

# **Repositioning Northeastern** **Agriculture**

*Building on the region's past and present*

*To prepare for its future*

**Authored by Jeff Beach, Public Information Officer  
New Jersey Dept. of Agriculture**

## **Introduction**

For decades, the story of agriculture in the Northeastern United States has been one of urgency, of a vague dread that perhaps the region's voracious appetite for development could not be stopped from gobbling up what remained of the agrarian heritage established by the earliest Colonial settlers. However, that need not be the end of the story. The efforts to preserve farmland and increase farmland viability in the Northeast have become a surprisingly successful chapter. States such as Indiana and Illinois now look with envy toward the Northeast and speak about the region's states being "light years" ahead of them in protecting agriculture's future.

These recent plot twists, though, could be for naught if Northeastern states don't follow through with even more innovation, determination and, where needed, legislation to maintain our farm economies' viability. Fending off the continued assault of sprawl requires new approaches in how we think about Northeastern agriculture. Indeed, in some ways, it requires adapting new ways of looking at agriculture itself. Long-term viability, the ultimate "happy ending" to this story, will come only with a sense of regional unity, solidarity and reliance on the region's diversity to renew its strength and purpose.

This story of struggling against the odds is no new tale for the Northeast. From the earliest Colonial times, the region was not expected to be a great food producer for the nation or the world. The soil, generally rocky and shallow, and the wide variations of seasonal temperature and moisture did not cast the Northeast in the role of large-scale producer. As years passed, and the Northeast became the birthplace of America's first large cities, the culture of even those earliest years tended more toward the urban than the rural.

What the Northeast's agricultural landscape lacked in scale, though, it more than made up for in variation and ingenuity, with farmers seeking out the most successful crops to suit their land. The efforts of those earliest American farmers are still felt today, and are why the Northeast leads the way in cranberry and blueberry production, why Vermont's dairies and beef are the stuff of legend, and why agriculture is still the number-one industry in Delaware. Understanding their land – its limitations as well as its strengths – is what brought success to the earliest Northeast farmers, and what helped them establish an agricultural base that to this day is an essential element of the region's quality of life. They realized they would have to bend to the will of natural forces to be successful. Likewise, today's farmers must bend to the will of market forces to succeed.

In many ways, the agricultural communities of the Northeastern states already have begun to make these changes and are repositioning themselves for viability in the modern marketplace. The very boundaries of agriculture are changing to encompass horticulture and aquaculture as more fundamental elements. New markets are being developed for more traditional produce through cooperation with schools, government agencies and food processors. New Jersey, for instance is tapping into the value-added fruit market, which is poised to take off in much the same way the packaged salad-greens market did over the past decade. Northeastern farmers, meanwhile, are focused on getting more production per acre to make the most of what they've got, and on value-added products and markets in order to keep a greater share of the consumer dollar.

Though farmers understandably want to keep development at bay, the residents who populate the region's urban and suburban areas are nonetheless important to agricultural stability. They represent the vast numbers of customers who need what's produced on the rural landscape. It may seem that sometimes urbanites believe food grows in the grocery store, but their understanding is beginning to change, thanks in large part to today's increased emphasis on the benefits of healthy eating. Studies show that this growing awareness of the need for a balanced diet brings with it an increased understanding of where the food comes from and what is needed to maintain the supply. This new

appreciation for farms and farmland has been credited with boosting the Northeast's farmland preservation programs. Voters who've never set foot in a barn or sat on a tractor have overwhelmingly supported these initiatives, enabling the NEASDA states to preserve 731,931 acres of farmland, according to the American Farmland Trust. That represents 50 percent of farmland protected through Purchase of Development Rights nationwide, no small task in the most densely populated region of the country, where property values are among the highest in the nation and housing demands are at all-time highs.

However, keeping the land free from development is but one leg in a tripod that must be built to support the viability of agriculture. Making sure the preserved parcels remain vital farmland is another matter altogether. Fostering, sometimes even creating, markets for farmers is the second leg of the tripod, and the NEASDA members can cite numerous examples of programs designed to open more opportunities through which growers can sell their produce. Whether it's the 30-year-old "Massachusetts Grown...and Fresher" campaign touting that state's produce, the 20-year-old "Jersey Fresh" campaign for the Garden State's bounty or Pennsylvania's effort to expand grocery stores into underserved areas. Whether it's Rhode Island's direct marketing efforts or New York leading the nation in farmers market WIC programs. Enabling more people to have greater access to the wealth of fresh agricultural products coming from our farms is key to ensuring the future viability of agriculture. Even development that already has occurred can serve as a market driver. Suburban homeowners have helped increase the market for nurseries and floriculture, as farmers in those sectors find it more profitable to work with trends than to fight them. Ironically, the demand from existing developments for nursery products makes farmers providing them less susceptible to development pressures themselves.

Both the preservation and marketing efforts of the NEASDA states are bearing fruit, but there is yet a third leg that is needed to complete the tripod – equipping the next generation and welcoming people new to farming to keep the agrarian tradition alive. This encompasses not only traditional agriculture education programs like 4-H, FFA and

others, but also includes something as simple as talking to elementary school students about proper nutrition. By building healthy eaters in their youngest years, our farmers are assured of customers for fresh produce in the future. The Northeast is uniquely positioned to take advantage of this trend. The region is teeming with urban centers, both large and small, where the schools can be both present-day customers for today's produce and instillers of good nutritional habits to shape tomorrow's consumers. In our large urban centers, the public school systems often function more as full-scale social service agencies than just educational institutions. Programs abound in the schools to care for children from early in the morning to well into the evening as their parents devote more time to work and civic activities. This opens opportunities for produce that can be used in breakfasts and after-school snacks, as well as lunches. The more direct links to agriculture can be included as a daily part of school life, the more likely it will be that school children see agriculture as a career choice, not some abstract idea in a book.

One of the more ambitious efforts in agriculture education has come from the "Massachusetts Agriculture in the Classroom (MAC)" program, which has developed an array of tools to teach school children about the role agriculture in their lives. Among those tools are "What's up, MAC?" a fifteen-minute video with ten supplementary lessons exploring how farmer's lives are still tied closely to the seasons and how farmers conduct their role as stewards of the land and open space.

Equipping the next generation also means fostering farmers as they either assume responsibilities for their family farms or come into the business for the first time. Often, these younger farmers bring a new vitality and willingness to experiment with technology and marketing that may not be as prevalent in their older counterparts. People new to agriculture can bring a fresh approach derived from their previous occupations. New Jersey provides one such example in dairy farmer Peter Southway. A former investment banker, Mr. Southway's success as a businessman enabled him to buy substantial acreage in northern New Jersey. Mr. Southway lost several friends and business colleagues in the

World Trade Center attack of September 11, 2001, and decided then and there to leave the rat race and embark on a full-time career as a dairy farmer. Today, he is leading an effort to build brand recognition for New Jersey's dairy products, including an initiative to create artisan cheeses.

The repositioning of agriculture will not always be easy. The Northeast's farmers come from long and proud traditions, and do not always warm to change rapidly. This is where the region's departments of agriculture and land grant schools can play their greatest role. We must reach out to assist farmers in modernizing their operations and, when practical, changing their operations over to something more profitable. Our agencies must recognize that changes in environmental law do not always take into consideration the impact those changes will have on farmers who run responsible operations and, through no fault of their own, could wind up behind a regulatory eight-ball. Environmental responsibility is critical for all sectors of the economy, but state and local enforcement agencies must be made to see the value in working with the agricultural community to ensure both environmental protection and agricultural viability.

Certainly, there are struggles ahead for the Northeast's agricultural community, but the history of agriculture is about overcoming hardships and making the most of the land. The following sections of this report provide some details about the status of each NEASDA state's agricultural sectors and examine some of the true success stories in this region.

### **Current Northeast trends**

As the year 2004 began, the U.S. Census Bureau estimated the nation's population at more than 292 million, a 1-percent increase over 2003. With one birth every eight seconds, one death every 13 seconds and one new person added through international migration every 25 seconds, the Bureau estimated that the population of the United States increases by one person every 12 seconds.

While Census numbers showed the overall population of the Northeast gaining less than other regions, a study by the Brookings Center on Urban and Metropolitan Policy showed the Northeast (along with the Midwest) leading the nation in sprawl, the amount of land consumed for urbanization compared to the population growth of an area. "Urbanized land" is defined as any area with 1,000 people or more per square mile. In short, Northeastern states saw bigger increases than other regions in land parcels that could be described as too big to mow, too small to plow. So, although populations in the most densely packed central cities of urban areas in the Northeast tended to decline or at best remain stable, the suburban areas surrounding them have continued to explode in residential and commercial development, gobbling up farmland as they do. Boston's population, for example, grew by 7 percent in the time covered by the Brookings Center study, but Boston increased its stock of urbanized land by 47 percent. Pittsburgh lost roughly 8 percent of its metro residents, but increased urbanized land by 42 percent.

Clearly, such trends do not bode well for maintaining farmland in the Northeast. With the exception of Maine, each NEASDA state lost farmland from 1997 to 2002 as measured

by the national Census of Agriculture. The table at the top of the next page shows the comparative “land in farms” and total number of farms in each, as reported in the Census data released on June 3, 2004.

-6-

<b>State</b>	<b>Farms (1997)</b>	<b>Farms (2002)</b>	<b><u>Land in Farms</u> <u>(1997 in acres)</u></b>	<b><u>Land in Farms</u> <u>(2002 in acres)</u></b>
Connecticut	4,905	4,191	406,222	357,154
Delaware	2,671	2,391	589,107	540,080
Maine	7,404	7,196	1,313,066	1,369,768
Massachusetts	7,307	6,075	577,637	518,570
N. Hampshire	3,928	3,363	463,383	444,879
New Jersey	10,045	9,924	856,909	805,682
New York	38,264	37,255	7,788,241	7,660,969
Pennsylvania	60,222	58,105	7,819,648	7,745,336
Rhode Island	994	858	65,083	61,223
Vermont	7,063	6,571	1,315,315	1,244,909

Source: 2002 Census of Agriculture (USDA)

The chart clearly shows the toll that sprawl has taken on the farmlands of the Northeast, and just as clearly demonstrates the importance farmland preservation will play in the years to come if the region is to maintain its agricultural viability. Anyone who doubts that farmland can disappear virtually overnight need look only to the transformation of Southern New Jersey’s landscape from the 1970s through the mid-1990s. Taking a cue from the likes of builder Abraham Levitt (whose post-World War II South Jersey “Levittown” on former orchards became the township of Willingboro, population 35,000-plus) builders cut a swath through largely undeveloped farmlands to create towns such as Mount Laurel (pop. 40,221) Evesham (pop. 42,275) Cherry Hill (pop. 69,965) and Washington Township (pop. 47,114) all within the span of a few decades.

Northeastern states, however, aren't letting their farmland disappear without a fight. Thanks to sympathetic residents – many whose sole exposure to cows or goats has been through petting zoos – state, county and local governments have embarked upon ambitious farmland preservation programs, with the funds to accomplish them frequently

-7-

passed in ballot questions or referendums. Preserving farmland has become a full-time effort for many states, and an integral part of the land-use master plans in the Northeast. The advent of regional and even statewide planning has aided this effort, helping residents in urban and suburban areas recognize their role in improving the overall quality of life in their states by preserving farmland and open space.

Aggressive preservation programs have had a stabilizing effect on the average size of Northeast farms. Of the 10 NEASDA states, only New Jersey saw a decrease, and only by four acres, in the average size of farms between the 1997 and 2002 Census of Agriculture. The other states in that time saw varying increases in the average size of farms, with New Hampshire and Maine posting the largest gains, 14 and 13 acres, respectively. The following tables show the changes from 1997 to 2002 in the numbers of farms in various size categories, as well as comparing the NEASDA states to the nation as a whole.

**2002 Farm Size Data**

State	1-9 Acres	10-49 Acres	50-179 Acres	180-499 Acres	500-999 Acres	1K-1999 Acres	2000+ Acres	Average Size
Conn.	984	1,625	1,077	387	91	23	4	85 ac.
Del.	456	794	562	316	122	89	52	226 ac.
Maine	918	1,861	2,506	1,334	393	135	49	190 ac.
Mass.	1,429	2,217	1,673	594	129	30	3	85 ac.
N.H.	507	1,035	1,138	509	134	22	18	132 ac.
N.J.	2,511	4,481	1,959	629	228	99	17	81 ac.
N.Y.	2,959	8,359	13,474	8,977	2,457	812	217	206 ac.
Penna.	5,102	16,862	24,168	9,560	1,800	496	117	133 ac.

R.I.	208	305	271	63	6	4	1	71 ac.
Vt.	477	1,738	2,216	1,586	406	123	25	189 ac.
U.S.	179,346	563,772	658,695	388,617	179,447	103,007	74,426	441 ac.

Source: 2002 Census of Agriculture (USDA)

-8-

### **1997 Farm Size Data**

State	1-9 Acres	10-49 Acres	50-179 Acres	180-499 Acres	500-999 Acres	1K-1999 Acres	2000+ Acres	Average Size
Conn.	1,065	1,835	1,447	453	75	26	4	83 ac.
Del.	460	880	677	359	156	93	46	221 ac.
Maine	773	1,747	2,802	1,545	393	113	31	177 ac.
Mass.	1,791	2,608	2,124	636	118	26	4	79 ac.
N.H.	656	1,160	1,351	613	116	25	7	118 ac.
N.J.	2,576	4,307	2,042	766	240	92	22	85 ac.
N.Y.	3,102	7,723	14,085	9,897	2,567	721	169	204 ac.
Penna.	5,550	16,283	26,190	9,847	1,840	409	103	130 ac.
R.I.	258	369	286	66	13	1	1	65 ac.
Vt.	520	1,658	2,433	1,888	449	100	15	186 ac.
U.S.	205,390	530,902	692,489	427,215	179,447	103,007	74,426	431

Source: 2002 Census of Agriculture (USDA)

While per-farm size has increased or slightly decreased in the NEASDA states, overall land in farms for all of the states except Maine decreased, in some cases by substantial percentages, in the five years between surveys, as demonstrated in the following chart.

### **1997-2002 Land in Farms Data**

State	Land in Farms '97	Land in Farms '02	Decrease/Increase
Connecticut	406,222 acres	357,154 acres	(-) 49,068 acres
Delaware	589,107 acres	540,080 acres	(-) 49,027 acres
Maine	1,313,066 acres	1,369,768 acres	(+) 56,702 acres
Massachusetts	577,637 acres	518,570 acres	(-) 59,067 acres
New Hampshire	463,383 acres	444,879 acres	(-) 18,504 acres
New Jersey	856,909 acres	805,682 acres	(-) 51,227 acres
New York	7,788,241 acres	7,660,969 acres	(-) 127,272 acres

Pennsylvania	7,819,648 acres	7,745,336 acres	(-) 74,312 acres
Rhode Island	65,083 acres	61,223 acres	(-) 3,860 acres
Vermont	1,315,315 acres	1,244,909 acres	(-) 70,406 acres
United States	954,753,502 acres	938,279,056 acres	(-) 16,474,446 acres

Source: 2002 Census of Agriculture (USDA)

-9-

Clearly, the key to sustaining Northeastern agriculture in the coming years will be to derive more market value per acre out of the farms that remain. That will require a shift toward more flexibility in farming and more tailoring of what is grown to the demands of the regional market. In many ways, it is a tightrope act – preserving the existing agricultural industries in the region while also creating a culture of innovation to meet the changing demands of consumers.

### **Emerging Opportunities**

Seizing market opportunities means both strengthening existing markets and cultivating new ones. Compared to other parts of the country, this is even more a challenge for Northeastern farmers, in part because the demographics of the Northeast have shifted dramatically in recent years. According to the U.S. Department of Commerce, five of the 10 NEASDA states – New York, New Jersey, Delaware, Connecticut and Massachusetts, in that order – are in the Top-25 states for minority populations. Clearly, even those NEASDA states where the minority population is low – Maine, Vermont and New Hampshire have the three lowest population percentages of minorities in the nation – are in proximity to the states where new market demands are being created by growing ethnic populations. While the diversity of the region may seem daunting at first, it will help agriculture to look at the population mosaic as more of an opportunity than an obstacle.

Already, changes in agriculture have been brought to bear as a result of the shifting demographic. One of those changes has been the increased importance of goats and sheep, both for their dairy and meat value. Vermont's Small Ruminant Dairy Project offers assistance to dairy sheep and goat farmers as they navigate through the ruminant industry's infancy. The demand for goat meat is growing throughout the region, as Muslim and other new immigrants bring with them their taste for the meat.

Expanding Asian and Asian-Indian populations in parts of the Northeast are creating new demand for produce like okra, eggplant, bitter melon, opo squash and daikon radishes.

This changing population of the Northeast is but one area that presents an opportunity for agricultural growth and new marketing vistas. Another is the prevalence of home computer use by Northeast residents. The urbanized character of the region has brought with it a greater reliance on home computers to do everything from banking to ordering

-11-

take-out food. The USDA's Agricultural Marketing Service has recognized that the same opportunity exists for direct marketing of agricultural products and has created an entire "how-to" section on the subject on its web site at:

[www.ams.usda.gov/directmarketing/internet%20marketingf.pdf](http://www.ams.usda.gov/directmarketing/internet%20marketingf.pdf)

Farmers need not create their own web site to take advantage of this new opportunity. They can, if they choose, simply find directories on which to be listed that direct customers to their products, or employ e-mail accounts to communicate directly with customers. Women, whom surveys show continue to be the primary food shoppers in U.S. households, spend more online in a given time (measured in July 1999) than men, according to the AMS web site, with the highest percentage (25 percent) spending between \$100 and \$499 in that month. The web site's statistics also showed that a combined 55 percent of people said they shopped on the Internet because of the convenience of shopping from home (30 percent) and the 24-hour availability of online shopping (25 percent). With people's daily schedules, especially in the urbanized Northeast, becoming more hectic, and time at a premium, both of those factors indicate that online marketing of agricultural products could have a promising future. Considering the success of previous direct-marketing strategies, such as community farmers markets, the possibilities for online success appear worth the investigation.

Already a going concern in many areas of the Northeast, supplying raw produce to nearby food processors also provides a growth area for marketing farm products. The confluence of hectic schedules with the desire to eat healthier has led consumers to create a booming demand for pre-packaged, value-added produce. Just 10 years ago, you

wouldn't find much of a selection of pre-packaged salad greens in the average supermarket's produce aisle. Today, multiple varieties of a number of brands like Ready Pac, Dole and Fresh Express fairly dominate the greens in the produce section, some even coming with other salad fixings such as dressing right in the package. Full-blown marketing techniques have taken hold in this area, with such items as baby carrots

-12-

prepackaged with ranch dressing in individual containers with Bugs Bunny's picture on the front. The next expected development in this area is the ability to slice and prepackaged fruits that previously would have been seen as off-limits because they would turn brown after slicing. Food processors are employing new technology to eliminate that problem, positioning fruit to experience the same kind of boom that salad greens have seen over the past decade.

One of the most fundamental changes in the Northeast agricultural market has already hit its stride. Horticulture and floriculture have blossomed as the past three decades of massive development have seemingly put a home improvement store or a garden center just about every mile. Residential development also has resulted in a boom in golf courses, with all of their attendant landscaping needs. From the serious garden club member to the new homeowner eager to express his or her own green vision, the region's residents have created massive demand for plants, flowers and all other necessary landscaping staples. In the 2002 Census of Agriculture, Pennsylvania and New Jersey ranked third and tenth, respectively, in the nation in the nursery, greenhouse and floriculture category in terms of square footage under glass or other protection. Pennsylvania and New York were ranked sixth and eighth nationally in bedding/garden plants, cut flowers and cut florist greens for square footage under glass or other protection.

Being, for the most part, seaboard states, the Northeast also can find great opportunity in the bounty of the sea. Looking at aquaculture in fresh new ways and making it more a part of what defines agriculture will open new marketing doors for the NEASDA states.

To be sure, the amounts of seafood harvested from the Atlantic Ocean and its bays are already staggering. What remains to be accomplished is the integration of aquaculture and agriculture as equal parts of the whole. In New Jersey, a separate and distinct web page connected to the “Jersey Fresh” program is under construction that will highlight local seafood.

-13-

Innovative partnerships geared toward meeting the changing demands of consumers and the less predictable effects of nature have been applied to aquaculture as well. In Connecticut, farm-raised shellfish including oysters and hard clams, were valued at more than \$11 million in 2002. Disease devastated the oyster industry in 1997, resulting in mortalities that approached 76 percent, according to the Connecticut Sea Grant Aquaculture Extension. Less than two years later, the Extension reported, the fishing industry was hit by a lobster fishery collapse. The Sea Grant Extension worked to help develop new gear and species for culture in Long Island Sound, including long-line approaches that were successful in both New Hampshire and Maine. University Extension-led experiments into new species for cultivation include blue mussels, razor clams, tilapia, red claw crayfish and nori (seaweed).

Yet another trend that bodes well for the Northeast is the increasing demand in the agritourism business. A June 8, 2004 MSNBC report featured Pennsylvania, Vermont, New York and New Jersey as examples of states where a concerted effort is being made to lure visitors to farms. Whether it was a day of pick-your-own activities or a full week in which urbanites or suburbanites spent time reconnecting with the land, the hospitality of farmers has become a new niche by which sustainable farming can be created.

In the Northeast, where farms aren't far from large population centers, the idea of “getting away” and spending a day or a week surrounded by rural landscape is becoming more and more appealing to those tired of fighting traffic, noise and air pollution. While the federal government does not yet track agritourism separately to determine exactly

how much is generated by the practice nationwide, Vermont has begun tallying numbers, and puts the state's agritourism income at \$19.5 million for 2002, a \$10.5 million increase from just two years before, according to the MSNBC report. Massachusetts reports a \$31 million agritourism business as of 2002, up from \$20 million in 1997. Gary Schubert, a Pittsburgh-area farmer interviewed for the MSNBC report, "People from Washington or New York, they just want to get out of the city for a while.

-14-

We have a ball. Some just want to get on a tractor or roll a ball of hay or just shovel manure." Mr. Schubert told MSNBC that he annually welcomes about 300 guests, who at first go through withdrawal symptoms from not having cell phones and satellite TV, but gradually relax by hiking wooded trails or riding in a paddle boat."

### **Northeast Success Stories**

What follows are some examples of how NEASDA states have already begun adapting to the evolution in agriculture. Some are stories of working with existing industries to better position those familiar products. Others show how aggressively pursuing new markets or creating new ways to draw people into existing markets have paid off in increased demand for locally grown products. Still others underscore the value of working with non-traditional groups to bring an increased awareness of agriculture to non-agrarian populations.

Because Northeastern states have felt the pinch of development encroaching on agriculture more quickly and more profoundly than their counterparts in the Midwest, South and West, these states have been forced to think in different ways about how to sustain agriculture. Out of that hardship came innovation and, likely, a better positioning to meet the changing demands of consumers and to brighten the outlook for producers.

**Connecticut** – Protecting farmland from development in the state with nation’s highest farmland value is the emphasis of an effort through which agriculture officials speak to both “protecting land and saving money.” A free guide from the American Farmland Trust, available through the state’s Department of Agriculture, helps landowners, land trusts and communities identify and pursue options to avoid the pressures of development. With the premise that promoting local food processors is good for local

growers, the Department also publishes a specialty foods guide and provides technical and marketing assistance for small and mid-sized food production businesses in the state.

-16-

**Delaware** – NEASDA’s southernmost state has stepped up in a big way to a leadership position in farmland preservation. The “First State” leads the nation in percentage of total land in farms permanently preserved through the purchase of agricultural conservation easements. The state also leads the nation in number of acres preserved per capita and in dollars spent on preservation per capita. Delaware also has been aggressive in aiding the siting of a biodiesel facility in Clayton. The private Mid-Atlantic Biodiesel Inc. facility has been touted by Governor Ruth Ann Minner as both a way of improving air quality and, more importantly for agriculture, a new marketing opportunity for the state’s soybean industry. The plan is to build a 5 million gallon per year production facility that would consume vast quantities of soybean, the state’s number-one crop.

**Maine** – The state whose agricultural marketing slogan urges “Get real, Get Maine,” has gotten real about marketing in many ways. In addition to increasing farmers markets by 30 percent from 2002 to 2003 (from 54 to 70), the state also has introduced programs to assist organic food processors (by providing financial assistance to cover up to 75 percent of their organic certification costs) expose more of the public directly to agriculture through “Open Farm” days and boost the fleece/fiber market with a “Fiber Frolic” day featuring such attractions as a Llama Drill Team. Agricultural officials also oversee the Maine Senior FarmShare Program, which provides fresh, unprocessed, locally grown produce for free to low-income seniors. Based on a \$100 share between farmers and individual seniors or farmers and agencies distributing food to low-income seniors, farms are paid in the spring for produce they commit to providing later in the season.

-17-

**Massachusetts** – The commonwealth is a prime example of the importance of fostering the greenhouse and nursery industry as that segment grows in market share throughout the NEASDA states. For 2002, greenhouse and nursery products accounted for nearly 35 percent of the agricultural commodities produced in Massachusetts (as measured by cash receipts). The Department of Agricultural Resources also has established a Farm Viability Enhancement Program and business training courses. In these programs, agricultural, economic and environmental consultants work with farmers to draw up plans that will boost the producer’s bottom line through diversification, direct marketing and value-added initiatives. Direct marketing sales through farmers markets, pick-your-owns and Community Sponsored Agriculture farms accounted for \$31 million in sales in 2002, up from \$20 million in 1997.. Currently on the drawing board is a plan to establish a year-round farmers market in Boston, the third-largest city in the Northeast.

**New Hampshire** – The New Hampshire Coalition for Sustaining Agriculture, begun in 1994, has reached out to include groups that haven't traditionally been part of the dialogue on preserving farm operations. Groups such as historic preservation societies and restaurant associations have been brought into the fold to lend their support for, and ideas about, sustaining the industry. The coalition's vision statements includes the line, "The future of agriculture in New Hampshire depends on profitable farms that can nurture families and be passed on to future generations." Among its recent efforts, the group has published materials designed to educate community planners about the importance of integrating agriculture into their plans. Another initiative, "Marketing U," brings together marketing, business, communications and food industry specialists to develop workable strategies for value-added products beyond the farm gate.

**New Jersey** – As of 2003, the Garden State is now preserving farmland at twice the rate it is losing it. With an average loss of about 10,000 acres per year, the state in 2003 preserved more than 20,000 acres, as the administration of Governor James E. McGreevey stepped up the efforts that had begun in the 1990s. The agricultural community in the state also is making good use of community farmers markets, opening 10 new ones in 2003 and seven more in 2004, bringing the total to 62. With a Federal State Marketing Improvement Program grant, the Department of Agriculture is examining the location of various ethnic concentrations around the diverse state. That information will be cross-indexed with farmers and community markets to better target produce grown with the areas of demand for those items, as well as encouraging farmers who already attend certain markets to grow products that are more in demand due to ethnic diets.

**New York** – Molding the next generation of consumers into those who favor locally grown farm products and healthy eating is the goal of several programs highlighted in the Empire State. School districts are encouraged to work with food suppliers or directly with farmers to purchase New York-grown products for their menus. Schools recently honored for their participation included events such as a Harvest Fair (where students shucked corn and milked a mechanical cow) and a School Garden, where students added to the locally grown foods by harvesting some of their own. Taking the concept beyond elementary and secondary level, food system stakeholders have forged relationships with the college in the state. Cornell University's Farm to School Program helps to develop strategies and disseminate information to boost school districts' participation in fostering healthy eating of locally grown foods.

**Pennsylvania** – When it comes to farmland preservation, it's hard to argue with the \$40 million included in the FY 2005 state budget. The money is part of a plan to preserve 43,000 acres, representing 375 farms, over the next four years as part of Governor Edward G. Rendell's Quality of Life Initiative. So where will all the products from those farms be sold? Pennsylvania's Agriculture Department has joined with other state agencies and officials to launch a program aimed at attracting supermarkets to underserved urban and rural areas of the state. Of a \$1.135 billion economic development program, \$150 million targets agricultural and tourism projects. Under the agriculture portion, supermarkets will be eligible for planning grants, loans or loan guarantees. The grants and loans will target projects that benefit the local economy or the well-being of a specific neighborhood.

**Rhode Island** – NEASDA's (and the nation's) smallest state made a big push in the direct marketing arena. Before 1990, farmers markets declined to the point where there were only two left in the entire state. Using a \$36,000 Federal State Marketing Improvement Program grant obtained in 1989, and another for \$72,000 obtained in 1996, agriculture officials were able to spur interest among farm groups to the point where farmers markets have made a comeback and now number 20 across the states. While the bulk, sixteen, are privately run by various farm organizations, the remainder, four, are run by the Division of Agriculture and are held in state parks. Measured by how many customers and farmers return every year to take part in the program, organizers said, the markets are a hit. In the 1997 NASS survey, Rhode Island ranked first nationally in value of agricultural products sold directly for human consumption per farm.

**Vermont** – Perhaps no NEASD state is better positioned to capitalize on the growing agritourism trade than Vermont. Already a rural tourism destination (thanks in part to the indelible images in a Frank Sinatra classic) with four-star hotels, inns, and bed and breakfasts, the state is now actively promoting family farms as stay-over options through the Vermont Farms! Organization. Sleigh-riding through fresh snow and snowshoeing across vast expanses of farmland are just two of the lures to visitors from nearby population centers like New York and Boston. Vermont also is well-placed to be a leader in building larger markets across the nation’s northern border. A recent conference of agricultural leaders from Vermont and Canada included a tour of the Intervale Foundation in Burlington, a site reclaimed for agricultural demonstration and networking between new farmers.

## **Conclusion**

The states that make up NEASDA have, indeed, seen their share of threats to agricultural stability in recent years. However, by working both harder and smarter, agricultural interests have begun to turn the tide and regain their rightful place as benefactors to the quality of life in the Northeast. Disrespected for years in favor of hot real estate markets and the chase for ratables, farm owners now find themselves growing more treasured as vital parts of an integrated planning process that sees the value of keeping farmers on the farm.

As an organization, NEASDA must commit itself to pursuing the principles that will most benefit a three-pronged approach of:

- 1) Preserving farmland
- 2) Creating new markets and strengthening existing ones to continue making farming worthwhile and
- 3) Equipping the next generation, as well as welcoming new people, to enter the industry with the same passion and dedication that previous generations have shown.

The examples cited in this report provide the basis for reinvigorated marketing efforts and innovative approaches to sustainability that can keep agriculture strong in the Northeast for decades to come. By pulling together as a region and working to enhance those efforts being made individually at the state level, NEASDA can play the leading role in the next chapter in Northeastern farming history.

## **Acknowledgments**

The following are gratefully acknowledged for their contributions to this report.

Northeastern Association of State Departments of Agriculture

Communication Officers of State Departments of Agriculture

Connecticut Department of Agriculture

Delaware Department of Agriculture

Maine Department of Agriculture, Food and Rural Resources

Massachusetts Department of Agricultural Resources

New Hampshire Department of Agriculture

New Jersey Department of Agriculture

New York Department of Agriculture and Markets

Pennsylvania Department of Agriculture

Rhode Island Division of Agriculture, Department of Environmental Management

Vermont Department of Agriculture, Food and Markets

New England Agriculture Innovation Center

New Hampshire Coalition for Sustaining Agriculture

Connecticut Sea Grant Aquaculture Extension

United States Department of Agriculture

National Agricultural Statistics Service

United States Census Bureau