

## Additional Ad Hoc Committee Revisions

- COMMUNITIES - How can we guide development to protect community assets and uphold opportunities for private investment?
  - The County should encourage Towns and the City/Villages to discuss land use and boundary issues.
  - Local governments should work together to coordinate future development; protect financial interests of all concerned.
  - Support municipalities in recognizing, protecting, and enhancing the land and its key qualities that create public value.
  - Support municipalities in encouraging non-farm development only where it is best suited, ~~and including~~ minimizing impacts to agricultural operations.
  - The success of smaller farming operations is often closely tied to the health and vitality of the local economy. It is important that farms and whole communities are able to thrive.
  - A study of the local economic impact ~~of~~ food sourced locally compared to that purchased from national distributors could be useful to institutions considering local purchasing policies and practices.
  - To address a common misconception that country living is cheap, we need to educate the public about the costs of development and maintenance and costs of procuring services for a country home relative to costs in a more densely populated area.
- VIABILITY - How can we ensure the viability of working lands?
  - Farmland is priceless and irreplaceable.
  - Design infrastructure, roads, electricity, and communications to keep farms competitive and viable in today's markets.
  - Need to offer farmers better opportunities besides just selling. Redevelopment of farmland for urban purposes can be lucrative for the landowner; it is their right.
  - Education is needed for the public to understand that farmers cannot run at a loss and still provide cheap food. Emphasis must be placed on the total value of food and fiber produced – not just low cost.
  - Farms may form cooperatives or partnerships in order to share resources.
  - Support choice of competitive market outlets to help ensure growers' economic freedom.
  - Protect infrastructure and institutions that enable different types of farm enterprises - large and small, existing operations and new entrants - to remain viable.
  - Support development of road and bridge infrastructure compatible with implements of husbandry; and support development of implements of husbandry that recognize limits of weight and size of transportation systems.



- Urban areas should make efforts to grow within their boundaries without expanding into agricultural lands, and make farming a priority. The County should encourage Towns and the City/Villages to discuss land use and boundary issues.
- There may be a need to formulate transition plans for urban areas.
- The accelerated pace of development and conversion seen in the 1990's will likely not be repeated on as large a scale.
- It is important to support resistance of further nonfarm development of farmland. This requires attention even at times when urbanization is not occurring at a rapid pace.
- Educational programs should be developed to show relationship of Portage County agriculture to county, region, state, national and international markets.
- Irrigated lands and productive farmland should not be converted to nonagricultural residential, commercial, or industrial development.
- NEED FOR WATER - Farms need access to groundwater at the times and amounts required for crop health and success. This is necessary for the agriculture industry to remain a viable part of the Portage County economy. The WiDNR may be limiting the number of well permits moving forward, even for replacement wells. How can we ensure protection of the groundwater resource - over the course of future growth and investments in diverse uses and activities that the resource supports - while also assuring stakeholders of reasonable use?
  - Crops need water to survive, and most farmland in Portage County needs irrigation to remain viable for production.
  - It is important to maintain water rights and the ability to farm using the water needed to grow crops.
  - Farmers who irrigate have a large investment in irrigation equipment and must irrigate crops to get maximum production in order to be profitable and to meet the food needs of an expanding population.
  - It appears there has been (Table 9) an increase of irrigation of the smaller direct marketing farms. There has also been an increase of irrigation being used on dairy farms and smaller crop farming operations. Large farming operations have become more stable with regards to irrigation usage.
- ENERGY - How can agriculture minimize fossil fuel energy use?
  - Need research to continue development of irrigation and other agricultural practices, machines and infrastructure that utilize less energy.
  - Encourage the agricultural industry to adopt energy efficient irrigation, machines and infrastructure, including conversion of waste to energy, that utilize non-fossil fuel energy sources as much as possible in light of costs and savings.
  - Consider possible land swapping to consolidate acreage base to minimize road travel.



## ANTICIPATED CHANGES IN AGRICULTURE

People of Portage County's agricultural community have appreciable experience with change and innovation. Many local farm industry innovations were showcased when Portage County hosted Farm Technology Days in 2014. While some advancements may be impossible to predict, it is generally agreed that the ability to innovate and navigate changes in markets and operating environments will remain important.

A few universal market realities create ongoing pressures for innovation in agriculture and other sectors, notably: declining resources (such as tight commodity markets anticipated in agriculture for the next few years); increasing stakeholder expectations (such as more pressure for environmental protections including nitrogen and manure management to protect water quality), and elevated transparency in the present information age.

In recent years high commodity prices have brought more of farms' acreage into production, including some marginally-productive lands. The current outlook on agricultural markets predict low commodity prices in general for the next couple of years. In soft markets, farmers may seek to minimize production costs by deciding not to raise crops on areas where only modest yields can be expected. Statewide, land [valuesuse](#) responds to commodity prices, as noted in an [article](#) published in the Milwaukee Journal Sentinel (Rick Barrett, *Steady rise in Wisconsin farmland values may be ending*, Sept. 01, 2015):

*When corn and soybean prices were high, some farmers bought or leased every acre they could find to plant crops, driving up the land values. Likewise, when dairy prices were high, farmers planted more crops to feed additional cows. Since then, however, commodity prices have fallen, partly in response to weakened global markets.*

The agriculture industry will proceed with attention and care toward not just markets and land values, but all manner of community assets to be preserved and enhanced. As in other local industries, developments in agriculture will be most effective as aligned with the resources and cooperation of communities.

Preserving and pursuing expanded economic opportunity for owners, management, and workers in the agriculture industry may be an ongoing challenge that requires constant discovery of creative solutions to challenges. It is hoped and anticipated that growers and agricultural enterprises in Portage County will remain entrepreneurial throughout the years to come.

### Land Use Issues related to Preserving Farmland

Strategies to Increase Housing Density Away From Farmland (needs further discussion...)

Land Use Policies to Preserve Farmland (by Governing Committees)

### Issues or Challenges in Promoting the Development of Agriculture

This Farmland Preservation Plan is aimed at aligning the current needs of a prosperous established industry with local strategies for preservation and sustainable development of working lands, and developments that enhance the viability of a breadth of different types of farms in Portage County.



## GOALS AND POLICIES FOR PRESERVING FARMLAND AND PROMOTING AGRICULTURAL DEVELOPMENT

The overarching purpose of these goals and policies is to maintain a thriving agricultural industry and conserve the irreplaceable farmland and natural resources that support farming as part of the fabric and rural character of communities throughout Portage County.

### Statements issued by the Portage County Farmland Preservation Ad-Hoc Steering Committee:

- Agriculture is a primary driver of the Portage County economy. It is important that the agricultural industry continue to thrive in Portage County, maintaining or growing from its present level of prominence into the foreseeable future.
- Farmers in Portage County take pride in producing the highest quality, safest, healthiest, and most abundant food in the world, and strive to ensure a good value for consumers.
- Agriculture and forestry are “developed” uses.
- Good farmland is an irreplaceable natural resource having long-term value locally, nationally, and internationally. Economic and political factors combined with weather patterns and increasing population can be expected to increase the need for good farmland on a long-term basis.
- This plan supports the preservation of the County’s farmland and protection of lands capable of conversion to good farmland, consistent with other land use policies and plans. It includes recommendations for meeting communities’ growth needs in ways that conserve land for farming and complement the thriving agricultural industry – not to infringe upon, or intensify conflict with existing operations.
- We strongly encourage local, county, and state officials to utilize this document as a guide in setting policy or planning.

### Agricultural development and farmland preservation goals are:

**GOAL 1: Preserve agricultural land county-wide.** Preserve farmland in Portage County to ensure its availability. Resist pressure to redevelop farm and forest lands to different uses.

**GOAL 2: Maintain a viable agricultural economy in the County.** Encourage pursuits that allow the agricultural community to remain economically viable and support living wage jobs. Develop a process where the general public shares in the goal of protecting agricultural resources.

**GOAL 3: Improve relationships between agricultural land uses and nonagricultural uses such as non-farm housing.** ~~Promote awareness about farming and e~~Enhance the effectiveness of collaboration among various stakeholders seeking local solutions to conflicts. Promote farm-friendly development, education and awareness of farm practices, and synergy between people of urban and rural residential communities.~~Keep agricultural practices unencumbered by nonagricultural development.~~



**GOAL 4: Ensure that growth of incorporated communities is compact, serviceable, fiscally responsible, and thriving.** Minimize the loss of farmland to expanding municipalities. Encourage orderly, planned urban growth consistent with the efficient use of tax dollars.

**GOAL 5: Maintain the County's natural surface and groundwater supplies at levels compatible with agricultural needs. ~~Support the significance of water and irrigation in agricultural production in Portage County for vegetable and other crops, dairy and livestock. Protect the quality and quantity of the surface and groundwater resources of Portage County.~~** Utilize agricultural practices that are environmentally compatible and protect air, soil, water and wildlife resources. Engage stakeholders in protecting water resources in ways that allow for continued agricultural productivity. Coordinate with agencies supporting protection of water resources.

## **POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS**

**Goal 1: Preserve agricultural land county-wide**

### **Policy Recommendations**

Focus: Preserve farmland in Portage County to ensure its productivity.

- a) Identify existing farmland and potential farmland and encourage agricultural and related uses on these lands.
- b) Recognize, for preservation, farmlands which have previously been identified for exclusive agricultural use through land use planning programs at the Town, Village, and County levels.
- c) Support large, contiguous blocks of farmland as a desirable land use pattern.
- d) Steer non-farm development away from farmland.
- e) Where residential development is allowed, limit it to higher-density, keeping it as compact as possible.

Focus: Resist pressure to redevelop farm and forest lands to different uses.

- f) Utilize land use planning to promote the preservation of farmland.
- g) Discourage the division or redevelopment of farmland for residential, commercial, or industrial purposes.

**Goal 2: Maintain a viable agricultural economy in the County.**

### **Policy Recommendations**

Focus: Encourage pursuits that allow the agricultural community to remain economically viable and support living wage jobs.

- a) Support the continuation of a viable diversified agricultural base throughout the County and associated need for irrigation due to sandy soils.
- b) Encourage agri-business and agri-industry which support area farming and provide local jobs.



c) Allow for the expansion of the agricultural sector and related growth of agri-business and agri-industry.

d) Recognize the significance of agricultural production and Portage County's contribution to state, national, and international markets through educational programs.

d)e) Support the significance of water and irrigation in agricultural production in Portage County for vegetable and other crops, dairy, and livestock.

Focus: Develop a process where the general public shares in the goal of protecting agricultural resources.

e)f) Support community initiatives that may help to address community needs and also maintain a viable agricultural economy (e.g. a farm enterprise incubator).

f)g) Assist retiring farm owners in establishing a succession plan that keeps the land in agricultural use.

g)h) Determine if a strong case could be made to purchase development rights, enabling the landowner to benefit from foreseeable development pressure while keeping land in production.

h)i) Educate the public about the costs of farming and the value of food and the importance of supporting the farmers that produce it.

i)j) Promote conservation practices in the agricultural community.

Focus: Maintain infrastructure needed to support a viable agricultural community.

j)k) Encourage contiguous farms and use of farm roads, designating "farm use" roads.

k)l) Support development of roads that can support implements of husbandry, and encourage development of implements of husbandry that recognize limits of the road.

l)m) Encourage provision of adequate utility services such as pipelines where safer than alternatives; 3-phase power lines, and competitive buy-back rates and systems allowing for distributed generation of power; and access to high speed internet.

m)n) Encourage widespread adoption of energy-efficient irrigation, machines and infrastructure that utilize non-fossil fuel energy sources in light of costs and savings. Support these efforts with relevant research and education.

Focus: Help to ensure affordable access to farmland suitable for a diverse set of viable types of agriculture

n)o) Take stock of the types of parcels available now or in the foreseeable future, including small usable parcels of larger farms

o)p) Support farm succession programs for all size operations

p)q) Encourage farms to group together and form cooperatives or partnerships in order to share land and other resources

Goal 3: Improve relationships between agricultural land uses and nonagricultural uses such as non-farm housing.



### **Policy Recommendations**

Focus: Enhance the effectiveness of collaboration among various stakeholders seeking local solutions to conflicts.

- a) Routinely monitor and advance implementation of key aspects of this plan.
- b) Sustain attention toward local agricultural issues, opportunities, and advances in the sector - keeping interested community members informed and engaged on an ongoing basis.

Focus: Promote ~~farm-friendly development~~, education and awareness of farm practices, and synergy between people of urban and rural residential communities.

- c) Convene meaningful and proactive community conversations, routinely, about what people who live in this agricultural community need and expect.
- d) Discourage non-farm land uses directly adjacent to agricultural lands in general. Adjacent non-farm uses may be accommodated on small non-farmable parcels provided a disclosure or covenant indicating that agricultural activities will continue to take place.
- e) Protect farm operations from the encroachment of incompatible land uses such as housing, and do not enable new housing developments to hamper agricultural production due to nuisance and health related problems, or resulting legal actions.
- f) Utilize appropriate planning procedures within areas of urban expansion to anticipate future development and reduce conflicts arising from adjacent land uses. Do not rely heavily on expansive set-backs that risk forcing the purchase of larger acreages, which consumes more farmland.
- g) Encourage and support use of formal disclosures and covenants as landowners may see fit.
- h) Ensure that newly developed areas are compatible with existing uses of land.

Goal 4: Ensure that growth of incorporated communities is compact, serviceable, fiscally responsible, and thriving.

### **Policy Recommendations**

Focus: Minimize the loss of farmland to expanding municipalities.

- a) Assist rural villages in recognizing the advantages of the orderly growth of high-density residential developments within a rural village.
- b) Encourage villages to accommodate commercial, industrial, and residential developments.
- c) Support the efficient extension of appropriate infrastructure into areas identified for planned growth and development.
- d) Identify institutional, recreational, and cultural facilities that are supported primarily by rural villages while being utilized by the community at large.



- e) Encourage the City and Villages to minimize plans for expansion into agricultural areas, and to instead direct growth within their boundaries, as through infill and redevelopment.
- f) Encourage municipalities to keep farming within and in close proximity to urban areas.
- g) Encourage municipalities to take steps to ensure that highly desirable, functional, and developable places are found within their boundaries.

Focus: Encourage orderly, planned urban growth consistent with the efficient use of tax dollars.

- h) Encourage infill of existing urban population centers and planned transition areas, and strongly discourage including farmland among transition areas.
- i) Discourage "leapfrog" development into surrounding agricultural areas.
- j) Allow for public facilities and services in a cost and energy efficient manner, consistent with federal, state, and local public facility plans and the need to protect farmland.
- k) Maintain adequate areas appropriate for residential, commercial, industrial, and infrastructural needs.
- l) Encourage compact development.
- m) Educate the public about the costs of development and maintenance and costs of procuring services for a home in the country as compared to more densely populated areas.

Goal 5: ~~Support the significance of water and irrigation in agricultural production in Portage County for vegetable and other crops, dairy and livestock. Protect the quality and quantity of the surface and groundwater resources of Portage County. Maintain the County's natural surface and groundwater supplies at levels compatible with agricultural needs.~~

#### **Policy Recommendations**

Focus: Utilize agricultural practices that are environmentally compatible and protect air, soil, water and wildlife resources.

- a) Encourage residents, businesses, and industries ~~landowners~~ to adopt practices that reduce groundwater contamination, and adopt practices that reduce water loss.

Focus: Engage stakeholders in protecting water resources in ways that allow for continued agricultural productivity.

- b) Support efforts to address point and non-point source pollution of surface and groundwater associated with all activities.
- c) Support further study of the entire groundwater aquifer and recharge area, examining the ability of individual wells to reliably meet water demands of various users including specific agricultural activities, and the ability of the resource to also meet environmental needs.



d) Recognize the potential for groundwater contamination due to agricultural practices and nonfarm activities, and stress the need for continuing education and study.

~~e) Maintain the County's natural surface and groundwater supplies at levels compatible with agricultural needs.~~

e) Protect the quality and quantity of the surface and groundwater resources of Portage County.

f) Acknowledge the need to sustain an economically viable agricultural industry throughout the dialogue and deliberation about groundwater management in Portage County.

f)g) Support the significance of water and irrigation in agricultural production in Portage County for vegetable and other crops, dairy and livestock.

g)h) Engage residents, businesses, and industry in sharing in the goal of protecting water resources - pursuing solutions that support all stakeholders' goals.

Focus: Coordinate with agencies supporting protection of water resources

h)i) Implement Portage County's Land and Water Resources Management Plan and Groundwater Management Plan - including monitoring, and periodic reassessment - consistent with this plan

i)j) Establish resource protection goals consistent with local development priorities

## **IDENTIFYING AND MAPPING FARMLAND PRESERVATION AREAS**

Section 91.10(1), Wisconsin Statutes, states *By January 1, 2016, a county shall adopt a farmland preservation plan that does all of the following:*

*(d) Clearly identifies areas that the county plans to preserve for agricultural use and agriculture-related uses, which may include undeveloped natural resource and open space areas but may not include any area that is planned for nonagricultural development within 15 years after the date on which the plan is adopted.*

*(dm) Describes the rationale used to determine which areas to identify under par. (d).*

*(e) Includes maps that clearly delineate all areas identified under par. (d), so that a reader can easily determine whether a parcel is within an identified area.*

*(f) Clearly correlates the maps under par. (e) with text that describes the types of land uses planned for each area on a map.*

*(g) Identifies programs and other actions that the county and local governmental units within the county may use to preserve the areas identified under par. (d).*

## **PROCESS AND RATIONALE FOR IDENTIFYING FARMLAND PRESERVATION AREAS**

The Portage County Farmland Preservation map(s) were created using the following philosophy and criteria.