

New Spirit Farmland Partnerships

Monarch Farms Project Q and A

What is the Monarch Farms Project (MFP)?

Monarch Farms is a joint project of New Spirit Farmland Partnerships and a group of social impact investors concerned with restoring the health of our ecosystems. The project is designed to:

1. Help organic and other conservation minded farmers secure long-term access to the farmland they need to grow or maintain their operations;
2. Convert conventional farmland to organic farming practices;
3. Establish habitat that increases populations of monarch butterflies and other beneficial wildlife.

How does the MFP work?

1. Farmers apply to MFP who need additional land to grow or sustain their operation. Farmers can also apply who wish to sell and lease back land they already own. To be considered farmers must live in our target region and meet our criteria (see these details below).
2. If you are selected and if suitable land is available that meets your needs and our criteria, we will seek to purchase the land and lease it to you on a long-term lease (see more details on the lease terms below).
3. A portion of the land (roughly 10 to 30% of the total acreage) will be converted by us, at no cost to you, to pollinator habitat.
4. Farmers leasing the land must agree to help care for the pollinator habitat on an annual basis and will receive a reduced rental rate in return.

What will happen to this land long-term?

The investors are committed to protecting both the farmland and the pollinator habitats in perpetuity. Exactly how this will be done is still to be determined but will likely involve partnerships with local land trusts.

What are the criteria for farmers to apply?

1. Must live and farm in Wisconsin or Illinois within a 100-mile radius of Madison, WI.
2. Has been farming in this region for no less than three years;
3. Already owns or rents their home farm;
4. Can demonstrate the financial sustainability of their farming operation;
5. Can demonstrate through third party certification or other means that they are committed to organic or other conservation minded farming practices.
6. Has an interest in and commitment to wildlife conservation;
7. Needs additional land to grow their operations;
8. Has suitable land near them that is for sale or which they believe the owner would consider selling. Note: we will also consider applications from farmers interested in selling and leasing back land they already own as long as they are able to meet all the other criteria listed here.

9. Are willing to have a pollinator habitat established on a portion of the land;
10. Are willing to protect and assist with the care and upkeep of the pollinator habitat.

What are criteria for the land to be acquired?

1. Is located in our target region;
2. Does not include homes or other structures requiring maintenance of any significant degree;
3. Meets the agricultural needs of the farmer who will lease it;
4. Has a portion of the land suitable for the establishment of monarch/pollinator/wildlife habitat.

Is there a minimum and maximum size of investment?

As a general rule, we would prefer to make investments in parcels of no less than 15 and no more than 120 acres.

What are typical lease terms?

1. Five-year lease with guaranteed option to renew as long as all lease obligations are being met;
2. Reasonable rental rate; reviewed and adjusted if necessary every third year.
3. Commitment to organic and other conservation minded farming practices;
4. Commitment to carry out an annual maintenance plan for the pollinator habitat;
5. First right of refusal if the investor wishes to sell the land.
6. Farmers may make an offer to purchase the land at any time so long as there is a method in place to guarantee long-term protection of the habitat and the land, such as an easement with a local land trust.

What if I don't live in your target region?

If our pilot year is successful we plan to expand the target region in year 2, so please feel free to apply or put your name on our mailing list for next year.

Can your investors give me a loan to buy equipment or animals or invest in other ways in my business?

No, I'm sorry, this project is only focused on farmland investments.

Do you work with beginning farmers?

A beginning farmer is defined as someone who has been farming less than 10 years. Our criteria require 3 years or more of farming experience so yes, we do work with beginning farmers. We do not, however, work with individuals who are not yet farming, because the cost to evaluate a business plan that is not yet, or just being implemented is too high for us, at this time.

How do I apply?

Our website at www.monarchfarms.org will launch in early March 2018 and you can fill out an online application form there or download a paper application form.

For more information contact Robert Karp at info@monarchfarms.org