

Hampshire County farms receive grants to improve climate resiliency, reduce emissions

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NORTHAMPTON — Four Hampshire County farms will receive funding aimed at helping them mitigate their impacts on climate change and adapt to changing climate conditions.

The farms in Hadley, Hatfield and Amherst are among 16 farms statewide that will receive a combined \$500,000 through the state's new Agricultural Climate Resiliency & Efficiencies Program. The program was created as part of an executive order by Gov. Charlie Baker, which lays out a comprehensive approach to further reduce greenhouse gas emissions; safeguard residents, municipalities, and businesses from the impacts of climate change; and build a more resilient commonwealth, according to the governor's office. The award announcement came Tuesday when the Statehouse was celebrating Agriculture Day.

At Queen's Greens in Amherst, \$50,000 will be used to dig additional wells and install frost-free water lines. The farm's co-owner, Danya Teitelbaum, said the water system expansion work would not be possible without the grant.

"I'm really appreciative," she said. "I am really excited how forward thinking it is — how to adjust to climate change. It's a great thing Massachusetts is doing."

The money will allow the farm to irrigate its high tunnels and greenhouses and make watering in the winter easier, Teitelbaum said. Existing above-ground irrigation systems on farm fields will be moved underground, which in turn makes it easier for the farmers to get around the field. Additionally, new irrigation systems will be installed in fields that previously went without them.

"We have added two wells to our washroom system with this grant," Teitelbaum said. "It will hopefully triple the amount of water in our washroom where all our produce gets processed."

All that work will help the farm become more drought-resistant and efficient, she said.

The ACRE program — through a reimbursement grant — funds materials and labor for the implementation of practices that work towards improving soil health, reducing greenhouse gas emissions and sequestering carbon.

The Devine Brothers Partnership in Hadley was awarded \$32,000 for a no-till drill project.

Astarte Farm in Hadley received \$4,600 for a flail mower, which will be used to cut and kill cover crops in a way that will "provide a lovely chopped mulch on the top of our production beds," farm manager Dan Pratt said.

The mower is similar to a lawn mower, but instead of pushing the cuttings off to the side, it will drop them straight down. That makes a layer on the growing bed that helps preserve moisture and suppress weeds, Pratt explained.

"I just think it's an extremely optimistic sign that the Massachusetts Department of Agriculture is interested in innovative soil preservation techniques," he said. "We really appreciate their support on many fronts."

In Hatfield, Harrison Bardwell of Bardwell Farm is using the \$11,900 grant to purchase a no-till planter — something that wouldn't be possible without the grant.

“This planter is the first step for me switching over to a no-till system,” Bardwell said. “It puts me that one step ahead for the future of my farm and also to be a leader to others to show others that it is possible.”

He hopes to be able to put the vacuum seeder in the ground by the end of May. By switching to no-till farming, Bardwell said it will save money on things like fuel and equipment repairs as well as help get better yields in production and quality. Bardwell said by using a system that limits soil disruption, he'll have better pest control and healthier soil.

“It's beneficial for the farm, economically and sustainably,” he said.

Baker's office said the ACRE program will help Massachusetts farms and food suppliers better prepare for intense weather and unpredictable storms.

“As impacts to farms are expected to result from more frequent and severe storm events, increased precipitation followed by periods of drought, higher overall temperature and increased evaporation rates, the program also offers incentives for agricultural operations to proactively address risks and strengthen their economic and environmental resiliency as they adapt to the changing climate,” the governor's office wrote in announcing the awards.

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