



Great Lakes Protection Fund

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Funded Project

Transforming Land Stewardship Through a Farm Navigator Network

Project No.	2043
Timeline	2021 – Active
Award Amount	\$1,219,000
Team Leader	American Farmland Trust



This project will increase the adoption of conservation practices and regenerative farming systems across the Great Lakes basin by creating the Great Lakes Farm Navigator Network, a new network of “navigators” and a supporting training program that will assist senior farmers and landowners transition their land to new owners and operators who have a commitment to conservation. If successful, the team expects to reduce phosphorus contribution to the Lakes by more than 400 metric tons per year within ten years.

We are at a pivotal moment in farming and farmland ownership. Nearly one in three farmers in the Great Lakes states are over 65 years old, and the average age of landowners renting land to farmers is 66. Many of these farmers and landowners are interested in establishing and maintaining conservation practices on their land. Still, they haven’t created farm transfer plans that incorporate conservation practices. The Great Lakes Farm Navigator Network will advise, train and support senior farmers and landowners to implement conservation options in their farm transfer plans and support beginning farmers to secure land access with a commitment to conservation. They will focus on:

- Women farmers/landowners – to develop and implement conservation or farm transfer plans.
- Senior farmers/landowners – to implement conservation options, such as agricultural conservation easements within their farm transfer planning.
- Beginning farmers – to secure land access with an articulated land ethic or commitment to conservation, tied to their personal and business goals.

The team will recruit and train navigators from regions where agriculture’s impact is the highest in the basin: Michigan, New York, Ohio, and Wisconsin. Navigators will come from multiple sectors, including University Extension, agricultural organizations, retailers, land trusts, and soil and water conservation districts, and they will undergo training in estate planning, contracting, trust instruments, and corporate and other sustainability initiatives. This will be a first-of-its-kind holistic program to serve all three diverse audiences of women farmers/landowners, senior farmers/landowners, and beginning farmers to achieve multiple land-related goals.