



FARMER RESOURCE NETWORK
RESOURCE GUIDE

LEGAL ASSISTANCE AND EDUCATION

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Whether you're considering starting a farm or you've been farming for decades, at some point you're likely to find yourself in need of help with a legal question or issue. Happily, there are a growing number of organizations and programs providing farmers with legal support across the country. The resources listed below will be a great place to start when you need this kind of expertise.

In this resource guide we distinguish between legal **assistance** and **education**. You'll also see that some organizations offer both types of support!

FARMERS LEGAL ACTION GROUP

Service Area: *National*

Service(s) Provided: *Assistance and Education*

Started in the 1980s as a response to the ongoing farm crisis, Farmers Legal Action Group (FLAG) is a nonprofit organization that provides farmers with direct legal support and advocates for the interests of small family farms nationally.

Through their farmer hotline, FLAG's attorneys provide expert guidance to agricultural producers who are facing legal challenges. While they can't represent you in court, they can help you understand your legal options, no matter where you are in the process. If you already have an attorney with limited understanding of agricultural law, FLAG's staff can consult with and support them. FLAG also writes and collects publications on a variety of topics and makes them available to farmers at no cost on their website.

If you are in need of legal guidance, contact FLAG's farmer hotline at **877-860-4349** and let them know Farm Aid sent you.

FARM COMMONS

Service Area: *National*

Service(s) Provided: *Education*

Farm Commons provides business legal education to farmers through multiple avenues including their online resource library, workshops, webinars and podcast. Their content centers around the legal aspects of owning and operating a farm business such as land use, liability, sales and contracts, food safety, farm succession and taxes. In addition to these direct-to-farmer services, Farm Commons educates attorneys on issues relating to community-based farmers around the country.

Farm Commons is a membership-based organization, though many of their resources are available at no cost. Receive 30% off of the cost of a producer membership when you enter the discount code "Farmaid30" while registering. Scholarships are available for BIPOC farmers as well.

FARM-TO-CONSUMER LEGAL DEFENSE FUND

Service Area: *National*

Service(s) Provided: *Assistance and Education*

Farm-to-Consumer Legal Defense Fund (FTCLDF) is a grassroots legal support organization committed to protecting the rights of family farmers and food producers to engage in direct commerce. They provide consultation to farmers on legal matters related to selling their farm products, consult with farmers' attorneys and in some cases they can provide pro bono legal representation. In addition to their legal assistance, FTCLDF offers online resources including information on state laws related to agricultural issues and more. Membership is available at a low cost and affords farmers the peace of mind to know they have quick access to services when the need arises.

NATIONAL AGRICULTURAL LAW CENTER

Service Area: *National*

Service(s) Provided: *Education*

The National Agricultural Law Center maintains a vast library of research and educational resources on topics relevant to agricultural law. They focus on ensuring these resources are accessible and understandable to the general public, so that farmers can easily visit their website to learn about their topic of interest. In addition to their written resources, they also host a live webinar series and maintain an archive of the recorded presentations.

AGRICULTURAL MEDIATION PROGRAMS

Service Area: *State-specific*

Service(s) Provided: *Assistance*

Agricultural mediation programs are state-level programs that provide third-party mediation to agricultural producers to resolve conflicts before they escalate to civil court. Some states' programs are specifically focused on resolving conflicts around USDA/FSA agricultural loans, however many states offer mediation for a broad spectrum of agricultural conflicts such as lease issues, neighbor disputes, family farm transition, wetlands determination and more. Most states have certified agricultural mediation programs in place for farmers — find yours here! When mediation services are needed in a state that does not have a program, FSA contracts with a reputable mediator in the given area. If your state does not have an agricultural mediation program, please contact your local FSA office to learn about your options.

LAW SCHOOL RESOURCES

Service Area: *Varies by Program*

Service(s) Provided: *Assistance and Education, Varies by Program*

Numerous law schools around the country offer services that benefit farmers. Some offer legal education resources in the form of publications, web-based libraries or webinars, and others provide direct legal services pro bono or at a lower cost than a private attorney. The list below is by no means exhaustive, so be sure to check out your nearest law school to learn what services may be available to you.

- Drake University's [Agricultural Law Center](#) (IA)
- Vermont Law and Graduate School's [Center for Food and Agriculture Systems](#) (VT)
- Pace University's [Pace Food Law Center](#) (NY)
- Penn State Law [Rural Economic Development Clinic](#) (PA)

FARMWORKER LEGAL ASSISTANCE PROGRAMS

Service Area: *Varies by Program*

Service(s) Provided: *Varies by Program*

Some law centers offer programs geared toward protecting the legal rights of farmworkers, and many of those further focus their services on migrant farmworkers. Legal support for farmworkers is usually accomplished through litigation, education and outreach or a combination of both. The list of programs below is not exhaustive, so be sure to check out [this state directory](#) from Legal Aid of North Carolina.

- Colorado Legal Services [Migrant Farm Worker Division](#) (CO)
- Michigan Immigrant Rights Center [Farmworker and Immigrant Worker Rights](#) (MI)
- Legal Aid of North Carolina [Farmworker Unit](#) (NC)
- Pennsylvania Legal Assistance [Pennsylvania Farmworker Project](#) (PA)
- Northwest Justice Project [Farmworker Unit](#) (WA)

LEGAL FOOD HUB

Service Area: *New England*

Service(s) Provided: *Assistance and Education*

[Legal Food Hub](#) (a project of [Conservation Law Foundation](#)), is a service that connects [eligible](#) farmers, food entrepreneurs and food and farm organizations throughout New England to free legal assistance. They pair clients with an experienced attorney for transactional legal needs and deliver legal education through an extensive online [resource](#)

[library](#). Their lightning guides provide quick and easy-to-digest information while the legal guides and webinars go into deeper detail.

IOWA CONCERN

Service Area: *North Central*

Service(s) Provided: *Assistance and Education*

[Iowa Concern Hotline](#), a program of Iowa State University Extension, provides 24/7 free and confidential access to an attorney for legal education (among other needs including financial specialists and stress counselors). While these attorneys may not specialize in agricultural law, they may be able to point you in the right direction. Iowa Concern serves folks across multiple states in the North Central region. Farmers can call the hotline for assistance at **800-447-1985**, and legal specialists can be reached by email as well.

BLACK BELT JUSTICE CENTER

Service Area: *Regional (Black Belt Region, Southern U.S.)*

Service(s) Provided: *Assistance and Education*

The [Black Belt Justice Center](#), a program of [Acres of Ancestry](#), is a nonprofit organization that provides legal and advocacy support to African American farmers, landowners and communities in the Black Belt region. Their aim is to help individuals and their communities sustainably build wealth through land ownership and stewardship and through exploring land-based cooperatives and businesses. They support farmers directly through legal assistance and business support services, covering a number of topics such as land leases, foreclosure prevention, heirs property mediation and more. BBJC also maintains a network of pro bono and low-cost attorneys and partners with like-minded organizations to facilitate trainings and community workshops. Services are also available to community-based organizations that are mission-aligned and serve African American and rural communities.

CENTER FOR AGRICULTURE AND FOOD SYSTEMS

Service Area: *VT, National*

Service(s) Provided: *Assistance, Education*

The Vermont Law School's [Center for Agriculture and Food Systems](#) was listed above for its legal assistance services, but did you know that farmers across the country can benefit from their educational resources? CAFS produces guides and toolkits for agricultural producers that tackle the legal aspects of topics such as land access, farmers markets and food safety.

NCAT ATTRA SUSTAINABLE AGRICULTURE

Service Area: *National*

Service(s) Provided: *Education*

The National Center of Appropriate Technology's [ATTRA Sustainable Agriculture](#) program offers a wealth of information on subjects related to sustainable agriculture production through their media hub and publication library. Many of their materials offer education on legal aspects of this work, as well as the process of navigating legal needs as a farmer. Two helpful publications folks can start with are [I'm a Farmer. When Do I Need a Lawyer?](#) and [Legal Resources for Farmers](#).

CONNECT WITH FARM AID

Not finding what you need? Request one-on-one assistance from our Farmer Services Team by filling out our [Online Request for Assistance form](#) or by calling **1-800-FARM-AID (1-800-327-6243)**. Farm Aid staff are happy to listen and help you however we can.

FARMER RESOURCE GUIDES

Check out our [Farmer Resource Guides](#) for straightforward information created by our Farmer Services Team to help with topics that come up frequently on our 1-800-FARM-AID hotline.