



WORKING LANDS WORKGROUP REPORT

DATE: January 10, 2017
TO: Food, Land and Water Project Steering Committee
FROM: Working Lands Workgroup
Co-Chairs: Mike Carlson, Anna Haines and John Koepke
Facilitator: Margaret Krome
SUBJECT: *Interim Report on Workgroup Progress*

Workgroup Charter

The Steering Committee asked the Workgroup to consider the future of “working lands” in Wisconsin. The Steering Committee asked the Workgroup to consider the following (summarized) questions:

- What are the key trends affecting Wisconsin’s “working lands?”
- Do current trends lead to a sustainable future? How do we define “sustainable?”
- What are our “working lands” goals?
- Are we making progress toward our goals? If not, why not?
- What would it take to achieve our goals?
- How will we measure progress?
- Where do we go from here?

Workgroup Membership

See attached list of Workgroup members (including changes) and attendance to date. The Workgroup co-chairs believe that the Workgroup would benefit from more participation by agricultural, real estate and developer representatives. We would welcome Steering Committee advice and assistance in this regard.

Workgroup Meetings

The Workgroup has held 2 meetings to date, on August 23 and November 10, 2016. Attendance has been low, particularly at the second meeting. The Workgroup hopes to expand its membership, and improve attendance, in order to ensure strong input from stakeholders representing a wide range of perspectives. There has been excellent, constructive participation by those Workgroup members who have attended to date.

- On August 23, Workgroup members introduced themselves, shared basic perspectives, and began to identify and address key issues and information needs.

- On November 10, the Workgroup heard and discussed an expert presentation on the Wisconsin's Farmland Preservation Program (see minutes attached). The Workgroup began to identify and discuss key "working lands" goals, issues and strategies.

Problem Description

The Workgroup has focused mainly on farmland, rather than forest land. Given the limited time available, that will likely continue to be the main focus. The Workgroup has worked to identify and define key concerns related to the future of Wisconsin farmland.

Wisconsin residents consume 30 million lbs. of food *every single day*, and our population continues to grow. Our food supply must be replenished, without fail, every day of every year, for all generations to come. A plentiful and affordable food supply requires an adequate land base. Wisconsin imports much of its food, but we are also a major food producer and exporter.

Agriculture and food processing contributed \$88 billion to Wisconsin's economy in 2012 (12% of the state's jobs, many centered in urban areas). Wisconsin's major dairy and food processing industries (not just farmers) depend, for their very existence, on a stable and productive land base. A shrinking land base and growing land use conflicts are undermining the foundation on which these industries stand.

This is not just a Wisconsin phenomenon. Today, the world has only *half as much farmland per capita* as we did just 50 years ago. That *per capita* loss is mainly due to a doubling of the world's population, but good farmland is also being lost to urban development, drought, erosion and other factors. The U.S. is no exception. In less than 3 decades, from 1982 to 2010, more than 24 million acres of U.S. cropland were lost to urban development alone. That is equivalent to 70% of the total land area of Wisconsin.

Wisconsin, for its part, has been losing 20-30 thousand acres of farmland *each year*, mainly to development. That includes some of the best farmland in the state. All told, over 777 thousand acres of rural land (including over 520 thousand acres of farmland) were converted to development from 1982 to 2007. That is an area the size of Dane County.

Despite growing food demand, and the needs of Wisconsin's expanding dairy and food industries, Wisconsin is targeting substantially less farmland for preservation than it did in the 1980's. Land use conflicts are growing as farms become more industrialized, as sprawling "checkerboard" development turns previously unbroken stretches of farmland into disjointed scraps, and as more homes are located near large-scale farming operations. Some farmers are finding it hard to expand and modernize, because suitable land is in short supply.

As we struggle to produce more food on less land, the increased intensity of farming operations is having a growing impact on our environment – including our lakes, streams and groundwater. The loss of farmland is exacerbating stormwater runoff problems in communities statewide. As we continue to lose farmland, we are losing one of our most important economic and environmental resources. Our rapidly dwindling farm landscape is also changing our very self-image: what we think of when we say "Wisconsin."

Wisconsin has a farmland preservation program to help preserve the state's agricultural land base. The program encourages local farmland preservation planning and zoning. Farmers may claim income tax credits if their land is protected from development, and if they comply with soil and water conservation practices. The program now provides about \$20 million in income tax credits each year.

The farmland preservation program was updated in 2009, amid high hopes. Tax credits were increased and simplified, and planning and zoning standards were streamlined. New "agricultural enterprise areas" were created. But despite these improvements, farmland loss has continued unabated. Some of this may be related to subsequent state law and budget modifications. But, more fundamentally, it is the result of land use decisions made at the county, local, farm and homeowner levels:

- Counties are steadily reducing the amount of farmland that they plan to preserve for agricultural use, as development pressure increases. Agricultural growth is on a collision course with urban and suburban development in many areas.
- Tens of thousands of acres have been removed from FP zoning districts, as county and local governments have revised or repealed their FP zoning ordinances. Large amounts of land have also been removed from FP zoning districts as a result of individual parcel "rezones."
- Despite some successes, farmer participation in "agricultural enterprise areas" has been disappointing to date.
- Many eligible farmers are failing to claim FP tax credits. This may be due to a lack of knowledge, or a wish to avoid FP "conservation compliance" obligations. FP tax credits are also geographically limited, and quite modest compared to other farm tax benefits that are provided without any "conservation compliance" obligations (e.g., "use value" property tax assessment and the new MAC income tax credit).

Farmers themselves are often ambivalent about farmland preservation. Most farmers support farmland preservation in the abstract, but they also want to preserve their own land use options. Farmer attitudes are also shaped by the changing structure of Wisconsin agriculture. Wisconsin farmers are aging (the average farm operator is 57 years old), and their land is their "retirement fund." Fewer operators are turning over their family operations to the next generation. For many farmers, financial opportunities from land development may outweigh the value of FP income tax credits and farmland protection. That limits FP enrollment and farmer support for FP zoning restrictions. The public, for its part, may be unaware of the large issues at stake.

Goals and Strategies

At its November 10 meeting, the Workgroup identified the following general goals and strategies:

Ultimate Goal: Maintain economically and environmentally resilient working landscapes.

Enabling Conditions:

- Vibrant rural communities.
- Strong agricultural economies.
- Enduring land access and affordability.

Strategies:

- Support economically and environmentally sustainable farms, including farms in and near urban areas.
- Support new farmers, and successful farm transitions to the next generation.
- Support effective, long-term protection of important farmland. Identify priority areas for protection.
- Support conservation stewardship.
- Support clear farmland preservation policies and programs.
- Improve public understanding of the economic, environmental and social threats posed by farmland loss. Support information, education and training related to farming, food production, farmland preservation, soil and water conservation, and the food needs of an urban society.
- Support farmland preservation as way to protect watersheds, and reduce storm runoff.
- Collaborate with a broad array of stakeholders.
- Enhance funding for farmland preservation and conservation compliance.
- Identify priorities, and target available resources to achieve those priorities.
- Strengthen the current farmland preservation program.
- Balance preservation with property rights, and provide reasonable predictability to farmers, developers and other landowners.
- Support sound land use planning and development.
- Systematically collect and publish clear information on farmland conversion and related trends, including demographic, housing, urban expansion and infrastructure trends. Help the public and policy makers understand key issues and trends.
- Tie broad farm tax benefits, such as “use value” property tax assessment and MAC income tax credits, to farmland preservation and soil and water conservation.
- Align federal, state and local laws, programs and policies to achieve farmland preservation and conservation objectives.
- Develop regional, community and “grass roots” farmland preservation strategies.

Next Steps

At its final 2 meetings, the Workgroup hopes to do the following:

- Expand Workgroup membership and participation, to ensure a robust discussion involving multiple perspectives.
- Refine the above list of goals and strategies, and make it more concrete. At the end of the process, the Workgroup hopes to make some fairly concrete, substantive recommendations to the Steering Committee.

Working Lands Workgroup Member List

First Name	Last Name	Organization	Attended Meeting 8/23/16	Attended Meeting 11/10/16
Dan	Bahr	Wisconsin Counties Association	Yes	No
Ed	Brooks	Wisconsin State Legislature	Yes	No
Margaret	Burlingham	Jefferson Co. FPP	Yes	No
Mike	Carlson	Gathering Waters; Co-Chair, Working Lands Workgroup	Yes	Yes
Dick	Cates	Dairy Professor at UW-Madison	Yes	No
Mike	Engleson	Wisconsin Lakes	Yes	Yes
Coreen	Fallat	DATCP	Yes	Yes
Rob	Gottschalk	Vandewalle & Associates	No	No
David	Grusznski	Greenseams and Working Soils Program	Yes	Yes
Lance	Gurney	Eau Claire County	No	Yes
Steve	Guthrie	Nicolet Hardwoods Corporation	No	No
Brian	Haase	Waupaca County Conservationist	Yes	Yes
Anna	Haines	UW Stevens Point; Co-Chair, Working Lands Workgroup	Yes	Yes
Steve	Hilger	Hilger Farms	No	No
Chris	Holman	Wisconsin Farmers Union	Yes	Yes
Jim	Holperin	Wisconsin State Senate	No	No
Ed	Huck	Former Exec. Director, WI Alliance of Cities	No	No
Bruce	Jones	Professor, Agricultural and Applied Economics	No	No
John	Koepke	Koepke Farms; Co-Chair, Working Lands Workgroup	No	No
Margaret	Krome	Michael Fields Agricultural Institute; Facilitator, Working Lands Workgroup	Yes	Yes
Deb	Nemeth	1000 Friends of Wisconsin	No	No
Tom	Quinn	Wisconsin Farmers Union	No	Yes
Aaron	Thompson	Professor & Land Use Specialist - UWSP	Yes	Yes
John	Torinus Jr.	Journalist, Entrepreneur, business manager	No	No
Alison	Volk	DATCP	No	Yes
Robin	Wagner	1000 Friends	No	No
Curt	Witynski	League of Wisconsin Municipalities	No	No

Attendees Not Listed in Group

Randy Poelma (Steering Committee)	Bill Berry (Steering Committee)
	Pat Leavenworth (Steering Committee)