

**GREEN LAKE COUNTY
FARMLAND PRESERVATION PLAN
AD HOC STEERING COMMITTEE MINUTES
Monday, May 19, 2014**

CALL TO ORDER

Chairman Harley Reabe called the meeting of the Farmland Preservation Plan Ad-Hoc Steering Committee to order at 7:03 p.m. in the Green Lake County Government Center, Training Room, Green Lake, WI. The requirements of the open meeting law were certified as being met.

PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE

COMMITTEE MEMBERS PRESENT:

Phil Anastasi, Kalton Bauman, Allan Brooks, Jim Fox, Nav Ghimire, Paul Gunderson, Jim Hebbe, Ben Moderow, Damon Reabe, Al Shute, Rod Zietlow

COMMITTEE MEMBERS ABSENT:

Bob Bahn, Mike Elder

OTHERS PRESENT:

Carole DeCramer, Ken Jaworski

Ken Jaworski, Martenson & Eisele, began by discussing a handout that was sent to each of the committee members prior to the meeting. *The Economic Impacts of Community & Regional Food Systems*, by Laura Brown, Community Development Specialist University of Wisconsin-Extension, Center for Community Economic Development, defines and explains food systems and how they impact Wisconsin. Mr. Jaworski also discussed the 2012 Census agricultural figures.

CONTINUED GROUP DISCUSSION OF THE FOLLOWING WITH RESPECT TO THE FARMLAND PRESERVATION:

- **Development trends, plans, or needs that may affect farmland preservation and agricultural development in the county.**
- **Key land use issues related to preserving farmland and promoting agricultural development, and plans for addressing those issues.**
- **Forestry as component agriculture.**
- **Accommodating future housing. Densities, preferred locations, compatibility.**
- **Goals, objectives, and policies in the current Farmland Preservation Plan.**
- **Actions to preserve farmland and promote agricultural development.**

The committee discussed the first six bullet points listed above and will continue the discussion at the June 23rd committee meeting. (*Notes attached*)

FUTURE MEETING DATES

June 23, 2014 7:00 P.M.
January 8, 2015 7:00 P.M.

ADJOURN

8:51 p.m. The meeting was adjourned; there was no objection.

RECORDED BY

Carole DeCramer, Committee Secretary

Discussion Topics & Meeting Notes

**Green Lake County Farmland Preservation Plan
Ad-Hoc Steering Committee
Monday, April 28, 2014, 7:00 PM
County Government Center, 571 County Road A
West Wing Training Room**

Discussion of the following with respect to the Farmland Preservation Plan: (Please note that the highlighted questions were those discussed at this meeting. The remaining questions will be discussed at future scheduled meetings.)

1. Agricultural uses of land in the county including key agricultural specialties, if any.
2. Key agricultural resources, including available land, soil, and water resources facilities.
3. Significant trends in the county related to agricultural land use, agricultural production, enterprises related to agriculture, and the conversion of agricultural lands to other uses.
4. Anticipated changes in the nature, scope, location, and focus of agricultural production, processing, supply and distribution.
5. Development trends, plans, or needs that may affect farmland preservation and agricultural development in the county.
6. Key land use issues related to preserving farmland and promoting agricultural development, and plans for addressing those issues.
7. Forestry as component agriculture.
8. Accommodating future housing. Densities, preferred locations, compatibility.
9. Goals, objectives, and policies in the current Farmland Preservation Plan.
10. Actions to preserve farmland and promote agricultural development.

Key Agricultural Resources

Green Lake County is home to a diversified agricultural base. Diversity leads to sustainability.

Green Lake County has some of the best and most reliable farming soils in the State. These soils can grow a variety of crops.

The most unique and productive soils occur in the SE corner of the County in the original "Mackford Prairie" region. Higher, more consistent crop yields occur here due to generally deeper top soil and higher soil class ratings.

Green Lake County soils appear to be very responsive to management techniques that further enhance productivity. An irrigation example was cited where production eclipsed 278 bushels per acre.

The term “reliable soils” was further defined to mean a natural tolerance to weather extremes. The soils can tolerate period’s drought and wet conditions in given years still producing very acceptable yields.

Green Lake County has a high percentage of family owned farms devoted to agriculture. Family owned farms generate a strong “caretaker” attitude.

Green Lake County farmers appear to have a strong connection to the land and have passed farms down to younger generations.

Green Lake County farmers are willing to engage in innovation.

Green Lake County is home to the largest Fresh Market Auction House in the State.

Green Lake Counties low rural population density appears to be an asset in attracting outside agricultural interest. This interest ranges from outside crop growers to Amish and/or Mennonite cultures.

Railroad infrastructure is in place to move agricultural product and increased investment in railroad is likely. The Fairwater to Markesan line was mentioned specifically.

In addition to area soils possessing a tolerance to weather extremes, area topography seems to further protect crops from extreme weather losses.

The Green Lake area exhibits a strong conservation ethic that appears to have transferred into land management. Green Lake itself (the water body) has a long history of water quality initiatives & programs designed to improve water quality. These programs may have been the catalyst for increased conservation practices elsewhere in the County.

Green Lake County farmers and land owners have a history of acceptance to conservation efforts. Many engage in conservation practices without any program assistance.

Green Lake County’s Land Conservation Department is very active and engaging with area land owners and is highly respected.

Wisconsin and the United States as a whole, contain an infrastructure advantage over other global countries and their producers in that the time to transport products is significantly quicker in connecting producers to buyers/users.

Field size has enlarged over the years improving cropping efficiencies and pest control success. Thus, a key resource becomes large, undisturbed tracts of farmland for agricultural production.

Trends in Agricultural Land Use

No till practices have increased throughout the County and due to its acceptance and success will likely continue and even increase in the future.

Over time crop production has increased, doing so while minimizing soil disturbance.

High corn and protein cost were factors in seeing a reduction in mid-size dairy farms (defined currently as 150-300 cows). There was a loss of land base available to dairy farmer because of

a shift of land into corn or soybean production, limiting dairies ability to grow or acquire needed feed at a cost effective price.

Grain farmers are not always local and will travel to rent property impacting the local dairy farmer's ability to pay land rent cost or purchase land.

Technology changes will improve efficiencies. Increased efficiencies will likely lead to farm consolidation to take advantage of economies of scale.

Expect to see more innovation in computer software and hardware designs working together to assist in agriculture management.

Land values will continue to increase due to the global demands for food both in volume and quality. Developing third world countries will play a big factor in increased food demand.

Best management practices (BMP's), can overcome class ratings of soils. Expect to see more "marginal" lands being put into production. With this, expect to see the definition of "marginal" land change over time as BMP's improve and barriers are overcome.

The new generation of farmers may meet financial barriers to expansion due to limited financing. As the cost of land, equipment and technology rise, new farmers will only be able to absorb a limited amount debt.

Expect an influx of grain and cash crop operators renting land in the region. Crop farmers are not always local and will travel to rent property.

Future renters of agricultural land must abide by the same farmland preservation and conservation standards of farmland owners ensuring protection of the resource.

Unfortunately the "battle" between farmers and non-farmers will likely continue over certain land use compatibility issues as the connection with the land becomes more distant with a majority of the populous.

Expect large farm equipment to place pressure on support infrastructure, especially town and county roads. Will local budgets be able keep up and support agriculture to the extent required?

Continued growth is likely in the organic market.

The Fresh Market in Green Lake County will need to target more urbanized locations so its growth can continue. There is a limited local population to support the Fresh Market. Growers must understand buyer demographics and improve the supply chain into new markets.

The Green Lake County region has experienced an increase in agricultural service providers spawned by reliable agricultural production and farmer commitment in the Green Lake County area.

Field size has enlarged over the years improving cropping efficiencies and pest control success. For these reasons, this trend will likely continue.

The gap between the value of land for agriculture versus development has narrowed significantly. Consistently high gas prices along with a slow housing economy have reduced the market for rural residential lots and subdivisions. The result is more land available for agricultural use and less farmer/non-farmer conflict.

Key Land Use Issues and Trends Related to Preserving Farmland

Good land management practices still need to focus on erosion loss along with the need to preserve farmland.

Regulation by non-farmers for farmers; that doesn't seem right.

Some people simply do not understand farming and how it works.

How to accommodate high capacity wells and windmills?

Some development will need to be accommodated in farmland preservation areas.

Housing generates more local tax dollars and must be accommodated as well.

In Green Lake County, the transformation of seasonal to permanent housing has had a positive impact on local tax revenue. Reinvestment in existing structures is occurring.

There is a big difference in the non-farm development pattern north vs. south of Green Lake (Water Body).

Buyers of non-farm land that is housing or seasonal related, are geared to outdoor lifestyles, not necessarily farming.

Urban/rural interface will continue.

Improved highway systems may lead to barriers for farmers to access land.

Land that is coming out of the Conservation Reserve Program, is not being renewed due to the increased value agricultural land for crop production. Land is being put back into service.

The commitment to Ag Preservation Zoning can be an emotional decision when presented to the County. This has led to small and scattered rezones out of A-1 Agriculture which is not conducive to long term agriculture and its preservation. Decisions don't always follow farmland preservation protocol.

Forestry as a Component of Agriculture

Some reforestation and habitat work is occurring on good farmland due to land owner values.

Hardwood forestry is an important local economical resource. It creates spin-off job opportunities.

Forest providing recreational opportunities as well plus attribute to the county's rural character.

Unlike adjacent counties to the north and west, Green Lake County has good soils for hardwood production (cherry, walnut, maple and oak).

There appears to be a need for more private forest management consulting. Over harvest, especially hardwoods, maybe a growing issue.

Can sustainable forestry, reforestation and tree farms economically compete with grain crops on an acre by acre profit standpoint? Is it truly the highest and best economical use?

Forest management must prepare for the impact of invasive species. Emerald Ash Borer mentioned specifically.

Accommodating Future Housing (Densities, Preferred Locations, Compatibility)

Non-farm residential development is a big barrier to progressive agriculture.

Low residential densities are more advantageous to farming. Keep ratio low. A one acre to 80 acre ratio of non-farm development to preserved farmland is not too bold.

Accommodating non-farm residential development in rural areas needs to be balanced. Residential development pays the bills. Locations need to be identified.

Non-farm development (all types) should be directed to public systems (sewer & water) most of which are provided by cities and villages.

By making buyer amenities available and affordable in cities and villages, future non-farm development maybe attracted to those locations thereby improving land use compatibility.

Urban offered amenities must be affordable because there is a big cost difference between city/village vs. town land.

Lenders are less willing to borrow \$\$ to young home buyers. Unsure what this will mean to future development patterns. It may make the rental market more active.

Crime, high city taxes and a perceived better quality life push development to rural areas.

Government leaders should always look for residential clustering opportunities.

Towns should look toward "land use planning" as means to accommodate other uses.

Transportation (primarily highways) will impact future development patterns. If the highway systems stay the same (two-lane) on 23, 44, 73 & 49, development patterns will likely stay similar.

It takes a special person to want to live in a rural area (i.e. increased travel cost, less services, more inconveniences, etc.) all in exchange for a better quality of life.