

Westminster Farmland Inventory

For thousands of years, indigenous tribes utilized the land in what is now the town of Westminster for hunting, fishing, and temporary settlement. In the town's early history, farming played a significant role in the livelihood of Westminster's residents along with a sizeable amount of industry, particularly furniture making. Orchards and animal husbandry dominated the agricultural landscape of early Westminster.

When industry started to shift from Westminster to nearby cities such as Gardner and Fitchburg in the late 19th century, the town became more residential to house the workforce of the surrounding industrial cities. Because Westminster offers both the social services of an urban setting and rural character, it has become a target for residential development. In addition, due to its location on Route 2, a direct route to Boston, the town's remaining open space is threatened to be swept up in the continually westward encroaching urban sprawl. Today, livestock and hay production continue to make up the bulk of agriculture in the town, contributing to keeping open space productive and free from development. Currently, 53% of Westminster's farm parcels are unprotected, which could result in this productive farmland being lost to development. With over 3,000 acres of remaining farm parcels in Westminster and a citizenry passionate about conservation and local agriculture, the town has an excellent opportunity to permanently protect more of its farmland to continue the legacy of agriculture in Westminster and keep farmland in the hands of farmers.



Prepared for the Town of Westminster in July 2019 by Mount Grace Land Conservation Trust with support from TerraCorps, an AmeriCorps program.

About the Inventory

Purpose

This farmland inventory provides a snapshot of agriculture in Westminster and can serve as a tool for towns, conservation organizations, and community members to build support for farming in the future.

Key definitions

Farm parcels are tax lots from town Assessor's data that have farm fields on them. Many farm parcels are partially wooded, with only some open fields being actively farmed.

Farm fields are open fields being used for pasture or crop production.

Disclaimer All calculations are based on assessor's data and MassGIS datalayers. These calculations are meant to give an overview and estimate of the town's agricultural land, not an exact acreage count.

Community conversations

- Meetings with the Westminster's Agriculture Commission and Town Assessor
- Interviews with other community members and farmers

Infographics

- Modeled on Whately Community Food Assessment Infographics, created by the Franklin Regional Council of Governments

Historical Context

- Westminster Master Plan (2014)
- Westminster Open Space and Recreation Plan (2014)
- Heywood, William Sweetzer, *History of Westminster, Massachusetts* (1893)

Massachusetts Bureau of Geographic Information Systems data layers

- Land Use (2005)
- Level 3 Assessor's data
- USDA prime and statewide important farmland soils for Worcester County (2015)
- MassGIS Protected open space (2019)

Authors

The inventory is a project of Mount Grace Land Conservation Trust, with support from TerraCorps, an AmeriCorps program. This factsheet was prepared by Kat Kowalski, TerraCorps-AmeriCorps 2017-2019, with help from Jamie Pottern, Mount Grace Land Conservation Trust, and builds off previous reports by Maggie Hensel MassLIFT-AmeriCorps 2016-2017, Kathleen Doherty MassLIFT-AmeriCorps 2015-2016, and Bradley Kennedy, MassLIFT-AmeriCorps 2014-2015.

A Snapshot of Agriculture in Westminster



There are **388** acres
of farm fields in
Westminster.

3,267 acres of
land in Westminster
are covered by prime
and statewide
important farmland
soil, or

14% of the total
land area.

88% of prime and
statewide important farmland
soils in the town are **not** being
utilized for food crops, fodder,
or pasture.



Livestock and Hay are the most
commonly raised products in Westminster

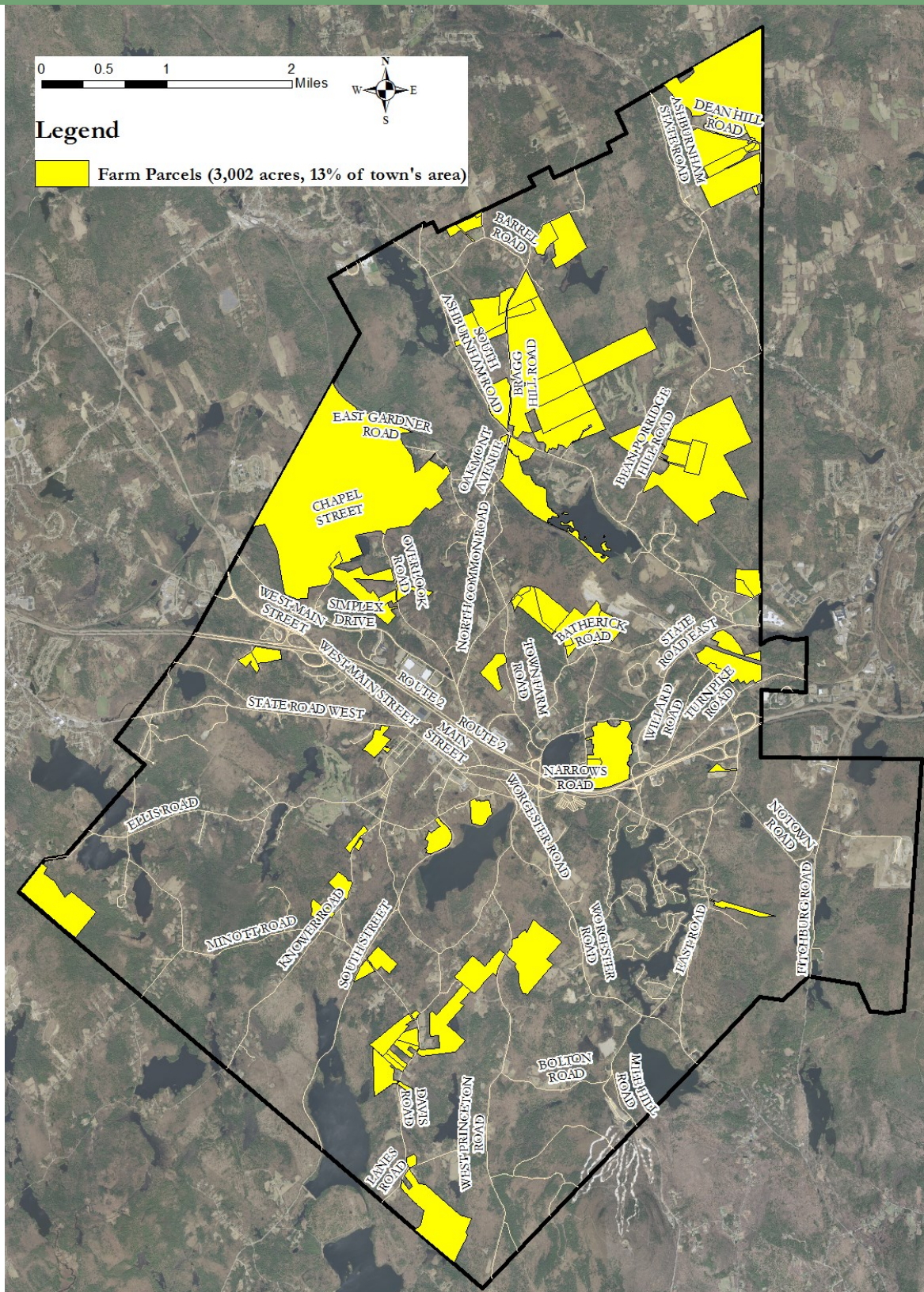


53% of farm
parcels in Westminster
are not permanently
protected.

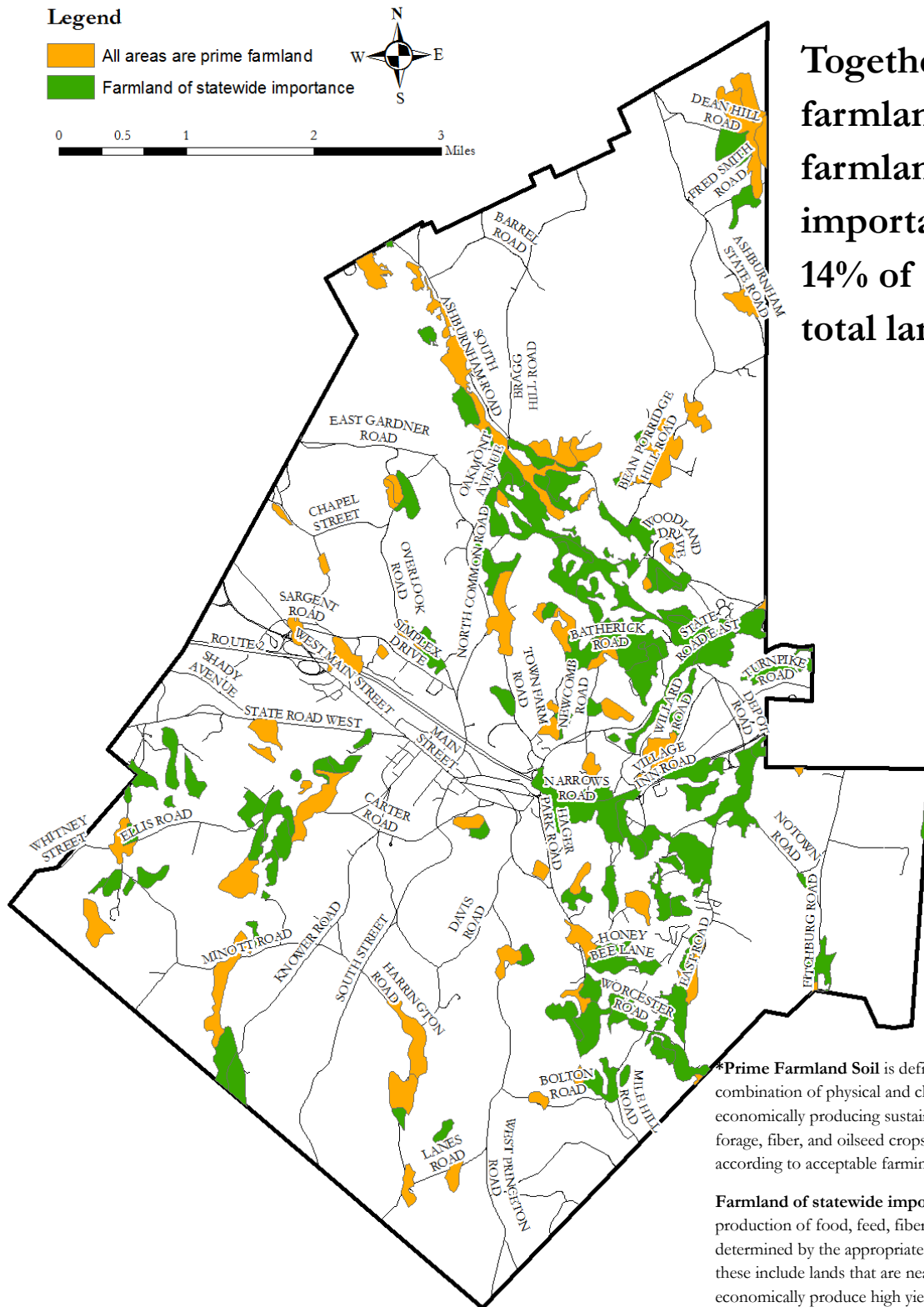


Only **11%** of farm parcels
in Westminster are utilized
for open fields, with the rest
covered by forest.

Farm Parcels in Westminster



Westminster's Agricultural Soils

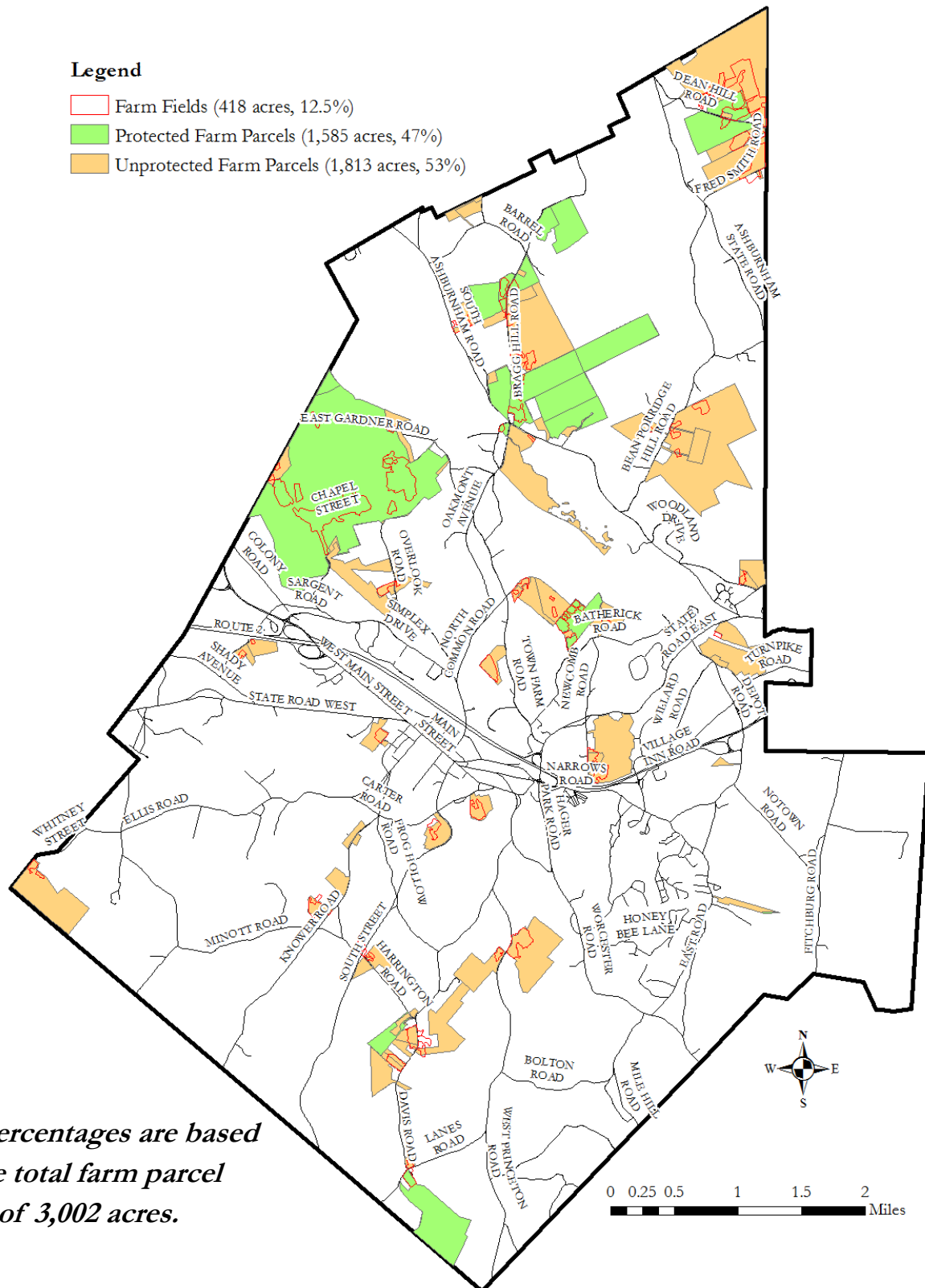


Together prime farmland and farmland of statewide importance* cover 14% of the town's total land area.

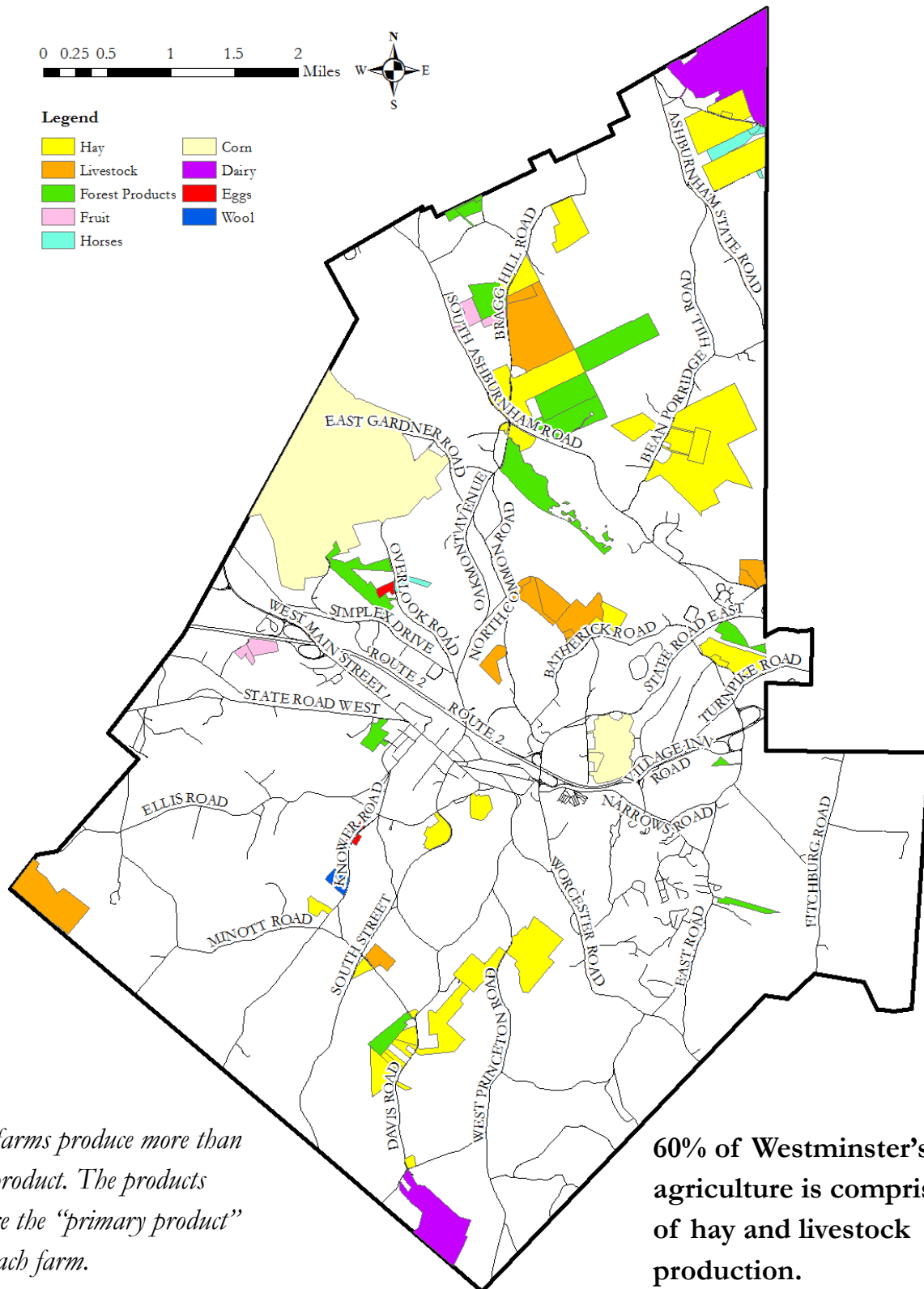
*Prime Farmland Soil is defined as "Land that has the best combination of physical and chemical characteristics for economically producing sustained high yields of food, feed, forage, fiber, and oilseed crops, when treated and managed according to acceptable farming methods." (MassGIS)

Farmland of statewide importance is important "for the production of food, feed, fiber, forage, and oil seed crops, as determined by the appropriate state agency or agencies. Generally, these include lands that are nearly prime farmland and that economically produce high yields of crops when treated and managed according to acceptable farming methods." (MassGIS)

Unprotected Farm Parcels in Westminster



Primary Products Produced in Westminster



Landowner Name	Farm Name		Farm Address	Book	Page	Parcel Acreage	Field Acres	Conserved
Aalto John S & Sara			Davis Rd	7890	283	8.0	9.0	No
Altobelli Alfreda L	Woody End Farm	260	Davis Rd	1801	276	4.0	2.0	No
Altobelli Dana & Lane George &	Woody End Farm		Lanes Rd	2261	112	109.0	4.0	Yes
Anderson Kathleen C Trustee			Woods Rd	3662	329	10.0	0.0	No
Anderson Kim O		90	Town Farm Rd	1806	20	20.0	10.0	No
Anderson Mitchell & Kathleen		12	Woods Rd	1941	171	7.0	0.0	No
Antoniatic William F & Valerie J		192	Davis Rd	1159	162	2.0	0.0	No
Baro Properties Ltd Partnship	Hogan and Sons/ Four Maples Farm	74	Bean Pomridge Hill Rd	2997	123	29.0	3.0	No
Barrett John R & Mary E		100	Fred Smith Rd	4810	112	23.0	1.0	No
Barrett John R Trustee		97-99	Dean Hill Rd	6974	034	3.0	8.0	No
Bean Adam J & Sherilyn		10	Harrington Rd	7606	005	17.0	1.0	No
Belanger Alan M			Narrows Rd	7046	105	4.0	0.0	No
Belanger Alan M			Overlook Rd	8062	122	60.0	6.0	No
Boucher William & Victoria		90	Bragg Hill Rd	3546	137	8.0	3.0	No
Casa Grande Realty Trust		78A	East Rd	2664	62	12.0	0.0	Yes
Chatigny Jodie L		28	Roper Rd	5930	049	8.0	2.0	No
Chernoch John J & Ann M		65	Harrington Rd	4752	038	25.0	0.0	No
Christensen Owen E & Carole		20	Dawley Rd	6688	326	18.0	8.0	No
Cook John D & Bonnie	Wind Eagle Farm	70	Whitney St	3535	176	92.0	2.0	No
Dennison Peter E & Clara E		193	Davis Rd	7888	238	27.0	0.0	No
Div Of Fisheries & Wildlife			Overlook Rd			840.0	2.0	Yes
Donald Foster	Wildwood Farm	44	Battles Rd	5210	017	91.0	5.0	No
Dufour John V & Brenda A Trustees		11	Harrington Rd	7852	369	8.0	0.0	No
Foster Donald S & Elizabeth M	Wildwood Farm	34	Battles Rd	7217	215	7.0	5.0	No
Francis Christine Trustee		97	Oakmont Ave	8059	203	80.0	0.0	No
Guinn Paul M & Lott Lisa A		99	Overlook Rd	5892	173	11.0	6.0	No
Hannula Clara			Davis Rd	8067	023	5.0	7.0	No
Hannula Edward A & Elizabeth			Davis Rd	2030	295	10.0	9.0	No
Hannula Edward A & Elizabeth		68	Harrington Rd	1230	260	2.0	0.0	No
Heins Karl W	Sunny Hill Farm	100	Dean Hill Rd	2265	9+41	0.0	42.0	No
Heins Karl W	Sunny Hill Farm	102	Dean Hill Rd	2265	9+41	229.0	42.0	No
Hertel Andrew J & Kerstin E	Maple Heights Farm	70	Howard Rd	6590	347	3.0	6.0	Yes
Hertel Andrew J & Kerstin E	Maple Heights Farm		Howard Rd	6590	347	46.0	6.0	No
Hogan Barbara A Trustee	Hogan and Sons/ Four Maples Farm	49	Bragg Hill Rd	6176	263	143.0	0.0	Yes
Hogan David E & Heidi A	Hogan and Sons/ Four Maples Farm	95	Bragg Hill Rd	2534	290	11.0	0.0	No
Hollenbeck Joseph R	Winter Hill Farm		Syd Smith Rd-Rear	7273	058	21.0	6.0	Yes
Hollenbeck Joseph R & Denae M	Winter Hill Farm	11	Syd Smith Rd	6297	345	3.0	6.0	No
Hollenbeck Joseph R & Denae M	Winter Hill Farm	11	Syd Smith Rd	6297	345	3.0	6.0	No
Hollenbeck Roland H & Gloria M	Winter Hill Farm	9	Syd Smith Rd	7134	183	3.0	6.0	No
Honkonen Ann R		20	Roper Rd	3069	247	18.0	0.0	No
Jarvenpaa Eino W & Alice B		94	Bragg Hill Rd	2256	81	36.0	3.0	Yes
Jarvenpaa Eino W & Alice B			Bragg Hill Rd	6981	189	10.0	4.0	Yes
Jarvenpaa Eino W & Alice B			Bragg Hill Rd	6981	189	23.0	4.0	Yes
Jarvenpaa Eino W & Alice B			So Ashburnham Rd	6981	189	2.0	1.0	Yes
Jarvenpaa Eino W & Alice B		145	Bragg Hill Rd	6981	189	19.0	0.0	Yes
Jarvenpaa Eino W & Alice B			Bragg Hill Rd	6981	189	48.0	0.0	Yes
Jarvenpaa Eino W & Alice B			So Ashburnham Rd-Rear	6981	189	80.0	0.0	Yes
Jarvenpaa Eino W & Alice B			Bragg Hill Rd	6981	189	34.0	0.0	Yes
Jarvenpaa Eino W & Alice B			Bragg Hill Rd	6981	189	90.0	4.0	Yes

Landowner Name	Farm Name		Farm Address	Book	Page	Parcel Acreage	Field Acres	Conserved
Jarvenpaa Eino W & Alice B			So Ashburnham Rd	6981	189	60.0	0.0	Yes
Jarvenpaa Eino W & Alice B		231	So Ashburnham Rd	6981	189	56.0	0.0	Yes
Jarvenpaa Steven & Barbara		238	So Ashburnham Rd	5	193	15.0	1.0	No
Jess Carl R Jr Trustee		49	Fred Smith Rd	6176	290	1.0	17.0	No
Johnson & Sons Poultry Farm Inc		70	Knower Rd	729	176	2.0	0.0	No
Johnson & Sons Poultry Farms Inc		51	Knower Rd	729	176	7.0	0.0	No
Kaarela Edson E Trustee		23	Sunset Rd	3121	59	8.0	1.0	No
Karkane Keith D & Karen L		37	Sunset Rd	5780	120	15.0	1.0	No
Kopley Keith P & Ashley B	Hillside Cellars	351	So Ashburnham Rd	7522	304	17.0	2.0	No
Lafortune Edward C II & Orene	October Farm	94	West Princeton Rd	3912	187	88.0	15.0	No
Lamsa Justin C & Leeann L			Bathrick Rd	1225	378	5.0	0.0	No
Lamsa Toivo, Celia & Dean A			Bathrick Rd	1338	115	18.0	3.0	No
Lyons Mary		109	West Princeton Rd	2352	257	40.0	2.0	No
Mann Edward I & Denise A			Davis Rd	8043	139	58.0	9.0	No
Marble Susan		177	Davis Rd	6705	099	5.0	7.0	No
Marsh Richard E & Jacqueline T			Dean Hill Rd	2211	196	63.0	2.0	Yes
Marsh Richard E & Jacqueline T			Dean Hill Rd	2211	196	28.0	42.0	Yes
Marsh Richard E & Jacqueline T		78	Dean Hill Rd	2211	196	2.0	10.0	No
Mossman Christopher C &			State Rd East	6209	274	20.0	0.0	No
Mossman Christopher C &			Depot Rd	6209	274	51.0	0.0	No
Mossman Christopher C & Joanne A		57	Depot Rd	6209	285	4.0	0.0	No
Otter Farm Inc		65	Bean Porridge Hill Rd	4146	234	23.0	1.0	No
Otter Farm Inc			Bean Porridge Hill Rd	4146	234	21.0	1.0	No
Otter Farms Inc			Bean Porridge Hill Rd	4146	234	252.0	5.0	No
Smith Charles L II & Charlotte Trustees	C.L Smith Timber Processing	15R	Main St	1462	73	18.0	4.0	No
Smith Charlotte	C.L Smith Timber Processing		Elm St	5290	043	1.0	4.0	No
Soini Steven		82	Fred Smith Rd	7962	127	70.0	17.0	No
St. Cyr Walter	Winter Hill Farm		Syd Smith Rd-Rear	5482	293	30.0	6.0	Yes
Town Of Westminster			South St	1375	121	23.0	4.0	No
Wiinikainen Marsha A	Wiin Haven Farm	100	Overlook Rd	1455	432	7.0	6.0	No
Young Alan W & Roberta J	Briar Rose Farm	133	Knower Rd	1446	467	11.0	7.0	No
Young Daniel T		113	Knower Rd	2026	63	14.0	0.0	No

Note: Each row represents a different “tax parcel”. Some farm fields span across multiple parcels, explaining the disparity between some of the parcel and field acreage sizes. Acreage is based on calculations done by mapping software and is meant to be used as an estimation, not an exact acreage count.

Strategic farmland conservation plan: Suggested Criteria to rank farms for conservation

Suggested Criteria for Farm Conservation Priority Ranking						
	Description	Criteria for Rank Number:				
		1	2	3	4	5
Acreage	Total acreage of parcel	1-10 acres	11-50 acres	51-100 acres	101-200 acres	200+ acres
Prime Soil - Total	Percent of total acreage covered by prime ag soil	1-20%	21-40%	41-60%	61-80%	81-100%
Prime Soil - Fields	Percent of open fields covered by prime ag soil	1-20%	21-40%	41-60%	61-80%	81-100%
Development Threat	Likelihood land will be lost for commercial agricultural use, based on availability for development, ownership status, relationship to excluded parcels, rental/lease security and other specific factors	Threat is very low or non-existent	Threat is low	Threat is somewhat serious	Threat is high	Threat is imminent
Infrastructure	Presence of farmhouses, barns, and other buildings.	No infra. present	Minimal infra. in poor condition	Some infra. present, but condition is poor	Sufficient infra. for future farm operations	Infra. in good condition and more than sufficient for farm operations
Proximity to Protected Land	Distance from farm parcel to permanently protected land	>10 miles	>5 miles	>2 miles	>1/4 mile	Abutting
		Larger farms will be prioritized in order to conserve more acres of farmland at once and improve regional food security. The presence of prime soil is an indicator of the land's potential capacity for food production, regardless of current land use. Farms whose prime soil is not covered by buildings or forest will be prioritized for conservation. Once farm fields are converted to building lots, their potential utility for food production is effectively destroyed forever. Farms that are imminently threatened by development should be prioritized for conservation. Beginning farmers especially need infrastructure, including a farmhouse, to get their farm business started. Farms with at least one farmhouse and a sufficient number of barns and other farm structures in good condition will be prioritized for conservation. Clustering protected land promotes wildlife movement and landscape connectivity. Farms that abut other protected land will be prioritized for conservation.				

Suggested Criteria for Farm Conservation Priority Ranking							
	Description	Criteria for Rank Number:					Rationale
		1	2	3	4	5	
Historical/ community significance	A qualitative measure of the value placed on the farm by the community that accounts for the length of the farm's history and community connections to the land	Not at all significant	Not very significant	Somewhat significant	Very significant	Extremely significant	Community buy-in is an important piece of any conservation project. Farms that are significant to the community for historic or other reasons will be prioritized for conservation.
Scenic Value	The farm's aesthetic value as understood by community members	Not scenic or not visible	Not very scenic	Somewhat scenic	Scenic	Iconic	Certain farms are likely to be recognized by community members as iconic landmarks that tie them to the history of their town. These farms should be protected from development in order to preserve community identity.
Economic Significance	How much income the landowner makes from farming, and how much of that income comes from local sales	Minimal	-	Average	-	High	Farming can form an important facet of the regional economy. Farms that contribute significantly to the health of the local and regional economy should be prioritized for conservation.
Product	The types of products produced on the farm	Hay; eggs; forest products (1 point each)	Vegetables; meat; dairy; value-added products; orchard (2 points each)	Any combo. of products adding up to 3 points	Any combo. of products adding up to 4 points	Any combo. of products adding up to 5 points	Farms that produce a diversity of products that directly feed people will be prioritized for conservation.
Other	Other considerations that may affect the importance of a farm or farm cluster for development						The criteria listed above may not capture the whole picture for every farm; this category allows managers and community members to identify farms that wouldn't traditionally be prioritized for conservation but that have value in other respects.

These criteria were developed by Mount Grace staff as a method of ranking farms in terms of conservation priority. They are included here to provide guidance if the Town is interested in designing its own strategic planning process for farmland conservation. It should be noted that any ranking system is inherently subjective, and the Town should engage with farmers and residents to identify their own priorities for farmland conservation.