



## APR Program Evaluated Through Massachusetts Farm Bureau Federation's Survey

### **FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

MARLBOROUGH, MASSACHUSETTS - June 15, 2016 - The Massachusetts Farm Bureau Federation (MFBF) has received many complaints and criticism in recent years from land owners who had sold their development rights into the agricultural preservation restriction (APR) program. This voluntary program is intended to offer a non-development alternative to farmers and other owners of "prime" and "state important" agricultural land who are faced with a decision regarding future use and disposition of their farms.



The Massachusetts APR program has permanently protected more than 900 farms and a total land area more than 73,000 acres. The primary purpose of it is to preserve and protect agricultural land, including designated farmland soils, which are a finite natural resource, from being built upon for non-agricultural purposes or used for any activity detrimental to agriculture and to maintain APR land values at a level that can be supported by the land's agricultural uses and potential.

To explore the scope and validity of the criticism that MFBF was hearing, the organization polled landowners across the state, who had sold their development rights to the Commonwealth through the APR program. When the survey concluded 197 responses were received, which represented 27 percent of the known APR farms as identified by the Massachusetts Department of Agriculture.

It is important to note that 63 percent of respondents felt that the restrictions that the state enforces or attempts to enforce on their property does not exceed those to which they agreed. While this majority is significant, it is critical to review the complaints to see a pattern.

"The APR program has been successful in keeping farmland in production and keeping land available for farmers," said MFBF President Ed Davidian, who farms in Northborough. "However, as the program has progressed the administration of the program has come under scrutiny by farmer land-owners.

"As many of the complaints and concerns expressed about the APR Program have been anecdotal, the purpose of this survey was to provide an objective analysis of APR owners experiences and perceptions of the administration of the program."

Some of the key findings and takeaways from the survey included:

- Many respondents (and presumably current APR owners) do not understand the provisions of the program. For instance, many listed the savings on property tax as a benefit of land being in APR. Others stated that they could not develop the land, which is the very basis of the restriction.
- A significant number of APR land-owning respondents (31 percent) feel that the state is enforcing more restrictions on their land than they agreed to in their contract.
- 24 percent of APR land-owners report that the state has prevented them from doing something on their farm that they wanted to do. This does not necessarily indicate that the state is being heavy handed in every instance. However, when nearly a quarter of all APR owners experience such a conflict, a closer examination is necessary.
- 25 percent of respondents feel that the state has not treated them fairly in the administration of the program.
- As far as benefits respondents experienced from having land in APR, the largest percentage of respondents saw the primary benefit of APR as keeping land out of development.

"These statements offer a window into how the respondents view this program," Davidian said. "Based on these results, I see several needs related to APR, including education, further analysis and action. Farm Bureau is considering ways to take these steps and work together with all stakeholders in this program to improve it to its optimal level."

To read the survey results in their entirety, please visit: <http://tinyurl.com/APRSurveyResults>.

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*The Massachusetts Farm Bureau Federation is a non-profit organization representing nearly 6,000 family members across the Commonwealth. MFBF is an advocate for farmers, run by farmer members who develop policies through its grassroots process. Its mission is "to protect the rights, encourage the growth, and be of service to its members, in the best interest of agriculture."*

For more information about the Massachusetts Farm Bureau Federation, please visit [www.mfbf.net](http://www.mfbf.net).

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