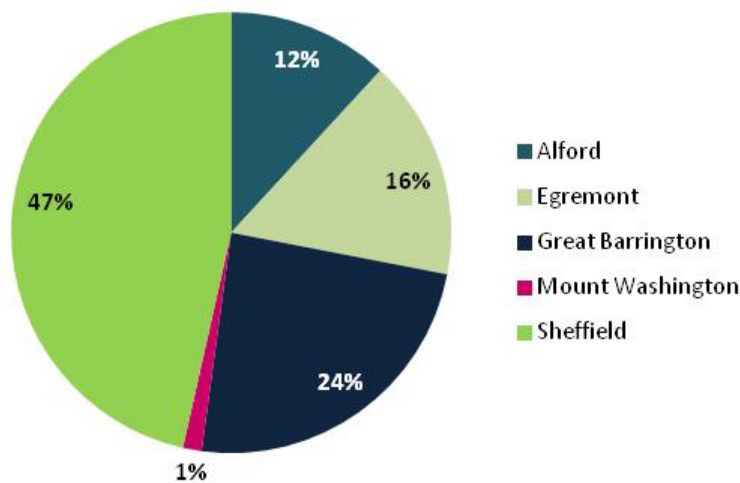


Source: Keep Berkshires Farming Farmer Survey

In addition to the surveys, farm maps were created for each of the five towns in collaboration with Berkshire Regional Planning Commission, area farmers, and tax assessors. These maps provide more insight into the total number of farms in any given community, the size of those farms, protection status, and tax incentive program participation.

Agricultural Land and Farms

Figure 2: Location of South Berkshire Agricultural Lands



Source: Keep Berkshires Farming Forums

Table 2: Land and Farms by Community

	Acres in Agriculture	Farms
Alford	944.5	5
Egremont	3,309.4	19
Great Barrington	3,863.6	30
Mount Washington	342.2	1
Sheffield	12,298.4	44
Total	20,758.1	99

Source: Mass GIS, tax assessor parcel records, 2012

The total 5-town area is home to 99 farms. The average farm size in the region is 159.2 acres, higher than the entire county average of 127 acres. Alford has the largest average farm size at 230 acres; Egremont has the smallest, at 100 acres.

LAND IN PRODUCTION

The five towns in the South County KBF group together represent 94,154 acres, 20,758 of which are in agricultural use. Of this land, 19.8% is permanently protected through the state’s Agricultural Preservation Restriction (APR) program. While this program specifically targets

prime agricultural soils, only 38% of lands with prime agricultural soils are currently protected from future development through this program. Alford is the most active of the five towns in participating in both the APR program with 62% of its agricultural acres protected in APR, although only 6.1% of Alford’s prime agricultural soils are permanently protected. The town of Egremont has the greatest percentage of prime agricultural soils permanently protected, with 13.4%. Mount Washington has no farm land in APR, while Sheffield has the most in terms of total acres (2,340 acres) in APR.

Table 3: Profile of Agricultural Land by Community

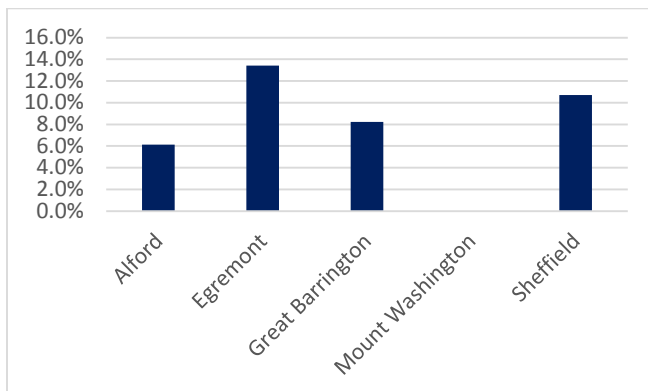
	Acres in Agriculture	Prime Agriculture Soils	Acres in APR	Chapter 61/61A ¹	Percent Agriculture Acres in APR	Total Percent Prime Ag Soils in APR
Alford	944.5	96.9	585.4	694.5	62.0%	6.1%
Egremont	3309.4	954.0	376.9	1599.8	11.4%	13.4%
Great Barrington	3863.6	1411.4	846.5	2575.8	21.9%	8.2%
Mount Washington	342.2	0.0	0.0	317.1	0.0%	0.0%
Sheffield	12298.4	3051.9	2340.0	8330.7	19.0%	10.7%
Total	20758.1	5514.1	4148.9	13517.9	20.0%	38.5%

Source: Mass GIS, tax assessor parcel records, 2012

Prime Agricultural Soils

Great Barrington and Sheffield have the most acres of prime agricultural soils, together representing 81% of the prime agricultural land supply in the five town area. In Great Barrington, only 21.9% of those lands are protected in an APR; however this is more than the proportion protected in Sheffield (19.0%). Great Barrington has the greatest number of acres of prime agricultural land not in agricultural use, while Alford has the least number of prime agricultural lands not in agricultural use.

Figure 3: Percent of Prime Agricultural Soils in APR Program



Source: Mass GIS, tax assessor parcel records, Berkshire Regional Planning Commission, 2012

¹ The total acres in Chapter 61/61a is in some cases higher than the acres in agriculture. This is due to the fact that Chapter 61 applies to forestry uses which are not necessarily listed as agriculture in the assessors land use data.

Table 4: Prime Agricultural Land Not in Agricultural Use

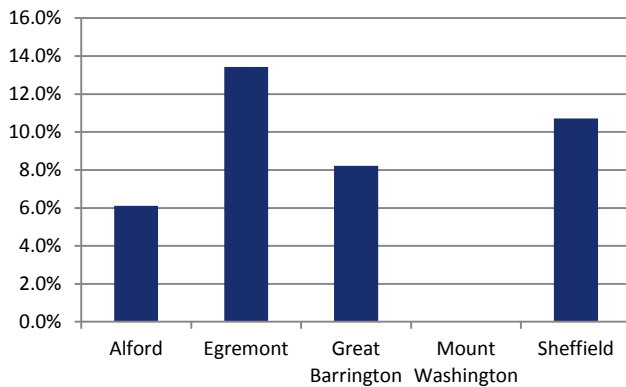
Town	Acres
Alford	412.7
Egremont	604.2
Great Barrington	3161.9
Mount Washington	0.0
Sheffield	2308.9
Total	6487.8

Source: BRPC, 2012

Agricultural Preservation Restriction

Mapping at farmer workshops indicated ninety-nine farms in the five South region communities. Of these, twenty-nine participated in a farmer survey, providing current information unavailable from standardized sources such as the Agricultural Census or the Massachusetts Department of Agriculture. Of these twenty-nine, nine farms had at least some land in APR. According to land use information from MassGIS, sixty-eight of the ninety-nine farms were in agricultural operation, with eighty-one farms currently in active operation. Of these currently in operation farms, thirty-five have at least some land in Agricultural Preservation Restriction, keeping land in agriculture for perpetuity.

Figure 4: Percent Agricultural Acres in the APR Program



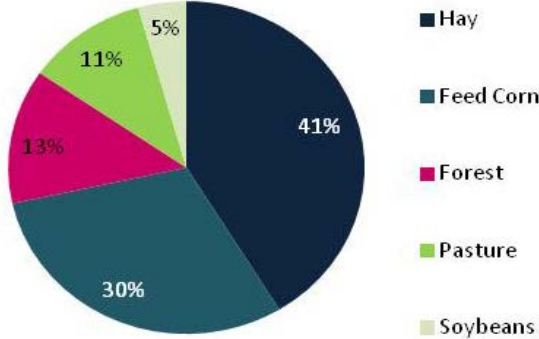
Source: Mass GIS, tax assessor parcel records, Berkshire Regional Planning Commission 2012

Agricultural Products

The predominant picture of agricultural production in terms of total land devoted to specific crops is that the South County region focuses on raising crops to feed animals: Hay (945+ acres), feed corn (693+ acres), and pasture (252 acres) together comprise 82% of all land in production.

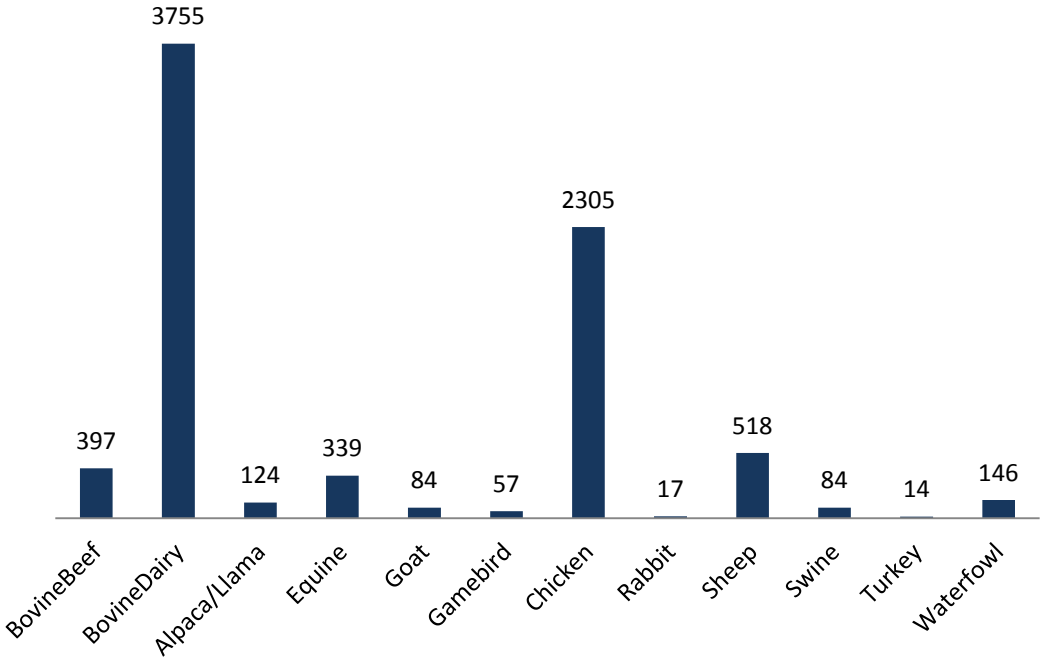
In total, responding farmers are responsible for the cultivation of 4,353 acres of land. The other two farmland uses include forest (300 acres) and soybeans (100 acres).

Figure 5: Land Cover by Crop (in Acres)



Source: Keep Berkshires Farming

Figure 6: Livestock Count in South Berkshire Towns

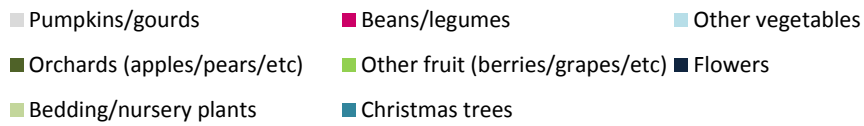


Source: Massachusetts Department of Agriculture, 2011

According to data provided by the Massachusetts Department of Agriculture, dairy cattle make up the largest proportion (48%) of total livestock in the South region, followed by chickens at 29% of the total livestock count.

South Action Plan

Figure 7: Percent Crop Land by Crop Grown



Source: Keep Berkshires Farming Farmer Survey

Additional farm products include pumpkins/gourds (21 acres), mixed vegetables (19 acres), and mixed fruit (13.5 acres). Farmers were also asked to indicate processed and value added goods they sell. Eggs and milk were the top two process products, corresponding with the high number of dairy cattle and chickens in the south region.

Table 5: Additional Farm Uses

Pumpkins/gourds	21 acres (3 of 5 producers gave acreage)
Beans/legumes	1 of 2 producers gave acreage of < 1ac
Other vegetables	19 acres (3 of 8 vegetable producers did not give acreage)
Orchards (apples/pears/etc.)	~ 2 acres
Other fruit (berries/grapes/etc.)	13.5 acres
Herbs	4 respondents grow herbs, no acreage given
Flowers	<1 ac, 1 out of 3 respondents did not give acreage
Bedding/nursery plants	8+ acres, 2 respondents
Christmas trees	5 acres (1 respondent)
Other	Ginger (1 grower, no acreage given)

Source: Keep Berkshires Farming Farmer Survey

Figure 8: Processed Products by No. of Producers

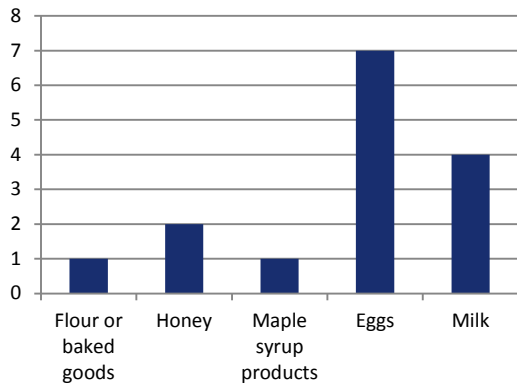
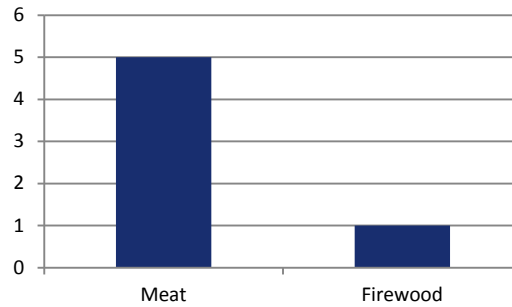


Figure 9: Value Added Products by No. of Producers



Source: Keep Berkshires Farming Survey

Agricultural Product Challenges

Moving product from farm to market is hindered by the limited availability of processing facilities, and the limited marketing or distribution of products. A dearth of processing facilities is apparent: there are no commercial scale meat processing facilities immediately within the region. Processing facilities used by regional farmers include slaughter facilities in Canaan, Eagle Bridge and Hoosick Falls, New York; Athol and Groton, Massachusetts, Westminster Station, Vermont; and Bristol Beef in Connecticut. Nearby value added processing facilities with commercial kitchens include a processing center in Greenfield, Massachusetts and Kingston New York. For any town in the South region, these locations are at least an hour and a half away. Farmers have anecdotally described waiting lists at slaughter facilities, and noted the substantial travel cost to get to these facilities.

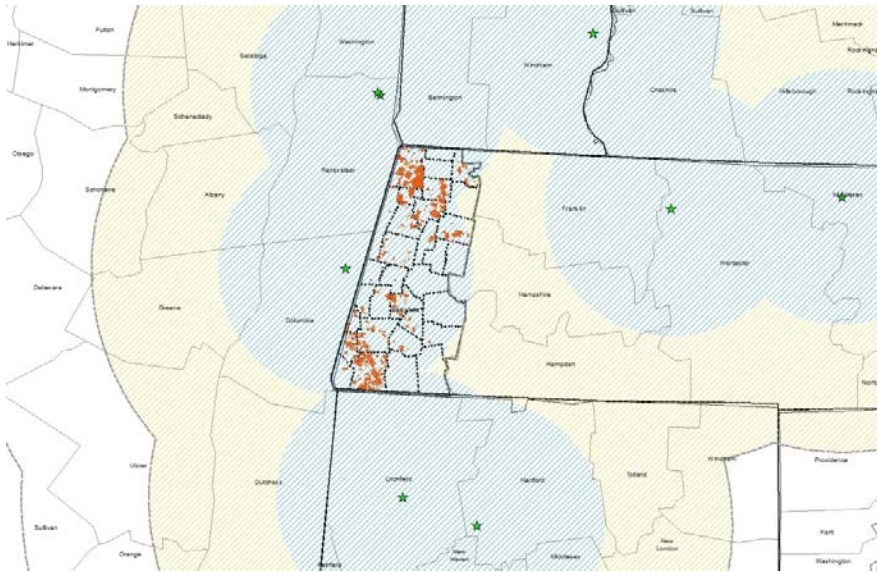
Table 6: Slaughter and Commercial Processing Facilities Serving South Berkshire Farms

Facility	Address
Hilltown Pork	Canaan NY
Adams Farm	Athol MA
Eagle Bridge Custom Meat & Smokehouse	Eagle Bridge NY
Westminster Meats	Westminster Station VT
Western Massachusetts Food Processing Center	Greenfield MA
Farm to Table Co-Packers	Kingston NY
Bristol Beef	Litchfield County, CT

Source: BRPC, 2013

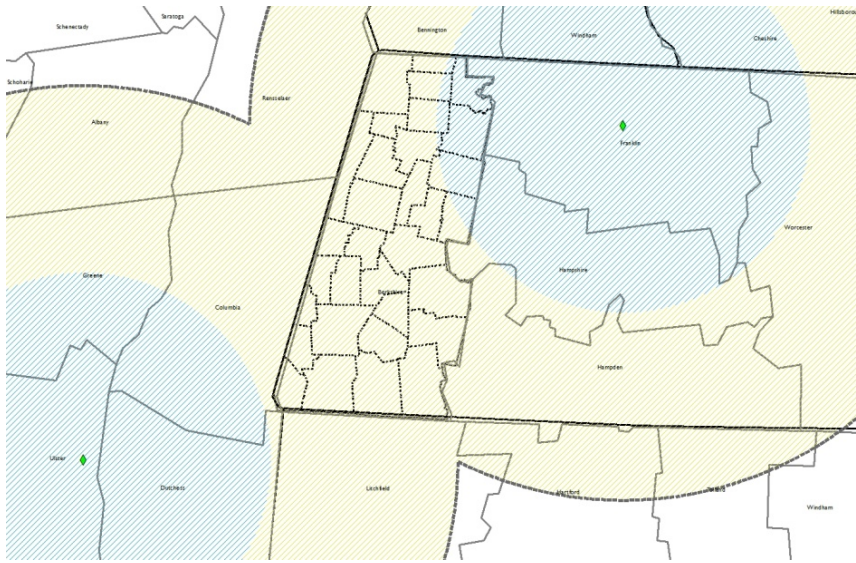
While a number of USDA certified commercial slaughter facilities outside of the region are options, a mapping exercise indicates the south Berkshire region being underserved, or not within twenty-five miles of a slaughter option. The South Region, which includes Alford, Egremont, Great Barrington, Mount Washington and Sheffield is within fifty miles of the Canaan, New York facility and the very southern farms within twenty-five miles of the Litchfield County facility, Bristol Beef.

Figure 10: Slaughter and Meat Processing Facilities



There are some local options for the slaughter and butchering of livestock. The issues with these local options is that they are not commercial USDA facilities, so the sale of the final product is limited to the farmer or consumers who bought part of or the whole live animal. For a farmer to be able to sell processed meat or poultry via wholesale or at a retail store, it must have been slaughtered at a commercial USDA facility. Identifying existing custom options in the south region, and identifying which custom operations have interest in scaling up will be one part of further identifying opportunity in the Berkshire region for a local slaughter and processing facility. One custom butcher in the Northern Berkshire region has expressed interest in scaling up, and a facility in the Northern Berkshire region could serve the South region as well. One community in the South region has begun to consider what it would take to site a slaughter facility, considering site characteristics, regulations and standards to ensure a high quality facility that would benefit farmers as well as consumers while promoting sustainable agriculture and processing best practices.

The south region is also underserved by existing commercial value added processing facilities, as is most of Berkshire County. Opportunity to change this is strong in the South region, with potential processing capacity opening up in Great Barrington, through the Berkshire Coop Market. Another opportunity in Lee would provide a closer option for South Berkshire farmers and producers. In terms of collaborative infrastructure, there has been discussion of offering storage facilities at the Great Barrington fairgrounds, which could help with storage challenges cited by local farmers.

Figure 11: Commercial Kitchens for Value Added Processing

Source: Keep Berkshires Farming

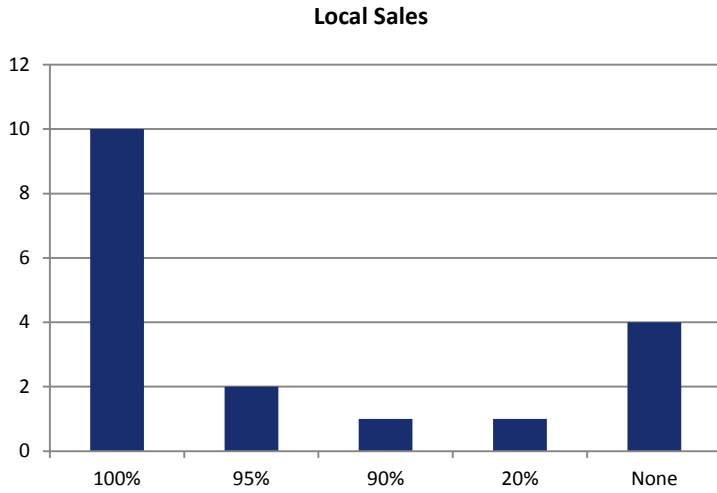
Having a nearby and convenient facility for processing farm goods is important in helping farmers profit, and important in making local foods available throughout the year for a number of consumer groups. If farmers have to take time, and spend substantial money on fuel to get to a processing facility, it impacts their profit margin. Residents have expressed desire for local produce all through the year, not just during the growing season, and larger institutions have identified storage and seasonality as barriers to using more local food. School is not in session in the summer, but if a farmer or institution could freeze and store produce, local food could be used in schools in the fall, winter and spring.

Another component of the food and agriculture system is food waste, and the South region has no state permitted food materials processors. The whole Berkshire region has three such facilities in Lee, Dalton and Williamstown. The Lee facility would be the nearest location for food waste generators in the South region, and is currently permitted to receive fifteen tons per day. The location and capacity of composting facilities is important consider in face of upcoming Massachusetts Department of Environmental Protection's commercial food waste ban.

Farm Business Practices

Fourteen farmers identified farming as their full-time job, while twelve identified it as part-time. More land is farmed than owned, pointing to lease or rental arrangements between farmers and land owners. Farmers in the South Berkshire region rely on a number of market outlets.

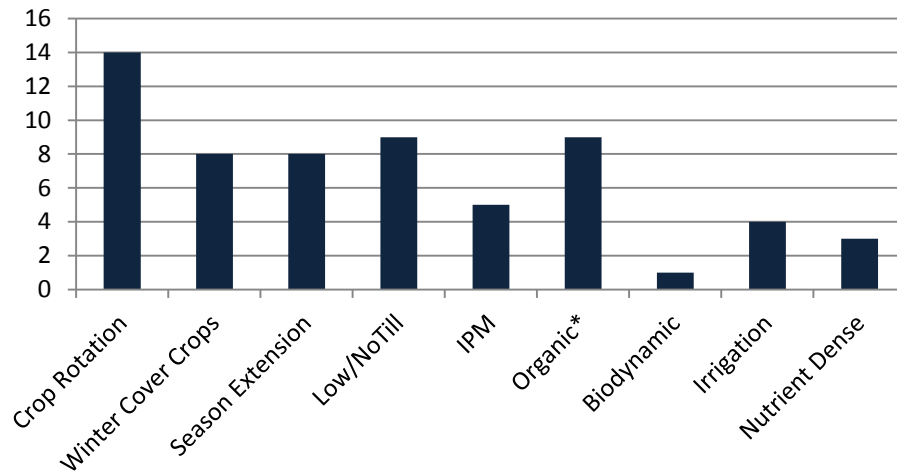
Figure 12: Product Destination



Source: Keep Berkshires Farming Farmer Survey

Of those who indicated they sell less or none of their product in the Berkshire region, five indicated they would like to sell more locally but are challenged by the lack of infrastructure, the difficulty in finding skilled, reliable help, the lack of a year-round farmers’ market, and the relatively small local population. Farmers surveyed use a variety of farm techniques, with fourteen indicating they practice crop rotation, low or no till soil management and organic methods. Nine of the farmers surveyed run certified organic farms.

Figure 13: Farming Techniques Employed



Source: Keep Berkshires Farming Farmer Survey

SUPPLIES AND SERVICES

In 2011, 17 respondents farmers spent a total of \$1,333,000 on farm supplies, with 18% (\$239,400) of those expenditures taking place in Berkshire County. In addition, thirteen farmers spent \$815,500 on services, with 8.1% (\$66,150) of those expenditures taking place in the southern Berkshires. The most notable barriers to the purchase of local supplies or services included:

- 1. Relative cost of local goods and services compared to what was available elsewhere
- 2. Distance to and from existing tractor repair service/lack of local tractor repair
- 3. Lack of supplies available locally

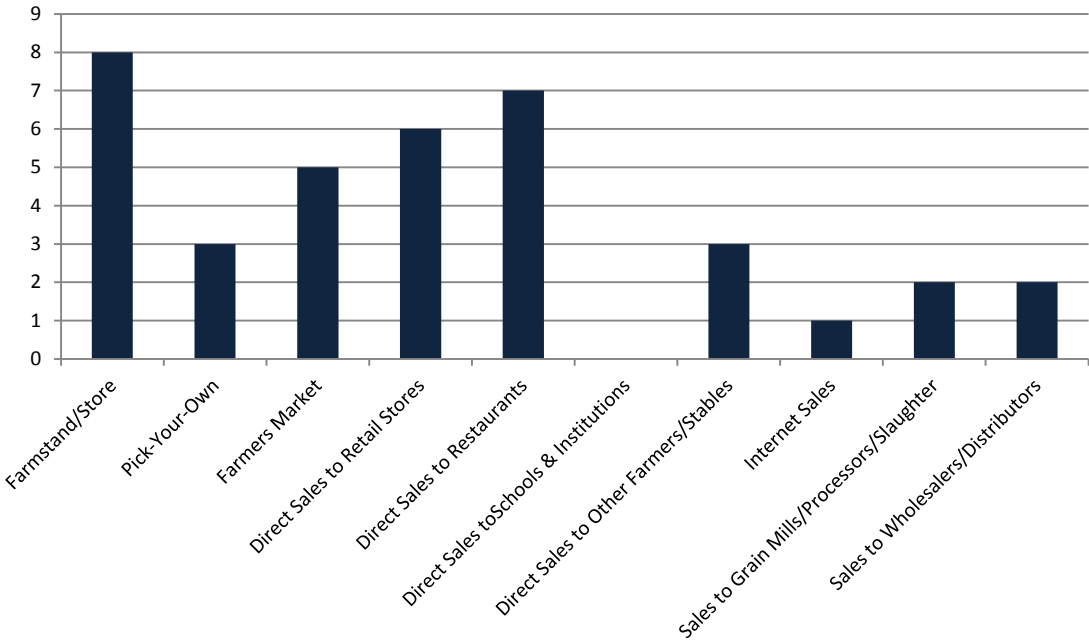
Not only do Berkshire farmers help contribute to the local economy by providing local goods and services for sale and consumption, but they contribute through purchasing goods and services.

Sales and Distribution Methods

In survey responses, farmers indicated the following as their sales/distribution methods (ranked in descending order):

- 1. Farm stand/store
- 2. Direct sales to restaurants
- 3. Direct sales to retail stores
- 4. Farmers Market

Figure 14: Methods of Sales and Distribution



South Action Plan

Source: *Keep Berkshires Farming Farmer Survey*

Only two farmers indicated selling directly to grain mills, processors or slaughterhouses. Only two farmers indicated selling directly to wholesalers or distributors, but some respondents did not answer this question about where they sell their products. None of the surveyed farmers indicated selling directly to schools or institutions, although all three institutions interviewed in the South region indicated interest in buying and serving more local product. This points to an issue identified throughout the region, getting local products into institutions. One strategy identified is that of a local food hub, which would serve as a central point for the aggregation and distribution of local products. Contractual growing relationships between farmers and institutions have also been identified as a potential opportunity.

FARMERS AND FARM LABOR

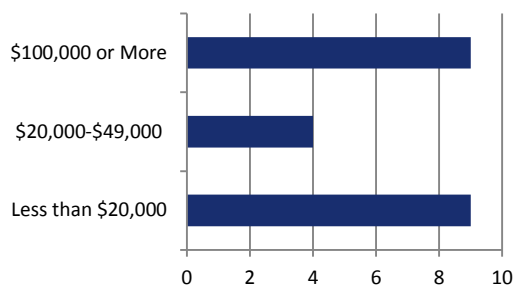
The average farm tenure in the South region is 51 years, and the average number of years that a farm has been in a family is 141 years—roughly three generations. There are 4,353 acres farmed among the twenty-eight respondents. Fewer acres are actually owned (2,445 acres), indicating that farmers in the South benefit from lease arrangements to augment holdings and production. Of the twenty-nine respondents, fifteen leased 1,676 acres—roughly 111 acres of leased land per farmer. Farmers in the South region also have off-farm income—fourteen described themselves as full time farmers, twelve described themselves as part time farmers.

Characteristics of the farm workforce support the identification of full time help and part-time, seasonal help. The majority of family member workers are in the 40 year old to 60 year old range. Of forty three full-time workers, twenty-one were family members. Of the seventy-seven part time workers listed, forty-three were family members. Population trends in the county as a whole (aging and declining in number) suggest that the ease of finding and securing both full-time and part-time farm help may not ameliorate

FARM SALES

An equal number of farms in the South region sell \$100,000 or more worth of products or \$20,000 or less in product.

Figure 15: 2011 Farm Sales by No. of Farms



Source: *Keep Berkshires Farming*

OPPORTUNITIES AND CHALLENGES

Farmers in the South Berkshire region were asked to identify what they viewed as opportunities and challenges of the local food system. Increased local interest in local food and awareness of the importance of buying local and agriculture were noted as positive impacts to farming, while access to labor and access to tillable land were identified as important tools to continue

farming. Collaborative processing infrastructure for slaughter, co-packing and processing was the most popular strategy to keep farming in the south region viable.

Opportunities

What has had a positive impact on your farm? (top 3)

- 1. Increased interest in local products
- 2. Buy local movement—safety/freshness
- 3. Increased awareness of farming

What would make it easier to continue farming?

- Access to labor
- Access to tillable land nearby

What strategies would you recommend to keep farming viable?

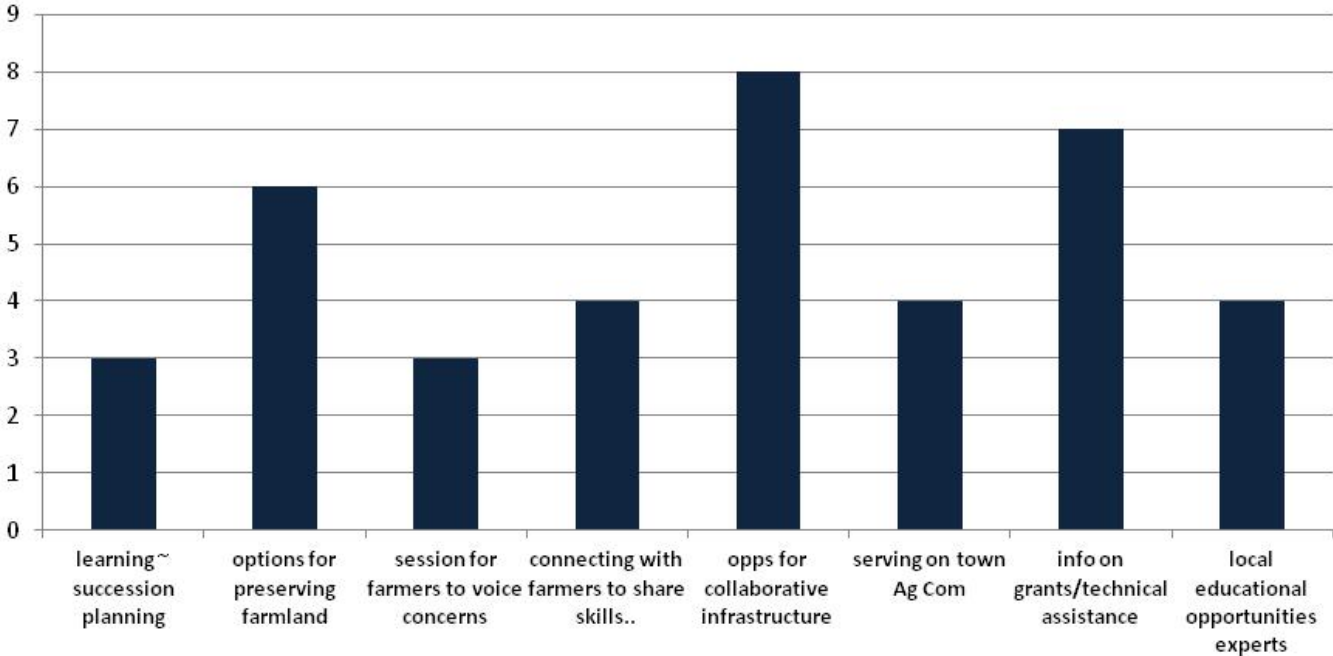
Infrastructure (slaughterhouse, co-packing, processing): the only option to receive a ‘3’

Which opportunities or assistance would be of greatest interest to you? (top 3)

Farmers who participated in the survey are interested in the following opportunities or forms of assistance:

- 1. Opportunities for collaborative infrastructure
- 2. Information on grants/technical assistance
- 3. Options for preserving farmland

Figure 16: Opportunities or Forms of Assistance of Greatest Interest



Source: Keep Berkshires Farming Farmer Survey

South Action Plan

Challenges

Land Access and Management

- Availability/cost of farmland
- Wetland laws
- Theft/trespassing/vandalism

High Costs of Doing Business

- Cost of fuel
- Property taxes
- Availability/cost of full-time help
- Availability/cost of part-time, seasonal help

Ability to Create and Sell Products

- Availability of processing facilities
- Marketing/distribution of products
- Getting a fair price for product

Survey results depict eight dairy producers in the South region. The difficult nature of the dairy market was noted to be a challenge or barrier to farming success in survey results.

Local Food Use and Access

The Local Foods and Health Team conducted a number of surveys to understand the degree to which local food is purchased and consumed locally, whether at home or in a business setting, as well as in-demand products that are not currently available at all or in at volumes or prices to meet demand. This helps identify potential market growth opportunities for local farms.

LOCAL DEMAND – CURRENT

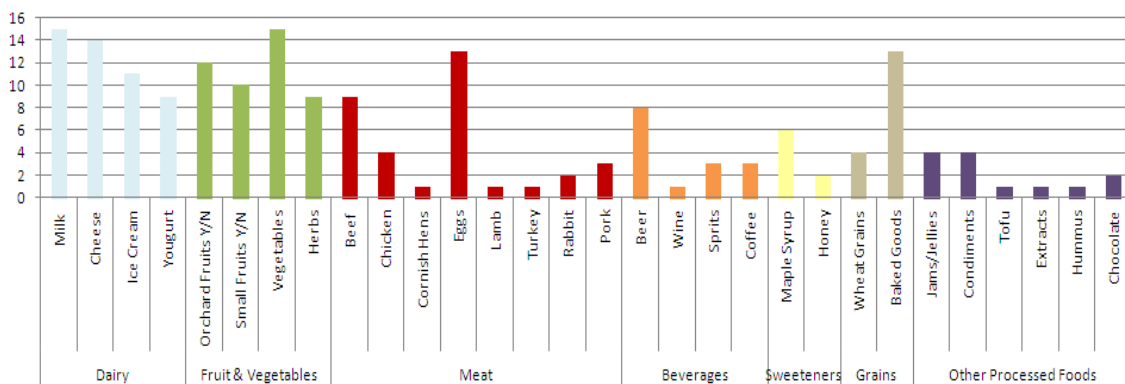
Institutions

Twenty-one institutions in the entire Berkshire region were surveyed through Keep Berkshires Farming, and three of these are located in the South Berkshire region.

Restaurants

Seventeen restaurants in the South region were surveyed. All of these restaurants serve some percentage of local food, though the percentage ranged from 5% to 95%. The most common percentage of local food served by a South region restaurant is 21%-40%. The local products most commonly served in the restaurants surveyed include milk, cheese, vegetables, eggs, and baked goods. As far as commodity categories, dairy and fruits & vegetables were strongly represented compared to other food groups. The restaurant serving 95% indicated that they were ‘maxed out’ in terms of what they could prepare or use—the only restaurant to say they would not be interested in using additional local food.

Figure 17: Local Products Purchased/Served by Local Restaurants



Source: Keep Berkshires Farming Restaurant Survey

Residents

CONSUMER BEHAVIOR

Three hundred and sixteen residents from the communities of Great Barrington, Sheffield, Alford, Egremont and Mt. Washington were surveyed. Most respondents estimated spending between \$100 and \$200 on weekly grocery expenses. The second largest cohort indicated spending \$500 or more a week on groceries. This means that respondents in the South region spend between \$5,200 and \$26,000 on food during the year. The two largest percentages of respondents reporting purchasing local food are 41% and 80%. Using grocery expenses, one could assume that between \$2,132 and \$20,800 are spent on local food products during the

South Action Plan

year. Multiplied by the population of the entire south region (12,736), farmers could potentially be making between \$27,153,152 and \$264,908,800 on grocery purchases.

Quality and freshness were reported to be factors of highest importance when selecting food. Production methods were also indicated to be very important factors in food selection—higher than family preference, health and diet, price and convenience. Caring about production methods would likely steer customers toward local products, who are more likely to use sustainable methods in their farm and business practices. Vegetables are both the product most purchased at local farmers markets and via CSAs, and also the product most independently provided at home.

WHAT ARE CONSUMERS PURCHASING?

Respondents tend to support local groceries such as the Guido's, and the Co-op, especially dairy products. More respondents indicated independent production than indicated participating in community supported agriculture.

Also interesting to note that there are more purchases from local farms (possibly via farm stands or stores) than there are from CSAs. Meat is regularly low in each category, which correlates with comments made when respondents were asked to describe foods they would like to see more of in the region—more meat options, and more affordable meat options, were explicitly mentioned. Most respondents were not part of a CSA. Of those 85%, a majority would not consider joining a CSA. Reasons given for not joining a CSA include cost and share size. It could be interesting to further explore reasons for not being a member or joining local CSAs, since solutions could be formulated to best meet those needs. Share sizes could be made smaller, or companies or other groups could develop some type of group cost or cost sharing program to distribute shares and cost.

HOW DO THEY FEEL ABOUT LOCAL AGRICULTURE AND AVAILABLE PRODUCT?

Residents generally are supporting local agriculture, with the two largest proportions of respondents purchasing between 41% and 80% locally produced food. A caveat provided in responses included seasonality—that the percentage of locally produced food tended to fluctuate between summer/fall and the winter season.

- Consumers in the region are satisfied with the quality of local food available, and are also able to access local food products somewhat easily.
- More are willing to expend additional funds on locally produced food and projects.
- A majority of residents also indicated that they would purchase more local food if it was more obvious where to find it.
- Preparation was not noted to be a barrier to the purchase and consumption of local fruits and vegetables.
- A large majority of respondents indicated feeling disconnected to the farmers producing local food. This could be addressed with additional networking opportunities. In Vermont, some communities have initiated a 'Farmer Correspondence' program, in which local farmers become pen pals with local classrooms. The Berkshire Co-op already offers farm tours; farmers markets and CSAs are other opportunities to connect consumers with farmers.
- Most respondents purchase local food at the Berkshire Food Co-op, with farmers markets or farm stands and super markets following.

LOCAL DEMAND – POTENTIAL

Institutions

All three institutions located in the South region expressed interest in purchasing more local food, and most institutions in the rest of the Berkshire region expressed similar interest. The market demand is there, but challenges of cost, seasonal availability, and volume exist. Institutions expressed interest in direct contracts with local farmers, a local food hub, some type of media so as to always be aware of what is available locally, and assistance in identifying local options as tools to expand their use of local farm products.

There are more than three institutions in the South region, and it is likely that those places not interviewed could also be interested in expanding their use of local farm products, and could provide local farmers with expanded and predictable market opportunity.

Restaurants

Sixteen out of seventeen restaurants in the South region indicated that they would like to purchase and serve more local food. Local products that restaurants would like to see more of include: meat, cheese, eggs, dried herbs, frozen/canned veggies, ketchup, vegetables, confections, jams, cured meats and fish. Meat is the most frequently cited product.

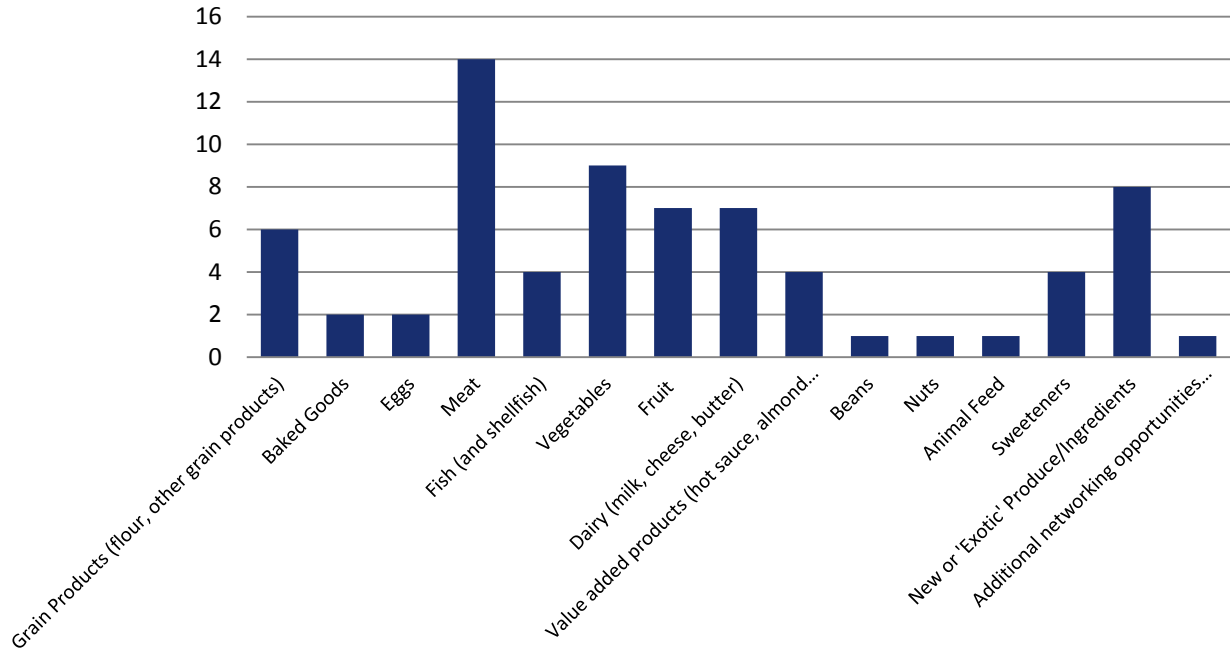
Considerations were noted that could serve as challenges or barriers to restaurants purchasing more local food. These included:

- Consistent quality of products to meet demand
- Consistent quantity of products to meet demand
- Cost of product compared to commercial options
- Delivery service
- Ability to conform to legal packaging regulations
- USDA approved items

Residents

Like restaurant owners, residents too seek more local food, with demand for specific items. Meat reflected the greatest interest, followed by vegetables, new or exotic ingredients, fruit and dairy. Meat reflects greater demand—especially affordable meat options, both for beef and chicken. Great emphasis was also placed on responsibly raised and grass-fed meat, which reflects an emphasis on production practice, noted in survey responses—that is, respondents care about how their food is produced, whether it is local or from far away. Most residents indicated that local food is an important option at local restaurants.

Figure 18: Local Products Consumers Would Like To See More Of



Source: Keep Berkshires Farming Resident Survey

Food Access and Security

DEMAND

Identifying Vulnerability: Families, children and the elderly

In terms of community need, data from the U.S. Census describes the following demography in the South region:

- Mount Washington has the highest percent of families living below poverty. The percent of overall population living below poverty is also very high in Sheffield (8.5%)
- The percent of children living below poverty is highest in Sheffield (11.30%).
- The percent of elderly residents living below poverty is highest in Mount Washington.
- Alford has the highest percent of seniors living alone, closely followed by Great Barrington. Sheffield is also high: 11.4%.
- Great Barrington has the largest percentage of residents receiving SNAP benefits, followed by Sheffield.
- Sheffield also has the highest percentage of children living below poverty, and also has a large percentage of families living below poverty.
- Sheffield demonstrates a sizable percent of populations describable as vulnerable—children living below poverty, seniors living below poverty, and seniors living alone. For children living below poverty, access to healthy foods may be more limited, and they may be more reliant on school food for the healthful options necessary for their physical growth and development. For seniors living below poverty, and living alone, access to food may also be limited, though by different factors such as their own health and mobility—a simple trip to the grocery store or Farmer’s Market may be a challenge, or

cooking and preparing food could be another challenge. On fixed or limited incomes, they may have less flexibility in exercising food preference and accessing healthful food options.

As fuel costs and food costs increase, and more of the Berkshire region population ages into and beyond retirement, food security and access could become a greater issue. Younger families and children could also be further challenged by cost of living increases, making the need for access to fresh, local food opportunities greater than it is currently. Older residents with transportation or mobility challenges may also struggle to access fresh, healthy, local foods.

In terms of local best practices, Berkshire Grown hosts 'Share the Bounty', a donation program. Through this program donations buy local products from local producers, and these products serve pantries and other meal assistance programs. The ten-year old program, largely funded by the Berkshire Taconic Community Foundation, provides support for 14 farm-organization partnerships. These include farms and food assistance organizations throughout the Berkshire region: Cricket Creek Farm, in Williamstown, provides food to the North Adams Berkshire Food Project; Indian Line Farm, in Egremont, provides food to the Sheffield Food Pantry.

Supply: Emergency Food Sites

Nine emergency food sites were identified in the South area. While these sites like to use local products, their selection is largely dictated by affordability and donations. WIC offers the greatest flexibility, in that enrollees may use WIC at Farmers’ Markets. Some of the larger providers of emergency food assistance are bound by cost and wholesale contracts to out of area suppliers—including the Berkshire Hills Regional School District. It might be worth investigating food support from the Southern Berkshires School District, which serves the Towns of Sheffield, Egremont and Alford, providing free and reduced lunch at all of its schools: Undermountain Elementary and Mount Everett High School in Sheffield, as well as its smaller schools in Monterey and Egremont.

Table 7: Emergency Food Sites in South Berkshire

Site	Clients Served	Schedule	Food Source
Fairview	1,500 school lunches made	July-August	
Southern Berkshire Regional School District	18 % of the student population are enrolled for free lunch, almost 5% are enrolled for reduced cost lunch.		
Berkshire South	60-80 people/week	Two dinners a week (both on Monday)	Local growers & businesses, community garden
Claire Teague Senior Center	At least 235/week	1 meal M-F	Donated baked goods, food prepared by Lanesborough group
Sheffield’s Food Assistance Program	100 people/week	9:30-10:30 1/week	Local grocery chains, 2 farm shares, Guidos, some local businesses
Guthrie Center	16 people/week	Lunch 1/week	Taft Farm, Kripalu, Guidos, Berkshire Mountain Bakery
Breaking Bread	70-92 people/week	1 dinner/week	Funded by local organizations & businesses
People’s Pantry		1 day/week	Guidos for local food
Sheffield Senior Center (Meals on Wheels)	20-25 people/week	5 days/week	Elder Services provides foods
Berkshire Hills Regional School (students eligible for free & reduced meals)	121,000 meals/school day 18% of student population enrolled for free lunch; 5% enrolled for reduced cost.	5 days/week	Wholesalers, local when cost allows
Women Infants and Children (WIC) Nutrition Program	600 clients, usually seen every 2-3 months		Enables clients to shop at local outlets, groceries or Farmer’s markets

Source: Keep Berkshires Farming Survey

Vision/Mission Statement

OUR VISION:

South Berkshire County has a resilient local food system that includes a full spectrum of economically viable farms offering a diverse range of products. The community supports its farmers both as neighbors and as businesses, purchasing their food for consumption at home, school, or out to eat. Successful farm businesses are part of the region's sustainable economy, keeping more money in the economy from local spending. Regional investment in value-added infrastructure has also enabled farmers to increase production and profits. Farmers continue to care for the productivity and health of the land and community by employing best practices for soil, water, habitat, and biodiversity. Eating local, healthy foods is promoted through education, networking opportunities, and economic development activities. It is also made possible for those of limited income or mobility to access more healthy food options at affordable prices to foster a hunger-free community.



Goals and Strategies

Food System Economy and Infrastructure

GOAL 1: SUPPORT LOCAL EFFORTS TO EXPAND YEAR-ROUND ACCESS TO LOCAL FOODS

Strategy a: Support enhanced value-added processing capabilities for meat, dairy, vegetable, and fiber products from the region.

Action Steps:

- Support a county-wide feasibility assessment for a slaughter facility to support improved access and pricing for local meat.
- Work with MA Farm Bureau and others to ensure policy recommendations for streamlining inspections and permitting for slaughter operations are strongly reflected in the state's new food and agriculture plan and subsequent action priorities of the Food Policy Council.
- Support countywide feasibility assessment for other food processing of food and fiber products with an eye on augmenting, rather than competing with, the capacity available through Franklin County CDC in Greenfield.

Strategy b: Improve capacity of local farms to access new markets through aggregation and distribution.

Action Steps:

- Work with small business and economic development entities to help attract and provide networking support to a local entrepreneur wishing to provide some scale of food hub activity – whether small matches to get more products in local restaurants or larger matches to markets outside the region (e.g., NYC).
- Continue to offer small, informal, matching through Berkshire Grown's online matching tool.

Strategy c: Work with regional school districts to transition to a local food system first model.

Action Steps:

- Cultivate awareness of facility needs for storage, growing, and preparation in facility upgrade conversations
- Connect food service directors to Mass Farm to Institution program staff to implement a local food menu in all schools.
- Work with local school committees to lead the charge and adopt a local food first resolution with schedule for implementation.

Strategy d: Increase Access to Current Commercial Kitchens for Processing Opportunities

Action Steps:

- Inventory churches, school, and other existing commercial kitchens in the subregion, including some indication of current occupancy and use status.
- Designate a go-to person to help field inquiries or expressions of interest from both those wishing to use kitchen space and facilities and facilities looking to rent out space for use.
- Link those wishing to process food for sale to the South Berkshire CDC and MA Small Business Development Center for business planning and new business startup assistance.

See also regional strategies on food processing/food hub.

Land Access & Availability

GOAL 2: KEEP CURRENT SOUTH BERKSHIRE FARMLAND IN PRODUCTION

Strategy a: Ensure current farmers have succession plans in place for their farms.

Action Steps:

- Promote the use of available succession planning resources, such as Land For Good, to local Agricultural Commissions, Land Trusts, and Farm Bureau and provide them with a guide on how to start the conversation.
- Create a resource bank on the Berkshire Grown website with succession planning resources, technical assistance programs, funding resources, and written materials or guides.

Strategy b: Increase awareness of land protection options.

Action Steps:

- Offer a one-stop, web-based shop of information and contacts for farmers or land owners interested protecting farm land.
- Work with local Agricultural Commissions, land trusts, and Berkshire County Farm Bureau to promote land protection tools to farmers in their communities.
- Work with municipal officials to develop protocols to exercise their right of first refusal on 61/61a. Highlight local case studies of win-win examples to help make the benefits more tangible.

GOAL 3: HELP CONNECT INTERESTED FARMERS TO LAND TO START OR EXPAND A FARM

Strategy a: Facilitate access to land for new or expanding farmers.

Action Steps:

- Map areas where farming is possible based on soils, historical use, and land cover to inform discussions of potential agricultural expansion areas. This has been done in Adams and Williamstown, and opened up conversations between private land owners and farmers both interested in seeing land used for farming.
- Facilitate land lease options on large properties or other open field areas not currently being farmed. This includes working with large land owners to educate them on tax programs and how agreements are reached, such as Land For Good and Columbia Land Conservancy sample agreements.
- Publicize Berkshire Grown as an intermediary contact to help pair land lease options to filter, educate, and negotiate participants in a way that helps ensure a positive experience for both parties.

Strategy b: Work with partners to think creatively about agricultural utility of none “prime-ag” soils.

Action Steps:

- Promote participation in MDAR’s Farm Viability Program as a means of exploring new crops and business planning.
- Help connect farmers to NRCS and other resources to help educate about soils and soil regeneration or maintenance techniques.

Farmer Business Networking and Support

GOAL4: STRENGTHEN AND CONNECT THE FARM COMMUNITY

Strategy a: Connect new and experienced farmers for mentoring and support.

Action Steps:

- Continue to offer periodic opportunities for farmers to get together to network in a social situation.
- Create and maintain an access-limited on-line presence through which farmers can post questions or announcements to each other.
- Build better relationships with Future Farmers of America (FFA) with local schools and as a new farmer resource.

GOAL5: ADAPT LOCAL FARMING TO ENSURE RESILIENCE TO NATURAL HAZARDS

Strategy b: Bring in expert knowledge and practices to support the evolution of farming to adapt to changing circumstances.

Action Steps:

- Collaborate with NOFA, NRCS, FSA, USDA, MDAR, Glynwood, Berkshire County Farm Bureau, Berkshire Grown and others to help identify, bring, and promote speakers on relevant topics and emerging practice.
- Explore the need for ongoing classes, such as could be offered through BCC, and pursue discussions on course creation as needed.

Food Access & Security

GOAL6: ELIMINATE HUNGER IN SOUTH BERKSHIRE

Strategy a: Working within existing systems to improve the volume of local food contributed directly to meal sites and food pantries to help address hunger in our communities.

Action Steps:

- Support gleanings programs at all farmers markets whereby farmers could opt to participate.
- Continue to support and expand the Share the Bounty Program providing subsidized CSA shares to lower-income families.
- Support gleanings or reduced cost produce to Elder Services to help ensure they have the capacity to meet increasing demand for senior meals at meal sites and through the Meals on Wheels program.

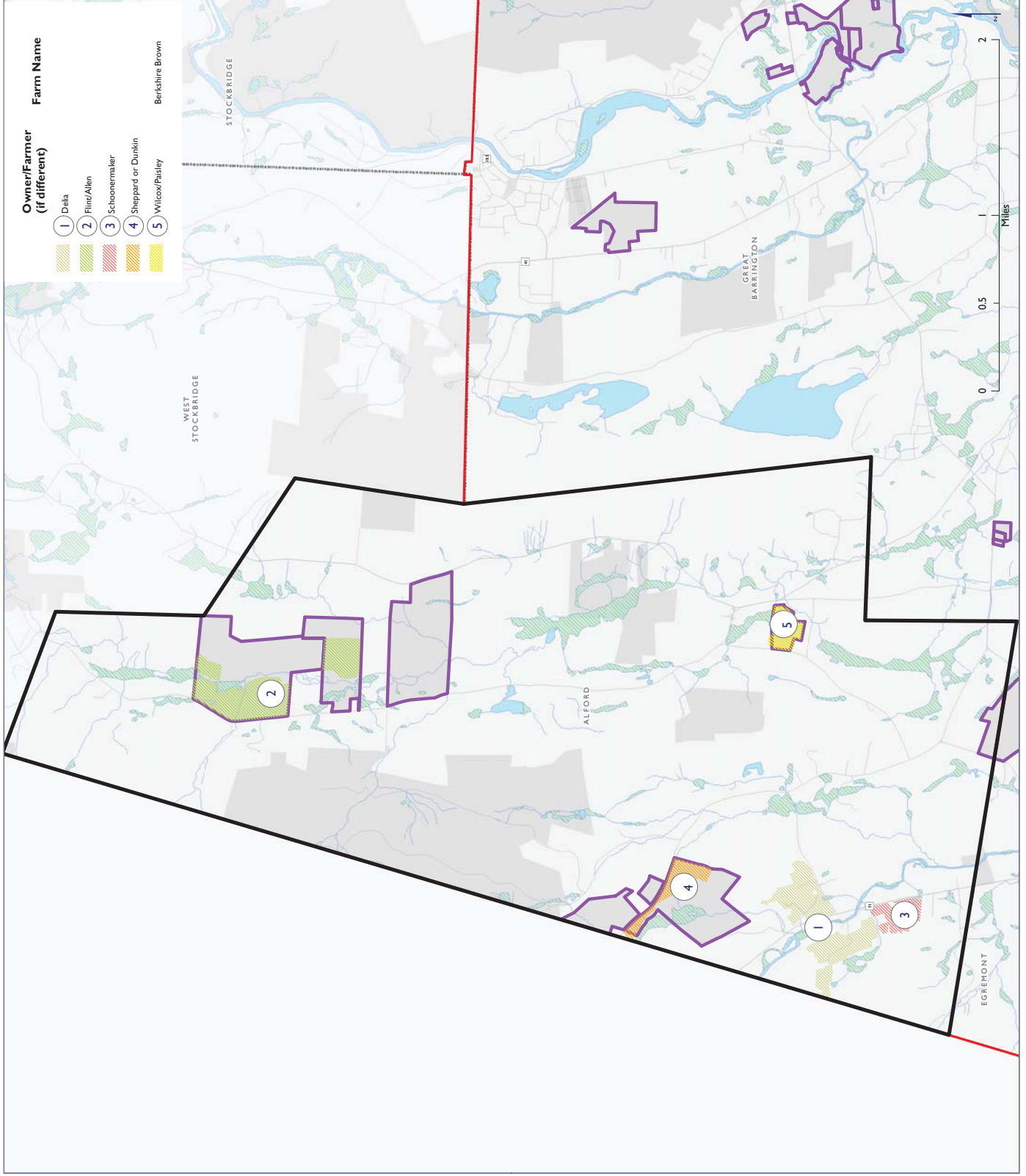
Strategy b: Improve nutrition awareness and behaviors

Action Steps:

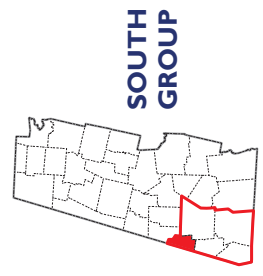
- Work with local and regional health and wellness entities to offer evidence-based programming that can build nutrition and food preparation skills within families.
- Work with local youth groups, schools, community centers and other non-profits. Increase practice of backyard gardening through education and campaign-style promotion as both a healthy hobby with nutrition-supporting results.

Implementation

Implementation has been an ongoing focus of Keep Berkshires Farming, and has been championed by Berkshire Grown.

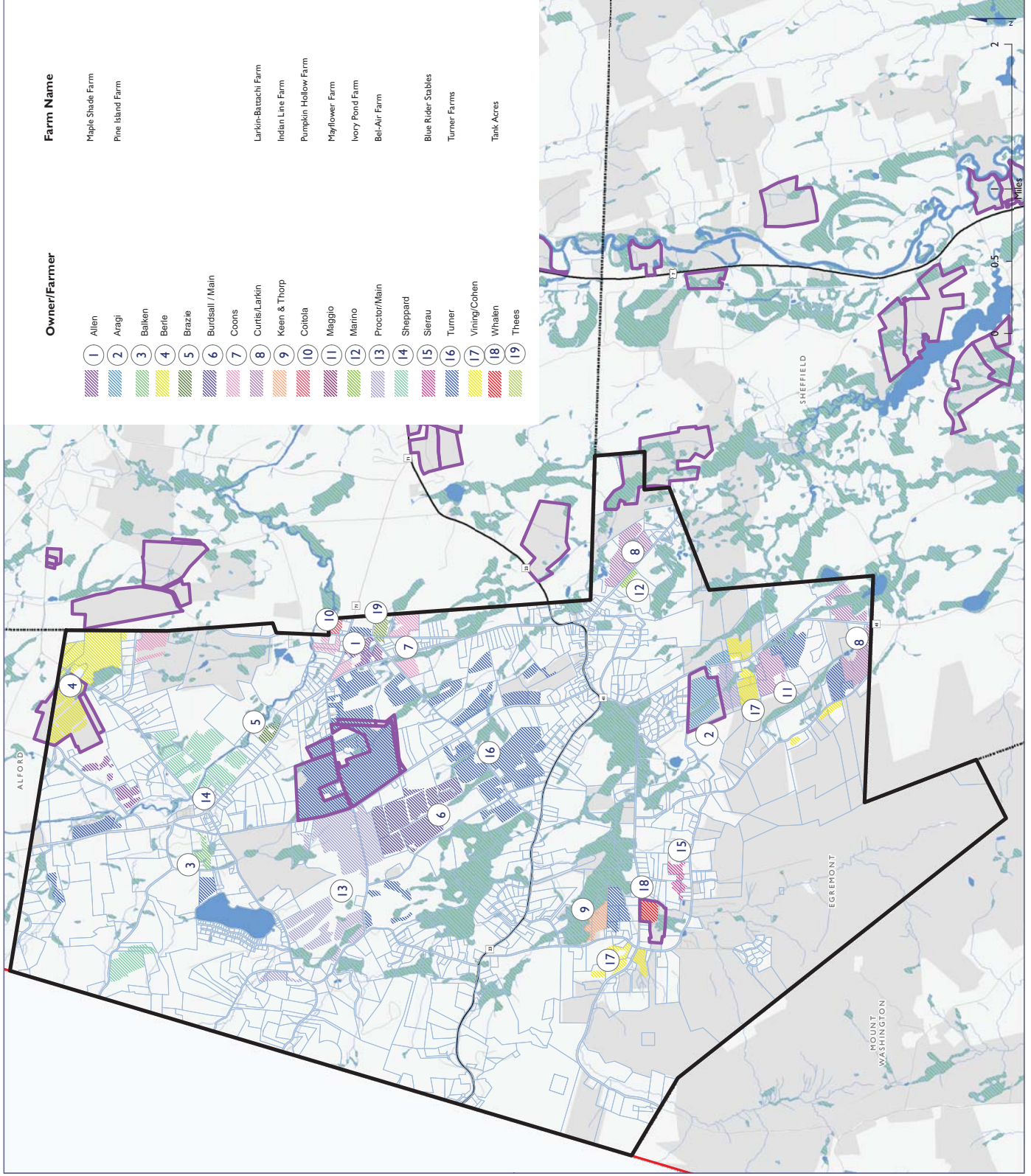


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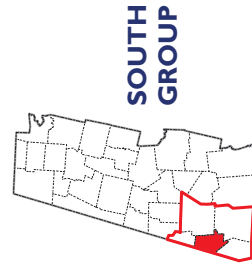


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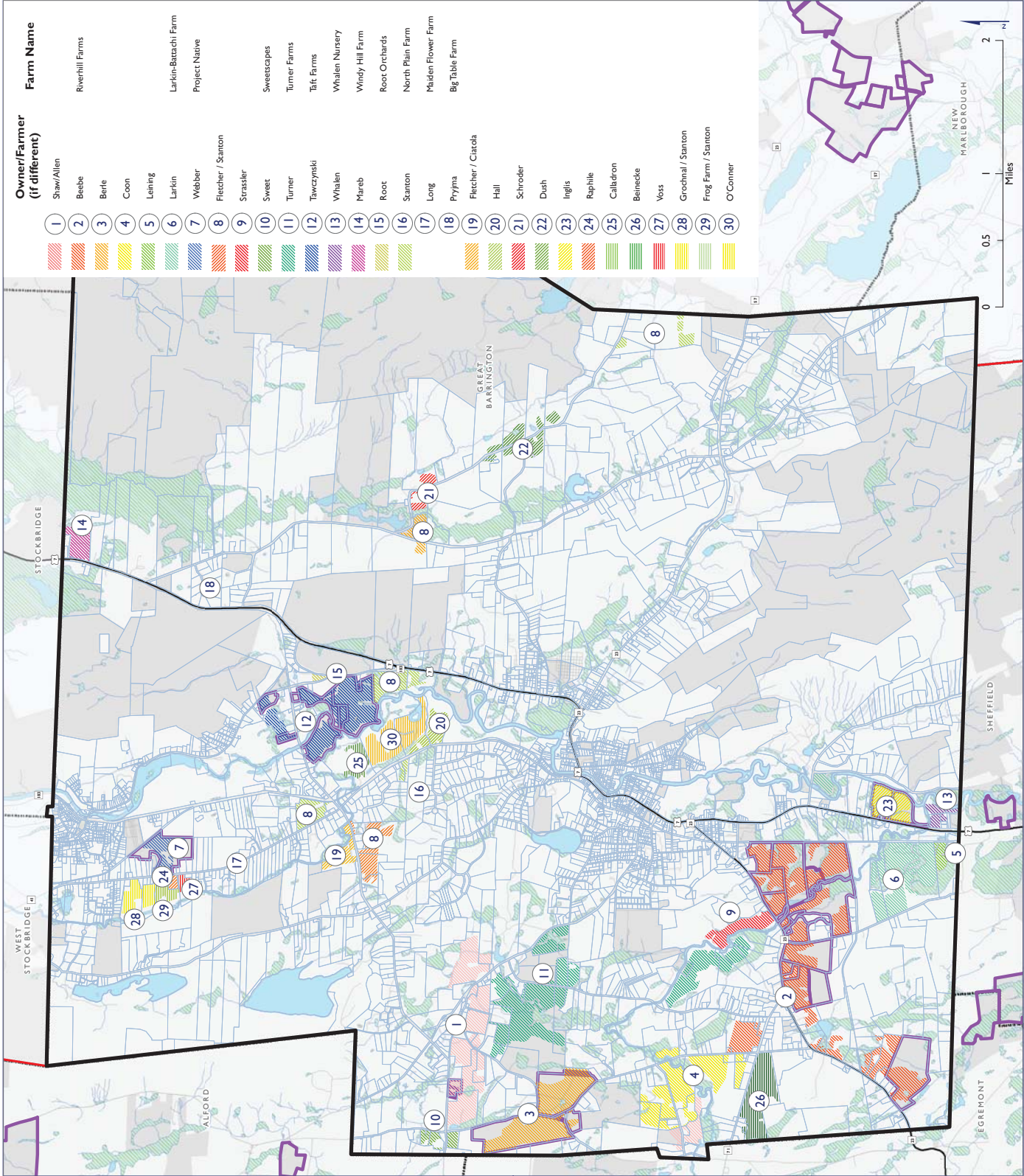


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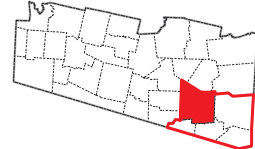
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Legend

- Agricultural Land
- Agricultural Preservation Restriction (APR)
- Protected Open Space
- Perennially Conserved Lands
- Interstate Highway
- Arterial Road
- Collector Road
- Local Road
- Wetland
- Open Water



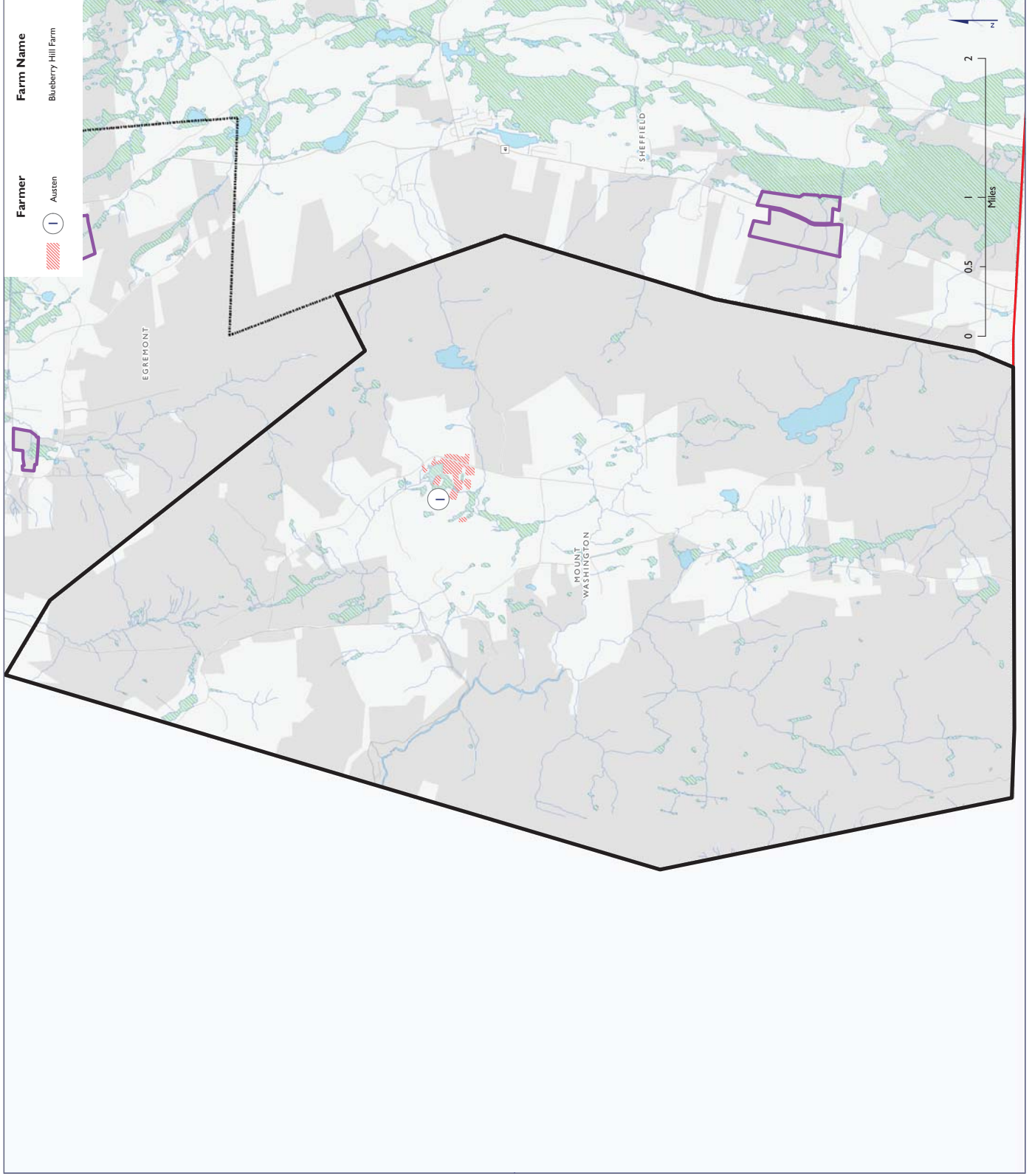
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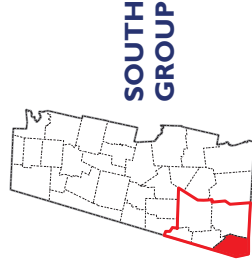
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Legend

Agricultural Land

Agricultural Preservation Restriction (APR)

Protected Open Space

Permanently Conserved Lands

Interstate Highway

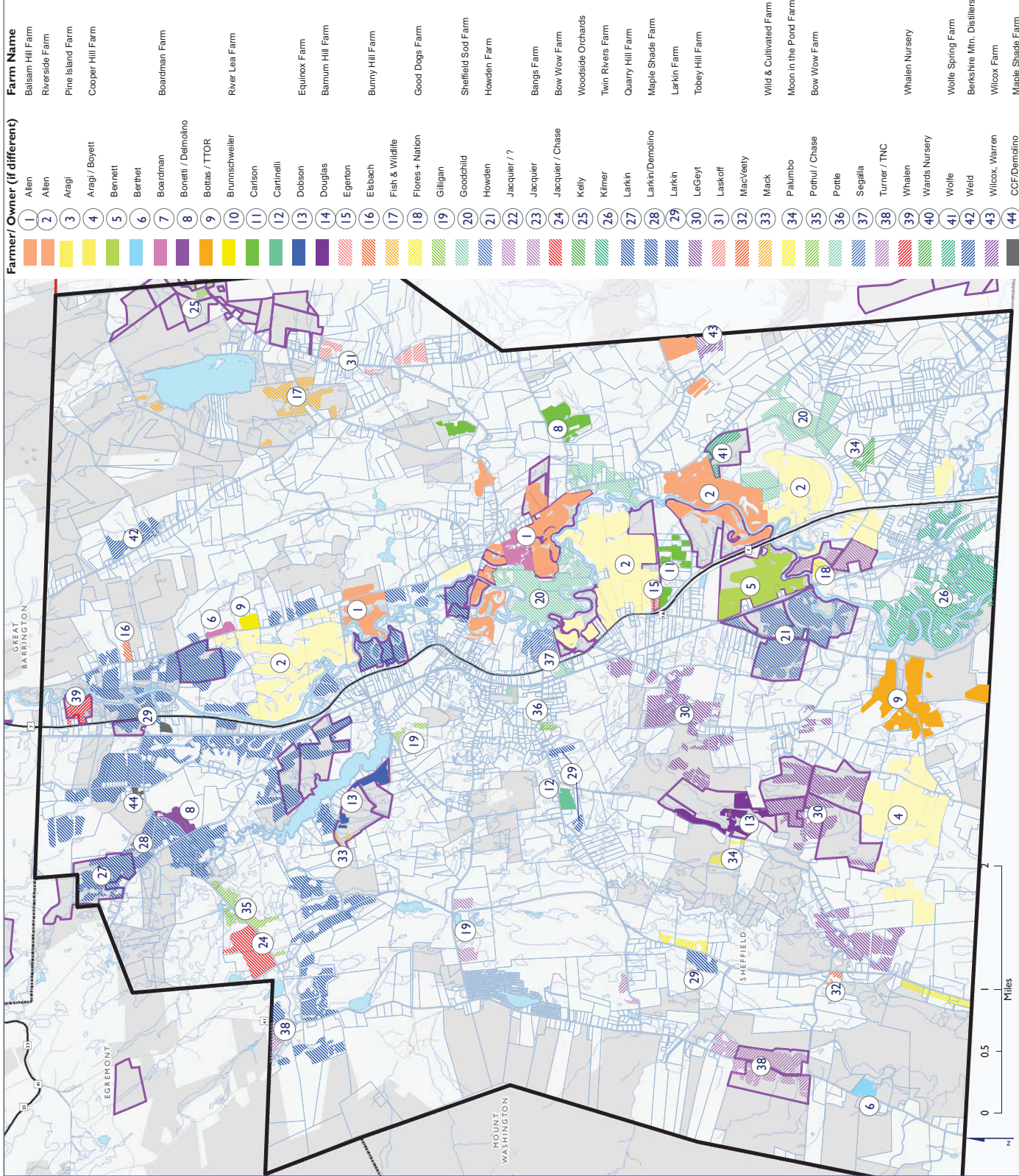
Arterial Road

Collector Road

Local Road

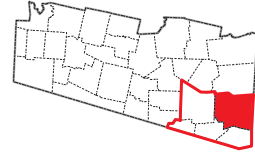
Wetland

Open Water



Farmer/ Owner (if different)	Farm Name
1	Balsam Hill Farm
2	Riverside Farm
3	Pine Island Farm
4	Cooper Hill Farm
5	Boardman Farm
6	Boardman Farm
7	Boardman Farm
8	Boardman Farm
9	Boardman Farm
10	River Lea Farm
11	Equinox Farm
12	Barnum Hill Farm
13	Barnum Hill Farm
14	Barnum Hill Farm
15	Barnum Hill Farm
16	Barnum Hill Farm
17	Bunny Hill Farm
18	Good Dogs Farm
19	Sheffield Sod Farm
20	Howden Farm
21	Howden Farm
22	Jacquer / ?
23	Jacquer
24	Jacquer / Chase
25	Bangs Farm
26	Bow Wow Farm
27	Woodside Orchards
28	Twin Rivers Farm
29	Quarry Hill Farm
30	Maple Shade Farm
31	Larkin Farm
32	Tobey Hill Farm
33	Wild & Cultivated Farm
34	Moon in the Pond Farm
35	Bow Wow Farm
36	Bow Wow Farm
37	Whalen Nursery
38	Whalen Nursery
39	Whalen Nursery
40	Whalen Nursery
41	Whalen Nursery
42	Whalen Nursery
43	Whalen Nursery
44	Whalen Nursery

KEEP BERKSHIRES FARMING



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