

CHAPTER 8: AGRICULTURAL RESOURCES

Introduction

Previous chapters in this document discuss the regional comprehensive planning process, summarize the first report that provided background data for the region, present a regional vision and identify the issues, opportunities, and core goals for development of the region. This chapter identifies agricultural strategies and specific recommendations which will need to be developed and carried out in order to achieve the aforementioned goals and overall vision for the East Central Region in the year 2030.

Agriculture is an important natural, economic and cultural resource in the East Central region as established by the following facts and issues:

- ◆ Most of the soils of the region are well suited for agricultural production. The majority of the prime farmland is in the southeast one-half of the region, an area that is also the most densely populated. This area also contains three major urban areas, Fox Cities, Oshkosh and Fond du Lac that are the economic development centers and are generating significant amounts of land consumption. This primary urban development and its sprawl impacts are resulting in a substantial loss of prime farmland and, left unchecked, a significant loss of agricultural potential.
- ◆ Agriculture is a valuable part of the region's economy. The market value of agricultural products sold in the region in 1997 was approximately 800 million dollars. While this market value continues to increase, it is only about one-half the statewide rate of increase. This difference reflects the loss of the most valuable farmland to development. The average per farm income has been increasing, primarily due to an increase in the size of farms. Agriculture only accounts for about 1.5 percent of total employment in the region. While this number is low, most of these employees are owner/operators.
- ◆ The character and culture of agriculture is changing. Farming is no longer the predominant economic and employment activity that defines community lifestyle. The local community and surrounding farm interdependence has diminished due to increased technology, better transportation and global agricultural marketing. The family dairy farm, once commonplace, is now relegated to a few portions of the region and is changing in size and characteristics. Many farmers are retiring or nearing retirement and their children are not continuing the farm. This puts more pressure on farm sale for land development or alternatively conversion to larger farms. While grain farming is an important agricultural activity, it is also a supplemental income for many farmers and transitional land use for others. For numerous farmers, agriculture is a second income as they have other primary employment. The agriculture sector is also changing with value added activities supplementing traditional farms and specialized activities such as horticulture supply and nurseries becoming more dominant.

Statement of Interaction with Other Planning Elements

Agricultural change is a major issue facing the East Central region. It is therefore addressed as a separate element in the regional comprehensive plan. This issue however, can not be addressed on a standalone basis as it interacts with many other issues. The regional comprehensive plan contains eight elements, economic development, housing, transportation, community and public facilities, agricultural resources, natural resources, cultural resources, and land use. The elements most closely interacting with agriculture are economic development, natural resources and land use and special efforts have been made to coordinate the work on these elements. The agriculture element overlaps, impacts, or is impacted by all of the eight elements. Following is a summary of these interactions:

Economic Development

Agriculture is an important segment of the regional economy. Farming and agricultural related businesses provide proprietor income and generate jobs. Farming is a basic industry; it is a producer that brings new money into the region and a consumer that requires local support services. A decline in farm production will have ripple effects that will impact overall income and employment.

Farming also requires financial assistance to remain viable. There are numerous governmental support programs that provide grants, loans and commodity subsidies. While these programs benefit most farmers they sometimes are counter productive because they interfere with free market forces. There is a continuing need for farmer education in farm management, business practices and agricultural commodity markets.

Housing

The linkage between agriculture and housing is the consumption of farmland by urban and rural residential development. Most of the undeveloped land in the region is farmed. Lands in the southeastern half of the region are prime agricultural lands and are under residential development pressure. Because the value of land is greater for residential development than agriculture, many farms and portions of farms are lost to housing development.

Undeveloped land is a prerequisite to the development of new housing. The question is not whether farmland should be used for housing but how much farmland is used. Housing development should not be located in prime agricultural areas. Individual homes and subdivisions should not fragment large agricultural areas because housing and intensive farming do not mix.

There is an increasing need for migrant housing and housing for year round farm laborers as farm size and labor requirements increase. It is difficult and expensive to house these workers on the farm therefore other low cost alternatives are needed.

Transportation

Agricultural commodity movement is dependent upon good modes of transportation. While dairy and grain shipments are primarily highway oriented, good rail service is also important. A good highway system provides the farmer access to processors, suppliers, haulers and various support industries. Farmers in the region have good highway access to local and regional

markets, good rail access to national markets and good port access on the Great Lakes to global markets. If the cost of shipping increases because of the cost of fuel or shipping opportunities are lost. Similarly, rail abandonment could have a devastating effect on those farmers who rely on national or global markets.

The location of new transportation corridors can also have a negative effect on individual farmers. New highways not only consume farmland but can split farm ownership and make farm operations impractical. Highways, by providing better access, can also induce rural development that consumes and fragments farmland.

Community Facilities

Agriculture is a rural activity that requires less community and public facility support than developed land uses in communities and the countryside. Agriculture operations, which are not labor intensive, do require basic health and safety services such as police, fire and rescue. They also require good transportation, communication and utility service.

Farm families and farm employees need access to a full range of community service functions. These services include retail, financial, medical, educational, and cultural resources. Good primary education is important to farm families in extremely rural areas that do not have a large property tax base for support. Also important are governmental facilities and functions to provide legal services, zoning and land use services, and social services. Other service examples are financial aid and technical assistance through the USDA and NRCS, and agriculture education and outreach through the UWEX.

Natural Resources

Agriculture is natural resource based. Agriculture production is dependant upon the quality of the soils, water availability and terrain. Approximately one-half of the region has natural conditions suitable for good agricultural production. In western portions of the region less fertile soils require special applications such as irrigation and greater fertilizer use.

Farming needs to be environmentally friendly and farmers need to be stewards of the land. All lands are not conducive to farming. Environmentally sensitive areas such as wetlands, stream corridors, steep slopes, unique forests and wildlife habitat need to be preserved. Farm practices also need to address land conservation techniques to prevent soil erosion, to protect surface and groundwater quality through manure management and fertilizer and pesticide application techniques, and to maintain a mix of land covers to prevent wind erosion and provide wildlife habitat.

Cultural Resources

Farming is part of the Wisconsin culture. Agriculture, succeeding logging and lumber as the predominant land use, is responsible for developing the character and economy of the state over the last 100 years. The traditional Wisconsin family farm depicts a lifestyle of the pastoral countryside. The pictured dairy farmstead, once commonplace, is now becoming a scarcity in the Wisconsin countryside. Various efforts are underway to preserve historic farmsteads. One recently successful effort was called "Barn Again" and attempted to identify historic and architecturally significant barns and provide assistance in their restoration and preservation.

There are numerous archeological sites located on farmlands. While the upper soil surface of many of these sites have been disturbed there are still many remnants and artifacts present. These sites are recorded by the State Historical Society and more detailed maps are being prepared to systematically investigate important sites.

Land Use

Agriculture is the predominant land use in the region. With the exception of some forest lands, agriculture is the land use most converted to development including residential, commercial and industrial uses. The conversion of prime farmland is one of the largest and most controversial issues facing the region. Almost all stakeholders agree that prime farmland should be preserved however the methods to reach this goal widely differ.

Farmland near the urban centers of the region is under extreme development pressure. Once prosperous farms located on prime agricultural soils are currently being converted to housing and shopping centers. Other farms are transitional, waiting for development market opportunities. Still other farmland areas are being fragmented with scattered residential development that poses farm operational conflicts and limits farm expansion. While right-to-farm laws have been passed to protect farmers the political pressure from rural residential populations will pose increased constraints on farm operation and expansion.

Vision Statement for Agriculture Resources

The purpose of a vision statement is to present an ideal future that serves a basis for determining goals and strategies for achieving the vision. Public input is crucial in developing a vision. All viewpoints positive and negative, focused and diverse, conflicting and supporting should be included. In preparation for forming the agricultural vision statement, a variety of sources were used including the regional comprehensive plan focus groups, the key facts from Milestone Report #1, and the Agricultural Resources Technical Advisory Committee (ARTAC). The ARTAC was asked to consider three questions: "What would you like to see preserved in the region?", "What would you like to see changed in the region?" and "What would you like to see created in the region?" The committee's responses have been summarized into a best of all possible worlds scenario. The vision statement is presented below.

"In 2030, agriculture is an important feature of the economy and lifestyle of the East Central region. Development pressures have been diverted away from prime farmland and ample, un-fragmented agricultural districts exist. Farming is practiced on the most productive soils. A variety of farm types and sizes are operating successfully. The region's farming community supplies both local and global markets. Citizens, local officials, and farmers are aware of and continuously address interrelated economic and land use issues. The viable and stable farm economy, in terms of farm income and prosperity, reflects concerted efforts by the private and public sectors to balance free market forces and government programs for land conservation".

Goals, Strategies and a Plan for Action (Plan Guidelines)

The Agricultural Resources Advisory Committee assisted East Central staff in creating the overall plan element vision and goals. For the most part, these statements were based on previously conducted focus group meetings which identified issues and opportunities. The identified issues and opportunities fall into four major categories; preservation and protection of agricultural lands, development of sustainable farming opportunities, government support mechanisms for agriculture, and importance of education in agriculture's future. The following plan guidelines summarize the key facts, discussion, current activities and programs associated with the agriculture plan element. As in Milestone Report #2, the element's vision statement and core goals are listed, however; Milestone Report #3 now includes the addition of more specific regional strategies and specific recommendations which will assist the region in meeting these goals.

Based on the advisory nature of the Commission, as well as its regional coverage many of the recommendations are geared toward its own potential involvement in achieving the established vision. The recommendations exist, in part, to meet a portion of the State's smart growth planning requirements to address the implementation of the plan, but even more so....many are written in a manner which is 'action oriented'. The recommendation statements are written in three general ways:

1. (e.g. "*the Commission should...*") – providing specific direction, role, or set of tasks/activities that the Commission itself can conduct, often times at a regional level. These activities will serve to assist member counties and communities directly or indirectly and, as an additional benefit, will improve the consistency and objectivity by which multi-jurisdictional land use issues are addressed.
2. Other recommendations are written so that they serve as a general 'policy'. Items that should or may be considered and applied in future decisions or opinions rendered by the Commission or its staff.
3. Still others are written as statements which 'support or encourage' certain outcomes, many of which require the leadership or assistance of other agencies and entities.

The recommendations are an important part of this planning document as they will serve to guide the Commission in its future activities. These will eventually serve as the basis for the Commission's future Strategic Plan and its current Annual Work Program planning and evaluation process. These are important tools that are used in communicating the Commission's mission and value to member units of government and the citizens of the region. More information and recommendations for plan implementation can be found in Chapter 12 – Regional Plan Implementation.

The 'policy links' section of the plan guideline is essentially a summary of the "*Statement of Interaction with Other Planning Elements*" portion of this chapter and is present so that the user of the document can keep these key linkage points in mind.

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Preservation & Protection of Agricultural Lands

PLAN GUIDELINE: AG-1

Year 2030 Regional Comprehensive Plan

Key Facts

Most of the region is well suited for agriculture. Approximately 50% of the region is farmed, with the most productive soils in the east/southeast portion. The best farmland is also under the most development pressure as urban expansion and rural residential development are both consuming and fragmenting the land. Farmland losses in the East Central region totaled almost 2 million acres between 1970 and 1999. Over 5,000 farms were lost, one-third of the total number that existed in 1970.

The loss of farms and agricultural lands is further evidenced by declined agricultural production. While the value of product sales was \$796,263,000 in 1997, the increase from 1992 was only 3.2 percent, half the statewide average of 6.1 percent. Real declines in sales for this period were shown in Calumet and Green Lake Counties.

Farm income continues to be insufficient to offset this development pressure. Therefore incentive and regulatory farmland protection efforts have been undertaken at many levels. While some programs have been in existence for many years, they have had mixed success.

So What!

There is a limited supply of prime farmland in the region. Farmland loss is accelerating due to the location of these lands around the region's primary urban centers. Once lands are converted to urban and rural residential uses they are lost forever. Even undeveloped lands in these areas are lost to traditional farming as they become too fragmented for efficient operation.

The loss of farmland also leads to the loss of agricultural production and declining significance of farming in the economy. This trend has a compounding effect on farmland loss as lands become more valuable for development than agriculture. This potential is even more threatening as over 35 percent of farmers in the region are over 60 years of age and family farm succession is becoming less common.

Without a strong farmland protection strategy, prime farmland will continue to be lost. Past programs have only been sporadically successful and new programs are not targeting prime agricultural areas.

Current Action

There are numerous programs targeting agricultural preservation and protection at the federal, state and local levels. The federal 2002 Farm Bill provides various kinds of conservation and farmland management assistance and various commodity subsidies. Through this program limited financial assistance is provided for the Purchase of Development Rights (PDR) that can directly preserve farmland.

The Wisconsin Farmland Tax Credit Program provides direct property tax relief to farmers. Farmland is assessed for its use value based upon agricultural production capabilities rather than its conventional market value. Significant property tax reductions reduce the incentive to sell farmland in high growth/land value areas.

The Wisconsin Farmland Preservation Program protects farmland through financial incentives and zoning. The program relies on voluntary farmer participation and/or county or town zoning. The program is being reviewed because of mixed success throughout the state. Only about 37 percent of the farmers in the region have participated in the program - roughly the same as the overall state average participation rate. The most success in the program is in Fond du Lac County where approximately 75 percent of the farmers are participating.

Wis. Admin. Code ATCP 51 was created and took effect in 2006 as part of Wisconsin Act 235 (2004) to reduce contentious and expensive local zoning and judicial review proceedings that varied from locality to locality. The new rules fall under DATCP's authority and specify standards for siting and expanding livestock operations which take into account public health or safety, cost-effectiveness, scientific standards, and usability by local officials. ATCP 51 applies to traditional livestock operations: dairy and beef cattle, swine, poultry, sheep, and goats. In general, in order for ATCP 51 to apply, a new or expanded livestock facility must have 500 or more "animal units." A number of options exist for communities in complying with the regulations, including the use of local zoning ordinances, or the development of licensing ordinances. In either case, the ability to appeal local decisions to the State exists as part of these rules.

The Wisconsin Legislature enacted a number of bills in the last several years to financially assist farmers. By improving income more farmers may remain in business and not be forced to sell off farmland. Additional measures include the recently proposed 2007 Assembly Bill 763, are directed at tax credits for dairy manufacturing modernization.

A broader effort known as the Working Lands Initiative was introduced in 2006 by DATCP in order to assess, develop, and promote a series of principles and programs for the protection and wise management of agricultural lands.

Year 2030 Vision for Agriculture

The following vision statement for the future protection of agricultural lands within the region was established by the Agricultural Resources Technical Advisory Committee:

In 2030, agriculture is an important feature of the economy and lifestyle of the East Central region. Development pressures have been diverted away from prime farmland and ample, un-fragmented agricultural districts exist. Farming is practiced on the most productive soils. A variety of farm types and sizes are operating successfully. The region's farming community supplies both local and global markets. Citizens, local officials, and farmers are aware of and continuously address interrelated economic and land use issues. The viable and stable farm economy, in terms of farm income and prosperity, reflects concerted efforts by the private and public sectors to balance free market forces and government programs for land conservation.

Goals, Strategies and Recommendations

The goals, strategies and recommendations developed for this section are intended to encourage the consideration of agricultural lands for long-term protection. Encouraging healthy cities and limiting inappropriate rural development patterns will foster the conservation of this important economic resource.

GOAL AG-1.1: Protect prime agricultural soils for current and future farm use.

STRATEGY AG-1.1.1: Actively promote the development and use of regulatory and non-regulatory land use tool regulations which will protect highly productive agricultural lands within the region.

- ◆ *RECOMMENDATION AG-1.1.1.1: Rural smart growth plans should clearly identify and place a priority on the protection of prime agricultural soils, including a thorough discussion of potentials strategies and implementation methods.*
- ◆ *RECOMMENDATION AG-1.1.1.2: The Commission should ensure that a map of highly productive agricultural soils is produced and distributed for use by communities. This regional map is to be based on county-level soil survey data and criteria.*

GOAL AG-1.2: Preserve farms and farmland for productive agricultural use.

STRATEGY AG-1.2.1: Large, contiguous tracts of farmland should be identified and preserved within the region to the extent possible. These areas are defined as being 100 acres or more of agricultural land use which is contiguous in nature as illustrated as a background layer on Exhibit LU-2, the Regional Framework Map.

- ◆ *RECOMMENDATION AG-1.2.1.1: Local comprehensive plans should consider placing a priority on the protection of large, contiguous tracts of agricultural lands.*
- ◆ *RECOMMENDATION AG-1.2.1.2: Communities should seek input and advice from local or regional land trusts regarding high priority agricultural conservation areas and collaborative implementation opportunities*

when preparing or updating their comprehensive plan.

STRATEGY AG-1.2.2: Improve local government rules and regulations pertaining to the ability to convert productive agricultural lands to other uses.

- ◆ *RECOMMENDATION AG-1.2.2.1: Counties and communities should consider the development and utilization of a variety of tools, policies, and programs for the prioritization and protection of productive agricultural lands, including, but not limited to:*

- *Use of the Land Evaluation and Site Assessment (LESA) system;*
- *Agriculture Development Districts;*
- *Purchase of Development Rights (PDR) programs;*
- *Transfer of Development Rights (TDR) programs;*
- *Zoning Ordinances;*
- *Subdivision Ordinance Policies, such as:*
- *Unsewered Subdivision Control & Water/Sewer Policies;*
- *Conservation Style Subdivision Requirements (w/ incentives for increased densities);*
- *Right to Farm Ordinances*
- *Financial incentives;*
- *Establishment of Agricultural Enterprise Zones.*

Additional information on some of these programs and other implementation resources are contained in Appendix F.

STRATEGY AG-1.2.3: Preserve and protect rural atmosphere and reduce conflicts between agricultural and other land uses.

- ◆ *RECOMMENDATION AG-1.2.3.1: Communities should limit the ability of non-*

agriculture land uses in close proximity to operating farms.

- ◆ *RECOMMENDATION AG-1.2.3.2: If non-farm residential development is allowed, communities should promote and support the use of conservation subdivision designs.*

STRATEGY AG-1.2.4: Work with local groups and organizations to develop collaborative and innovative methods of agricultural land protection.

- ◆ *RECOMMENDATION AG-1.2.4.1: The Commission should assist in the continued development and implementation of the DATCP's Working Lands Initiative (WLI). This would include involvement in the following target activities associated with the WLI:*

- *Update the existing Farmland Preservation Program and local plans;*
- *Create a new state Purchase of Development Rights grant program;*
- *Promote a new Working Lands Enterprise Areas program to foster clustering of active farms;*
- *Set statewide priorities and provide technical resources and assistance to local governments.*

- ◆ *RECOMMENDATION AG-1.2.4.2: The Commission should undertake a more detailed study to further prioritize the protection of these regionally significant lands. This study should be collaborative in nature and begin by identifying more specific target areas for conservation, the type & scale of protection options and potential financing methods for implementation.*

- ◆ *RECOMMENDATION AG-1.2.4.3: Create a new public/private organization to promote*

agricultural entrepreneurship (consistent with DATCP's Working Lands Initiative).

- ◆ *RECOMMENDATION AG-1.2.4.4: The Commission should work with the Glacial Lakes Conservancy to review, edit, and promote a model purchase of development rights ordinance for use by East Central communities.*

- ◆ *RECOMMENDATION AG-1.2.4.5: The Commission should host a meeting of its key County staff and elected officials, as well as other stakeholders such as DATCP and local land trusts, to evaluate the potential development of a regional 'purchase of development rights' (PDR) and/or 'transfer of development rights' program for the protection of agricultural lands. Such a program could initially be well suited for the Tri-County area (Calumet, Outagamie & Winnebago) due to the nature of development activities in the area.*

- ◆ *RECOMMENDATION AG-1.2.4.6: Work with the Glacial Lakes Conservancy (covering Calumet and portions of Fond du Lac Counties within our region) and other land trust organizations on the development of agricultural protection programs and land prioritization methods.*

STRATEGY AG-1.2.5: Agricultural infrastructure should be maintained and improved so as to allow for future industry change and expansion.

- ◆ *RECOMMENDATION AG-1.2.5.1: The region's rail system should be considered by communities for the transport of agriculturally-based materials and products.*

- ◆ *RECOMMENDATION AG-1.2.5.2: The existence and abilities of agricultural support industries should be assessed*

throughout the region to better identify capacities and thresholds for new agricultural initiatives.

STRATEGY AG-1.2.6: Urban communities need to become more engaged in the discussion about, and solutions to, farmland preservation and rural development issues.

- ◆ *RECOMMENDATION AG-1.2.6.1: The Commission should work with UW-Extension and other partners to foster and facilitate regular, meaningful meetings between urban and rural entities as a means to increase communication and cooperation.*
- ◆ *RECOMMENDATION AG-1.2.6.2: Urban communities need to consider their ability to reduce agricultural land conversion on the 'fringe' areas by increasing the density and livability of their communities.*
- ◆ *RECOMMENDATION AG-1.2.6.3: The Commission should continue its involvement in efforts to educate and assist local units of government who are seriously interested in the future protection of their agricultural resources and regional initiatives.*

Policy Links

The issues identified in this sub-element are related to other plan elements within the comprehensive planning effort. The elements underlined below represent these policy links.

The existence of agricultural lands and farms is of huge economic importance to the region. The conservation of agricultural lands and their appropriate management will contribute to the enhancement of the region's natural resources.

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Development of Sustainable Farming Opportunities

PLAN GUIDELINE: AG-2

Year 2030 Regional Comprehensive Plan

Key Facts

The face of agriculture is changing in the East Central region as well as the state and nation. The traditional Wisconsin family farm is disappearing as small farms struggle to stay in business, while larger farms, producing more but stirring local controversy, are growing.

The predominant farming activity in the region involves dairy and grain production. While dairy farms only represent 35% of the region's farms, they account for the majority of agricultural dollar sales. However dairy farms are changing. Many smaller dairy farms are going out of business or converting to grain or specialty farming. Smaller farms are also expanding to larger farms for more efficiency and profit. Grain farming has become more prominent in recent years. Marginal dairy operations have converted to grain farming and many grain farmers can supplement their income from a second non-farm occupation. Grain farming has also become a transitional use on the urban fringe as farmers hold their land for future development.

Over the last 30 years there has been a steady decrease of farms in the region with 5,125 lost between 1970 and 1999. While much of this loss is due to economic factors, farm lifestyle change has also played a role. Over 35% of the farmers are over 60 years of age and are not being sufficiently replaced by family descendants or young start-up farmers.

Farmers, representing two percent of the population, are feeding the nation. Agriculture market prices put strains on farm income and on consistent and continued production. Market prices vary widely and are not predictable. For example, recent milk prices have varied from

\$11 to \$18 per hundred weight, a 64% difference. Small and marginal farmers find it more difficult to handle these market changes.

So What!

There is much debate about the future of farming and agriculture in East Central Wisconsin. On one side public opinion and some farm interests support the small family or traditional Wisconsin farm. On the other side, economic competition supports larger, more efficient, business farm operations. Other interests call for value added and specialized farm diversification.

The family farm epitomizes rural character in Wisconsin's agricultural heritage. Yet these are the very farms that are disappearing. Fragmented land uses that intermingle with farms and rural residences lead to conflicts with farm operations and eventual farm loss. This fragmentation thus also destroys the rural character that people value. This loss is most evident in the urbanizing areas of Outagamie, Waupaca and Winnebago Counties but also throughout the region.

Small dairy farms, while receiving increased financial support to stay viable, are increasingly becoming larger in order to economically prosper and compete in a more global environment. As farms grow in size, they are sometimes referred to as mega-farms. These farms move away from conventional farm practices and encompass large facilities and equipment. They also change the character of their locality as they accumulate land acreage and institute more intensive operations.

As farms become larger and more business like, larger capital and labor investments are required. This investment needs farm owners who are operating on a long term basis. There is a growing shortage of farmers willing to commit these resources because many of them are nearing retirement and descendants are not willing to continue farming and assume debt. The result is a continuing decline in traditional family farms.

Current Action

Numerous initiatives are underway to preserve farming and assist farmers in Wisconsin. The federal 2002 Farm Bill provides various kinds of conservation and farmland management assistance and various commodity subsidies.

In February, 2008, the EPA announced the development of a new Agricultural Strategy by appointing 30 citizens to serve on a newly-formed Farm, Ranch, and Rural Communities Advisory Committee. In an ongoing effort to strengthen relations with the agriculture community, the Committee will advise the administrator on environmental policy issues impacting farms, ranches, and rural communities, including these specific foci:

- 1) How EPA's policies and regulations on climate change and renewable energy will affect the agriculture community;
- 2) An environmental strategy for managing waste from livestock operations that considers regulatory and voluntary approaches, and provides tools for producers to attain superior environmental performance, and;
- 3) Development of a constructive approach to advancing sustainable agriculture, protecting the environment, and addressing communication between environmental and agricultural interests.

There are also a number of national organizations that provide financial, technical and educational assistance to farmers such as the American Farmland Trust and the American Farm Bureau. These entities can typically work with local units of government on a variety of agricultural, economic, and land use related activities.

The Wisconsin Legislature enacted a number of bills in the last two years to financially assist farmers. By improving income, it is anticipated that more farmers will remain in business as they will not be forced to sell off farmland.

The Wisconsin Department of Commerce has the Dairy 2020 Program that provides monies for start-up, modernization and expansion of dairy operations. The Agricultural Development Zone also assists in the development of agri-business to promote "value-added" agriculture. The statewide use value property tax program also relieves a financial burden on farmers.

A broader effort known as the Working Lands Initiative was introduced in 2006 by DATCP in order to assess, develop, and promote a series of principles and programs for the protection and wise management of agricultural lands. This program includes a variety of concepts and activities associated with sustainable agriculture and the preservation of 'working' landscapes.

Year 2030 Vision for Agriculture

The following vision statement regarding the future opportunities for farming and sustainable agriculture within the region was established the Agricultural Resources Technical Advisory Committee:

In 2030, agriculture is an important feature of the economy and lifestyle of the East Central region. Development pressures have been diverted away from prime farmland and ample, un-fragmented agricultural districts exist. Farming is practiced on the most productive soils. A variety of farm types and sizes are operating successfully. The region's farming community supplies both local and global markets. Citizens, local officials, and farmers are aware of and continuously address interrelated economic and land use issues. The viable and stable farm economy, in terms of farm income and prosperity, reflects concerted efforts by the private and public sectors to balance free market forces and government programs for land

Goals, Strategies and Recommendations

The goals, strategies and recommendations that were developed for this section are intended to encourage both small and large scale agricultural uses which are sustainable in nature.

GOAL AG-2.1: Preserve and promote a mix of farm types and sizes.

STRATEGY AG-2.1.1: Maintain and support a mixture of diverse farm types and sizes throughout the region.

- ◆ *RECOMMENDATION AG-2.1.1.1: Local and County smart growth plans should adequately assess and discuss land use and siting issues, opportunities and policies associated with varying sizes and types of operations, including but not limited to:*
 - *Large Livestock Facilities (> 500 animal units);*
 - *Small Dairy Farms (< 500 animal units)*
 - *Cash Cropping;*

- *Organic Cropping;*
- *Specialty Crops (i.e., grapes);*
- *Community Gardening/Agriculture.*

GOAL AG-2.2: Provide economic incentives to assist farmers and stabilize income and promote new operations.

STRATEGY AG-2.2.1: Incorporate more environmentally oriented land practices into farming.

- ◆ *RECOMMENDATION AG-2.2.1.1: State funding for such program should receive adequate levels of financial support in order to achieve regional performance goals.*
- ◆ *RECOMMENDATION AG-2.2.1.2: The Commission should support and promote the WDNR's Green Tier program to its member counties and communities.*
- ◆ *RECOMMENDATION AG-2.2.1.3: The region's agricultural operations should strive to meet the requirements of the WDNR's Green Tier program.*

STRATEGY AG-2.2.2: Preserve large tracts of farmland and promote redevelopment to allow for future opportunities for agricultural industry development and expansion.

- ◆ *RECOMMENDATION AG-2.2.2.1: Local units of government should address the potential cumulative impacts of the siting and approval of multiple conservation subdivisions on local agricultural operations.*

STRATEGY AG-2.2.3: To improve or create opportunities for 'buy local' initiatives.

- ◆ *RECOMMENDATION AG-2.2.3.1: The Commission should become further involved in issues associated with 'food planning'. Additional studies on the existing food system and ability to support/develop*

community based agricultural initiatives can be conducted.

- ◆ *RECOMMENDATION AG-2.2.3.2: The Commission should apply to DATCP for funding and assistance for food system planning activities through the "Buy Local, Buy Wisconsin Initiative".*

Policy Links

The issues identified in this plan sub-element are related to other plan elements within the comprehensive planning effort. The elements underlined below represent these policy links.

Sustainable farming practices will have many positive impacts on the region over time. Operational efficiencies achieved through sustainability can offer improved economic benefits, while at the same time, increasing the level of protection on the region's natural resources.

Government Support Mechanisms for Agriculture
PLAN GUIDELINE: AG-3
Year 2030 Regional Comprehensive Plan

Key Facts

There seems to be no clear cut farm policy at any governmental level. The policies and programs are as diverse as the types of agriculture and farms throughout the country. Major programs, many with long histories of mixed success, continue to direct major financial resources and subsidies to select farm commodities and sectors. This practice many times disrupts the free market for agricultural products and makes farmers dependent upon government subsidy.

Government is initiating new programs to address specific issues and adapt to changing needs. Support for diversified marketing and value added products is one example.

So What!

Farming and agriculture are changing and it is important that government recognizes and reflects these changes. There are numerous programs at all levels of government with substantial investment and involvement. However, many of the current programs retain vestiges of long time government subsidy and support efforts that sometimes increase problems for farmers rather than assist them.

As an example, federal commodity programs are directed to subsidize the income of specific producers. However, they cover less than fifty percent of total farms. This is because the commodities involved are a few primary crops. Also, there is no direct relationship between access to program benefits and the financial status of the farmer. The results are that approximately 50 percent of the program payments go to large commercial farms. Because the subsidies are targeted, they do not

reflect the increasing diversity of agriculture and many times encourage boom and bust cycles of production that stress smaller farms.

Many of the government programs are intended to reduce the cost side of farming. Examples are the conservation and wetland reserves program, and the various financial support programs such as farm credit and tax credits. These programs benefit all sizes of farms but are many times directed to smaller family farms where financial assistance plays a more important role. However, certain environmental regulatory policies without financial assistance may increase costs because of administrative costs for permits and increased costs of environmental improvements.

Property tax abatement has been a prime cost issue with farms in the State and especially in portions of the East Central region. High property taxes put burdens on farms of all sizes and expedite the demise of marginal farms. The use-value property tax program reduces the property tax based on the value of the land in production. This reduces operating costs by the market value of the land minus the agricultural production value. A greater benefit of this program is the preservation of farmland that may be forced to sell through high taxes. A downside to the current program is that lands in urbanizing areas can be cheaply held for speculative purposes thus causing leapfrog development and disruption of orderly development.

Current Action

Federal, state and local government play a significant role in supporting agriculture and farm preservation.

The federal 2002 Farm Bill reauthorized and expanded a number of programs to assist farmers. The major emphasis of Farm Bill promotes environmental and land conservation incentives that protect and enhance the farmland resource. Most important of these are the Conservation Reserve and Wetland Reserve Programs and the Environmental Quality and Wildlife Incentives Programs. Another important aspect of the Bill is the Farmland Protection Program designed to initiate preservation techniques such as transfer or purchase of development rights.

The Commodities Program within the Farm Bill provides various subsidies and direct economic incentives to farmers. Important to Wisconsin farmers are direct subsidy payments for various grain crops and milk production. Various other assistance programs include farm credit for ownership, operation and emergency loans, forestry assistance and crop insurance.

Wisconsin has a number of assistance programs for farmers:

- The farmland preservation program protects farms through tax relief and preservation zoning. The program is voluntary and is implemented at the town and county level. Based on data from 2002, 37 percent of the eligible farmers participated in the program within the region.
- Approximately 7,800 farmers in the region participated in the state's Farmland Tax Relief program in 2002 with tax relief totaling over 1.7 million dollars.
- The Agricultural Renewal Initiative provides guidance to farmers and local government for the establishment and siting of larger livestock facilities.
- The state has created a website called SavorWisconsin.com that connects agricultural consumers with producers in an

attempt to promote Wisconsin grown products.

- Other efforts include additional tax credits for dairy farm modernization, ethanol production incentives, and cooperative management. There have also been a number of active proposals for things such as rural tax incremental financing and a virtual dairy team for new technology application.

At the local level, counties and towns have adopted farmland preservation plans and agricultural zoning, however; many of these are out of date and need to be updated based on current planning considerations. The 'smart growth initiative provides a valuable mechanism for integrating broad level farming and farmland preservation visions into a community long range plan.

Year 2030 Vision for Agriculture

The following vision statement for the future protection of agricultural lands within the region was established the Agricultural Resources Technical Advisory Committee:

In 2030, agriculture is an important feature of the economy and lifestyle of the East Central region. Development pressures have been diverted away from prime farmland and ample, un-fragmented agricultural districts exist. Farming is practiced on the most productive soils. A variety of farm types and sizes are operating successfully. The region's farming community supplies both local and global markets. Citizens, local officials, and farmers are aware of and continuously address interrelated economic and land use issues. The viable and stable farm economy, in terms of farm income and prosperity, reflects concerted

the private and public sectors to balance free market forces and government programs for land conservation.

Goals, Strategies and Recommendations

The goals, strategies and recommendations that were developed for this section are intended to encourage coordinated and cost effective agricultural support mechanisms.

GOAL AG-3.1: Provide market-oriented economic governmental support programs for agriculture and farmers.

STRATEGY AG-3.1.1: Improve coordination and linkages amongst federal, state and local programs.

STRATEGY AG-3.1.2: Provide governmental support in the development of plans and research which facilitates new agricultural markets and creates added value products within the region.

- ◆ *RECOMMENDATION AG-3.1.2.1: The Commission should conduct additional research and policy development activities for the siting of large livestock operations within the region. The development of a 'programmatic' environmental impact statement (EIS) for the region would proactively identify those portions of the region most suitable to accommodate such facilities based on a number of factors, including environment/land capacity, transportation, quality of life, and economy, and ability to provide support services. Such a document could also be used as the basis for streamlining permitting processes associated with such facilities (e.g. ATCP 51).*
- ◆ *RECOMMENDATION AG-3.1.2.2: The Commission should monitor land use issues*

associated with the siting of corn-based ethanol and Cellulosic ethanol plants within the region and, if interest from its member Counties is sufficient, consider the development of a comprehensive planning study or 'best practices guide' to assist local units of government.

- ◆ *RECOMMENDATION AG-3.1.2.3: Support and develop community-based local food initiatives and niche farming opportunities, such as:*
 - *Specialty / Artisan Foods & Niche Farming (grapes, goats, etc.);*
 - *Urban gardens;*
 - *Farmer's markets;*
 - *Public markets;*
 - *Awareness - Farm Fresh Atlas;*
 - *Community Supported Agriculture (CSA) initiatives.*

STRATEGY AG-3.1.3: Support the maintenance and development of agro-tourism initiatives within the region.

- ◆ *RECOMMENDATION AG-3.1.3.1: The Commission should assist and promote local and regional food fairs and festivals (i.e. Calumet County Fall Food Festival).*
- ◆ *RECOMMENDATION AG-3.1.3.2: The Commission should support the development of a new Niagara Escarpment agro-tourism initiative which showcases the entire range of activities and products associated with this landscape feature.*
- ◆ *RECOMMENDATION AG-3.1.3.3: The Commission should support the region's growing viticulture (grape growing/wine making) industry by providing continued assistance to private sector wineries and other partners in applying for, and receiving, an American Viticultural Area (AVA) designation centered on the Niagara Escarpment. Within the East Central*

region, the County of Calumet and portions of the Counties of Outagamie and Fond du Lac would be included in the proposed designation (linked to economic development).

- ◆ *RECOMMENDATION AG-3.1.3.4: The Commission should seek to develop a Niagara Escarpment Wine Trail Route and promotional pieces to as to enhance agricultural tourism within the region.*

GOAL AG-3.2: Promote tax and land use policies that support the enhancement of agricultural activities and the preservation of farms.

STRATEGY AG-3.2.1: Streamline environmental permit programs.

STRATEGY AG-3.2.2: Provide financial support for agricultural education.

STRATEGY AG-3.2.3: Promote financial institution support of local farming operations.

- ◆ *RECOMMENDATION AG-3.2.3.1: Communities should encourage the involvement of resident banking/lending officials in the discussion of agricultural issues.*

Policy Links

The issues identified in this sub-element are related to other plan elements within the comprehensive planning effort. The elements underlined below represent these policy links.

Government support mechanisms for agriculture can improve and enhance the short and long term economic conditions of the agricultural community and provide opportunities for additional economic development. Opportunities for the growth of niche farming industries and 'grow local' initiatives abound within the region. Programs which conserve

agricultural land can also benefit the region's natural resources.

Importance of Education in Agriculture's Future

PLAN GUIDELINE: AG-4

Year 2030 Regional Comprehensive Plan

Key Facts

While significant resources have and are being applied to agricultural educational efforts, there is still a general misunderstanding of the significance and plight of agriculture and farming in the region. There needs to be a more concerted and coordinated effort between the education providers to reach the primary stakeholders. The need for greater education was identified as a priority in public focus groups and by the Agricultural Technical Advisory Committee.

So What!

People take the food they eat and the agricultural products they buy for granted. They are generally not concerned with where the products come from as long as they are available, the quality is reasonable and the pricing is right. Only when a problem develops, such as BSE (Mad Cow Disease) or a shortage appears, do people become concerned and ask questions about how and where the food is produced and at what cost.

Awareness of agricultural issues is a problem not only with consumers, but in many cases for the farmers and producers themselves. Many farmers still exist who have used the same techniques and business practices for generations, while adaptation is now a necessity. Issues requiring consideration include environmental regulation, land stewardship, finance and business practice, new and value added products, cooperative benefits and community interaction. While farming has traditionally been a lifestyle, if that lifestyle is to survive long-term it must also be a viable business.

Government officials could also benefit from education that would provide a greater appreciation of agriculture and farming. Within the East Central region agriculture is an important part of the local economy. Farming provides jobs and income and tax base that affects the prosperity of local communities. It is important that local officials understand how the decisions they make impact farming in their area. It is critically important that they understand the complex relationship between the interests of farmers, who own most of the land, and citizens, who make up the voting majority. Local officials need to balance these interests when they make land use, economic and government service decisions.

Current Action

There are numerous educational efforts and programs addressing agriculture and farming. Individual farmers, farm groups, state and national associations, educational institutions and state and federal government are all involved in providing education.

Individual farmers have opened their farms to the public to promote awareness of farm practices and products. As only about two percent of the population in the region is involved in agriculture most people are unaware of farm life. The "Breakfast on the Farm" event held on Outagamie County farms is an example where the public consumes locally produced food and tours the farm. Many farmers also host school children to view their facilities and operations.

Farming groups and associations also play an increasing role in education and marketing. Groups like the Farm Bureau not only represent farmers' interest in the political process but provide educational materials to the public on the value and plight of farmers. The Farm Bureau also supports farmers directly in such matters as marketing, business plans and farming methods. The Farmland Trust is a national organization that works to advance the cause of farmland protection. The Farmland Trust provides research and support to farmers and farm groups and provides educational materials to the public on farmland loss and preservation efforts.

Schools and universities play a dual role in agricultural education. First, they directly educate people for farm and agricultural related occupations. This education is not just in farming techniques and management but in agricultural science involving new products and secondary industries. Agricultural education participation rates at the high school level have declined due to a decrease in the number of farm families but also a failure of the next generation to enter the business.

Second, schools and universities also educate the public. As an example, the University of Wisconsin Extension has outreach projects that provide agricultural materials and seminars on general and critical agricultural matters. There are a variety of methods used including pamphlets, mass media, and the internet. UW Extension offices and staff assistance are available in most counties throughout the region.

Federal and state government also put significant resources into education. The United States Department of Agriculture provides research and educational materials ranging from international markets for agriculture to specific applications on individual farms. The National Resource Conservation

Service provides educational information on conservation practices directed to farmers and local governments. The Wisconsin Department of Agriculture and Department of Commerce provide materials to farmers and the public on agricultural issues and government program support.

Year 2030 Vision for Agriculture

The following vision statement for the future protection of agricultural lands within the region was established the Agricultural Resources Technical Advisory Committee:

In 2030, agriculture is an important feature of the economy and lifestyle of the East Central region. Development pressures have been diverted away from prime farmland and ample, un-fragmented agricultural districts exist. Farming is practiced on the most productive soils. A variety of farm types and sizes are operating successfully. The region's farming community supplies both local and global markets. Citizens, local officials, and farmers are aware of and continuously address interrelated economic and land use issues. The viable and stable farm economy, in terms of farm income and prosperity, reflects concerted efforts by the private and public sectors to balance free market forces and government programs for land

Goals, Strategies & Recommendations

The goals, strategies and recommendations developed for this section are intended to encourage the development and sharing of information to communities and agricultural stakeholders.

GOAL AG-4.1: Increase the public's and local officials' awareness of the significance of agriculture and farming in their community.

STRATEGY AG-4.1.1: Create ways to better inform elected officials on agricultural and food supply issues.

- ◆ *RECOMMENDATION AG-4.1.1.1: The Commission should work with DATCP, the Wisconsin Towns Association, Wisconsin Counties Association and other partners to create a new education and outreach program which help local governments implement working lands programs and increase public understanding and support of programs.*
- ◆ *RECOMMENDATION AG-4.1.1.2: The Commission should collaborate to improve current information and education on basic agricultural industry changes and impacts.*
- ◆ *RECOMMENDATION AG-4.1.1.3: Locally prepared smart growth plans should include improved economic analyses of agricultural lands within their communities so as to promote awareness.*

STRATEGY AG-4.1.2: Inform the general public of current agricultural and food supply issues.

- ◆ *RECOMMENDATION AG-4.1.2.1: The Commission should work with the appropriate entities to develop and promote information regarding farm lifestyle opportunities.*
- ◆ *RECOMMENDATION AG-4.1.2.2: Educate and inform the region's residents of the benefits of locally produced, healthy meals.*
- ◆ *RECOMMENDATION AG-4.1.2.3: That a specific curriculum be developed with the assistance of CESAs for agricultural and food supply issues.*

GOAL AG-4.2: Provide greater education opportunities and assistance to farmers and agricultural business.

STRATEGY AG-4.2.1: Better educate farmers on community impacts and business practices related to agriculture.

- ◆ *RECOMMENDATION AG-4.2.1.1: Agriculture related groups and schools should provide opportunities for education and awareness on food supply and local community impacts of agriculture.*
- ◆ *RECOMMENDATION AG-4.2.1.2: The Commission should support ongoing efforts, including the development of the Working Lands Initiative, to improve assistance to farmers and agricultural businesses.*

Policy Links

The issues and solutions identified in this sub-element are related to other plan elements within the comprehensive planning effort. The elements underlined below represent these policy links.

The development and distribution of information to decision-makers and stakeholder groups will aid the conservation of agricultural lands and the region's natural resources. Transportation issues associated with agriculture and the movement of goods and services are critical for maintaining the economy of this sector. Additional efforts must focus on agriculture for both local and regional economic development. Many forms of crop-based agriculture have special workforce needs and therefore housing demands may differ in some rural areas.

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