Integrating Farmland Preservation with Future Land Use

Douglas County Towns Association Unit Meeting
Amnicon Town Hall
July 19, 2016
7:30PM - 9:30PM

What’s happening with farms and farmlands in the state?

- In 1848, when Wisconsin was founded, 2 out of 3, or 67% of the population lived on a farm. Today, 2.6% of the population lives on a farm in WI.
- 8,700 farms and 620,000 acres were lost in WI from 2007 to 2012.
- Farm losses are happening everywhere in the country, however, an 11% decrease in the number of WI farms surpassed the national average of 4.3%.
- Farmers are aging along with the rest of the US population and the average age was 58 in 2015.
- However, as farmers retire, fewer young farmers are taking their place.
What’s happening with Douglas County farms and farmlands?

- Number of farms down 80% since 1920
- Farm acreage declined by >50% since 1920
- Average farm size increased 140% since 1920
- Biggest decline between 1960-1970; not much change in farm acreage or size since then
- 364 farms in 2012, up 14% from 2000 and 9% from 2007.
- Market value of products sold in 2012 was nearly $8 million. Up 28% from 2007.

Douglas County Farm Ownership

- Douglas County farmers own and manage 70,578 acres, or 8.5 percent, of the county’s land (includes cropland, rangeland, pasture, tree farms and farm forests)

(Compare: Burnett = 16% / Bayfield = 7.6% / Ashland = 6.9 %)
Consequences of losing farmlands and farms in Douglas County

- A stable share of the economy is lost
- Loss of small, independent family owned businesses
- Economic impacts to local businesses that support agriculture
- Food production declines
- Will not be able to meet the growing demand for locally produced food
- Ecological and scenic assets of agriculture are lost
- A way of life is lost
- Once they’re gone you can’t get them back

Wisconsin's Farmland Preservation Program

- Revised under the “Working Lands Initiative” in 2009
- Adopted to help address rapid land conversion and protect a $59 billion industry vital to the state’s economy and cultural heritage; preserve open space; and reduce conflicts from encroaching urban lifestyles.
- Helps farmers and local governments preserve farmland, protect soil and water, and minimize land use conflicts through:
  - Planning
  - Zoning
  - Agricultural Enterprise Areas
  - Agricultural Conservation Easements
  - Tax Credits
Existing Douglas County Farmland Preservation Plan

- Adopted in 1979
- Must be updated and certified by the state by 2017.
- Key components of this plan were incorporated into the DC Comp Plan 2010 – 2030
- The existing Prime Farmland Map was also included in the DC Comp Plan 2010 – 2030

Existing Prime Farmland Map

- Orange = “All areas are prime farmland”
- Brown = “Farmland of statewide importance”
- Gray = “Prime farmland if drained class”
- These classes are based on the soils capability to produce
Updated Douglas County Farmland Preservation Plan

- A 15 person steering committee was created by the County Board in January 2016 to update the FPP.
- The FP Plan, currently being drafted, will incorporate the relevant ag chapters of existing plans (Comp 2010-2030, Land and Water, existing Farmland) with updates to sections on key trends and needs (i.e., housing, transportation, ag infrastructure, etc).
- It will include the existing vision, goals and objectives from the DC Comp Plan 2010-2030 and other approved county plans with some consolidation and revision for clarity.
- It will include the updated Preserved Farmland Map.
- It must be recertified by the State every 10 years.

Certified Farmland Preservation Plans

- Must clearly identify farmland areas that will be preserved for ag related uses for 15 years following adoption.
- Must describe the rationale used to identify farmland preservation areas and how they were mapped.
Important points about certified farmland plans:

- The State encourages local governments to identify and preserve sufficient land and infrastructure needed to support agriculture.
- The FPP is a nonbinding guidance document which can help counties and towns establish policies to protect farmland for the future.
- It enables landowners meeting soil and water conservation standards to claim an income tax credit.
- It enables counties and towns eligible to participate in other parts of the Farmland Preservation Program such as Agricultural Enterprise Areas and Farmland Preservation Zoning.
- It does not impose land use restrictions by itself.
- It must be consistent with the future land use proposed in your towns.

Updated “Preserved Farmland” Map:

- Orange = “All areas are prime farmland” remains as is.
- Brown = “Farmland of statewide importance” remains as is.
- Gray = “Prime farmland if drained” class is removed (highly unlikely that current regulations would allow these areas to be drained).
- Land that has existing ag use is added (is currently producing).
- A-1 Zone that is adjacent to existing ag land use is added (to allow expansion of existing ag lands).
Town Future Land Use Map

Conflict Map
Conflict Areas

FLU non-ag conflicts with preserved farmlands = 76,658.04 Acres

FLU non-ag conflicts including the Rural Traditional class = 178,747.61 Acres
Assuring Consistency between the Preserved Farmland Maps and the Future Land Use Maps

- When areas of the FLU/Farmland maps are inconsistent, it will be up to the Towns to decide how to resolve the conflict.
- We will provide several options and recommendation to make it easier, but the decision will be up to you.
- The state will not allow lands to be included on the preserved farmlands map if non-ag development is planned for those lands within the next 15 years.

Towns decide how to address any conflicts

- Options to consider:
  - **Change the FLU** and keep the lands preserved for farming.
  - **Keep the FLU class as is** and remove the parcel(s)/class from the preserved farmlands map.
  - **Change the language** in a conflicting class so that it no longer conflicts - For example: “Rural Traditional Class” - Allows residences when activities integral to or incidental to an ag or ag related use are included; such as beekeeping, small livestock, Christmas trees, forest management, or enrollment in a wetland protection or ag conservation program.
  - **Create a new FLU class**
  - **Some combination of the above**
  - **Consider the Steering Committee Recommendations**
Example of addressing a Future Land Use/Preserved Farmland Conflict

A Single Family Residential class overlays a Preserved Farmland class

Steps:
1. Determine what the best class should be.
2. Decide to keep SFR FLU, change the FLU class to one consistent with ag.
3. Notify the County of your decision.

Recommendations

- When a non-ag conflict occurs on an area of “Prime Farmland”, change the conflicting future land use due to the importance of these soils for farming.
- When a non-ag conflict occurs on an area of “Farmland of Statewide Importance” base your decision on town needs and adjacent land use and infrastructure.
- Avoid farmland losses and meet FLU needs by changing language where possible.
What is next for Towns?

- Please provide the name and contact information for the lead person responsible for reviewing maps (see sign-up sheet).
- Detailed maps with conflict areas clearly marked and quantified and a list of options will be mailed for you to consider.
- Send response to the County by October 31, 2016
- If needed, we will schedule a visit with your town to help work through the process.
- We will incorporate your decisions into the preserved farmland map.

Tentative Schedule

- Obtain maps from the county and review conflicts - August thru Oct 2016
- Finalize farmland preservation map and plan - Nov 2016
- Information only presentation to the county board - Dec 2016
- Present final draft to LCC which also serves as a public hearing - Jan 2017
- FPP resolution presented to county board for approval - Mar 2017
- County approved FPP submitted to the state for certification - Mar 2017
Questions?
Thank you for your time!

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