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## More Greenery, Less Stress

**R**educing stress and anxiety can be as simple as softening an urban or paved area with trees and greenery, according to a recent University of Wisconsin study. The study found that across all strata of society, people who live in a neighborhood with less than 10% tree canopy were much more likely to report symptoms of depression, stress and anxiety.

Published in March in the *International Journal of Environmental Research and Public Health*, the study adds to the growing body of scientific analysis showing nature's importance to humans' emotional and mental well-being. Researchers analyzed mental health data from the Survey of the Health of Wisconsin (SHOW) and Landsat 5 satellite data from July 2009 that reported how much vegetation was present in each of the SHOW census blocks.

"Across neighborhoods of Wisconsin, from the North Woods to the cities, the results are striking," says Dr. Kristen Malecki, assistant professor of population health sciences at the UW School of Medicine and Public Health. "Higher levels of green space were associated with lower symptoms of anxiety, depression and stress." See [www.med.wisc.edu/news-events/wisconsin-research-shows-green-space-keeps-you-from-feeling-blue/43187](http://www.med.wisc.edu/news-events/wisconsin-research-shows-green-space-keeps-you-from-feeling-blue/43187). •

## Massachusetts' Decision Good for Land Trusts

**O**n May 15, Massachusetts' highest court issued a resounding endorsement of land conservation organizations' myriad contributions to the cultural, health, societal, economic and environmental public good—contributions that benefit all citizens of Massachusetts and, by implication, the entire country. The court took great care to craft clear, sensible criteria to assist taxing authorities to distinguish bona fide charities from the few attempting to abuse the charitable property tax exemption for solely private purposes.

The ruling came in the case of *New England Forestry Foundation v. Hawley*, SJC-11432 (May 15, 2014). Massachusetts' Supreme Judicial Court (SJC) ruled that the New England Forestry Foundation's (NEFF) preservation of forest land qualifies as a charitable purpose under state law and that NEFF's conservation parcels can be exempt from local property taxes. As the SJC wrote, "[W]e are not alone in recognizing conservation organizations as serving a traditionally charitable purpose by lessening the burdens of government."

Notably, the SJC found that conservation land could be exempt even if no public access is permitted: "As the science of conservation has advanced, it has become more apparent that properly preserved and managed conservation land can provide a tangible benefit to a community even if few people enter the land." The SJC, however, did articulate a careful standard that if a charitable organization actively excludes the public, it faces a heightened burden to show that exclusion is necessary to achieve its public purpose. See [www.lta.org/public-benefits-ruling](http://www.lta.org/public-benefits-ruling) for more details. •

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## \$100,000 Settlement for Land Trust and Terrafirma

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**W**ithin 14 months of discovering that a neighbor clear cut on one of its preserves, the San Juan Preservation Trust (WA), with Terrafirma's backing, obtained payment of a \$100,000 settlement.

The Land Trust Alliance formed Terrafirma in 2011 to help land trusts defend their conservation easements and fee lands held for conservation from liability for legal challenges.

The clear-cut is on part of the trust's John H. Geary Shoreline Preserve, 38 acres along the west side of Fidalgo Island that a coalition of neighbors conserved in 1992. To orient new homeowners to the preserve when they move in, the trust sends out welcome letters and educational mailings, conducts stewardship presentations and provides copies of a boundary survey. Still, the trust is concerned that new owners clearly understand conservation and plans to use some of the settlement funds to increase outreach.

"No one likes to embark on litigation, but this community worked very hard to protect this shoreline," said Keith Gerrard, president of the San Juan Preservation Trust Board of Trustees. "We have a responsibility to defend all of our nature preserves in

perpetuity, and we won't shy away from that commitment. We were pleased that Terrafirma worked with us."

Upon discovering the violation, the land trust did an exemplary job on documentation of the trespass and communication with the neighbor. It kept precise records of all conversations and activities, producing accurate maps and photos quickly, along with an accurate chronology. The trust prevailed in the case in part due to its thorough and prompt handling of all the steps needed to prepare for litigation.

According to Gerrard, "We are happy to report that the settlement was also able to reimburse Terrafirma's litigation costs." By the terms of Terrafirma's insurance policy, Terrafirma funded the litigation and can recover those costs. Terrafirma will use recovered funds to help fund future conservation defense liability challenges for land and conservation easements of its member organizations. In addition to educating neighbors, the San Juan Preservation Trust intends to use the remaining recovery (approximately 87.5% of the settlement) to restore vegetation, restabilize the steep bank and implement new strategies to avoid future violations.

To read more about the case, see [sjpt.org](http://sjpt.org). •

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## Enlisting Bugs to Fight Invasives

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**M**embers of the all-volunteer Westborough Community Land Trust in Massachusetts were seeing purple, and it wasn't good. Invasive purple loosestrife, with its distinctive violet flowers, was taking hold in wetlands in and around the town of Westborough, and the land trust decided it was time to act.

"We're the only environmental organization in town," says land trust member Annie Reid, who helped lead the project. "This was one thing we could do to help with something a lot of people would readily acknowledge as a growing problem." Loosestrife grows in wetlands, so applying herbicides that could contaminate waters was not an option. The land trust obtained permission to introduce the loosestrife-eating *Galerucella* beetles on two state-owned properties.

Students from a high school environmental science class helped raise the beetles and monitored quadrants on the release areas. Although the class and its monitoring efforts were discontinued after a few years, land trust volunteers continued to hatch and release beetles to complete the 5-year project. In 2014, a year after the project ended, anecdotal observation indicates the loosestrife is weakened, and the beetles continue to reproduce, Reid says.

Those involved with biocontrol projects emphasize that they take many years to reach full effect. While biocontrols will not eradicate an invasive species, they can help keep it in check.



Westborough High School students dig purple loosestrife root balls. They cultivated specimens of the plant to breed beetles that were released to help control the invasive loosestrife.

Land trusts are testing bugs to battle invasives in other areas as well. In Oregon, Klamath Lake Land Trust in spring released Canada thistle stem gallflies and weevils on a property to combat the invasive thistle. In New York, Finger Lakes Land Trust partnered with Cornell University to release *Laricobius nigrinus* beetles to feed on hemlock woolly adelgid in some of its preserves. •

## Farms, Communities Strengthened by Feeding Hungry



FARMING 4 HUNGER

Farming 4 Hunger volunteers process green beans to distribute to those in need.

**A** project in southern Maryland to grow and distribute fresh food to those in need is also helping to develop markets for locally grown food, form community connections and provide jobs for former inmates.

Bernie Fowler Jr. founded Farming 4 Hunger in 2011 after seeing friends and former subcontractors of his bankrupt construction business at a food bank. As he wrestled with his own family and business problems, he says he felt a calling of faith to raise fresh food for the hungry, and he partnered to grow produce on a friend's farm.

Over the past few years, Farming 4 Hunger has developed an aggregation center and distribution network through churches and food banks as well as a network of farmers and volunteers to plant and harvest produce. Volunteers reduce labor costs, so farmers are able to sell produce to the program at discount rates. Pre-release prison inmates gain job skills, such as heavy equipment operation, and learn sustainable farming methods through the organization.

In 2014, Farming 4 Hunger is working closely with the Southern Maryland Agricultural Development Commission, an organization dedicated to helping farmers transition away from growing tobacco. "While several years ago we were pushing the idea of a food hub, we didn't have enough farmers coming together," says Christine Bergmark, the commission's executive director. "Now we see this sort of natural evolution for aggregating product."

The commission is expanding Farming 4 Hunger's distribution points to schools and social service agencies. In turn, this network is helping to spark other markets for farm products. Farmers who came together to feed those in need are now coordinating to supply hospitals and schools, Bergmark says, adding that "ultimately we'd like to develop an upper-tier market for local produce with restaurants and specialty markets."

Next on the horizon for Farming 4 Hunger? Fowler says the organization receives offers from farmland owners who want to donate or lend their land to the program. He is in the planning stages with the commission and local universities to train young farmers and former inmates to farm these lands. •

## Cultivating Young Farmers

**A**s agricultural operators age, there is growing concern over cultivating the next generation of farmers and ranchers. While the Census of Agriculture reports that young, beginning principal operators who reported their primary occupation as farming increased from 36,396 in 2007 to 40,499 in 2012, these young farmers account for just over 1% of principle operators.

The greatest obstacles for new farmers are the high upfront costs of land and equipment, according to a recent report by American Farmland Trust. "Cultivating the Next Generation" summarizes federal and state programs and resources to help farmers get a foothold, and profiles some new farmers ([www.farmland.org/](http://www.farmland.org/)

[www.farmland.org/programs/localfood/planningforagriculture/Sustaining-Farms-Farmland-Future.asp](http://www.farmland.org/programs/localfood/planningforagriculture/Sustaining-Farms-Farmland-Future.asp)).

In June the USDA announced that farmers enrolled in the Conservation Reserve Program (CRP) could receive incentives to transfer a portion of their land to beginning, disadvantaged or veteran farmers through the Transition Incentives Program. The program provides two additional years of payments for retired farmers and ranchers who transition expiring CRP acres to socially disadvantaged, military veteran or beginning producers who return the land to sustainable grazing or crop production. For more information, see [www.usda.gov/wps/portal/usda/usdahome?contentid=2014/06/0112.xml&contentidonly=true](http://www.usda.gov/wps/portal/usda/usdahome?contentid=2014/06/0112.xml&contentidonly=true). •

# Agricultural Census Shows Less Farmland, Aging Operators

**U**.S. farmland continues to shrink, and farm operators have reached their oldest average age at 58 years, according to the 2012 Census of Agriculture, released this May by the U.S. Department of Agriculture.

There are 3.2 million farmers operating 2.1 million farms on 914.5 million acres across the United States. Farmland has decreased by more than 7.5 million acres since 2007 and by more than 72 million acres since 1982.

The census found:

- 87% of all U.S. farms are operated by families or individuals.
- Three-quarters of all farms had sales of less than \$50,000, producing only 3% of the total value of farm products sold, while those with sales of more than \$1 million—4% of all farms—produced 66%.
- Direct-to-consumer sales by farms grew 8% from 2007, with sales totaling more than \$1.3 billion.

For more details and county-by-county statistics, see [www.agcensus.usda.gov](http://www.agcensus.usda.gov).



COLORADO CATTLEMEN'S AGRICULTURAL LAND TRUST

According to the U.S. Census of Agriculture, the largest category of agricultural operations is beef cattle, accounting for 29% of all farms and ranches. Pictured is Knott's Ranch, protected by Colorado Cattlemen's Agricultural Land Trust.



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A prescribed burn plays an important role in keeping woodlands and grasslands intact in the Malpai Borderlands, nearly 1 million acres of unfragmented open space in southeastern Arizona and southwestern New Mexico.

## Investing in Forests Could Prevent Costly Megafires

**M**anaging forests using such techniques as controlled burning and tree thinning can cut wildfire-related costs by more than half, reduce the risk of high-severity fires, and benefit people, water and wildlife, according to a study by the U.S. Forest Service, the Sierra Nevada Conservancy and The Nature Conservancy.

Scientists modeled likely future wildfires in California's Sierra Nevada range with and without proactive fuel treatments. The results indicate that actively managing forests improves their health, significantly reduces the size and intensity of fires and would save millions of dollars in structure loss, released carbon and firefighting costs.

For more information on the Mokelumne Avoided Cost Analysis, or to download the study, please visit [www.sierranevada.ca.gov](http://www.sierranevada.ca.gov).