



# 25 FREE RESOURCES EVERY FARMLAND OWNER CAN USE

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*Protecting and improving the value of your farmland is hard. Here are 25 free resources at your disposal that can help.*

When it comes to being the best steward of your farmland, knowledge is power. To make an educated decision about improving the value of your land, you'll need to do your homework first.

Whether you're a new farmer or you've owned land for a long time, you can do a lot of that homework with the help of free resources, many of which are available online. These resources can direct you through important choices about your farmland's health, productivity and efficiency.

Here's a rundown of some of our favorites.

## **Free financial resources**

Interested in better managing your farmland's finances? Wondering if you're charging or paying the right price for your land? Curious about what farming grants and loans might be available to you?

These resources have you covered:

- USDA guidelines for applying for farming grants and loans.
- A bevy of options from the USDA for handling the business side of your farm (including resources like financial planning from SCORE).
- The free farm loan calculator from FarmLoans.com, which lets you estimate a loan's amortization. (Note: this calculator is only for estimating purposes; we can't attest to its accuracy in any individual situation.)
- Our very own Farmland Rental Checkup, which offers a productivity score for your land, lets you know whether your current rent is at market rate, offers soil maps and more

## **Free sustainability resources**

Sustainability is key to longevity in farming. As technology advances, farmers and landowners have more options than ever for ensuring that they're maintaining the health of their soil and the surrounding land so that it will be productive for generations to come.

These resources help answer your sustainability questions:

- The Sustainable Agriculture Research and Education (SARE) website has a wealth of useful information on everything from season extension to soil health to cover crops. This site also includes a database of project reports, if you're interested in reading up on the latest research in sustainability.
- The American Farmland Trust has lots of projects related to the conservation agriculture movement, and its website has information on several topics on preserving farmland and sustainable farming practices.
- ATTRA, a division of the National Center for Appropriate Technology (NCAT), offers resources and information on sustainable farming and agriculture. One of our favorite features: a toll-free phone number and online form that let you ask your sustainability questions to an expert.
- The Soil Health Institute offers lots of general information about the role soil plays in our lives and the importance of (you guessed it) soil health. Many of the resources are intended for a general audience, but they're still useful for professionals.

## **Free resources that offer general farming industry information**

Whether you're curious about cutting-edge or tried-and-true farming methods, research can give you a great overview of the collective knowledge about the topic.

If you'd just like a refresher on something or you're not quite ready to dive into the specifics yet, the USDA.gov "Topics" section and the National Center for Appropriate Technology (NCAT) website have good general information on a comprehensive range of agricultural subjects.

If you're ready to get into the details, the USDA National Agricultural Library is one of the world's largest collections of agriculture and its related sciences, and many of its articles and reports are available online. The USDA Research, Education, and Economics site is another helpful collection with a focus on economics.

If you're curious about how your farm practices compare to nationwide trends, head to the 2017 Ag Census. It has extensive survey data about farmland across the U.S. that covers topics ranging from pest management practices among corn producers to a statistical summary of honey bee colonies.

## **Free legal resources**

Even if you've been farming for decades, you likely have legal questions about your work from time to time. And no wonder: new laws and regulations pass nearly every session, and every time you undertake a new business venture, there's probably legal red tape to contend with.

But not all legal support is expensive. These legal farming resources are free and offer some basic guidance for farmers and landowners:

- Farmcommons.org provides free educational materials available in both written and audio format (so you can listen while you're doing other things). Another feature we like: farm law quizzes that let you test your working knowledge of the law of the land.
- FarmAid, famous for the concert series it sponsors to raise money, remains a thriving nonprofit dedicated to providing resources to support family farms. Chief among those resources is its legal arm, the Farmers' Legal Action Group (FLAG), which provides legal services and support to family farmers and their communities.

## **Free local resources**

Education and extension programs equip farmers and landowners with all kinds of agricultural knowledge that they can put into practice. And many of them are right in your backyard. The USDA and many universities offer these programs—here are just a few:

- Interested in youth 4H programs or information on small farming support? Check out your local State Department of Agriculture extension office.
- Curious about how to apply for a loan or what water conservation looks like around you? Interested in getting more involved in your community? You're looking for your local USDA office.
- If you're in the Midwest and looking for a stellar ag extension program, check out Iowa State University, University of Minnesota, University of Wisconsin-Madison and University of Illinois. Ag extension programs are an excellent source of practical research, community events and other resources for farmers and landowners.

Perhaps the best free resource of all, though, is your own farming community. Talk to the people who have been farming in your county their whole lives—they know the ins and outs of the land in the region, and probably have recommendations about everything from equipment to flooding history to negotiating crop prices.

Especially if you're new to the area and are just starting operations on your farmland, ask local experts to share their insights about farming on land that looks a lot like your own. Even if you've been growing in the area for years, if you have an important decision to make, chances are one of your neighbors has been down the same road before.

## **Free resources for beginners**

Ag extension programs offer another great resource: free counseling for farmers. Through these counseling programs, farmers just starting out their careers can talk with advisers for guidance.

Iowa State's Beginning Farmer Center is one example of a university program dedicated to new farmers. If you're not sure how to tackle things like legal issues and tax laws or just want to learn the basics of sustainable agriculture and how to be a good steward of your land, these counseling programs are here to help.

## **Information grows value**

There's always something to learn about new resources, your land's health and how to best manage your operations.

Whether you have questions, need help making a decision or just want to learn more about your farmland, don't go it alone. There's a trove of free resources and fellow farmers and landowners out there to guide you in taking the best care of your farmland—and nurturing its longevity, sustainability and productivity for generations to come.

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