

Your Farm Transition Plan May Be the Greatest Legacy You Leave

By Bonnie Warndahl

Perhaps in a small Wisconsin community you wouldn't assume that "everyday folks" like farmers could have much impact in the world—but I invite you to consider that, as a farmer, not only are your choices deeply impactful to your community and the world at large, at this point in history, your decisions are critical to the future of America's food systems. And every farm matters.

This may seem like an exaggeration or overstatement, but when we step back and take in the full picture, it all makes sense.

- 1) Farmers are aging—and rapidly! The average age of a U.S. farmer is 58, and 60% of current producers (those who grow food and fiber for the rest of us) are over the age of 55.
- 2) Of privately-owned farmland, 80% is owned by farmers 55+ (with 38% owned by farmers 65+).
- 3) Farmland is disappearing at a rate of 2,000 acres per day (40 acres per hour) due to development and conversion to other uses. Preserving what's left of farmland and providing new farmers access to that land is critical to the future of food production in the U.S.
- 4) Due to many challenges, new and beginning farmers are entering the industry at a rate of only 9% compared to the 60% of producers retiring. Supporting skilled and experienced farmers in accessing good farmland and establishing viable businesses is vital to the future of ag.

Despite all of this, only about 23% of farms have a succession plan in place—but there's hope! A growing movement of farm advocates recognizes the pinch point American agriculture is in, and we are working hard to provide the support and resources farmland owners need to keep farms in farming and farmers on the land.

Filling a Critical Gap in Farm Succession Support

Holding Ground, Letting Go: A Guided Approach to Farm Transition and Legacy is a pilot project by Foxhead Regenerative Agriculture Project (FoxRAP), in partnership with the University of Wisconsin-Madison Division of Extension, Renewing the Countryside

(RTC), and Southwest Counseling. We're here to help you navigate the technical and emotional complexities of a farm transition.

Many farm owners are approaching retirement age without concrete succession plans. Farm transition technical assistance is often focused solely on legal and financial preparation. While our program includes this guidance, offering valuable services from professionals, we also address the overlooked personal, identity-related barriers that can prevent aging farmers from successfully transitioning their farms to the next generation

This holistic approach will make the process easier for all parties: farmers, families, and service providers.

We Need You!



Photo by Phil Kraus of Kraus Creative Company

Harvey Benson and Bonita Underbakke of Harmony, Minnesota, transitioned their 160-acre farm to friends in the community who were struggling to access affordable land. The new farmers live on the land alongside Harvey and Bonita, and are working toward growing small grains such as wheat to make local flour.

This pilot program is seeking participation from 30 producers aged 58 and older in the Upper Fox River watershed, which includes Green Lake, Marquette, Waushara, Winnebago, Fond Du Lac Counties, and nearby farmers who are interested in farm transition planning, whether or not you have identified successors.

As a participant, you will attend two in-person group workshops in February and March of 2026, including a free lunch, followed by personalized one-on-one coaching and technical assistance from March 2026 to September 2026.

You will work with a project team comprised of experienced farm transition specialists from FoxRAP, UW Extension, Renewing the Countryside, and Southwest Counseling. This program is free to you, with materials included, and offers significant value in education, service provider expertise, and technical assistance.

Register Today!

Farmers who plan for transition are the hidden heroes of agriculture! Please consider joining us in the legacy of preserving our state's working lands and ensuring the success of next-generation farmers.

Register at:

<https://www.farmlandaccesshub.org/event-details/holding-ground-letting-go-a-guided-approach-to-farm-transition-and-legacy-2026-02-24-10-00>

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