



Green Meadows Farm, Hamilton & Topsfield, Massachusetts

REQUEST FOR PROPOSALS

Deadline: September 15, 2020

(Finalists will be asked to submit a business plan and other information by November 30)

Background and Information

Thank you for your interest in Green Meadows Farm in Hamilton and Topsfield, MA and the attached Request for Proposal (RFP). Essex County Greenbelt Association (Greenbelt) is the land trust of Essex County, Massachusetts. In late 2019, Greenbelt acquired Green Meadows Farm from the Patton Family, and now seeks a farmer who shares our vision of sustainable farming to lease the land on a secure, long-term basis, beginning either in 2021 or 2022. The lease date will depend upon the timing of the review process and the preferences of the chosen applicant.

Since 1961, Greenbelt (www.ecga.org) has been committed to protecting open space across Essex County, Massachusetts and has conserved nearly 18,000 acres of land, including working farmland. Greenbelt's strategic objectives include public access, promotion of biodiversity, water quality, ecosystem health, and sustainable, local food production.

As we issue this RFP, we are all dealing with the disruption and uncertainty of the COVID-19 pandemic. Our first priority is the health and safety of our staff and of prospective farmers and our community. We will maintain compliance with any and all government and public health recommendations and orders. With this in mind, timelines may shift, and we encourage prospective respondents to be ready to be flexible.

Greenbelt's Goals for Green Meadows Farm

We are seeking applicants whose farming philosophies complement Greenbelt's strategic objectives, and especially our three primary goals for Green Meadows Farm:

- 1) Greenbelt is committed to farmland access and affordability, at a time when working farmland in our region is under threat from competing land uses, principally housing development. Therefore, Greenbelt has a strong

preference to work with farmers who do not currently own or have secure, long-term access to farmland. We anticipate entering into a long-term ground-lease (99 years) with a farmer, allowing the farmer to own and build equity in their infrastructure in support of their agricultural operations. As part of the lease arrangement, the farmer will be responsible for payment of all real estate taxes, their own insurance, and utilities. The farmer will own and independently operate their farm business.

- 2) Greenbelt is committed to the long term protection of healthy ecosystems, habitat and water resources. Green Meadows Farm has direct frontage on the Ipswich River, and includes floodplain, wetlands, buffer zones and sensitive bank resources, as well as fields with prime agricultural soils. From 2002 through 2017, Green Meadows Farm and its once vibrant farmstand (since razed) was known for over a decade as one of the few USDA Certified Organic Community Supported Agriculture programs (CSAs) in this area of Massachusetts. Although the farm has not been certified since 2017, the two larger fields have remained in active conventional agricultural production. Therefore, while we do not view organic certification as a necessary prerequisite for entering into a lease, a strong preference will be given to applicants proposing agricultural operations that use organic, regenerative, and/or other sustainable methods that build and improve soil health, and that avoid synthetic herbicides, pesticides, fungicides, and fertilizers.
- 3) Greenbelt is committed to providing public access to open space, and to supporting an engaged, active, conservation-minded community. Green Meadows Farm is located in the heart of a large network of protected open space, which includes an extensive interconnected trail system that is well used by the public. The property at Green Meadows Farm will include trails and public access, and Greenbelt will work collaboratively with the farmer to integrate these with the farm operations. Greenbelt will also work to support other forms of public engagement with the farm in ways that are compatible with the farm operation.

Existing Farm Condition & Infrastructure (see also attached maps)

Location

[654 Asbury Street, Hamilton, Massachusetts](#) (for Google maps, use 656 Asbury Street, South Hamilton, MA)

Hamilton Assessors Parcels: portion of 19-4

Topsfield Assessors Parcels: 44-1, 45-1, 45-2, 45-3

The farm comprises a contiguous, vacant 60-acre parcel with approximately 20 tillable acres across 5 primary fields. An 8-foot high deer fence in good condition (installed approximately 10 years ago) completely encloses the two main growing fields. There is long, highly visible frontage on Asbury Street, a heavily trafficked road between Topsfield and Hamilton. While there are presently no agricultural buildings on the Green Meadows

Farm side of Asbury Street, there is a large paved parking area, and a developed system of farm roads. Water for irrigation has historically been extracted from two existing on-site farm ponds.

Across the farm on the south side of Asbury Street lies Greenbelt's Vineyard Hill Reservation. On this side, there is an approximately 1,000 square foot antique barn (good condition), a 1.3-acre field, and an approximately 250-plant highbush blueberry patch. Any or all of this could be included as part of the long-term lease arrangement.

Greenbelt's preference is for the farmer to reside on the property. By late 2020 or early 2021, Greenbelt may be the owner of (or otherwise have access to via lease) a 1,286 square foot, 4 bedroom, 3 bath home, with a one car attached garage, a one car oversized detached garage, and a six-bay detached garage. The home is adjacent to the farm. All of the structures have been well-maintained and are in good condition. Greenbelt plans to work with the finalist to develop an ownership or lease arrangement for the residence and outbuildings that is compatible with the farmer's specific financial circumstances.

Financial and Other Considerations

Long-term Ground Lease: Greenbelt's goal is to enter into a 99-year ground lease with a farmer to provide that farmer with affordable and secure land tenure. The lease will be structured to enable the farmer to build and own farm infrastructure on-site. Greenbelt is working closely with Equity Trust on the long-term ground lease, and the final lease arrangement will be tailored to the specific circumstances of the chosen applicant and their farm operation. For more information on ground leases, see <http://equitytrust.org/category/publications/farm-resources/>.

Lease fee: Lease fee will be negotiated with the selected farmer based on the type of farm activities proposed and local market conditions, tempered by the obligations negotiated with the selected farmer for some form of public access and Greenbelt member activities. The ground lease fee will be in the range of \$1,500 - \$2,000 per year.

Property taxes: The farm is enrolled in Chapter 61 and 61A, the state's current use-valuation program. Taxes on the Topsfield portion of the farm are less than \$300 annually. The Hamilton portion of the farm has not yet been separately assessed since Greenbelt acquired the land, but the expectation is that taxes will be similar to those in Topsfield. Further construction of farm infrastructure by the selected farmer may increase property taxes.

NRCS Conservation Plan Requirement: The selected farmer will be required to work with the Natural Resource Conservation Service (NRCS) on a Conservation Plan for the farm that includes the following: (1) wetland buffers and/or filter strips to prevent adverse impacts to the water quality of existing wetlands and waterways; (2) in the event animal husbandry activities are proposed, establishes and governs the type and number of each type of animal unit permitted on the Premises, analyzes the pasturage potential of the Premises and establishes and governs the cycling of pasturage, and (3) any other measures necessary to ensure the carrying capacity and production capability of the Premises is not exceeded in

order to protect water quality, prevent soil erosion, enhance soil health and otherwise protect the conservation values of the farm and surrounding natural resources. Greenbelt will have a preliminary, general Conservation Plan from NRCS for the farm available to share sometime this summer.

Criteria

Greenbelt will select a farmer who best fits the following criteria:

- **Farm Enterprise**: The farming enterprise described in the farmer’s proposal is: (a) well suited to the size, soils, and configuration of the farm; (b) well-adapted to local markets for farm products and will contribute to the local farm economy; (c) likely to encourage long-term commercial use of the farmland; and (d) economically feasible.
- **Farming Experience**: Demonstrated farming experience and training that relates to the proposed farm operation.
- **Food & Fiber**: Priority will be given to those proposals where food or fiber for human use is produced.
- **Sustainable Farm Practices**: Farmer demonstrates experience with and commitment to sustainable farm practices that maintain soil health and the health of surrounding waterways, natural resources, and the human and natural community surrounding the farm.
- **Community Engagement**: Farmer demonstrates willingness to accommodate some form of public access and other opportunities for community engagement.

Selection Process & Confidentiality

We will be accepting responses to this RFP through September 15, 2020. Finalists will be chosen from this first round of proposals, and asked to submit a full business plan and other financial information by November 30, 2020 (see page 10 for more information), after which Greenbelt will schedule interviews. An Application Review Panel will review applications and make a final recommendation to Greenbelt’s Board of Directors. Our goal is to make our final selection no later than January 2021.

All of the information you submit is confidential, and will be shared only with the Application Review Panel and Greenbelt’s Board of Directors. Your financial information will be shared only on a need-to-know basis with members of the Review Panel and the Board selected to review applicant financials.

Please email your application labeled “[Your name]’s Application” to: chris@ecga.org

Send applications that cannot be emailed to:
Chris LaPointe, Director of Land Conservation
Essex County Greenbelt Association
82 Eastern Avenue
Essex, MA 01929

If you have any questions while completing this application, please contact Chris LaPointe at 978-471-0644 (chris@ecga.org). Thank you so much for your interest in making your farm's home on this land.

We will coordinate “Open Farm” days for prospective applicants to visit the property. Given the uncertainties around COVID-19, we cannot schedule them at this point. If you would like to schedule a visit to the farm on your own, please contact us to arrange that.

Please look for additional information which will be forthcoming on our website ecga.org/GreenMeadowsFarmRFP.

GREEN MEADOWS FARM, HAMILTON AND TOPSFIELD, MA

FARM PROPOSAL

A. APPLICANT

Contact Person:

Name(s):

Title:

Address:

Daytime Phone:

Evening/Weekend Phone:

Email:

B. CURRENT FARM BUSINESS (If you are operating your own farm business. If you do not own your own farm business, leave this section blank)

Legal Name of Business:

Name(s) of Owners:

Date Established:

Type of Business (Sole Proprietorship, General Partnership, LLP, LLC, Corporation, 501(c)3, etc.):

On a separate sheet, please describe your current farm business, including the owner; the number of acres currently farmed; the crops and/or live goods you grow and/or livestock you raise; how and where your products are marketed (i.e. do you sell retail such as CSA, on-farm sales, or farmers markets or wholesale, and in what regions, communities, and markets do you market your products); number of employees, and your farm's gross annual income.

C. CURRENT EMPLOYER (If you are not currently employed, leave this section blank)

Legal Name of Business:

Type of Business:

Employer's Name:

Employer's Phone Number:

Employer's Email:

Employer's Address:

Job Title and Responsibilities:

D. VISION & QUALIFICATIONS

On a separate sheet, please answer the following questions:

1. Please describe your farm proposal for the site. To the extent possible, use the attached blank map to depict your proposed plan for the use of the land, such as where you might have crops and/or raise livestock, and anticipated farm infrastructure (see Attachment 2 in Section E below).
2. Tell us about your experience farming. Please include qualifications indicating that you can successfully execute your proposed farm business described in #1 above.
3. Approximately what size farm do you wish to have (in acres)? Do you imagine using the whole acreage? If not, describe how you would manage fallow portions of the farm.
4. Would you consider sharing the property, or sub-leasing? If so, what do you see as compatible operations and activities? How will you seek and secure these partnerships and on what timeframe? Would you be interested in Greenbelt's assistance in finding such partnerships?
5. What opportunities and challenges do you see for selling your products?
 - a. Will you be selling retail (through a CSA, other on-farm sales, or farmers markets) or wholesale or both?
 - b. In what communities and regions will you be selling your goods, and through what markets or resellers?
6. What is your ideal timeline for beginning your tenure at the farm? How do you see your farm in three years?
7. Please describe how your farming operation will support the aims of Greenbelt (to review Greenbelt's mission and goals, see www.ecga.org). In responding to this question, please discuss your values, experience and commitment regarding the following areas:
 - a. Sustainable and/or organic methods of agriculture.
 - b. Selling to local markets.
 - c. Agricultural education including farmer apprenticeships and/or youth farm programs. What is your experience (if any) with serving as an educator? What populations have you worked with in this capacity?
 - d. Allowing members of the community some level of access to the farm, be it through community celebrations, access to the riverfront, public trails, etc.
8. Do you have a need or desire for a home on-site? Please describe how you hope to meet your housing needs if you move your farm business to the Green Meadows property. Would you be interested in living on the farm?

9. Is there anything else you think we should know about you or your farm operation at this time?

E. ATTACHMENTS

Please attach the following in support of your application:

1. Resume. Your resume as well as resumes of any principals involved in your farming operation.
2. Land Use Plan for Green Meadows Farm. Please print out the attached blank farm map and draw on it to depict your land use plan. (From section D, #1)
3. Three References – From sources who can speak to your experience as a farmer.
4. Other relevant documentation you wish to include (please list here).

Finalists will be asked to submit more detailed information by November 30, including the following:

1. Land Use Plan that addresses near- and long-term use of the land, including crops and/or live goods you plan to grow; soil needs (which soil types are best suited to your farm operation, and how you would manage less-than-ideal soils); any changes to and improvements to the property you envision and the timeframe for these improvements.

2. Business Plan, including:

- Market analysis
- Management strategy & goals
- Personal financial statements
- 3-year business profit & loss statements
- Current business balance sheet
- 2-year projected monthly cash flow
- 3-year capital plan

For information and assistance with farm business plans, see:

http://www.thecarrotproject.org/farmer_resources/business_and_financial_planning

Additional information and resources will be forthcoming on our website at ecga.org/GreenMeadowsFarmRFP.