

Agricultural Stewardship Association

Strategic Plan, 2020 – 2025

Mission

This strategic plan for 2020 – 2025 reaffirms our mission to protect our community’s working farms and forests, connect people to the land, and promote a vibrant future for agriculture and forestry in our region.

Our 50-Year Vision

As a nonprofit, community-based accredited land trust, we make the promise of perpetuity: protecting conserved lands forever and supporting the people who make these lands productive. Therefore, our vision of success must span multiple generations. In fifty years, we know our work will have been successful if...

- Our region has a vibrant agricultural economy producing a variety of food, forestry, and energy products.
- The acreage we have conserved ensures farm viability, providing food for our rural communities and regional urban centers.
- Farms are resilient in the face of changes in the economy, climate, food distribution systems, etc.
- Future generations of farmers are trained, supported, and successful.
- People understand and value local agriculture and forestry, and its role in building and sustaining local communities.
- We continue to be effective, proactive, financially stable, and well-supported.

Our Framework for Impact

To achieve our vision, ASA will implement the following interconnected goals.

- A. Conserve Land** by protecting a significant amount of high quality and diverse farms, forests and woodlands to maintain the agricultural viability and character of the area we serve.
- B. Support Farmers** to help the businesses of established and emerging farmers remain or become economically viable.
- C. Engage People** to demonstrate the value of agriculture, forestry, and land conservation by linking it to people’s daily lives.
- D. Sustain ASA** by creating a durable, adaptive, well-run organization with broad community support.

A. Conserve Land

Protect a significant amount of high quality and diverse farms, forests and woodlands to maintain the agricultural viability and character of the area we serve.

As a conservation land trust, our core function is to protect farm and forest land using conservation easements, land acquisition and affordability tools. With continuing development and ongoing economic challenges faced by farmers, we need to expand our protection efforts. We will follow the criteria defined in ASA’s 2015 Farmland Conservation Plan and in a future update to be informed by this strategic plan.

Objective	Actions	Benchmarks	FY20	FY21	FY22	FY23	FY24
1. Conservation Priorities: Conserve viable and diverse agricultural and forest lands.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Update ASA’s land conservation plan with revised land selection criteria that examines and emphasizes diverse conservation values, including soil quality, environmental benefits, community benefits, and scenic and/or historic landscapes. 	Completed land conservation plan.		■	■		
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Deepen partnerships to support conservation priorities, including community conservation projects. 	At least one property per year conserved with significant partner engagement.	■	■	■	■	■
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Reemphasize and internalize forests and woodlands as a core part of ASA’s conservation mission through planning, marketing, outreach, and organizational practices. 	Inclusion in land conservation plan; one article per newsletter and at least four e-blasts per year that feature ASA’s forest and woodland protection work; add acres of forest and woodlands to project descriptions and other materials.	■	■	■	■	■

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Seek funds directed to woodland conservation and climate resilience</i> without depleting farmland protection resources in the process. 	<p>Research and apply for at least one relevant grant per year. Lobby for additional funding dedicated to the protection of forested lands.</p>	■	■	■	■	■
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Objective	Action	Benchmark	FY20	FY21	FY22	FY23	FY24
2. Climate Resilience: Address farm viability in a changing climate	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Advance organizational climate resilience strategies</i> through discussions, message development, and an examination of climate inclusion in conservation prioritization 	Complete climate conversations and write perception assessment; develop climate strategies and messaging; updated land conservation plan.	■	■	■		
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Inventory climate resilience actions</i> in our community and publicly acknowledge agricultural and soil health activities that are climate positive. 	One press release or article in ASA’s newsletter per quarter and at least four e-blasts and social media posts per year that feature climate resilience activities.	■	■	■	■	■
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Communicate the linkage between climate resilience and economic viability</i> of farms and forests by emphasizing and communicating connections, resources, partnerships, and opportunities. 	Include in regular communications plan and educational and outreach programs.		■	■	■	■
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Incorporate climate resilience in to easement language</i> starting with examples from other land trusts. 	Complete research; test with landowners; start incorporating by 2021.	■	■	■	■	■

B. Support Farmers

Support established and emerging farmers to help their businesses remain or become economically viable.

It is an essential and expanding part of our mission to support those who work the land to develop successful, sustainable businesses that can be passed along to the next generation.

Objective	Actions	Benchmarks	FY20	FY21	FY22	FY23	FY24
3. Farm Viability: Facilitate networks and resources to make farms more economically viable.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Strengthen partnerships and connect farmers with farm service organizations, such as Cornell Cooperative Extension, Hudson Valley Agricultural Development Corporation and Farm Credit East. 	Refer at least three farmers per year to these programs. Create or deliver at least two co-branded programs per year.		■	■	■	■
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Support county-led efforts by assisting with the implementation of agricultural and farmland protection plans. 	Serve on committees to help implement the plans.	■	■	■	■	■
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Continue programs and workshops focused on farm and business viability. 	Present at least two programs per year; one in each of our counties.	■	■	■	■	■
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Provide conservation landowners with greater access to resources and networks as part of the yearly monitoring process. Connect with relevant service providers and peer farmers for mentoring and support. 	Create and distribute a resource and contact list to handout and post on ASA's website.		■	■	■	■

Objective	Actions	Benchmarks	FY20	FY21	FY22	FY23	FY24
4. Land Access and Farm Succession: Strengthen resources and staff capacity to facilitate land access.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Link farmers to local service providers (through referrals, programs, and resource access),</i> such as American Farmland Trust, Hudson Valley Farmlink Network and National Coalition of Young Farmers. 	Refer at least three to five farmers per year to these programs. Create or deliver at least one co-branded program per year. Increase accessibility (such as placing link to Hudson Valley Farmlink Network on ASAs website) and research ways of reaching land-impooverished communities.	■	■	■	■	■
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Develop land access workshops and programs</i> through strategic grant writing and fundraising 	Research and apply for at least one relevant grant per year.		■	■	■	■
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Consider and promote land affordability tools</i> such as ground leases and Pre-emptive Purchase Rights (PPR). 	Research sites and projects suitable to various models/tools; seek additional funds and partners to increase the use of affordability tools.		■	■	■	■

C. Engage People

Engage decision-makers and the broader community to demonstrate the value of agriculture, forestry, and land conservation by linking it to people's daily lives.

The value of farms and forests is determined, in part, by how the community values them. To do our work effectively over multiple generations, we need informed public policies backed up by the support of the community. Without long-term, strategic community engagement, we can't deliver our long-term mission.

Objective	Actions	Benchmarks	FY20	FY21	FY22	FY23	FY24
5. Public Policy Advocacy: ASA will help shape policy at various levels to support working lands and conservation.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Evaluate existing advocacy strategy by identifying our role, process, risk assessment strategy and policy partners. 	Evaluation completed.	■	■			
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Assess and engage with public policy needs annually; consider our position, role, available staff time, and partnerships (Land Trust Alliance, American Farmland Trust, Farm Bureau, etc.) 	Annually assess public policy efforts and engage in up to two advocacy projects at any given time, while capitalizing on partnerships.	■	■	■	■	■
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Expand municipal government outreach and education, targeting places we've never worked and engaging with them on a regular basis. 	Engage with up to three municipal governments per year, including one community new to ASA each year. Devote a section in the land conservation plan on the positive aspects of farmland conservation on municipalities and school districts.	■	■	■	■	■
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Train volunteer policy advocates, including board members, and prepare resources for our supporters to participate in advocacy on our behalf. 	Volunteers trained and resources provided.			■	■	■

Objective	Actions	Benchmarks	FY20	FY21	FY22	FY23	FY24
6. Community Engagement: Create and expand ways to engage diverse communities.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Engage geographically, generationally, and economically diverse communities</i> through innovative outreach. 	Research other nonprofits and develop ideas and actions.	■	■	■		
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Identify community needs</i> as defined by the community; develop and present programs to address those needs. 	Present at least ten programs per year.		■	■	■	■
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Develop partnerships for working lands programming</i> with other farming and woodland organizations such as 4H, Future Farmers of America, Soulfire Farm, New York Forest Owners Association, National Coalition of Young Farmers. 	Of the 10 to 12 programs per year, develop and present at least four per year with partners.		■	■	■	■
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Pursue opportunities to own land and/or establish a partner farm</i>, in addition to the already established Cambridge Community Forest. 	Create criteria; explore options; pursue options for owning land. Consider establishing an education/demonstration location on an active farm.			■	■	■

D. Sustain ASA

Sustain ASA by creating a durable, adaptive, well-run organization with broad community support.

To deliver on our perpetuity promise, we must create a resilient organization with diverse funding; a strong staff, engaged board, and a deep pool of volunteers; and a comprehensive succession plan that covers all aspects of leadership.

Objective	Actions	Benchmarks	FY20	FY21	FY22	FY23	FY24
7. Financial Strength: Grow the budget and diversify income to ensure financial stability.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Create financial projections and set fundraising goals.</i> 	Income and expense budgets for next three fiscal years.	■				
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Increase Board engagement in fundraising</i> through direct donations and donor development. 	100% board giving; all board members engaged in at least one fundraising task (prospecting, cultivating, asking, thanking)		■	■	■	■
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Expand work with foundations</i> through increased identification, cultivation, and solicitation. 	Proposals submitted to at least three new foundations per year.	■	■	■	■	■
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Examine fundraising approaches and expand development programs</i> (major gifts, planned giving, and monthly giving) to deepen donor engagement and increase giving. 	Fundraising model created, tested, and adopted; donor and giving targets established for all programs.	■	■	■	■	■

Objective	Actions	Benchmarks	FY20	FY21	FY22	FY23	FY24
8. Organizational Planning: Build organizational capacity through human resources and planning.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Develop and implement the ED succession plan</i> in preparation for executive director retirement. 	Consensus reached on process and timeline; appointment of a succession committee; publicly announce the new ED and complete the transition.	■	■	■	■	
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Create a risk management plan</i> by assessing mission, operational, and environmental risk and developing of preventative and contingency strategies to manage risk. 	Risk management plan completed, including provisions for cross-training.		■	■		
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Evaluate and emphasize recruitment, retention, and leadership activities.</i> 	Analyze and update board recruitment criteria; proactively cultivate board, staff, and volunteer leaders; develop advancement policy; select board leadership positions at least one year in advance.	■	■			
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Add staff capacity</i> to address workloads and expand our impact. 	Create a five-year strategic matrix to map growth of staff positions, build staff accordingly.		■	■	■	■
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Invest in staff benefits, compensation, and training</i> to help attract and retain staff. 	Yearly growth in compensation; turnover of no more than one staff member per year; provide at least one training and/or professional development opportunity each, per year, for staff and board.	■	■	■	■	■
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Strengthen the volunteer program</i> through evaluation and goal-setting. 	Evaluation complete; goals and benchmarks established.	■	■			