

# Food • Land • & Water

Toward a Sustainable Wisconsin



---

## Working Lands Workgroup Summary of 1<sup>st</sup> Workgroup Meeting, August 23, 2016

### Attendance

#### **Committee Co-Chairs:**

- Anna Haines, Director, Center for Land Use Education UWSP
- Mike Carlson, Gathering Waters
- John Koepke, Farmer (absent)

**Facilitator:** Margaret Krome, Program Director – Public Policy, Michael Fields Ag Institute

**Recorder:** Ben Wojahn, Conservationist, Vernon County Land and Water Conservation Dept.

#### **Committee Members:**

- Aaron Thompson, Professor & Land Use Specialist – UWSP
- Coreen Fallat, DATCP
- Brian Hasse, Waupaca County Conservationist
- Chris Holman farmer, Center for Integrated Ag Systems at UW-Madison
- Pat Leavenworth: retired NRCS WI State Conservationist (attending as Steering Committee Co-chair)
- David Grusznski, Program Director, Greenseams and Working Soils Program
- Dick Cates, Farmer, Dairy Professor at UW-Madison
- Ed Brooks, Representative (R-Reedsburg)
- Margaret Burlingham, Chair Jefferson Co. FPP
- Dan Bahr, Wisconsin Counties Association
- Randy Poelma, Ho-chunk Nation
- Bill Berry, NACD, American Farmland Trust
  
- Absent
  - Bruce Jones, Professor, Agricultural and Applied Economics
  - Curt Witynski, Assistant Director, League of Wisconsin Municipalities
  - Dave Holbach, Retired State Senator and Secretary of Building Commission
  - Deb Nemeth, Interim Executive Director, 1000 Friends of Wisconsin
  - Ed Huck, Former Executive Director of the Wisconsin Alliance of Cities

- Jim Holperin, Former Wisconsin State Senator
- John Koepke, Farmer (Workgroup Co-chair)
- John Torinus, Journalist, Entrepreneur, and business manager
- Margaret Kohring, The Conservation Fund
- Robin Wagner, Special Projects Director, 1000 Friends
- Steve Guthrie, Woodlands Manager Nicolet Hardwoods Corporation
- Steve Hilger, President, Hilger Farms

### **Fears and Hopes**

**Aaron Thompson:** Professor & Land Use Specialist, UWSP

Hope- “My hope is that local communities become part of farmland preservation efforts. How do we re-engage them? The hope is that we can encourage local voices in this discussion.”

Fear- “The 2008 slow down, and the associated slow down in real-estate development, caused a lot of communities to stop the investment in farmland preservation programs. Rebuilding the community support around this issue is probably one of the biggest challenges we face. My fear is that between the real-estate slow down and FPP, that real-estate will get going faster than farmland preservation efforts in the Midwest.”

**Anne Haines:** Director, UWSP

Hope- “My hope is that we come to some interesting and meaningful engagement. Hopefully we will see some implementation come out of this, whether it is at a statewide level or county by county, farmer by farmer. I don’t have any expectations of what that is, but it would be nice to see something move forward.”

Fear- “My fear is the demographic piece. The average age of farmers is about 57 years old so one of my fears is that as a group of farmers retires who is coming behind them? There are new beginning farmers but how do they afford to buy property? How do you start a business in agriculture or forestry?”

**Brian Haas:** County Conservationist, Waupaca County

Hope- Not stated.

Fear- “My greatest fear is that we are not going to find some common middle ground in whatever we come up with as part of this process.”

**Chris Holman:** farmer, Center for Integrated Ag Systems at UW-Madison

Hope- “If we are to lose farmland because of underlying demographic trends and pressures, my hope is that we find ways to manage that loss in a planned, strategic way that commands support from the broader community. “

Fear- Not stated.

**Coreen Fallat:** Program Manager, DATCP

Hope- “My hope is that we’ll be able to come up with some meaningful ways to get to farmland preservation and environmental conservation and use the tools that we have or identify some other tools that might be more appropriate. It has been 10 years since the Working Lands Steering Committee Report came out. Maybe there are some new things we can think about that other states have had success with. My hope is that we can find some way to move toward more meaningful action.”

Fear- “I think there is a disconnect between what people say they want and what is really happening. Many communities say that farmland preservation is important, but they often fail to take concrete steps to preserve farmland. I wonder if we are effectively communicating about farmland preservation and farm conservation.”

**Dan Bahr:** Wisconsin Counties Association

Hope- “Both political parties have tried to balance the goals of a vibrant agriculture with environmental protection. I think this has been true regardless of who is in power and I’d like to see that continue.”

Fear- “I don’t want to see a situation where we get so polarized, where people don’t recognize the need for balance. As we go forward, we can conserve and protect the environment and also have strong and vibrant farms, whether they are family farms or CAFOs. There is room for everyone. I think it’s important for Wisconsin to continue being a strong agricultural state.”

**David Grusznski:** Program Director, Greenseams and Working Soils Program

Hope- “We can do a better job of educating society as a whole about the importance of soil and water resources on the landscape. I don’t see regulation going over well. Incentives for conservation practices change as frequently as crop prices, so I don’t see incentives working well either. It comes down to doing a better job at educating and getting everyone on the same page.”

Fear- “My fear is that there is now a three way competition for acreage among small farms, developers, and very large intense farming operations. This competition is putting greater strain on soil and water resources. Emerging land uses and farming practices are changing the landscape in ways, and on a scale, which we have never seen before.”

**Dick Cates:** Farmer, Dairy Professor at UW-Madison

Hope- “My hope is that we enable the next generation. We can’t sit around and do business as usual. We have lots of new, young farmers - people who want to farm in Wisconsin. So we should capitalize on that human capital.”

Fear- “My fear is that we keep going down the same destructive path that we’ve been following, as a result of apathy or not being able to see the big problem. As a society, this is the greatest mistake we can make, to lose the cultural heritage which is our agricultural land.”

**Ed Brooks:** Representative (Reedsburg), Wisconsin State Legislature

Hope- "I hope that we can achieve some equitable solutions that people will want to support rather than force-feeding solutions."

Fear- "The fear would be the flip-side of the hope. That we fail to arrive at a good, equitable product that people are willing to buy into."

**Margaret Burlingham:** Chair, Jefferson Co. FPP

Hope- "I hope we can find a way to engage the public at the county and grassroots level. The public does not always understand the importance of agricultural lands. Most of our natural areas are in farms. Groundwater recharge is a big issue; we are right next to Waukesha County. How can we get the public engaged in protecting farmland because the public needs to understand its importance and needs to want it."

Fear- "The average Wisconsin farmer is about 57 years old, which is 20 years older than the average Wisconsin resident. As current farmers retire, what is going to happen to their farms? In our area, when farmers retire, the farms are often broken up into lots and forever lost to agricultural use. That can have many adverse impacts."

**Mike Carlson:** Executive Director, Gathering Waters

Hope- "Through this effort, I hope that we can identify key priorities for working lands protection in the state, and that we can build a narrative that gets the public and decision makers more engaged."

Fear- "I fear that we have lost the narrative of why investing in working lands protection is so important."

**Randy Poelma:** Ho-chunk Nation, 15,000 acres.

Fear: I fear the growing conflict between large and small farms, and that small farms are getting pushed out.

Hope: I hope that we can move toward more sustainable farming systems.

**Pat Leavenworth:** retired NRCS WI State Conservationist (attending as Steering Committee Co-chair).

Fear: Loss of farmland and resulting food insecurity.

Hope: That the mood in the state turns toward preserving farmland, recognizing that adequate farmland is crucial to farmers' ability to farm and sustain our food supply.

### **Group Discussion – Issues and Concerns**

- Political impasse at state and local levels, divisiveness of land use issues
- Blaming farmers vs development pressure for farmland loss
- Farmers have competing incentives (e.g. preserving farmland vs maximizing economic return)
- Competing philosophies: planning and zoning vs voluntary land use decision-making
- Identifying regionally appropriate farmland preservation needs and tools
- What is the appropriate role of PDRs
- Little public awareness of farmland preservation needs
- Is the current Farmland Preservation Program effective? Do FPP tax credits make a difference? How important are FPP plans, FPP zoning, FPP agreements, and Ag Enterprise Areas.
- Impact of Farmland Preservation Tax Credits in light of other tax relief programs such as Use Value Assessment and Manufacturing Agricultural Credit (MAC).
- Attitudes: reluctance to embrace change, apathy and amnesia
- Different communities have different needs, concerns, and strategies (no “one-size-fits-all”)
- Forest, as well as farmland, protection

### **Group Discussion – Hopes**

- Build on existing programs
- Preserve farmland in order to have a strong vibrant food system
- Build stronger public support for farmland preservation
- Farming is valued
- Flexibility to meet diverse community needs
- Transition farms to the next generation
- Engage non-farming land owners utilizing proper messengers
- Form bigger collective "We"

### **Who else should be here? - brainstorming**

- Realtors and builders
- Large Ag producer
- Large Ag DBA farm Bureau type rep
- Homeowners
- Dick Okray-potato farmer
- A nay-sayer
- Legal estate planning background -George Twohig suggested
- Wisconsin planning directors
- Lake front property owners
- County Code Administrator
- Towns Association
- Hunting community- Ducks Unlimited, etc.

- Developer
- Landowners
- Beginning farmers

### **Agenda for Second Workgroup meeting – brainstorming**

- Why is working lands protection important? (Margaret Krome & Mike Carlson)
- Are we making progress towards our goals?
- What’s needed to achieve our goals?
- Strategies/models for addressing working lands loss (government and non-government) (Mike, American Farmland Trust)
- Trends: areas heavily affected by Working Lands Initiative (Anna, Aaron, Coreen)
- Better communicating working lands needs
- What are the trade offs
- Why are working lands protection not important to some, even though they benefit
- Impacts of agronomic practices on farmland loss through erosion (Bill Berry)

### **Additional information needs - brainstorming**

- Farmland conversion, where?
- Forest ownership patterns (Mike C.)
- Facts on: population growth-need for land, need for food
- Impacts of agronomic practices on farmland loss through erosion ( e.g. soil health, CRP, cash grain, pasture, row crops)
- Strategies for supporting beginning farmers.
- Government subsidies, tax policies, and programs and their impact on land use decisions and working lands conversion to other uses.
- Models for non-government working lands protection
- Activating community resources to support W.L. protection.
- Forestry lands, fragmentation. Impact of losing strength of paper industry, Ag use value taxation’s impact on Working Forest Lands
  - Values-Why is W. L. protection important.
  - Water quality
  - Community jobs food production
- Legis. Fiscal Bureau Report on Ag Use value taxation including comparisons of other states.
- Forestry conversion.