

Working Lands Management Program

Guiding Principles and Policy

Guiding Principles

Our vision is to utilize a working lands program to financially support our growing land stewardship needs to achieve greater mission impact. This program diversifies our income base with a steady, reliable income stream. NLI's mission will also align as we incorporate natural ecosystems into productive agricultural land for clean water, healthy soils, biodiversity and heritage preservation to optimize the value of natural resources on productive lands. When feasible, our working lands may be restored to appropriate habitats.

These draft guiding principles for NLI's Working Lands Program are formulated to guide the development of site stewardship goals, determine the best farm management strategies to include both conservation and economic sustainability, as well as highlighting our values in building long lasting relationships with the farmers and the local communities where they are located.

Principle 1. Sustainable Land Stewardship. Profitable and responsible land management includes practicing restorative agricultural techniques for quality soils and water quality protection. The farm management and production plans for each farm should have a measureable set of goals for soil health and water quality protection based on scientific principles and practices.

Principle 2. Mutually Beneficial Lease Arrangements. Leases will be fair to both parties as well as provide for technical assistance with conservation practices to reduce the economic risk to the farmer in return for implementing sustainable agricultural practices.

Principle 3. Conservation and Restoration. Initial conservation practices may include assessment of marginal lands, remaining habitat remnants on farms such as hedgerows, stream corridors, enhancement of pasture and hay lands with native plants and control of invasive species. The management and production plans for each farm should have short and long term conservation and restoration goals and practices.

Principle 4. Market and Revenue Economic Opportunities. Farms may be assessed as to the economic potentials for valuing the ecosystem services, as well as the potential for local food production, conservation grazing and haying, specialty crops and organic farming as long as they fit within NLI's Working Lands Policy. It is our intent to demonstrate that ecologically managed agricultural lands are profitable and improve our regions natural resources.

Working Lands Policy

NLI will implement farmland management standards that strive to protect and conserve the natural resources of the site.

Farmers who lease NLI working lands shall:

- Use farm practices that protect and minimize degradation of soil and water resources, wildlife habitat, flora, fauna, and cultural resources.
- Promote the long-term ecological health of NLI working lands
- Encourage communication among the Lessee, NLI, and the Natural Resource Conservation Service, the Soil and Water Conservation District and other appropriate resources as outlined in NLI's leases or procedures.

A Resource Management System Plan (RMS Plan) will be developed for each farm, making recommendations regarding farm management and conservation goals, and include an implementation strategy with timelines. The RMS Plan will be developed with technical assistance from the local district of the Natural Resource Conservation Service (NRCS), the local Soil and Water Conservation District (SWCD) and the Consolidated Farm Service Agency (FSA), the USDA will assist with designing the RMS. The RMS Plan will incorporate soil conservation, water quality, nutrient management, wetland buffer and pesticide management guidelines that will be approved by NLI.

Natural resource conservation on NLI farmlands shall be achieved through implementation of soil and water quality protection standards combined with more comprehensive, site-specific Conservation Plans. These Conservation Plans shall also have nutrient management plans under the umbrella of the RMS Plan.

NLI will build equitable partnerships with the Lessee using their agricultural management capabilities and reducing their economic risk.

NLI will:

- Build partnerships using both short and longer-term leases on parcels based on natural resource management goals for the site. The equitable and efficient assignment of farm leases to farmers shall require standard procedures for the transfer of leases on new land acquisitions, for negotiated lease extensions, or, when negotiations fail, a public bid process, and for farm lease retirements or acreage reductions.
- Ensure that each Lessee maintains adequate insurance coverage for NLI, which must be named as additional insured, and all parties that work on the farmed parcel.

- Provide a clear process for each Lessee to submit annual lease fees timely, as required in its Farm Lease Agreement.

The lessee and NLI will execute a Farm Lease Agreement in a form approved by the Working Lands Sub-Committee of NLI's Land Conservation Committee.

NLI may promote alternative agricultural production where appropriate

- To promote the most appropriate use of productive land, and
- To encourage local beginning farmers

Examples of such leases may include local food production, conservation grazing and haying, specialty crops and organic farming. A Farm Marketing Plan may be developed with the lessee to include an analysis of markets and revenue generation appropriate to each site within the context of its conservation goals.

NLI may reduce or terminate agricultural activities on working lands for ecosystem restoration.

- Restore native plant communities, wildlife habitat or protect cultural resources
- Provide a consistent, fair, and efficient course of action for the acreage reduction and/or termination of leased properties from the program.
- Provide for advance planning for restoration activities by depositing lease rents into a designated revenue fund for restoration and stewardship of leased properties after they are retired from the program

NLI's Land Conservation Committee shall periodically review staff recommendations and determine whether each leased property should a) remain in the program, b) be terminated from the program, or c) be reduced in acreage so that it is partially terminated from the program.

NLI may terminate a leased property from the program or reduce the acreage of a leased property a) because of implementation plans for site habitat restoration, or b) for any other reason related to the management and operation of NLI's properties and affairs.

In advance of the reduction or termination of agricultural activities, if the land is to be restored, NLI shall prepare a restoration plan and budget, and allocate project funds for restoration into which farm lease fees shall be allocated, unless otherwise directed by the Board of Trustees.