



Land Link Programs in the Northeast US: A Program Assessment and Lessons Learned

**by Leslie Pillen and Clare Hinrichs
February 2014**

Rural Development Paper no. 53



LAND LINK PROGRAMS IN THE NORTHEAST US:

A PROGRAM ASSESSMENT
& LESSONS LEARNED



LESLIE PILLEN
CLARE HINRICHS
THE PENNSYLVANIA STATE UNIVERSITY
FEBRUARY 2014

3 WHY STUDY LAND LINK?

STUDY METHODS 3

3 WHAT DO LAND LINK PROGRAMS DO?

WHAT RESOURCES DO PROGRAMS USE? 4

6 WHAT ARE PARTICIPANTS' NEEDS AND GOALS?

WHAT ARE THE OUTCOMES OF LAND LINK PROGRAMS? 7

8 HOW DO PARTICIPANTS RATE THEIR EXPERIENCE IN A LAND LINK PROGRAM?

LESSONS LEARNED 12

THE GOAL

This report summarizes the activities and outcomes of land link programs in the Northeast US, and provides key recommendations to existing and new programs. Land link programs focus on issues related to farmland access, transfer and succession for the current and coming generations of US farmers. They connect farmland seekers to land and land owners, and may connect participants to resources that prepare them to make good land access and use decisions. This report is based on interviews with Northeastern land link program staff and a survey of seekers and owners who participate in these programs.

HIGHLIGHTS

- Upwards of 1000 seekers and owners join Northeast land link programs each year
- 61% of seekers and owners are somewhat or very satisfied with the services they received from land link
- Both seekers and owners often need considerable support to find each other and to make good farmland access and use decisions

WHAT IS A LAND LINK PROGRAM?

A land link program is defined here as a program that connects farmland seekers (aspiring, beginning or established farmers) to farmland owners (farmers, non-farming land owners, or public and institutional land owners), and/or connects participants to services that support land access and use decisions. Services may include land listing, matching, education, technical assistance and mediation. A match is made when a seeker and owner establish a lease, purchase or other arrangement to access farmland.

WHY STUDY LAND LINK?

Increasingly, people are concerned about the need to help beginning farmers access farmland, to reverse the trend of a declining US farm population, to promote greater local food production, and to support aging farmers in developing plans for farm transfer to the next generation of farmers. The first US land link program was established in 1990, and by 2013 at least 48 land link programs operate in 30 states across the US to address these concerns. It is important to understand what these programs have accomplished so far in order to address future challenges and opportunities.

STUDY METHODS

This study was an MS research project in Rural Sociology at Penn State University from 2012-2013. It focused on the land link programs located in the Northeast US: Connecticut, Delaware, Maine, Maryland, Massachusetts, New Hampshire, New Jersey, New York, Pennsylvania, Rhode Island and Vermont. There are 19 programs in this region, and 17 contributed to this study. Key land link staff were interviewed between November 2012 and March 2013. Each staff person also completed a questionnaire about their program's budget, staffing and participants. An online survey was distributed to the participants of 10 Northeast land link programs from March-April, 2013. One hundred and four farmland owners and 271 farmland seekers who are or have been part of a land link program in the Northeast responded to the survey (24% response rate). Selected results from the interviews and survey are outlined in this report. Quotations throughout the report are from staff interviews.

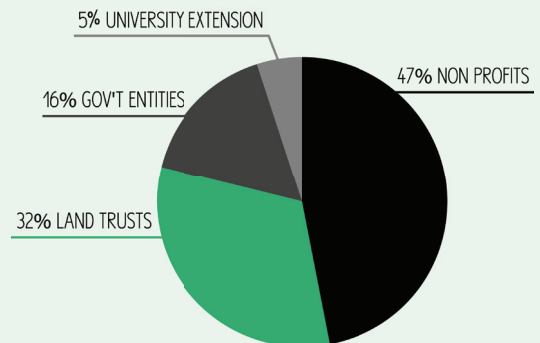
WHAT DO LAND LINK PROGRAMS DO?

Land link programs offer diverse services, depending on purpose, resource availability and program priorities. Some offer only listing services, while others conduct site visits, hold workshops and provide in-depth consultations to participants. These diverse program configurations make it challenging to present summary data across programs. However, aside from listing services, three key categories of land link program focus include screening, strengthening and sharing work.

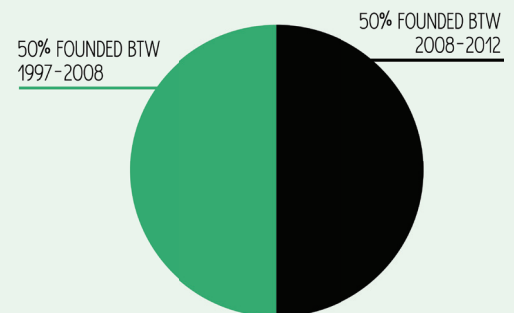
SCREENING work includes two facets: 1) evaluating participants' readiness for listing or contacting listings (seekers for farming

OVERVIEW: NORTHEAST LAND LINK PROGRAMS

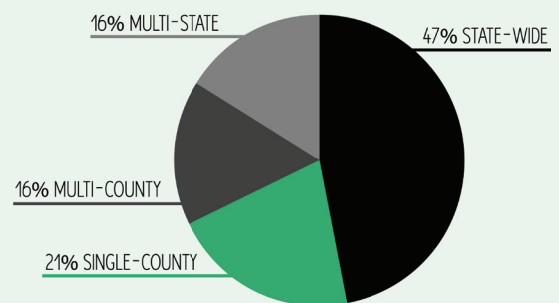
HOW ARE PROGRAMS ORGANIZED?



HOW LONG HAVE THEY BEEN IN OPERATION?



WHAT SIZE AREAS DO THEY SERVE?



HOW MANY PEOPLE PARTICIPATE?

- 10-30 seekers join most programs per year (2 programs have 100-150 seekers join per year)
- 10-30 owners join most programs per year
- 8 have more seekers than owners
- 5 have more owners than seekers
- 3 have about equal numbers of seekers & owners

HOW MANY MATCHES HAVE THEY MADE?

- Over 250 matches have been made by 16 programs

experience and owners for their land's suitability for farming), and 2) identifying further support services participants need. Some programs limit participation to seekers with several years of experience in farming, while others allow anyone to access their list and contact prospective matches, but may limit additional staff time devoted to inexperienced seekers. Screening methods may include questions on an application form, intake interviews and occasionally site visits to evaluate a property (not widely recommended by staff due to the time-intensive nature of this work).

STRENGTHENING work incorporates services that help participants develop and clarify their own land access goals, needs and expectations. Both seekers and owners frequently need help identifying and elaborating on many aspects of land access and use goals before communicating with a potential or intended match. Programs may do this work through extensive questions on the application form, individualized consultations, site visits, topical workshops, and other educational resources. This work may happen before or after a prospective match has been identified.

“OUR ROLE IS REALLY TO ASK THE HARD QUESTIONS THAT MIGHT BE UNCOMFORTABLE FOR A FARMER TO ASK AND ON THE FLIP-SIDE TO ASK THE QUESTIONS OF THE FARMER THAT MIGHT NOT OCCUR TO THE LAND OWNER OR BE UNCOMFORTABLE FOR THEM TO ASK.”

SHARING work includes services that support participants through the process of communicating their goals, needs and expectations to a potential match. This work may include facilitating kitchen table meetings between a seeker and owner, and helping participants prepare business plans, resumes and personal references as written and formalized forms of communication. Coaching in farm succession planning is also sharing work, but only three programs provide this service.

EXAMPLES OF SERVICES OFFERED AND WORK COMPLETED BY INDIVIDUAL PROGRAMS:

- 20-30 site visits made per year
- 4-8 workshops held per year
- 10-50 land owners attend a workshop
- 3-4 mixers or meet and greet events held per year
- 70-100 hours of contact time provided per client (over several months)
- 5-7 phone calls about land link received per day
- 1 e-newsletter sent per month

LISTING SERVICES

Most, but not all, programs incorporate a land listing service. Application forms are typically used to collect information for this service. However, list quality can be challenging as not all

participants know how to “sell themselves.” Some participants are vague or unsure about their goals. They may omit key details in the application, or even inflate the description of what they have to offer. It is important to plan for how to manage the list and address complaints about list accuracy.

Keeping listings updated can also be challenging. Participants often do not tell the program when they have secured a match or when they are no longer interested in finding one. Programs should consider making listings expire to avoid this issue, but also make it easy for people to renew their listing.

“WE WERE JUST POSTING [APPEALING PROPERTIES] RIGHT INTO OUR BLOG, BUT WE REALIZED THEY DIDN'T HAVE A LOT OF VALUE IF OWNERS REALLY HADN'T THOUGHT THROUGH WHAT THEY WERE DOING.”

Owners do not reach out to seekers via lists as often as seekers reach out to owners, so lists of seekers may not be a good time investment for programs to maintain. In the survey, over 60% of owners said they had contacted NO seekers, whereas over 50% of seekers said they had contacted TWO OR MORE owners. However, an application form for seekers can still be useful for initial screening to determine preparedness and additional goal strengthening and sharing needs.

Each program must decide who is eligible to submit or post a listing, and what types of arrangements qualify for the program. For example, one program only allows land to be posted for strict agricultural purposes. Some programs also list internships, farm work and farm management opportunities, which can be helpful to address gaps in farming experience that seekers may have.

WHAT RESOURCES DO PROGRAMS USE?

Land link programs rely on a variety of financial, human and technological resources to carry out program activities and meet program objectives. This section provides an overview of common and creative strategies that land link programs in the Northeast US use to acquire and configure these needed resources. The key inputs discussed here include funding, staffing, partners and technology.

“IT TAKES A LOT OF RESOURCES. IT TAKES TIME AND IT TAKES AN EMOTIONAL COMMITMENT ON THE PART OF THE FARM FAMILY, AND IT TAKES AT LEAST ONE ADVISOR AND OFTEN MORE THAN ONE SPECIALIST.”

FUNDING

“LAND LINK PROGRAMS ARE NOTORIOUSLY HARD TO FUND BECAUSE THEY INVOLVE SO MUCH CAPACITY AND THERE ARE RELATIVELY VERY FEW MATCHES THAT OCCUR.”

Securing funding for land link programs can be challenging. Primary expenses include staffing, travel for site visits and workshops, and website creation and maintenance. Programs' annual budgets range from under \$10,000 to over \$100,000. Some have no specific program budget. Funding sources include state funding, grants, a fee for services, individual donations, website sponsors or ads (underwriters), or a combination thereof. All sources can be challenging to sustain over time. There is no exact correlation between budget size and outcomes realized, although larger budgets usually allow programs to offer more services. See Hubbard (2006) for further discussion on how programs configure services based on various budget sizes.

“IF YOU WANT TO HAVE ANY STATS YOU HAVE TO SPEND.”

STAFFING

Most programs are managed by staff people who work less than full time for the land link program. Some are part-time staff, but others are at or near full-time yet have other responsibilities within the organization that also require their time. Most staff devote between 10 and 20 hours per week to land link work, although three people work less than five hours per week and four work full-time on land link. The number of hours spent on land link roughly corresponds to the size of each program's budget and the number of services offered.

Activities that typically occupy staff time include participant recruitment, data entry, hosting events and consulting with individual participants. Programs that offer more and more complex services (such as individualized consultations or farm succession planning) require more staff time and expertise.

Staffing changes over time can make it more difficult to maintain partnerships and program continuity, and some newer staff said they struggled to develop new policies and procedures due to a prior lack of record-keeping. Nine staff people entered their position in 2011 or 2012, and 7 started between 2001 and 2009.

Staff expertise shapes program activities. Needed skills and knowledge depend on each program's purpose and design, but a lack of expertise on staff can limit the variety and quality of services offered. Staff training, contracting with area experts and developing strategic partnerships are ways some programs address existing gaps in staff skills or knowledge.

KEY STAFF SKILLS AND KNOWLEDGE:

- 1 Soft skills
 - Interpersonal skills: listening, mediation, negotiation
 - Outreach
- 2 Farming knowledge and skills
 - Networking
 - Knowledge of resources needed
 - Site evaluations: soil testing, water quality, condition of structures, etc.
 - Familiarity with the local farm community
- 3 Knowledge about land access strategies
 - Technical skills and knowledge
 - Geographic information systems (GIS)
 - Business planning and risk assessment
 - Real estate law
 - Accounting
 - Land planning

“IT REALLY IS ABOUT PEOPLE TIME, AND IT'S ABOUT RESPONSIBLY FACILITATING RELATIONSHIPS THAT ARE HEALTHY AND POSITIVE FOR BOTH PARTIES.”

PROGRAM PARTNERS

Partner organizations help provide needed resources to both programs and participants. Partner organizations may refer clients to land link programs, and land link programs may refer people to partner organizations for specific services. Other partners collaborate to offer topical workshops. Several programs are currently developing partnerships with farm incubator programs to facilitate greater access to on-farm experience and management for seekers, before they begin seeking land. One consideration when developing partnerships is to ensure partners are located across the entire service region so that participants can access resources near them.

“BOOTS ON THE GROUND REALLY HELP. IT HELPS TO HAVE THE CAPACITY TO DO SITE VISITS AND TO MEET LANDOWNERS ONE-ON-ONE.”

Board members are also important partners for many programs. In programs that have advisory boards, some members are land owners who have partnered as the first match for the program. Other programs have board members who are current or retired farmers that live across the service region, so the programs use their expertise and geographic dispersion by sending them on site visits to potential farmland properties.

EXAMPLES OF LAND LINK PROGRAM PARTNERS:

- Nonprofit sustainable farming organizations
- Land trusts
- Conservation districts
- Other land link programs
- Cooperative Extension
- Business development organizations
- Banks/farm credit
- Universities or colleges
- Economic development commissions
- FSA or NRCS
- Planning commissions
- State agriculture departments

TECHNOLOGY

Digital technologies are important for many programs to efficiently maintain a listing service and to effectively track client data. However, each program tries to establish a balance between use of technology to streamline services and maintaining a human element in the land access process.

EXAMPLES OF TECHNOLOGIES USED BY LAND LINK PROGRAMS INCLUDE:

- Website or blog development and maintenance to list properties
- PayPal to manage application fees
- Online map management to list properties
- Access, Salesforce (10 free nonprofit licenses), Constant Contact to manage client data
- GIS software to identify underutilized land

Land link programs weigh privacy concerns against posting clients' contact information online, and availability of staff time to maintain list quality against time devoted to goal strengthening and sharing work. After identifying a potential match in a listing, some programs require participants to contact the staff person to request contact information of a potential match (most time-consuming method). Others have a registration and login system to gain direct access to contact information of the other party. Some

post direct contact information in the listings, and some use a coded email relay system that enables direct but anonymous contact (like Craigslist). A concern with internet-mediated contact is that some participants, particularly land owners, may be reticent to use the internet, or lack the skills to do so. Many staff people devote time to "hand-holding" to facilitate participation of such land owners in the program.

WHAT ARE PARTICIPANTS' NEEDS AND GOALS?

The top-rated owner motive for offering their land through a land link program was to PUT THEIR LAND TO GOOD USE. Almost 75% of owners said this is a very important reason for joining. Almost 60% said SUPPORTING LOCAL FOOD OR FARMERS is a very important reason, and just over 50% said SUPPORTING BEGINNING FARMERS is a very important reason. Financial reasons were, overall, relatively less important: approximately 25% of owners said rental income or tax benefits were very important reasons for joining. The importance of these motives did not differ significantly between farming and non-farming land owners.

Owner type varies across programs and can heavily influence participants' educational needs. Depending on local context and program purpose, some programs have many more non-farming land owners while others have mainly farming land owners. Across the Northeast, 38% of owners have never farmed their land, 22% previously farmed it and 40% currently farm their land.

“ I THINK THAT FROM THE [NON-FARMING] LAND OWNER PERSPECTIVE, THE HARDEST THING FOR THEM IS LIKELY THE FACT THAT THEY DON'T REALLY UNDERSTAND WHAT FARMING IS. ”

SURVEY RESPONDENT CHARACTERISTICS

FARMLAND SEEKERS (N=271):

- 58% male & 42% female
- 96% white
- 75% hold a Bachelor's degree or more
- Between age 22 & 68; average age is 42
- 25% had household incomes below \$25,000 in 2012; 25% had household incomes between \$25,000-\$50,000
- 71% joined to start a new farm business & 29% joined to expand a current farm business

FARMLAND OWNERS (N=104):

- 44% male & 56% female
- 97% white
- 80% hold a Bachelor's degree or more
- Between age 30 & 86; average age is 61
- Almost half have annual household income of \$100,000 or more
- 60% have a primary or secondary residence on the property offered
- 74% are offering land for rent & 21% are offering land for sale

Across land link programs overall, relatively small tracts of land are offered by owners. Roughly 40% of owners are offering 10 or fewer acres, another 40% are offering 11-40 acres and the remaining 20% are offering over 40 acres. In contrast only 30% of seekers want 10 or fewer acres, 30% want 10-40 acres, and 40% want more than 40 acres.

While many seekers need help with land access, they also often need other resources for farming, as well as on-site housing. Owners selected all resources they have available from a given list. Results are reported here, with the frequency these owners reported being contacted by interested seekers, where significant. One limitation of these data is that owners' report of a resource on the property may not correspond to quality, or to owners' awareness of the quality of the resource(s) they are offering.

OWNERS: BESIDES LAND, WHAT OTHER RESOURCES CAN YOU OFFER A FARMER?

- 73% have water available
- 67% have one or more buildings to offer: Owners with buildings reported being contacted by seekers twice as often as those without buildings (6.5 contacts vs. 3.3 contacts)
- 40% have equipment to offer
- 36% have housing available
- 25% are offering mentoring: Owners offering mentoring reported being contacted by seekers over twice as often as those not offering mentoring (10.1 contacts vs. 3.8 contacts)
- 12% are offering owner financing: Owners offering financing reported being contacted by seekers over twice as often as those not offering financing (10.4 contacts vs. 4.7 contacts)

WHAT ARE THE OUTCOMES OF LAND LINK PROGRAMS?

Each staff person discussed program outcomes during the interview, and program participants answered a series of program evaluation questions in the online survey. Almost all staff said they are commonly asked about number of matches as the expected metric, but number of matches made by a program is not always the best or only metric of their success. However, many programs also lack measures for outcomes other than matches made.

Why are number of matches a contested metric? First, most staff have difficulty tracking participants to determine whether they made a match. Most staff rely on the individuals to inform them when they find a match. Second, focusing on number of matches may obscure the importance of match quality. A poorly planned match can have worse outcomes than no match. Third, defining what constitutes a match that a program can claim as "theirs" can be difficult. For example, if a seeker attends an event hosted by the land link program and finds a land owner there to lease from, but neither party fills out the usual application form to join the listing service, some programs may view that as a match while others may not. Fourth, number of matches made is also difficult to evaluate because few programs set a goal of number of matches they want to facilitate each year. Several staff said they feel it is out of their hands because they cannot control the likelihood for compatibility among current participants. One younger program has a target, which is to build the program to

facilitate 12-15 matches per year. Finally, focusing on number of matches made discounts the educational and support services some programs provide. If a program helps a seeker prepare to search for land independently but that person does not actually locate an owner through the program, there should be another metric for this service.

OTHER METRICS FOR MEASURING PROGRAM SUCCESS SUGGESTED BY STAFF PEOPLE:

- Number of unique website hits
- Number of new seekers and owners recruited
- Number of farm succession plans developed in writing
- Preparedness to make land access decisions
- Number of acres made available by exiting and non-farming land owners
- Helpfulness of resources provided
- Knowledge and skill gain through workshops or consultations
- Acres of land protected through conservation easements
- Number of services provided to clients
- Number of clients served by each service offered

WHAT KIND OF MATCHES HAVE BEEN MADE?

Most programs do not consistently track other evaluation measures, meaning number of matches made is what staff could report. Most reported that they typically make fewer than 10 matches per year. Two programs that facilitate more than 10 arrangements per year also offer loans, indicating this may be a way to help bolster number of matches made.

“THE NUMBER OF MATCHES ISN'T GOING TO MEAN ANYTHING OVER TIME IF THE RELATIONSHIPS GO SOUR. THE STRENGTH OF AN AGREEMENT DEPENDS ON BOTH PARTIES UNDERSTANDING COMPLETELY WHAT THEY'RE GETTING INTO.”

The survey showed that across programs, 65% of seekers have not yet secured land, 7% secured land through a land link program and 29% secured land through some other means. Of the 90 seekers who have secured land, 44% are leasing, 49% purchased land and 7% have some other arrangement. Of the 39 seekers who are leasing their land, 60% have short-term leases (3 years or fewer), 29% have longer term leases (4 years or more) and 11% have an alternate arrangement (such as lease to own). Furthermore, almost 80% of the leases are cash leases. Among owners, 71% have not found a farmer, 10% found a farmer through a land link program and 19% found a farmer through other means.

HOW DO PARTICIPANTS RATE THEIR EXPERIENCE IN A LAND LINK PROGRAM?

This section outlines the evaluation measures used in the survey. Participants indicated which service(s) they used, rated the helpfulness of each service to their search for a partner and indicated which services they would use if they were offered.

Accessing a list of potential farmland was the top service used by seekers. Among owners, the service used most was the opportunity to list their land through the program (Figure 1). Aside from listing and list accessing activities, all other services were utilized by less than one-third of respondents. Other services may have been less-frequently used for several reasons, including lack of awareness of whether the service is offered, actual unavailability of the service, or lack of interest in the service.

Seekers found site assessments (though only 13% of seekers received this service (Figure 1)) and access to a list of properties to be the most helpful services (Figure 2). They found print resources, networking to other resource providers and match recommendations to be relatively less helpful. However, seekers who did not receive these services said they do want match

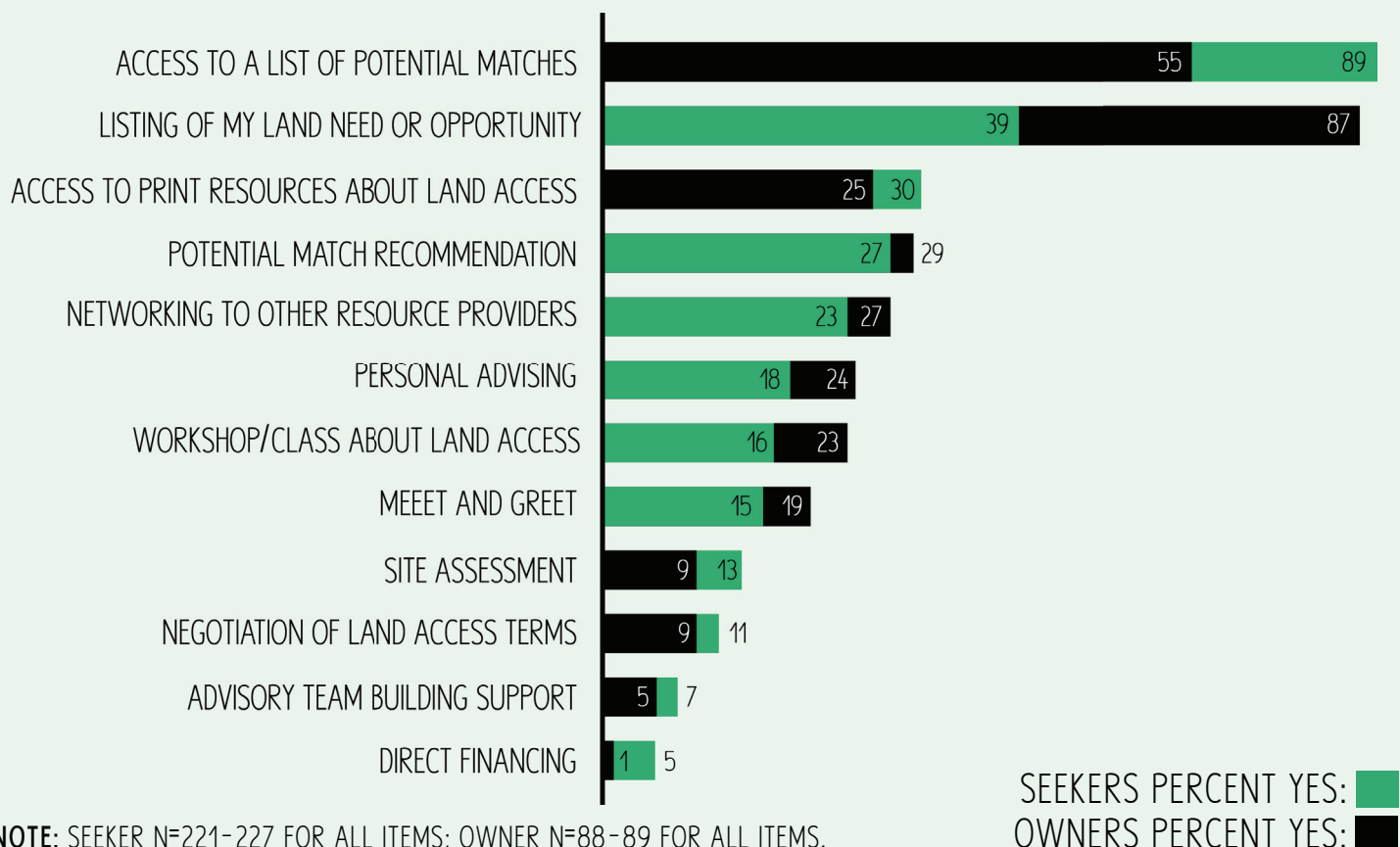
recommendations and networking to resource providers (Figure 4). Owners found personal advising, print resources and access to a venue for listing their land to be the most helpful services (Figure 3). In comparison, workshops and access to a list of seekers were relatively less helpful to owners.

Participants who thought a service was unavailable through the program they joined were asked whether they would use a service if it were offered (Figure 4). Among both seekers and owners, top services they said they would use if offered include receiving recommendations on specific matches that may be a good fit, referrals to other resource providers and meet and greet events for area seekers and owners to meet each other in person.

Participants were also asked how helpful the land link program was relative to other methods of locating land or a farmer. Among both seekers and owners, 44% said it was somewhat or much more effective (Figure 5). They were also asked how satisfied they are with the program overall. Among both seekers and owners, 61% were somewhat or very satisfied with the program (Figure 6).

Finally, participants rated a series of outcome statements on a scale of 1 to 5, where 1 is strongly disagree and 5 is strongly agree. The results indicate that there is still significant education and facilitation work to be done to help seekers and owners prepare for successful farmland matches (Figures 7 and 8).

FIGURE 1: LAND LINK PROGRAM SERVICES USED BY PROGRAM PARTICIPANTS



NOTE: SEEKER N=221-227 FOR ALL ITEMS; OWNER N=88-89 FOR ALL ITEMS.

FIGURE 2: AMONG **SEEKERS** WHO USED EACH SERVICE: PLEASE RATE THE HELPFULNESS OF EACH SERVICE YOU RECEIVED FROM THE LAND LINK PROGRAM AT PREPARING YOU TO ACCESS FARMLAND: **PERCENT EXTREMELY OR VERY HELPFUL**

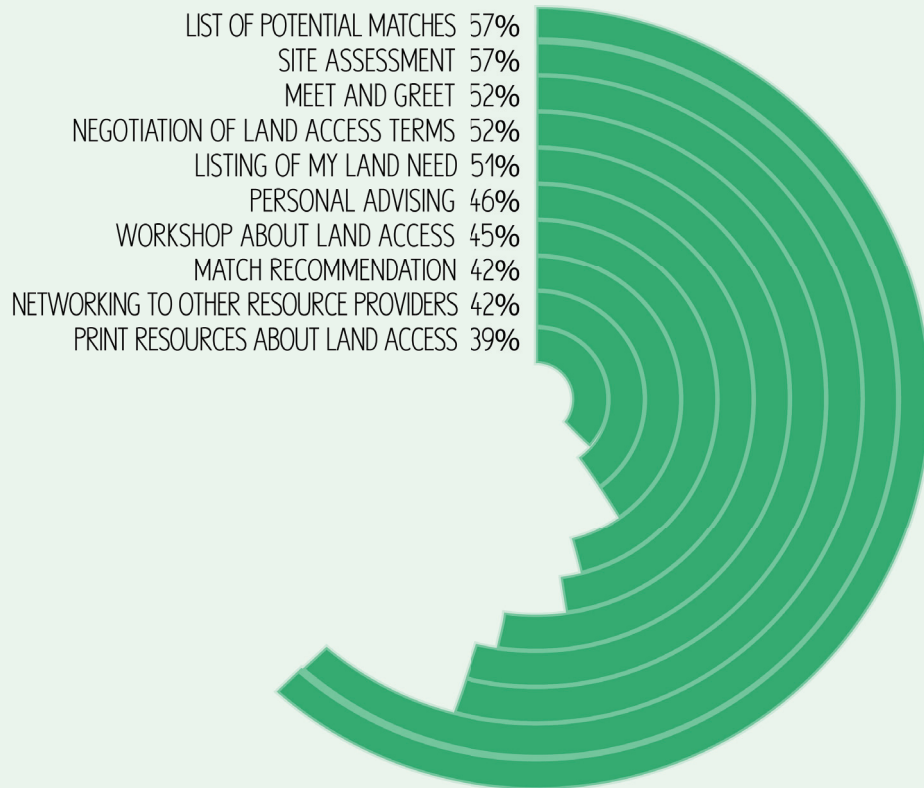


FIGURE 3: AMONG **OWNERS** WHO USED EACH SERVICE: PLEASE RATE THE HELPFULNESS OF EACH SERVICE YOU RECEIVED FROM THE LAND LINK PROGRAM AT PREPARING YOU TO FIND A FARMER FOR YOUR LAND: **PERCENT EXTREMELY OR VERY HELPFUL**

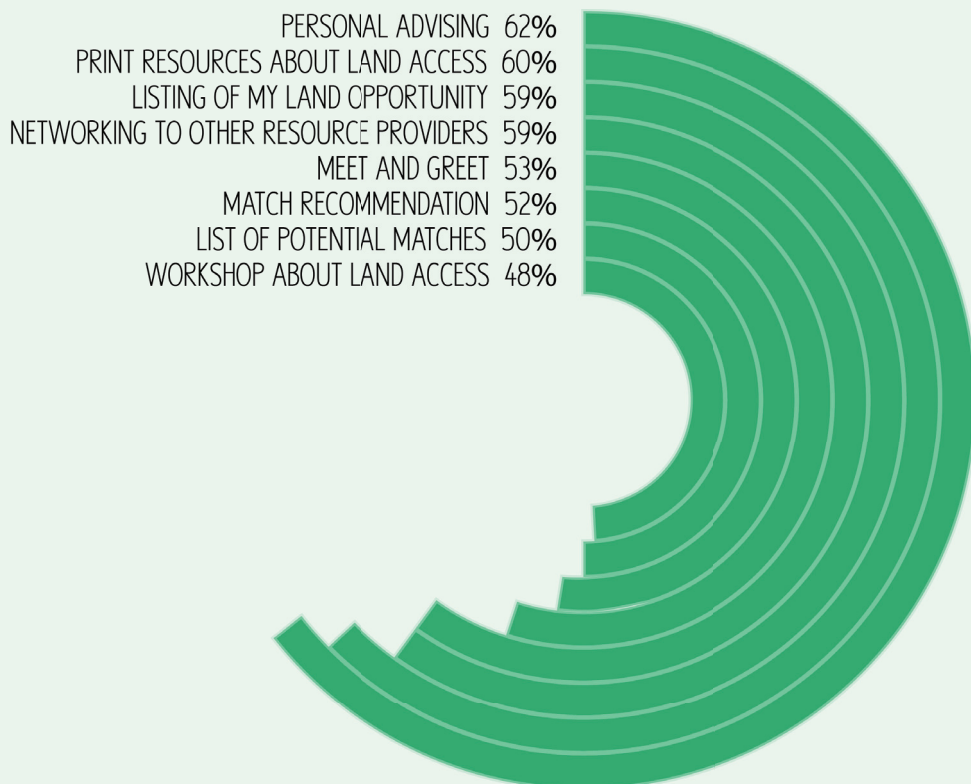


FIGURE 4: IF OFFERED, WOULD YOU USE THE SERVICE?

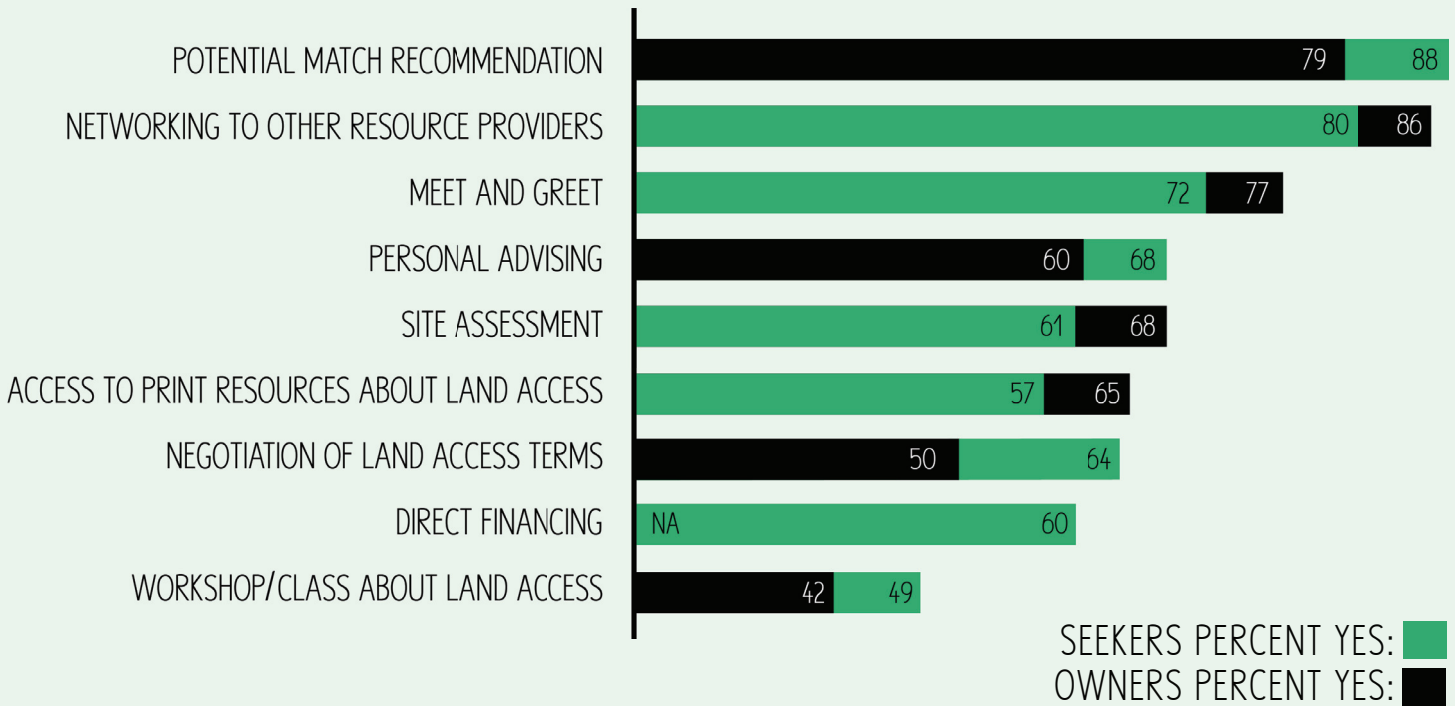


FIGURE 5: COMPARED TO THE OTHER METHODS YOU HAVE USED TO FIND OR OFFER FARMLAND, HOW EFFECTIVE DO YOU FEEL THE LAND LINK PROGRAM HAS BEEN AT HELPING YOU FIND LAND (SEEKERS) OR FIND A FARMER (OWNERS)? (N=295)

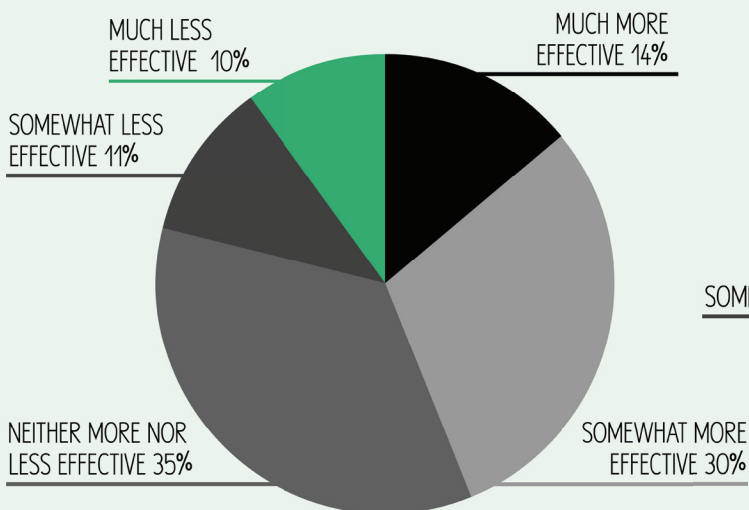
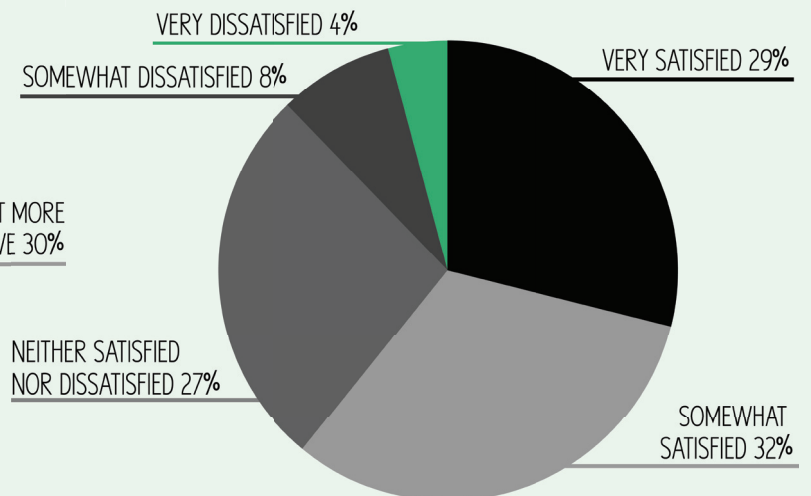


FIGURE 6: OVERALL, HOW SATISFIED OR DISSATISFIED ARE YOU WITH THE SERVICES YOU HAVE RECEIVED FROM THE LAND LINK PROGRAM? (N=327)



NOTE: OTHER LAND SEARCH METHODS LISTED INCLUDED NEWSPAPER CLASSIFIEDS, FARM PUBLICATIONS, REAL ESTATE WEBSITES, LETTERS OR EMAILS SENT DIRECTLY TO LANDOWNERS AND DRIVING AROUND THE COUNTRYSIDE.

FIGURE 7: PERCENT OF **SEEKERS** WHO AGREE OR STRONGLY AGREE: BECAUSE OF THE SERVICES I RECEIVED FROM THE LAND LINK PROGRAM, I AM...

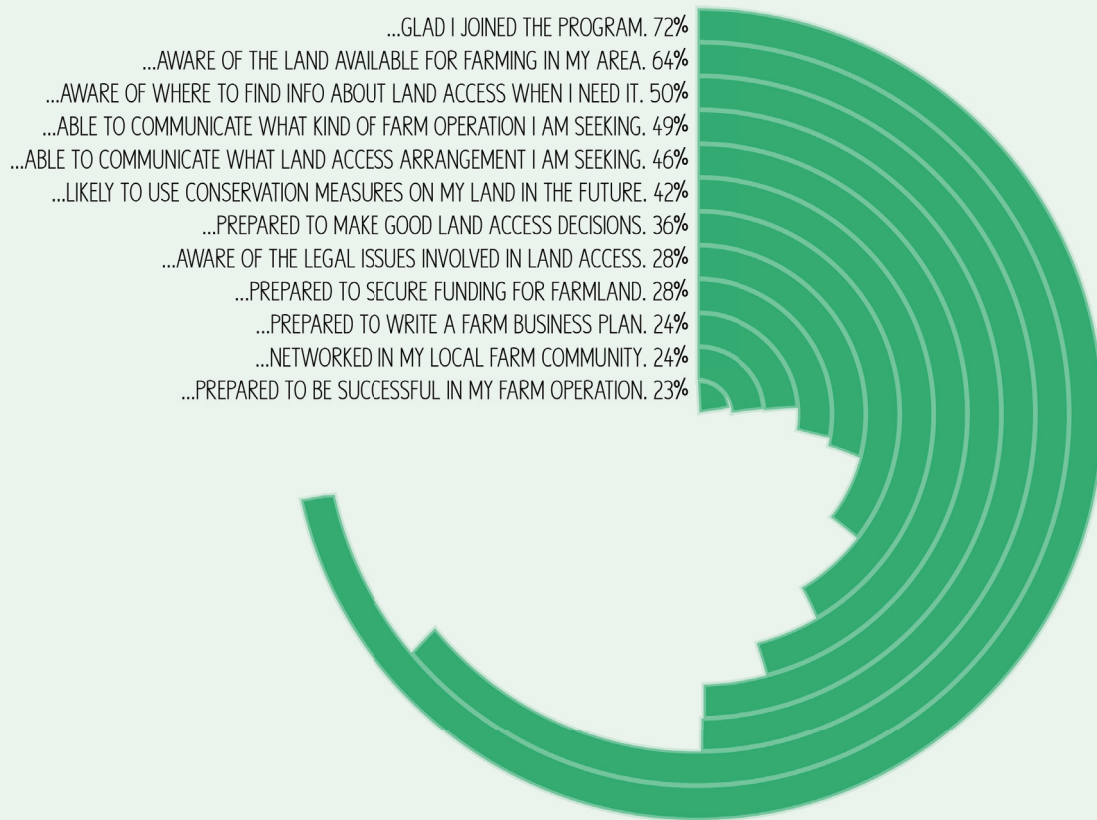
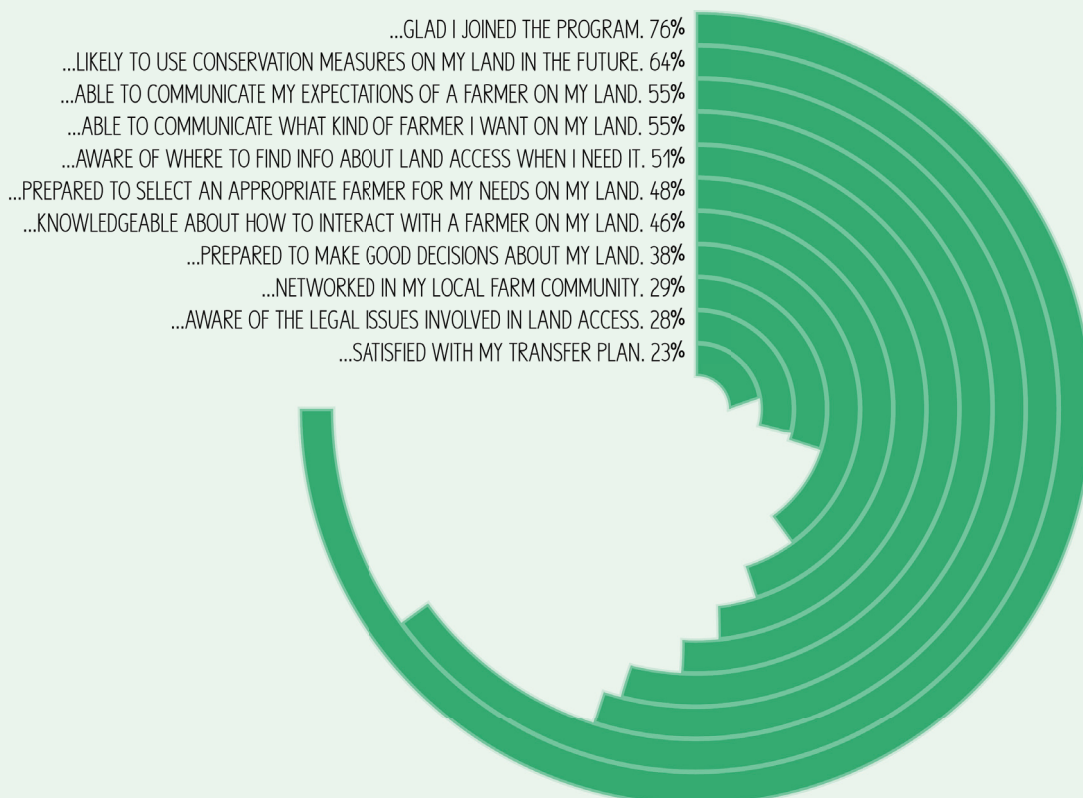


FIGURE 8: PERCENT OF **OWNERS** WHO AGREE OR STRONGLY AGREE: BECAUSE OF THE SERVICES I RECEIVED FROM THE LAND LINK PROGRAM, I AM...



LESSONS LEARNED

Each land link program across the Northeast US uniquely configures its resources, including funding, staffing, partners and technology, to meet diverse program goals and objectives. This section summarizes what land link programs are doing well, areas in which programs could improve, and some recommendations for how to address future challenges and opportunities.

- 1 Listing services are successfully helping seekers locate available land and helping owners publicize their available land.
 - A listing service is the most frequently offered and the most accessed service of land link programs across the Northeast. Seekers rated access to a list of land as the most helpful service provided. Owners similarly rated the opportunity to publicize their available land through a listing service as a top resource.
- 2 Both seekers and owners need additional support to prepare for and make sustainable land access and use decisions.
 - Greater focus is needed on screening participants to identify service needs; strengthening knowledge of their needs and goals through individual consultations, site visits and other educational services; and facilitating communication during match development through negotiation support, kitchen table meetings and helping seekers prepare written communications.
 - Programs should track and publicize program outcomes other than number of matches made to better emphasize the diversity of services that many programs offer. Without a commitment to identifying and tracking new measures of program success, it will be difficult to shift the focus toward more meaningful outcomes.
- 3 Facilitating sustainable farmland access and transfer requires substantial resources. Programs must use creative strategies to increase and stabilize this resource base.
 - Programs can and do address human resource gaps through staff development, contracting with experienced consultants and innovative partnerships with area resource providers and the local farm community. Partnerships are especially key to also fostering local support for sustainable agriculture.
 - Programs should seek to automate listings and other services where possible to enable staff to focus more on individualized assistance. These findings suggest that programs may want to consider discontinuing seeker listings in order to free staff to spend more time on providing other services.

“WE DON'T HAVE A GOAL OF MATCHES MADE. WE SEE OUR ROLE AS MORE OF PROVIDERS OF EDUCATION. WE'VE LEARNED THROUGH OPERATING THE PROGRAM FOR TEN YEARS THAT A MATCH REALLY MEANS NOTHING UNLESS IT'S A SUSTAINABLE ARRANGEMENT.”



ADDITIONAL RESOURCES ABOUT LAND LINK AND LAND ACCESS

- American Farmland Trust. 2013. “Saving American Farms: A Nationwide Survey of Land Trusts that Protect Farm and Ranch Land.” (http://farmlandinfo.org/documents/39420/AFT_FIC_LTSurvey_03-2013_lores21.pdf).
- Hammer, J. 2008. “Growing Opportunity: An Examination of Existing Farm Link Programs and Their Applicability to Oregon.” (http://www.pdx.edu/sites/www.pdx.edu.cupa/files/media_assets/growreport.pdf).
- Hubbard, P. 2006. “A Land Link for Western Montana: Keeping Land in Agriculture from One Generation to the Next.” Master’s professional paper, The University of Montana. (<http://etd.lib.umt.edu/theses/available/etd-12212006-162006/>).
- International Farm Transition Network. (<http://www.farm-transition.org/>).
- Land for Good. “Toolbox for Educators and Advisors.” (<http://landforgood.org/resources/toolbox/toolbox-educators-advisors/>).
- Parsons, R., et al. 2010. “The FarmLASTS Project: Farm Land Access, Succession, Tenure and Stewardship.” USDA. CSREES. (www.uvm.edu/farmlasts).

AUTHORS' NOTE

This research was motivated by Leslie Pillen’s desire to understand how land link programs facilitate land access for beginning farmers. She previously managed a beginning farmer incubator program in Nebraska, and found helping these graduates access land independently was challenging. She hopes the experiences of Northeastern land link programs shared here can contribute to developing more and stronger land link programs around the country. This study formed the core of her MS thesis in Rural Sociology, entitled “From Old Agricultural Ladders to New Land Access Springboards: An Assessment of Land Link Programs in the Northeast US.” The full thesis is available at <https://etda.libraries.psu.edu/>. Clare Hinrichs served as adviser for Pillen’s MS thesis research. Hinrichs is a Professor of Rural Sociology in the Department of Agricultural Economics, Sociology and Education at The Pennsylvania State University.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Research support provided in part by: Northeast SARE graduate student grant #GNE 12-042
Contributing land link program staff from: Center for Farm Transitions, Columbia Land Conservancy Farmer Landowner Match, Connecticut Farm Link, Land for Good, Land Link Montgomery, Maryland FarmLink, New England Farmland Finder, New England Land Link, New Entry Sustainable Farming Project Farmland Matching Service, New Jersey Farm Link, NY FarmLink, PASA Farm Lease Connection, RAFFL New Farmer Initiative, Vermont Land Link, Vermont Land Trust Farmland Access Program, Westchester Land Trust Farmland Match
Graphic design by: Rebecca Fitzer

Copyright © 2014 by Leslie Pillen. All rights reserved. This guide is a working document. Please visit the Northeast Regional Center for Rural Development website (<http://tinyurl.com/landlink>) for information about any updates. Limited duplication of contents of the guide for non-profit and educational purposes is welcome. Please credit the source in all copies.