

Investing in Farmland Preservation & Access in Central Texas

Austin-Travis County Food Policy Board

Commissioners Andy Smith, Matt Simon, Marissa Bell

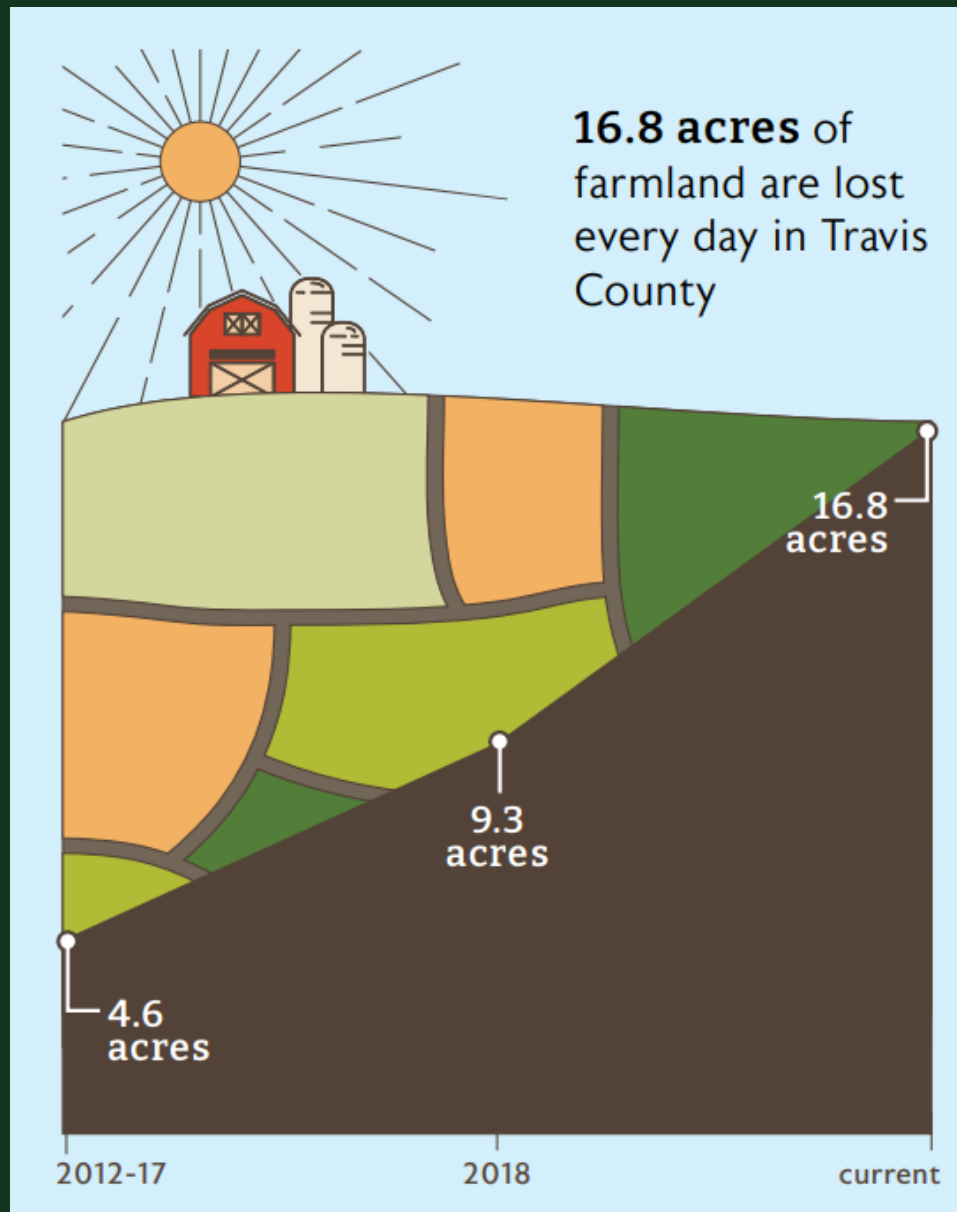


Food Access & Resilience Crisis

- **Less than 1%** of food consumed in Travis County is produced locally.
- **More demand than supply** - Central Texas' production cannot realistically meet its total demand for food.
 - When prices rise, local food becomes inaccessible for families and small businesses
- COVID-19 showed our fragile supply chain
 - Local producers were more resilient and quick to respond.



Farmland Access Crisis



| | 2017 Total Acres | 2022 Total Acres | 5 year loss | 2017-2022 Decrease | Years until farmland is completed developed |
|------------|------------------|------------------|-------------|--------------------|---|
| Travis | 212,782 | 193,523 | 19,259 | 9.10% | 50 |
| Williamson | 541,344 | 368,663 | 172,681 | 31.90% | 11 |
| Hays | 254,999 | 129,788 | 125,211 | 49.10% | 5 |
| Bastrop | 321,934 | 247,205 | 74,729 | 23.20% | 17 |
| Caldwell | 269,665 | 229,140 | 40,525 | 15.00% | 28 |

Now is the cheapest and easiest time to break the cycle.



Ripple Effects of Losing Farmland:

- **Food System Resilience**

- Less local food production capacity

- **Water & Flooding**

- Increased runoff, reduced aquifer recharge

- **Climate**

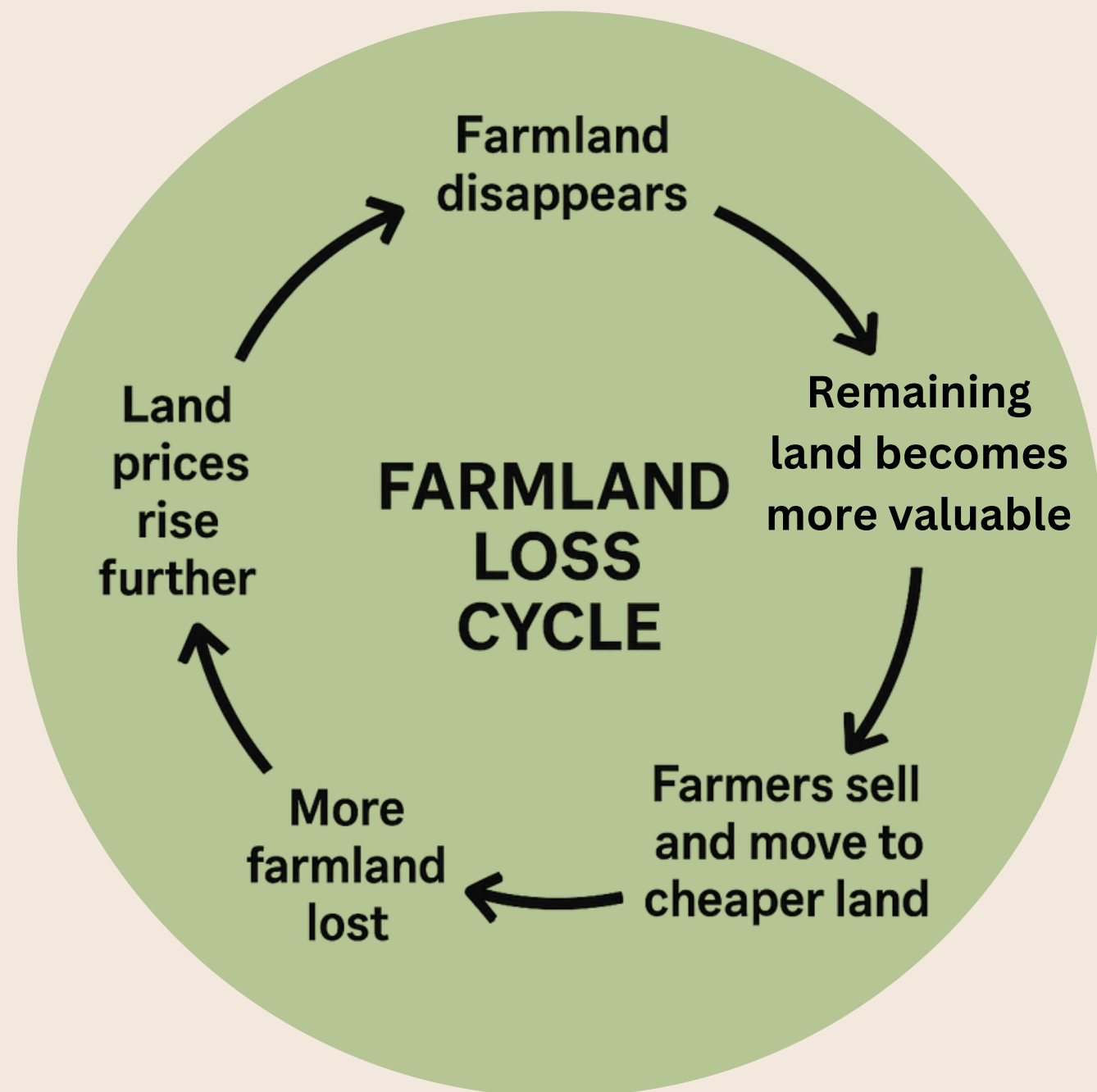
- Lost carbon sinks, more emissions from development

- **Biodiversity**

- Habitat loss and ecosystem function decline

- **Local Economy**

- Fewer viable farms, lost green jobs



Farmland Preservation Supports Many City Priorities and Goals

| City Goal Area | Alignment / Impact | Reference (Plan & Goal #) |
|-------------------------------|--|---|
| Food Security | Preserves agricultural lands and expands regenerative food production, building local food system capacity. | Austin-Travis County Food Plan – Goal 1 |
| Climate Action | Protects carbon-rich soils and supports carbon sequestration on working lands. | City Strategic Plan – CH3. Austin Climate Equity Plan – Natural Systems Goal 1 (Needs Support). |
| Farmland Protection | Advances target to protect 500,000 acres of farmland in 5-county region; currently off track. | Austin Climate Equity Plan – Natural Systems Goal 2 (Off-Track) |
| Watershed Protection | Regenerative farmland increases infiltration, reduces runoff, and supports aquifer recharge. | City Strategic Plan – CH3.2, CH3.3.2; Watershed Protection Master Plan |
| Biodiversity | Maintains wildlife habitat and soil biodiversity | Resolution 20230126-054 – UN Biodiversity Framework Targets 1 & 3 |
| Emergency Preparedness | Strengthens local food supply and reduces reliance on distant supply chains during crises. | City Strategic Plan – Resilience goals CH4 |
| Open Spaces / Parks | Supports parkland use for community agriculture, nature-based education, and food-based business incubators; aligns with parkland acquisition goals and strengthens agritourism and local markets. | Our Parks, Our Future Plan – Goals 1, 2.3, 2.5, 4.3.2, 4.3.3, 7.4 |

Austin-Travis County Food Plan:

Food Plan Strategy 1.1: Preserve land for food production

| Mechanism | Description | |
|----------------------------|---|----------------------|
| Fee-Simple Purchase | City buys land outright; can lease to farmers or partner with organizations | La co ea ec |
| | | Ch |

Food Plan Strategy 1.2: Pursue capital funding sources, such as general obligation bonds, to fund the conservation of agricultural land.

Source: 2024, [City of Austin, Austin-Travis County Food Plan](#)

Austin already protects land for water, wildlife, and open space. The same tools can be used to protect land for food production.

| Water Quality Protection Lands | Parks & Open Space |
|---|---|
| 35,0000+ acres conserved for Barton Springs-Edwards Aquifer | ~15,200 acres of maintained for recreation, resilience, and |



Case Study:

Wilbarger Creek Conservation Alliance (WCCA)

- **1978:** Jon Beall acquires Three Creeks Farm after military retirement
- **2011:** Begins conservation easement discussions with Hill Country Conservancy
- **NRCS Funding:** \$1M awarded through Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) Farm and Ranchlands Protection Program (predecessor to Regional Conservation Partnership Program – RCPP)
 - **2017 Easement Secured:** with NRCS funds and matching funds from Travis County and others, the Wilbarger Creek Conservation Alliance protected 2,000+ contiguous acres of farmland.
- **Ongoing Stewardship:** Land leased to sustainable agriculture producers aligned with conservation goals.



Meet our WCCA Farmers: *The Refugee Collective*

- Leased **20 acres** since 2018
- Employs refugees in fair-wage, dignified work
- Produces certified organic vegetables & eggs – **50,000+ lbs annually**
- Employs **10 year-round staff**, paying **\$300,000+ in full and part-time wages**
- Implementing Texas' first [**Resilient Farm Plan**](#)
 - 1.2 tons/ac/yr of carbon sequestered, improving soil water-holding capacity (add'l 11 million gal of storage after 20 years), and improved wildlife habitat



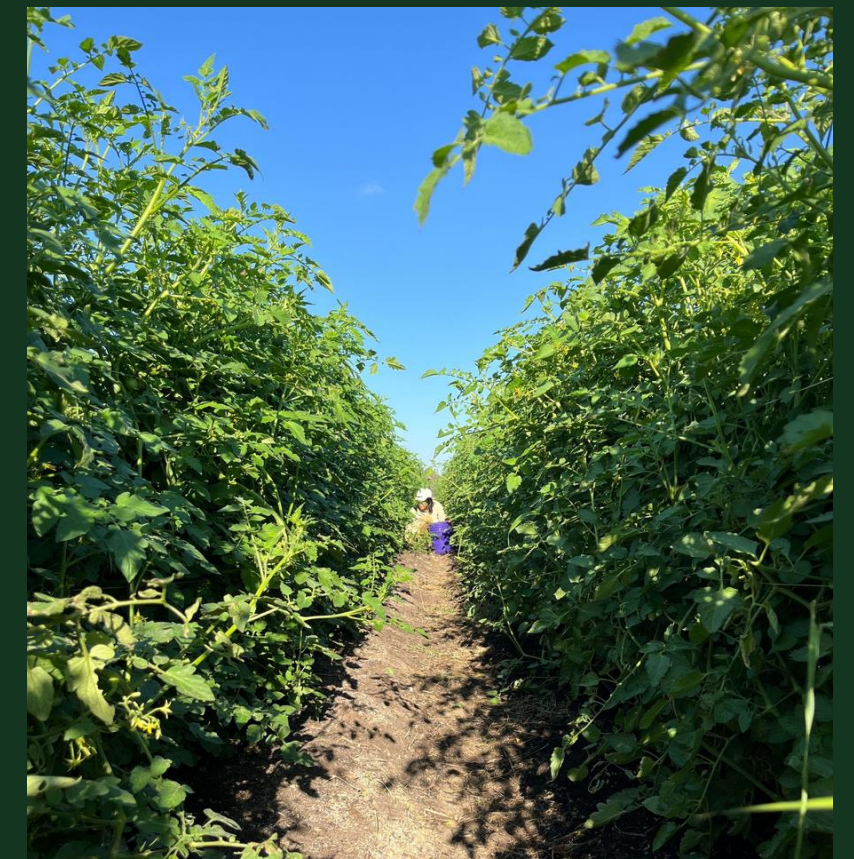
Meet our WCCA Farmers: *Geosmin Regenerative Farm*

- Leased **10 acres** since Jan 2022
- Mission: grow food that heals, educates, and builds community
- Produces **13,680 lbs** pasture-raised chicken & **12,319 lbs** eggs annually
- Employs **1 full-time + 1 part-time staff**, paying **~\$59,700** in wages
- Provides affordable land access, enabling new farmers to start operations



Meet our WCCA Farmers: *Hot Spell Farm*

- Leased **2 acres** since 2023, **cooperatively-owned and operated**
- Produces **10,000+ lbs** of vegetables annually
 - Including food for local school meal programs!
- **5 staff positions created**
- Provides critical land access for new farmers, removing financial barriers to starting a farm.



"It's hard to put into words how much this opportunity has provided me. I do not own land. I have a home in town. If I hadn't found Jon's land to lease - affordably and at a reasonable distance - I wouldn't be farming. There were no other options out there. I am insanely lucky."

- Geosmin Regenerative Farm

"The resource that Jon has provided all of us with is immeasurable. Land acquisition is an immense financial hurdle for up-and-coming farm businesses, either requiring prior wealth or committing to 5 or 6 figure debt. Our arrangement is truly a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity and without it, we would never have been able to start Hot Spell as a group of young people living in Austin."

- Hot Spell Farm

Now Therefore Be it Resolved...

Austin-Travis County Food Policy Board Recommendation Number: 20251020-05

- **Dedicate Funding:** Make a one-time allocation of \$15 Million in the 2026 General Obligation Bond to pilot a farmland preservation program
- **Pursue Federal Funds:** Leverage bond funding through applying for the USDA-NRCS Regional Conservation Partnership Program (RCPP)
- **Collaborate regionally:** Form a broad regional collaboration among Central TX city/county governments and non-profit organizations to preserve farmland
- **Utilize existing partnerships and programs:** Work with Travis County's Conservation Easement Program for the acquisition and administration of conservation easements

Source: [ATCFPB Recommendation 20251020-05](#)