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**What’s at stake when we pave over, fragment and otherwise fail to protect Texas farmland from the disruptions of development?**

*American Farmland Trust’s new report demonstrates how developing farmland puts food security, the environment and our way of life in jeopardy.*

**5/20/2020, WASHINGTON, DC** — Millions of acres of America’s agricultural land were developed or converted to uses that threaten farming between 2001 and 2016, according to [**“Farms Under Threat: The State of the States,”**](https://farmlandinfo.org/publications/farms-under-threat-the-state-of-the-states/) a new report by [**American Farmland Trust**](https://farmland.org/). The report’s**Agricultural Land Protection Scorecard** isthe first-ever state-by-state analysis of policies that respond to the development threats to farmland and ranchland, showing that every state can, and must, do more to protect their irreplaceable agricultural resources.

**“**[**The**](http://www.farmland.org/farmsunderthreat)**State of the States”** report shows the extent, location, and quality of each state’s agricultural land and tracks how much of it has been converted in each state using the newest data and the most cutting-edge methods. The Agricultural Land Protection Scorecard analyzes six programs and policies that are key to securing a sufficient and suitable base of agricultural land in each state and highlights states’ efforts to retain agricultural land for future generations. It offers a breakthrough tool for accelerating state efforts to make sure farmland is available to produce food, support jobs and the economy, provide essential environmental services, and help mitigate and buffer the impacts of climate change.

**Texas’ farms are under threat, with its best land succumbing to development.**

The report found that Texas was the most threatened state in the nation due to the loss of agricultural land to poorly planned real estate development. Between 2001 and 2016, 1,373,000 acres of agricultural land were developed or compromised, 555,000 of which were “Nationally Significant,” or land best suited for growing food and crops.

“Texas’ agricultural land is the most threatened in the nation,” said Billy Van Pelt II, AFT senior director of external relations. “This report identifies the urgent need for action to protect this land that is critical for Texas’ agricultural economy and its ability to grow food and other crops.  We’ve all witnessed the impacts of empty grocery store shelves in recent months – we must be vigilant in protecting our farms and ranches and ensuring that our food system is more secure and resilient.”

The hot spots for development are around Austin, Dallas-Fort Worth, Houston, Odessa and San Antonio.

However, the threat is more than just urban sprawl. Texas’ agricultural land is disproportionately threatened by a new, more insidious kind of development discovered by AFT through this research, termed low-density residential, or LDR, land use.

Roughly 50% of the land developed or compromised in Texas fell into this category. LDR is insidious because it is not always immediately visible to communities and policy makers and therefore has yet to provoke a policy response. In Texas, LDR is 30 times more likely to be converted to urban and highly developed land use than other agricultural land.

LDR land use compromises opportunities for farming and ranching, making it difficult for farmers to get into their fields or travel between fields. New residents not used to living next to agricultural operations often complain about farm equipment on roads or odors related to farming. Retailers such as grain and equipment dealers, on which farmers rely, are often pushed out. Farmers can be tempted to sell out for financial reasons, or because farming just becomes too hard in the circumstances. And lastly–but importantly–as older farmers near retirement they sell their properties, too often to non-farmers. This means that new and beginning farmers have a hard time finding land, threatening the very future of agriculture. More often than not, the land prices in these areas have been driven up by the encroaching development making it impossible for new farmers to afford to buy a farm.

Committed state action is an essential response to the loss of farmland and ranchland. Pursuing multiple approaches and linking them together is the most effective path. Texas ranked in the third quartile of states in taking action to protect farmland according to the **Agricultural Land Protection Scorecard**.

Van Pelt added, “Texas is a state where agriculture is valued, and we look forward to working with the Texas Agricultural Land Trust and our other partners across the state to ensure that farms continue to be an important contributor to the economy. The current trend of farmland conversion is putting Texas’ agricultural economy at risk. The rate of farmland loss is jeopardizing $7.2 billion in agricultural exports and a thriving local food economy that exceeds a quarter of a billion dollars.”

Texas is an agricultural state with $24.9 billion in annual revenues from farms and nearly 132 million acres of agricultural land. Roughly 25% of this agricultural land is considered “Nationally Significant,” meaning that it is among the nation’s best land for growing food and crops.

Texas’ top agricultural products are cattle, poultry and eggs, and cotton. Roughly 413,000 farmers and 149,000 farm workers are directly involved in the state’s agricultural economy.