

Appendix B

Envision 2050

FARMLAND PRESERVATION PLAN

LA CROSSE COUNTY, WISCONSIN

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INTRODUCTION

1. CHAPTER OVERVIEW

Agriculture is a vital part of Wisconsin’s economy and cultural identification. In 2017, agriculture constituted a 74,614,000-market value of products sold in La Crosse County, down 14% from 2012. Despite its importance, agriculture faces many challenges. Farmland around the country is being lost at an alarming rate, and once it is gone, we cannot get it back. In the 2020 *Farms Under Threat: The State of the States* report released by American Farmland Trust, Wisconsin converted 147,000 acres of Nationally Significant agricultural land to urban and highly developed or low-density residential land use between 2001 and 2016. This translates to an approximate loss of a little more than 9,000 acres of productive farmland a year due to development. Because of the economic importance of agriculture in Wisconsin and the potential for the continued loss of our agricultural land base, farmland preservation planning is crucial to preserve the agricultural land remaining in the State. Although well-crafted farmland preservation plans may not necessarily restrict the rate of land development, they can help to redirect development towards more appropriate areas, preserve prime farmlands, promote balanced growth, and keep infrastructure costs low while strengthening local economies and protecting the environment. Wisconsin is one of ten states that provides technical assistance as well as grant funds to assist local efforts as they relate to land-use planning.

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This chapter will define farmland preservation planning activities in La Crosse County, past and present, and provide a menu of activities and priorities to accomplish farmland preservation in earnest. The first, and current, Farmland Preservation Plan (FPP) was adopted in 1980. This plan has become outdated which is typical throughout Wisconsin. With the adoption of the La Crosse County Comprehensive Plan in 2008, another step toward updating land use policies and preserving farmland in La Crosse County was completed. We also adopted an amendment to this Farmland Preservation Plan in 2016, which this document aims to amend in 2021.

Another important event occurred on June 29, 2009. On this date, the Wisconsin Working Lands Initiative (WLI) was adopted as part of the 2009-2011 biennial budget known as Wisconsin Act 28. This initiative became effective on July 1, 2009. One of the top priorities of the WLI is a requirement for every county in the state to update their farmland preservation plan. Under the new law, the La Crosse County Farmland Preservation Plan must be updated by December 31, 2022. This document is meant to fulfill the Working Lands Initiative mandate. This document will also provide a process by which La Crosse County will accomplish farmland preservation activities and meet the standards of the Working Lands Initiative.

2. PURPOSE AND SCOPE

The purpose for drafting, adopting and implementing a Farmland Preservation Plan is achieved by gathering and documenting public input. In this manner, La Crosse County can create an appropriate process for mapping areas for preservation and define the tools to accomplish this systematic approach to farmland preservation. Upon completion of the initial portions of public input, the Steering Committee will develop plan goals, objectives, and criteria for mapping Farmland Preservation Areas.

In the past, agricultural land has been treated in many land use plans as a “holding” area for eventual developed uses. Where planning has occurred for local agriculture, too frequently the plan treats the agricultural sector as an interim use eventually giving way to other land uses. Agricultural land often lacks a legal underpinning to protect it, even relative to wetlands and other natural areas, which are often explicitly protected under federal or state law. The mapping of appropriate Farmland Preservation Areas will place a significantly higher emphasis on the preservation of these areas. County farmland preservation plans are not intended to prevent non-agricultural development. Rather, planning and farmland preservation tools are used to limit non-agricultural development in areas with favorable conditions for agricultural enterprises and target those other areas suitable for non-agricultural development. Planning for long-term farmland preservation and for the economic development of agriculture can help identify and preserve the sufficient land and infrastructure base needed to support agriculture. A plan that understands and addresses the needs of farm and agriculturally related business owners can help insure predictability and security for these business owners. Well thought out plans also help minimize conflict arising from incompatible land uses while at the same time protecting the rural heritage that has long defined Wisconsin. Planning for agriculture can also contribute to other goals such as preserving wildlife habitat areas and maintaining groundwater recharge areas.

3. OVERVIEW OF 1980 FARMLAND PRESERVATION PLAN

The previous La Crosse County Farmland Preservation Plan was adopted in 1980. This plan sought to:

- Acknowledge that the general physical characteristics of La Crosse County, being its topography and access to water based resources, has greatly influenced the patterns of social and economic development presently existing in La Crosse County.
- Emphasize that it is desirable to preserve our land and water-based resources and that to do so will preserve the quality of life in La Crosse County.
- Preserve that land considered most suitable for agricultural production:
- Minimize the adverse effects of urban growth in agricultural areas of La Crosse County:
- Consider all land within La Crosse County as non-replaceable and to encourage land usage within the county to be compatible with the natural environment:

The La Crosse County Planning Department led the development of the plan, facilitated through a grant from the Wisconsin Department of Agriculture, Trade, and Consumer Protection (DATCP) in 1979. Public meetings provided the opportunity to introduce the farmland preservation program and to understand the needs and future visions of county citizens. A citizen advisory committee containing at least one representative from each town provided regular commentary. A technical advisory group with staff from County, State, and regional agencies provided general assistance in preparing the report. In addition to the primary document, the Planning Department prepared separate planning elements specific to each town. As a result, the County received certification from DATCP for their revised zoning ordinance which became the primary tool for preserving farmland in La Crosse County.

4. OVERVIEW OF 2009 WORKING LANDS INITIATIVE

After years of program planning and input from stakeholders around the state, the Wisconsin Legislature passed landmark legislation in 2009. Wisconsin Act 28 (2009-2011 Budget Bill) created what is known as the Working Lands Initiative (WLI). This new law made very significant revisions to Chapter 91 Wisconsin Statutes, which had been - with minor changes in the interim period - Wisconsin's farmland preservation law since 1977. The law continues a long history of relying on local governments to lead program implementation efforts and attempts to improve on the success of these efforts by:

- Expanding and modernizing the state's existing farmland preservation program
- Creating new tools to assist in local program implementation, including:
 - Promulgation of Agricultural Enterprise Areas (AEAs)
 - Creation of a Purchase of Agricultural Conservation Easement (PACE) matching grant program

One of the first steps in modernizing the existing program is a requirement for every county in the state to update their farmland preservation plan. Under the law, the La Crosse County Farmland Preservation Plan must be updated by December 31, 2022.

The farmland preservation planning effort is coordinated through a steering committee made up of farmers, local plan commissioners, town planners, local & county elected officials, and staff along with assistance from the DATCP.

Created by Wisconsin Act 28, (2009-11 Biennial Budget Bill) the WLI is the result of input by government institutions, non-government organizations, and private businesses to provide tools that can be used to help preserve Wisconsin farmland, promote agriculture, enhance the natural environment, and minimize conflicts created by competing land uses.

Using current agricultural practices and land-use realities, the WLI establishes more modern, flexible farmland preservation policies with less state oversight. This helps local governments plan and preserve agricultural land as

well as create compact, focused suburban and urban development. WLI helps farmers keep land in agricultural use, employ good conservation practices, and develop agricultural enterprise areas.

The new WLI consolidates and enhances tax credits, maintains the use value assessment program, establishes a state working lands trust fund, and creates a new program (PACE) for targeted purchases of agricultural conservation easements from willing landowners.

5. OVERVIEW OF 2010 FARMLAND PRESERVATION PLAN AMENDMENT

In 2010, the La Crosse County Zoning and Planning office applied for and received a grant to prepare a five-year update to the Farmland Preservation Plan. The County decided to accomplish this process in house. The La Crosse County Board of Supervisors next adopted a public participation plan in September of 2010 that describes the ways in which the public and local units of government would be involved in the preparation, review, and approval of the plan update. Municipalities within the county were involved in the drafting of this plan in a number of ways and were kept abreast of the plan's progress. The plan was adopted in early 2011 and included implementation strategies which have significantly improved farmland preservation and conservation practices over the last decade

6. PLAN PREPARATION, REVIEW AND ADOPTION

In 2021 a Comprehensive Plan Steering Committee was appointed comprised of local farmers, elected and appointed officials, and utilized in house local administrative staff to provide direction in the preparation of the new La Crosse County Comprehensive Plan which will include this Farmland Preservation Plan or FPP. The committee structure was very similar to that of the subcommittees that was assembled to guide the preparation of the County Development Plan. The committee consisted of 15 members meeting on a regular basis to provide the staff direction and act as a conduit to direct information back to the towns for their consideration as this plan was being drafted.

With assistance from staff, the public, and elected officials, the steering committee prepared numerous plan drafts which were presented to the public, towns and county officials and submitted the drafts to DATCP for certification. A final draft of the plan was prepared based on the local government input that was received. The steering committee approved a resolution supporting this draft. The Steering Committee reviewed this draft in May of 2022 and recommended the draft plan to the full County Board for its review and action, satisfying the requirement under Wis. Stats.66.1001 to adopt the plan by ordinance.

On September 15th, 2022 the County Board of Supervisors adopted this plan by Ordinance. A copy of the ordinance is included in Appendix C.

Every effort has been made to use the best available data for the update. Because the plan uses data from the 2012, 2017 census of agriculture and the 2020 US Census, the demographic information is the most recent data available and should be appropriate for years to come.

The La Crosse County Farmland Preservation Plan must be consistent with the Comprehensive Plan, La Crosse County Zoning Ordinance, and the La Crosse County Farmland Preservation Plan must be certified by DATCP for any landowner in La Crosse County to be eligible for Farmland Preservation Program Incentives.

Recognizing that land use plans should not be static documents, the 2021 La Crosse County Comprehensive Plan provides for an amendment process, which allows for consideration of amendments to the adopted plan on an annual basis. While many amendments over time are anticipated to be property-specific, some amendments take a more comprehensive form. The incorporation of the Farmland Preservation Plan is the first such comprehensive amendment to the Comprehensive Plan. Following is a list of amendments to the Comprehensive Plan:

- The Table of Contents section has been repealed and recreated as part of the 2022 FPP amendment in order to reflect the inclusion of the new Appendix "A - D".

- The Future Land Use Map, depicting the County’s recommended land use plan map as of the date of plan adoption in 2021, has been amended by the adoption of this FPP amendment. This Future Land Use Map, which can be viewed online here <https://arcg.is/1rv4H9> has been updated to reflect the land use category designations that are set forth by the new FPP.
- The FPP text amends the “Agricultural Preservation” land use category of the Comprehensive Plan to now become the new “Farmland Preservation” category and revises the definition of this category to be consistent with the definition and criteria established for farmland preservation areas, as specified in Chapter 31.04 (4)(a) (2.)

The remainder of the 2021 Plan document text remains unchanged. As amended, the Comprehensive Plan document incorporates La Crosse County’s adopted Farmland Preservation Plan and meets the consistency benchmark required by statute.

7. PLAN MAINTENANCE AND AMENDMENT

Wis. Stats 66.1001 requires that an adopted plan be reviewed and updated at least once every ten years. However, to ensure that the plan remains a viable planning tool, it should be reviewed each five years and following any significant change in land use, land use policy or land use regulation in La Crosse County. Staff and committee members should review statistics of land use changes annually and try to predict any major shifts in land use policy on a local, regional, and state level and economic shifts in how land is utilized to prepare for potentially necessary plan amendment activities.

ANNUAL REVIEW

The Zoning and Planning Department should review and monitor this plan and suggest amendments to the Planning Resources and Development Committee in November of every calendar year. As part of this review, staff should contact each of the participating municipalities to provide them with the opportunity to suggest changes. The primary focus during this review will be on Chapter 6 of the FPP which lists the goals, objectives, polices, and activities. In the analysis of demographic shifts that are occurring in La Crosse County, to determine whether amendments are needed, the following considerations should be reviewed:

- ◆ General development trends
- ◆ Farmland Conversion Rates
- ◆ Farmland Preservation goals and objectives
- ◆ Completed implementation activities and their effectiveness
- ◆ Recommended strategies
- ◆ Available resources for future projects
- ◆ Public input
- ◆ Input from other stakeholders

Without periodic review and assessment, this plan has the potential to lose its relevance as conditions change, specific projects are implemented, and new priorities emerge.

HISTORY OF ADOPTION AND AMENDMENT

1953 – Initial Adoption of Zoning in La Crosse County

Original ordinance approved and adopted by the Towns:

| | | | | | |
|------------|---------------|------|------------|---------------|------|
| Bangor | January 1, | 1965 | Hamilton | September 2, | 1953 |
| Barre | August 28, | 1953 | Holland | April 6, | 1954 |
| Burns | September 14, | 1953 | Medary | September 15, | 1953 |
| Campbell | September 15, | 1953 | Onalaska | September 15, | 1953 |
| Farmington | August 31, | 1953 | Shelby | September 16, | 1953 |
| Greenfield | August 31, | 1953 | Washington | September 2, | 1953 |

*1980 – Farmland Preservation Plan and Zoning Ordinance Certified**

Farmland Preservation Approved and Adopted by Towns:

| | | | | | |
|------------|--------------|------|------------|---------------|------|
| Bangor | August 19, | 1982 | Hamilton | November 18, | 1982 |
| Barre | November 11, | 1980 | Holland | September 19, | 1985 |
| Burns | July 21, | 1983 | Onalaska | November 19, | 1980 |
| Farmington | November 12, | 1980 | Shelby | November 17, | 1980 |
| Greenfield | November 12, | 1980 | Washington | November 12, | 1980 |

2012 – Farmland Preservation Plan and Zoning Ordinance Certified*

Farmland Preservation Approved and Adopted by Towns:

| | |
|------------|------------|
| Bangor | Hamilton |
| Barre | Holland |
| Burns | Onalaska |
| Farmington | Shelby |
| Greenfield | Washington |

*Towns of Campbell and Medary did not adopt Farmland Preservation Zoning.

Chapter 2 BACKGROUND CONDITIONS

1. CHAPTER OVERVIEW

This chapter provides a brief overview of La Crosse County to provide the general context for farmland preservation planning. Due to very recent efforts by La Crosse County there is significant data regarding existing conditions in both the comprehensive plan, and the land and water resource management plan adopted in 2019. The information in this chapter is intended to supplement those sources or to update relevant data.

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2. LAND USE

La Crosse County is made up of over 300,000 acres. While nearly 70 percent of the County remains in agriculture or natural cover, the County is home to a regional center and metropolitan area. It is therefore not surprising that the County includes some of the fastest growing communities in the state. A benefit of the County planning effort is to provide a context to consider local growth decisions in conjunction with neighboring communities.

Table 2.1: Existing Land Use Table

| La Crosse County Existing Land Use Table by ACRES | | | | | | | | | | |
|---|----------------|--------------|------------|-------------------|---------------|---------------|----------------|---------------|------------|----------------|
| Municipality | Agricultural | Commercial | Industrial | Park & Recreation | Public | Residential | Woodland | Water | Other | 2021 Subtotal |
| C. La Crosse | 1,069 | 1,154 | 420 | 1,568 | 3,724 | 2,640 | 1,667 | 2,809 | 161 | 15,212 |
| C. Onalaska | 1,097 | 429 | 40 | 499 | 1,557 | 1,498 | 1,350 | 536 | 14 | 7,021 |
| V. Bangor | 368 | 13 | 5 | 27 | 151 | 124 | 52 | 329 | 1 | 1,071 |
| V. Holmen | 2,360 | 119 | 48 | 57 | 787 | 673 | 679 | 1 | 27 | 4,750 |
| V. Rockland | 134 | 1 | 13 | 20 | 56 | 70 | 29 | 59 | 0 | 381 |
| V. West Salem | 787 | 130 | 69 | 51 | 412 | 391 | 272 | 62 | 4 | 2,178 |
| T. Bangor | 9,704 | 7 | 106 | 1,367 | 629 | 324 | 10,044 | 13 | 0 | 22,195 |
| T. Barre | 6,146 | 7 | 0 | 1,207 | 265 | 460 | 5,044 | 98 | 0 | 13,227 |
| T. Burns | 13,946 | 3 | 33 | 10 | 651 | 487 | 14,610 | 1,127 | 0 | 30,867 |
| T. Campbell | 42 | 71 | 76 | 24 | 308 | 490 | 201 | 6,834 | 30 | 8,075 |
| T. Farmington | 17,917 | 1 | 19 | 26 | 1,034 | 852 | 26,998 | 1,413 | 0 | 48,259 |
| T. Greenfield | 7,730 | 29 | 0 | 15 | 490 | 639 | 10,328 | 2 | 0 | 19,232 |
| T. Hamilton | 12,803 | 47 | 0 | 585 | 1,065 | 984 | 15,205 | 1,254 | 0 | 31,943 |
| T. Holland | 7,152 | 46 | 0 | 302 | 724 | 1,159 | 8,545 | 9,389 | 0 | 27,315 |
| T. Medary | 1,246 | 29 | 0 | 156 | 211 | 477 | 3,485 | 646 | 2 | 6,252 |
| T. Onalaska | 7,349 | 64 | 83 | 223 | 875 | 1,619 | 8,834 | 8,224 | 0 | 27,272 |
| T. Shelby | 3,532 | 49 | 9 | 733 | 649 | 1,093 | 7,902 | 4,318 | 2 | 18,287 |
| T. Washington | 11,266 | 1 | 0 | 0 | 530 | 362 | 10,965 | 16 | 0 | 23,141 |
| La Crosse County Totals | 104,648 | 2,200 | 922 | 6,869 | 14,120 | 14,341 | 126,208 | 37,129 | 242 | 306,678 |
| Percentage of Subtotal | 34% | 1% | 0.3% | 2% | 5% | 5% | 41% | 12% | 0.1% | 100% |
| Municipality | Agricultural | Commercial | Industrial | Park & Recreation | Public | Residential | Woodland | Water | Other | 2021 Subtotal |

3. POPULATION

As of the American community survey in 2019, there were 118,016 county residents, which represents a 2.94% increase over 2010 (Table 2-2).

Table 2-2. Population; La Crosse County and Civil Divisions; 1980 through 2025

| La Crosse County Census Data - Population | | | | | | | | |
|---|-----------|--------|---------------|-----------------|-----------------|----------------------------|------------------|------------------|
| | 1980 pop. | 1990 | 2000 pop. | 2010 population | 2019 population | percent change 2010 - 2019 | 2020 Projections | 2025 Projections |
| La Crosse County | 91,056 | 97,904 | 107,120 | 114,638 | 118,016 | 2.94% | 118,246 | 122,291 |
| Un-incorporated | | | | | | | | |
| Bangor town | 572 | 598 | 583 | 615 | 660 | 7.3% | 610 | 623 |
| Barre town | 901 | 909 | 1,014 | 1,234 | 1,384 | 12.2% | 1,191 | 1,248 |
| Burns town | 988 | 977 | 979 | 947 | 1,046 | 10.5% | 993 | 1,007 |
| Campbell town | 4,118 | 4,490 | 4,410 | 4,314 | 4,340 | 0.6% | 4,511 | 4,587 |
| Farmington town | 1,603 | 1,577 | 1,733 | 2,061 | 2,201 | 6.8% | 2,052 | 2,153 |
| Greenfield town | 1,537 | 1,617 | 1,538 | 2,060 | 2,255 | 9.5% | 1,614 | 1,651 |
| Hamilton town | 1,472 | 1,633 | 2,103 | 2,436 | 2,603 | 6.9% | 2,821 | 3,028 |
| Holland town | 1,776 | 2,175 | 3,042 | 3,701 | 4,196 | 13.4% | 4,134 | 4,447 |
| Medary town | 1,794 | 1,539 | 1,463 | 1,461 | 1,638 | 12.1% | 1,562 | 1,604 |
| Onalaska town | 5,386 | 5,803 | 5,210 | 5,623 | 6,140 | 9.2% | 6,071 | 6,349 |
| Shelby town | 5,620 | 5,002 | 4,687 | 4,715 | 4,907 | 4.1% | 4,589 | 4,617 |
| Washington town | 611 | 598 | 738 | 558 | 584 | 4.7% | 861 | 901 |
| Incorporated | | | | | | | | |
| Bangor village | 1,012 | 1,076 | 1,400 | 1,459 | 1,426 | -2.3% | 1,672 | 1,757 |
| Holmen village | 2,411 | 3,236 | 6,200 | 9,005 | 10,061 | 11.7% | 8,958 | 9,729 |
| Rockland village | 383 | 509 | 625 | 594 | 709 | 19.4% | 790 | 839 |
| West Salem village | 3,276 | 3,611 | 4,738 | 4,799 | 5,102 | 6.3% | 5,998 | 6,372 |
| Onalaska city | 9,249 | 11,414 | 14,839 | 17,736 | 18,864 | 6.4% | 19,009 | 20,238 |
| La Crosse city | 48,347 | 51,140 | 51,818 | 51,320 | 52,396 | 2.1% | 50,810 | 51,141 |
| Towns Subtotal | 26378 | 26918 | 29725 | 29725 | 31954 | 7.5% | 31009 | 32215 |
| Villages Subtotal | 7,082 | 8,432 | 15,857 | 15,857 | 17,298 | 9.1% | 17,418 | 18,697 |
| Cities Subtotal | 57,596 | 62,554 | 69,056 | 69,056 | 71,260 | 3.2% | 69,819 | 71,379 |

Sources: U.S. Census Bureau (counts), American Community Survey 2019 Wisconsin Department of Administration, Division of Intergovernmental Relations (estimate), East Central Wisconsin Regional Planning Commission (projections)

4. LAND USE PATTERNS AND TRENDS

Map 2.1 and Table 2.1 show the existing land use patterns in 2017.

Existing Land Use Patterns: There are over 300,000 acres of land in La Crosse County. The following table and maps describe and depict these patterns. County wide, agriculture and forest lands make up for 70 percent of the County’s land area. Residential lands make up approximately 5 percent of the County’s acreage. A detailed set of existing land use acreages has also been prepared by the University of Wisconsin – La Crosse. These estimates were created through a different methodology and provide additional detail than those done by the Regional Planning Commission.

Land Use Density: Land use density is highest in areas closest to the urban areas as well as along the various lakeshores and some of the major road corridors. In addition, isolated pockets of higher density development are appearing in rural areas experiencing newer subdivision development. This is particularly evident in the Town of Onalaska and Hamilton. Lower density development on parcels more than 20 acres in size are typically found in agricultural areas and in or within environmentally sensitive areas.

Existing/Potential Land Use conflicts: Annexation by incorporated communities will have an impact on town land use in some areas. La Crosse County is currently working with several communities to develop boundary agreements to forecast annexations and prevent conflicts. The County continues to provide assistance on land use issues where appropriate.

5. PLANNED URBAN DEVELOPMENT

According to the La Crosse County Comprehensive Plan, urban development is planned largely around existing urban centers and existing areas of dense development in order to preserve the existing urban and rural development patterns of the County. The County’s development pattern has formed a sideways “T” which centers the leg of the “T” on the central corridor, east to west of the La Crosse River and Interstate 90. The top of the “T” forms along the Western Edge of the county north south along the Black and Mississippi river Corridors and along the State Highway 157, Highway 35/53 corridor. The Plan also acknowledges the fiscal advantages of this urban development policy in efficient and economical use of existing infrastructure investment.

The plan also identifies urbanizing districts in the County based on the adjacencies to urbanized areas with transportation arterials and services.

Growth Projections: Future land use projections represent generalized growth scenarios based on State projections and current development densities. The projections indicate the County should generally plan to accommodate 5,000 additional combined acres of residential, commercial, and industrial land over the next 20 years. A generalized look at land supply shows that there are nearly 190,000 acres that are physically suited for development. For more information on housing and land use trends, please refer to the existing conditions report in this Comprehensive Plan Document.

Map 2.2 shows those areas slated for development.

Chapter 3 AGRICULTURAL CONTEXT

1. CHAPTER OVERVIEW

As we complete each chapter of this farmland preservation plan, we will continue to build a strong foundation for the decisions which will ultimately implement the plan. In making these decisions, it is important to look at agriculture in La Crosse County in an historic context. Historic farmland conversion trends, economic impacts, and perceptions of agriculture by landowners and other residents continue to shape the tools we use to preserve farmland. The effect of demographic shifts on the existing plan may dictate the need for any amendments.

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2. AGRICULTURAL LAND

According to the 2017 census of agriculture, there were 667 farms in La Crosse County, representing a decrease of 11 percent since 2012. The number of acres of farmland declined 9% since 2012 to 144,344 acres in 2017

Table 5-1. Harvested Cropland by Farm Size: 2017

Statistically, in the state of Wisconsin some recent observations include:

- A SHARP DROP (-43%) IN THE NUMBER OF ACRES BEING DIVERTED FROM AGRICULTURE
- VALUE OF LAND DIVERTED FELL SHARPLY -24%
- VALUE OF AGRICULTURAL LAND ROSE 12%
- CASH RECEIPTS FOR CROPS ROSE 34%
- CORN UP 46% SOYBEANS UP 25%
- LA CROSSE COUNTY ONLY 57 ACRES WERE DIVERTED IN 2020

| Farm Size | 2017 | |
|----------------------|------------|----------------|
| | Quantity | % |
| 1 to 9 acres | 49 | 7 |
| 10 to 49 acres | 150 | 22 |
| 50 to 179 acres | 218 | 33 |
| 180 to 499 acres | 185 | 28 |
| 500 to 999 acres | 51 | 8 |
| 1,000 to 1,999 acres | 14 | 2 |
| Total | 667 | 144,334 |

Source 2017 census of ag

Table 5-2. Farm Use: 2017

| Land Use Type | 2017 | |
|--|----------------|------------------|
| | Acres | Percent of Total |
| Cropland | 85,157 | 59 |
| Woodland | 41,857 | 29 |
| Permanent pasture | 10,103 | 7 |
| Farmstead, buildings, ponds, roads, etc. | 7,217 | 5 |
| Total | 144,334 | 100 |

Source: 2017 Census of Agriculture

3. AGRICULTURAL OPERATIONS

It becomes more important to refine the analysis of agricultural land uses in the county. This analysis should include not only the number, size and locations of farms in the county, but also the type of farm operations and their economic relationship to other farms, markets and farm infrastructure. This involves not only identifying production, whether conventional or specialty, but how the farms depend on feed operations and other supply sources, custom work, contracting, secondary processing stages and ultimate markets. Examination of broader trends in agricultural economics and agricultural land use at a regional, national, and international scale would also be a useful part of the planning discussion as these trends may impact the future nature, scope, location and focus of local agricultural production. Examples of trends might include farm consolidation, product type and processing chains, supply needs and sources, changes in ownership, median age of operators, and competition of other uses for farm acreage.

Economic Growth and Business Development

Identification and analysis of the economic generators in the county, including information on employment, wage rates and average per capita income by industry sector, can help provide a picture of economic conditions in the county. As a part of this analysis, consider information about planned or potential areas for agricultural related business development, not just commercial uses in general. Always consider existing commercial and industrial areas to assess where and how to focus further development in order to best avoid farmland preservation areas, and cluster ag-related businesses nearer farmland.

It is also useful to consider off-farm employment and commuting patterns as these may contribute heavily to decisions of what type of farming is engaged in and are often a major source of farm family income, insurance, and retirement benefits. An inventory of trends in the number, composition, skill levels, seasonality, and wage levels of jobs in the regional labor market is also relevant to the discussion of maintaining farm operations and growing agriculturally related businesses.

The data in Tables 5-3 5-4 and 5- 5 illustrate the importance of the agricultural economy in La Crosse County. It is apparent that due to the large number of steep hills, wooded valleys, and river systems, that there is a smaller area for available to agricultural operations. La Crosse County is not typically in the top tier of agricultural production in the State of Wisconsin. This fact highlights the need to preserve the already limited areas of agricultural production for the economic benefit and additional environmental protection that these agricultural areas will provide, especially to help maintain the integrity of our land and water resources in La Crosse County.

Table 5-3. Taxes Generated by Agriculture

| Tax Type | Amount |
|--------------|----------------|
| Sales Tax | |
| Property Tax | \$70.4 Million |
| Income Tax | combined |

Source: 2007 Census of Agriculture

D = Withheld by source to avoid disclosing data for individual farms

Table 5-4. La Crosse County's Top Commodities

| Commodity | Sales by Dollar Value, 2017 |
|------------------------|-----------------------------|
| 1. Milk | \$33.5 Million |
| 2. Grains | \$24.6 Million |
| 3. Cattle and Calves | \$9.4 Million |
| 4. Hogs and Pigs | \$2.1 Million |
| 5. Other Crops and Hay | \$2.4 Million |

Source: 2017 Census of Agriculture

Table 5-5. Operator Characteristics: 2017

| Value of Sales | Quantity | Percent of Total |
|---|----------|------------------|
| Principal operators by primary occupation | | |
| Farming | 418 | 49.4% |
| Other | 427 | 50.5% |
| Principal operators by sex | | |
| Male | 756 | 66.0% |
| Female | 389 | 34.0% |
| Average age of principal operator (years) | 57.0 | |
| All operators by race | | |
| Huspanic, Latino, Spanish Origin | 8 | 0.7% |
| Asian | 8 | 0.7% |
| Black or African American | 0 | |
| Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander | 0 | |
| White | 1,129 | 98.6% |
| More than one race | 0 | |

Source: 2017 Census of Agriculture

4. AGRICULTURAL ECONOMY

How important is Agriculture to La Crosse County's Economy? Agriculture provides 6,776 Jobs in La Crosse County, it accounts for \$2.2 Billion in business sales, it contributes \$257 Million in County income, and pays about \$70.4 Million in taxes. More and more county farmers sell directly to consumers. In all, 51 farms generate \$261,000 in direct- marketing sales. Farmers own and manage 144,334 acres, or 50% of the county's land.

Since agricultural land use within La Crosse County is often in close proximity to surface waters, steep slopes and other natural features and resources, it is important to both preserve the agricultural use of the land and to provide a buffer to preserve the natural areas they border. It will be important to continue to implement conservation compliance standards to ensure that agricultural land use is sensitive to these important natural resources. Farmers in La Crosse County must explore ways of doing more with less land. The best way to accomplish this is by adding value to their products or collaborating with other operations to seek out economies of scale. Added value and direct marketing practices will continue to succeed in La Crosse County because of the large urban population and proximity of the agricultural use land to these urban centers. This urban-rural link is important and will be further explored in Chapter 4. Agricultural land uses provide rural character in close proximity to urban centers and engages an urban population that seeks open space recreation and respects the landscape. This brings many sets of eyes and ears into the rural areas. These eyes and ears can become critics, or supporters, but as discussed earlier, they also bring added markets for agriculture. It becomes important that agriculture is preserved in a manner that is positive, publicly supported, and provides the commodities that are in demand locally. Agriculture Enterprise Areas would enhance the value-added concept and the collaboration portions of this economic section. By creating important rural agri-business partnerships, the agriculture economy in La Crosse County has a better chance to flourish.

5. AGRICULTURAL INFRASTRUCTURE

Historically, well planned transportation routes have been the most important infrastructure for agriculture. La Crosse County has continued to repair, maintain, rebuild and construct excellent highways for commerce and agricultural transport. There continues to be a subsidence of other available infrastructure in the form of creameries, feed and seed mills and implement dealers because of the reduction of farm acres and farm numbers. It becomes a longer commute to find these businesses and processors on which the agriculture sector depends, and this downward trend will continue if farmland is not preserved in La Crosse County. This infrastructure will continually change and adapt as the markets and use of agricultural land continue to change. With the proliferation of custom operators, machinery is maintained and sold on a more regional basis. More farmers markets and local food sales have arisen as the trends toward sustainability continue. Of note, much of the mapped agricultural infrastructure is within the urbanized areas of La Crosse County. This important relationship between urban and rural land use must be acknowledged, supported and even further developed to continue to improve the economy for agriculture in La Crosse County. Please refer to Map 3.1 for a geographic view of the infrastructure in La Crosse County.

6. SPECIALTY AGRICULTURE

Diversity in agriculture can provide a community with added value in agribusiness with more choices for consumers, greater economic sustainability due to more resiliency to market products, and environmental fluctuations and growth potential due to diversification and differentiation in the market. The following are examples of specialty agriculture markets:

- Christmas Tree Farms
- Pumpkins, gourds, etc.
- Ginseng
- Mushrooms
- Organics
- Specialty Grains
- Tree nuts
- Dried Fruit Products
- Floriculture
- Wildlife and Fish Farms
- Specialty Fruits and Vegetables
- Specialty Meats and Cheeses

The Wisconsin Department of Agriculture Trade and Consumer Protection (DATCP) provides a Specialty Crop Block Grant (SCBG) program aiming to increase Wisconsin's competitiveness in global marketplace. According to the DATCP website, The Farm, Conservation, and Energy Act of 2008 (Farm Bill) authorized the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) to provide these grants to benefit the specialty crop industry.

Chapter 4 LOCAL FOOD SYSTEM

1. CHAPTER OVERVIEW

Food systems are drawing the attention of planners and policy makers around the U.S. The traditional focus of planners on public resources has seldom focused on the private nature of food markets. However, the acknowledgement of the public health, economic and environmental effects of food systems is on the cutting edge of modern planning to create healthier and economically sustainable communities.

Consider the movement away from local markets in the past 100 years to giant conglomerates and the vertical integration of producers who ship food from long distances to a more centralized big box store. Questions emerge about transportation costs, environmental impacts, effects on vulnerable populations' financial independence and security of populations being able to provide for themselves.

This chapter will propose policy guidance on this important topic in promoting a stronger, more economically vital and self-reliant system of providing locally grown products for La Crosse County's population.

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| 5. | Food Stores |
| 6. | Emergency Food Resources |

2. NON-FARM FOOD PRODUCTION

The growing average age of the American farmer along with the consolidation of farms and the emergence of large commercial farms, raises questions about the future of locally available foods and the biodiversity of crops produced. Non-Farm food production provides valuable opportunities for communities to supplement food supplies and lower costs for the delivery and distribution of products. Local regulations, however, can create impediments to non-farm food production. Careful consideration of the public impacts of certain regulations is needed to address benefits and costs of public policy decisions.

The following is a list of non-farm food production ideas for communities along with considerations for supportive policies for implementation:

- Gardens. Support local gardening with Master Gardener lectures, programs and training. Encourage home composting to reduce food wastes and disposal costs. Foster neighborhood interaction, the sharing of diverse, locally grown foods.
- Bee Keeping. Work with local bee-keepers on the protection of bee keeping sites and opportunities for growth. Introduce local beekeepers to farm markets.
- Poultry. Identify opportunities for land use regulations that support small scale poultry production. Hold public workshops to identify tolerances for adjacent land uses and conditions required for permitting.
- Community Agriculture. Look for suburban locations for farmstead preservation where a co-op may exist, providing space for gardening and farm enthusiasts to interact and produce convenient produce stands.
- Edible Landscapes. Thousands of dollars are spent each year on public open space landscaping and private landscaping in high employment areas. Fruit trees and other decorative, food producing plants can be used in the landscape with little maintenance. The evolution of new cultivars has provided a new opportunity for low maintenance or maintenance free plant types that offer food for the local population.

3. COMMUNITY GARDENS

Vacant, underutilized or temporarily undeveloped lands can offer great opportunities for community gardens. Synergistic land use relationships such as a corporate headquarters with a grove of fruit trees that offers produce to workers or the temporary donation of land on a medical or senior housing campus can create a win-win situation for partners.

There are many prospective user groups that can be engaged to create community gardens from local gardening or master gardener clubs, to ethnic and culturally diverse groups to school programs and business interest such as a local seed supplier. New opportunities for community gardens can emerge from community workshops or lectures by locally successful organizers of existing gardens.

Beneficial community gardens can be all sizes and configurations from larger suburban plots to small square foot urban gardening.

Table 6-1. Community Gardens: 2021

| Name | Municipality | Address |
|------------------------------------|--------------|-----------------|
| International Gardens | La Crosse | Front Street |
| Kane Street Gardens | La Crosse | Kane Street |
| Mayo Washburn Neighborhood Gardens | La Crosse | Division Street |
| Myrick Park Native Gardens | La Crosse | La Crosse St |
| Mayo Clinic Community Gardens | Onalaska | Midwest Dr |

One of the public participation activities that was carried out by the Steering Committee was a day trip visit to a Hmong Garden. The notes from that trip are below:

"Gardening teaches Hmong everything in life we need to know. Gardens allow us to come back to our roots and back to our culture."

500-1000 pounds of produce is harvested from this 1.52 acre garden every week and given to Hmong families.



The Hmong have health disparities and a higher rate of heart disease, diabetes, and high blood sugar. Gardening helps get them back to their culture and eat in the ways they used to eat. Dream is to have a place to give plots to Hmong community members that is sustainable and safe so they may garden for their families, clans, and even farmers markets/to sell. Current location requires gardeners and visitors to cross a busy county highway. The owner next to them has an easement and will not allow them to walk to their land, so they park on a side road, cross the highway, and walk through the ditch to get to the garden. Watering is done from a stream with buckets. The herbs they spoke about for the chicken stock is tshuaj rou qaib which translates to medicine for chicken and is used to strengthen the immune system and for women after giving birth. Some information and pictures I found of the herbs:

[https://chawjcreations.com/2019/09/27/boiled-chicken-w-hmong-](https://chawjcreations.com/2019/09/27/boiled-chicken-w-hmong-medicinal-herbs-tshuaj-hmong-hau-ntsug-qab/)

[medicinal-herbs-tshuaj-hmong-hau-ntsug-qab/](https://chawjcreations.com/2019/09/27/boiled-chicken-w-hmong-medicinal-herbs-tshuaj-hmong-hau-ntsug-qab/)

4. FARMERS MARKETS

The number of farmers markets in the United States continues to grow, reports USDA’s Agricultural Marketing Service (AMS), reaching a total of 4,685 in August 2008. Local Farm Markets provide a great opportunity for local growers to converge and offer a greater diversity and quantity of products to the public. The public benefits from the social aspects of farm markets as a community event, often combined with local music, arts and instructive presentations.

As the popularity of farmers markets grow, attention must be given to the logistics of these markets to create rewarding environments for both the consumer and producer. Ideas such as limiting the number of green bean sellers can affect the overall diversity of the market while allowing the seller to sell enough product for their mobilization of goods to pay off. Additionally, conveniences such as truck-farmer provisions where producers can simply park and open their tailgate, takes the work out of setting up and taking down tables.

Lastly, Farm Markets can grow exponentially in popularity with effective programming and the integration of music, sales or coupon events, promotions and synergistic markets such as arts and crafts.

5. FOOD STORES

Local food stores can also contribute to local food systems by working with local as well as national producers and considering convenience to all segments of the population. The recent trends of big box food stores moving to suburban locations can leave poorer areas of metropolitan areas with fewer choices, and often higher priced and less nutritious choices.

Land use planning that encourages urban infill over suburban sprawl can keep commercial nodes backfilled when stores go dark, promoting dense compact development patterns that provide good, centralized locations for food stores.

Key Terms in This Chapter

Convenience store – A retail store that offers a limited range of foods often with non-food product lines.

Supermarket – A retail food store that offer a full range of foods.

Specialty food store – A retail food store that specializes in a single food category, including bakery, ethnic food, meat, produce, gourmet food, candy, and so on.

Additional models in food stores are emerging with smaller convenience sized prototypes in urban centers to the public market concept whereby centralized stores are offered an opportunity to lease smaller booth type configurations with other local food stores, offering the consumer an Asian-style dense market with a large variety of choices in both indoor and outdoor locations.

Retail Food Establishment License. A license from the state is required for establishments, permanent and mobile, to sell most processed food directly to consumers in a retail setting. Includes grocery stores, convenience stores, mobile units, knockdown stands, and pushcarts. This does not include restaurants. There are also rules set forth by the Health Department and the City of La Crosse that must be adhered to.

The Tables Below will provide current information on Food related activities in La Crosse County:

Agriculture related Fairs

| | | |
|--|--|---|
| Holmen Korn Fest 3rd Weekend in August Halfway Creek Park 300 W. Roberts St., Holmen, WI Contact: Holmen American Legion – 608-527-4444 | June Dairy Days 1 st Weekend in June Village Park, Corner of Hamilton & Mill Streets West Salem, WI 54669 Contact: junedairydays@yahoo.com | La Crosse County Interstate Fair 3 rd week in July Intersection of Hwy 16 and County Road M West Salem, WI 54669 |
|--|--|---|

Farmer's Markets

Bridgeview Plaza Farmers Market

Featuring fresh produce, bedding plants, perennials, flowers, herbs, honey, houseplants, and some crafts.

When: Wednesdays, 8:00AM – 1:00PM

Season: First Wed. in June to last Wed. in October

Where: [Bridgeview Plaza, 2500 Rose St, La Crosse](#)

More information: (608) 785-9872

Cameron Park Farmers Market

La Crosse's only farmer-run market and the region's only high-end sustainable agriculture and arts market serving the community with local meats, vegetables, fruits, cheeses, breads, crafts, and more. Also music, art, and drama performers.

New vendors are always welcome to join, as are local businesses, and community supporters. When: Fridays, 4:00PM – dusk; Saturdays 8AM – 1PM

Season: First Fri. in May to last Fri. in October; Second Sat. in May to last Sat. in October

Where: [Cameron Park, downtown La Crosse](#)

More information: (608) 433-6708

<http://www.cameronparkmarket.org/>

Holmen Farmers Market

Festival Foods Holmen hosts a large farmers market right in the parking lot. You'll find local growers selling everything from garden fresh fruits and vegetables, to honey and floral. Take advantage of some of the freshest seasonal produce in the area. When: Wednesdays, 3:00 – 7:00PM

Season: last Wed. in May to last Wed. in October.

Where: [Festival Foods Holmen, Holmen Square, 600 N. Holmen Dr., Holmen](#)

La Crosse Hmoob Cultural & Community Agency Farmers Market

When: Thursdays, 7:00AM – 4:00PM

Season: Last Thur. in June to last Thur. in October

Where: [La Crosse Hmoob Cultural & Community Agency, 1815 Ward Ave., La Crosse](#)

More information: (608) 781-5744

Onalaska Farmers Market

Farm-fresh goodness awaits you at Onalaska area’s excellent farmers markets. Meet local growers and sample the area’s incredible diversity of fruits, vegetables, artisan cheese, honey, herbs, flowers, and an ever-changing array of other seasonal products.

When: Sundays, 8:00AM – 1:00PM

Season: First Sun. in June to last Sun. in October

Where: [Festival Foods Onalaska, Crossing Meadows Shopping Center, 1260 Crossing Meadows Dr., Onalaska](#)

West Salem Farmers Market

When: Wednesdays, 2:00 – 6:00PM

Season: First Wed. in June to second Wed. in October

Where: [Bike shelter at corner of Jefferson St. & Mill St. S., West Salem](#)

Winter Market

Visit local vendors offering fall and winter produce, baked goods, canned goods, meat, eggs, jewelry, art and gifts, all grown and produced within 100 miles of La Crosse. This event is sponsored by Students for Sustainability and University Centers.

When: Saturdays, 10:00AM – 1:00PM **Season:** select Saturdays from November to January ([see schedule for details](#))

Where: [State Room, Cartwright Center, UW-La Crosse](#)

More information: (608) 433-6708 cameronparkmarket@hotmail.com

In addition to these seven public markets, there are an estimated 18 community supported agriculture farms serving the La Crosse Area in the 2021 season:

[Bear Creek Farm](#)

Jon and Sarah Suchla

608-790-7924

Pickup: Blair on Saturdays; La Crosse on Fridays; Holmen on Thursdays.

[Bella Sol Tierra](#)

Jan Blair

608-637-6727

Pickup: La Crosse.

Also available: meat, eggs, mushrooms.

[Burr Oak Produce](#)

Steve Freng

608-857-3937

Pickup: Bangor, Galesville, Melrose, Holmen, La Crosse, Onalaska, Sparta, West Salem.

[Driftless Farm](#)

Amelia Baxter

608-452-2315

Pickup: La Crosse on Wednesdays, Fridays; Stoddard.

[Driftless Organics](#)

Mike Lind

608-624-3735

Pickup: La Crosse on Wednesdays.

[Featherstone Fruits and Vegetables](#)

715-892-0327

Pickup: Winona, Rushford on Wednesdays.

[Harmony Valley Farm](#)

Richard DeWilde

608-483-2143

Pickup: La Crosse, Onalaska on Fridays.

Summer and autumn fruit and coffee shares also available.

Hoch Orchard and Gardens**Harry and Jackie Hoch****507-643-6329**

June: Strawberries, 12 pints July: Raspberries, 6 pints August: Tomatoes, 20 pounds September: Apples, 20 pounds

*Also offered: Cider CSA as well as a hard cider CSA add-on.***Knapp Creek Farm****Aaron Kane****608-634-3880**

Pickup or home delivery: La Crosse, Viroqua, Westby on Tuesdays.

Lynch Farms**Mike Lynch****507-459-7107**

Pickup: Houston on Thursdays, Fridays, Saturdays, Sundays.

Pasture raised beef, pork, and chicken. Availability varies throughout the year. Contact directly for details.

Mastodon Family Farm**Maureen Allen****608-521-0076**

Pickup: La Crosse on Fridays.

Old Oak Family Farm**Jerry Niedfeldt****608-486-4205**

Pickup: Black River Falls on Tuesdays; La Crosse on Thursdays; Bangor on Tuesdays.

(you pick dates, June through Sept.).

O'MOE CSA at Driftless Farm**Ben MacDonald****608-317-6313**

Pickup: La Crosse on Wednesdays.

Pine Creek Farms**Jonathan Stensgared****507-475-3664**

Pickup: Rochester, Winona on Tuesdays, Wednesdays.

PlainSong Farm**Jim and Laurie Syverson****507-421-0600**

Pickup: La Crosse, Caledonia, Spring Grove, Rochester.

Ridgeland Harvest**Kate and Mat Eddy****608-675-3855**

Pickup: La Crosse, Onalaska on Thursdays.

Small Family Farm and CSA**Jill and Adam Varney****608-625-4178**

Pickup: La Crosse, Onalaska, Sparta, West Salem, Viroqua, La Farge, Cashton on Wednesdays.

Pork, chicken, eggs, and honey also available.

Valley View Organic Farm**Aaron Sommers****920-883-7096**

Pickup: La Crosse

Meat CSA shares for organic pastured beef, pork, rabbit, chicken, and turkey, as well as eggs.

6. EMERGENCY FOOD RESOURCES

According to the American Planning Association’s Policy Guide on Community and Regional Food Planning, 2017, Hunger and Food Insecurity are prevalent in the United States. APA’s Policy Guide references The US Department of Agriculture’s Economic Research Service (2017) report that indicates in 2017, 13 percent of all US Households were “food insecure” because of a lack of sufficient food. Centralization of food producers, transport costs and convenience in local markets may exacerbate the problem, making communities more and more reliant on outside sources. In order to address this growing threat to local sustainability and self-sufficiency, consideration may be given to the realm of opportunities listed in this chapter for local food production, public education on topics such as food preservation, canning techniques and local resources such as community gardens. Assessing a region’s local food needs during a crisis such as a major natural disaster, terrorist attack or disease can assist planners and policy makers in understanding what emergency food resources may be needed in case of a disaster but may also create less reliance on outside food sources through the implementation of various local food systems planning objectives.

EMERGENCY FOOD RESOURCES

- **A Place of Grace Catholic Worker House**
919 Hood Street, La Crosse · 608-782-6224
- **Community Garden**
corner of Kane St. and St. Cloud St., La Crosse · 608-386-3319
<http://www.lacrossehtf.org>
- **First Evangelical Free Church Food Pantry**
1950 State Road 35, Onalaska · 608-782-6022
- **Onalaska Emergency Food Basket**
735 Sand Lake Road, Onalaska · 608-783-7722
- **Salvation Army**
223 8th Street North, La Crosse · 608-782-6126
<http://www.salvationarmylacrosse.org>
- **WAFER Emergency Food Shelf**
403 Causeway Boulevard, La Crosse · 608-782-6003
<http://waferlacrosse.org>
- **West Salem Area Community Care & Share Pantry**
359 North Leonard Street, West Salem · 608-786 -1142
- **A Place of Grace Catholic Worker House**
919 Hood Street, La Crosse · 608-782-6224
- **Come for Supper – Our Savior’s Lutheran Church**
612 Division Street, La Crosse · 608-782-3468
- **Monday’s Meals – St. Luke’s United Methodist Church**
1022 Caledonia Street, La Crosse · 608-782-6421
- **Bethany Lutheran Home Delivered Meals**
1315 Cass Street, La Crosse · 608-796-1092
<http://www.bethanylutheranhomes.org>

Key Terms

Community meal center – A place where prepared meals are offered to the hungry on a regular basis and generally at no cost. Community meal centers are often groups or other local operated by church community organizations. Also known as “soup kitchens.”

Food bank – A nonprofit organization that collects food from a variety of sources and distributes it to food pantries, community meal centers, homeless shelters, and similar organizations that exist to feed low-income residents in community. Food is generally donated to a food bank by for-profit growers, manufacturers, distributors and retailers who in the normal course of business have excess food that they cannot sell.

Food pantry – A place where food is offered to low-income residents for free or a low cost. Food pantries are often operated by church groups or other local community organizations.

7. IMPLEMENTATION AND POLICY OUTCOMES FOR LOCAL UNITS OF GOVERNMENT

A variety of implementation tools related to food systems planning are available to local units of government for consideration. Typical implementation tools include zoning ordinances, master planning, promotion and marketing, public-private partnerships and collaborative agreements. Zoning tools may include:

- Flexible zoning districts such as Planned Unit Developments or Conservation Developments allowing urban agriculture or home-based business
- Conditional uses for a variety of agricultural uses
- Permitted temporary uses for produce stands or farm markets

Promotion and marketing may be subsidized by local units of government that wish to promote buy local programs or local food-based businesses or events supporting local agriculture.

Public private partnerships may involve leveraging public assets such as land or public parking lots for events such as farmers markets, truck farmer parking or community gardens. Municipalities can offer public land for various agricultural uses in exchange for private maintenance of public spaces or lease revenue. Other collaborative agreements may invite local producers to use community facilities for winter events or the sharing of public equipment in the maintenance of community gardens.

Chapter 5 FARMLAND PROTECTION TOOLS

1. CHAPTER OVERVIEW

This chapter describes farmland protection tools that are intended to help protect farmland from incompatible land development. Some of the tools are unique to Wisconsin, while others have been used in various parts of the United States.

The tools are grouped into broad categories for organizational purposes. The last section of this chapter presents a summary of those tools that the towns and La Crosse can use to help protect farmland. Benefits and limitations are described along with funding requirements, availability and status of current implementation.

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| 7. Voluntary Tools |
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2. EDUCATIONAL TOOLS

“OPTIONS” REVIEW FOR DEVELOPERS

The County could request (or require) property owners who wish to urbanize their property to meet with government institutions or non-government (conservation) organizations to discuss farmland and open space preservation alternatives. This may require additional government resources to manage such as design consultants, design review committees or a landscape architect who can advise property owners on land development scenarios.

EDUCATIONAL WORKSHOPS

University Extension Agents, conservation organization representatives, experienced landowners, tax advisors and others can be invited to give presentations to local landowners in order to educate local officials and interested landowners. UW Extension can also be a resource for statewide ‘webinar’ events that offer statewide sharing of information and question and answer sessions at very reasonable costs.

INCREASED FUNDING FOR CONSERVATION EDUCATION

To increase broad, proactive funding to provide advocacy, education, assistance to participants, new incentives, and expansion of existing incentives for conservation and sustainability. Addition of personalized consultations to increase the number of farms participating in conservation and the Farmland Preservation Program. Include youth, universities and more collaboration through all organizations.

3. FINANCING TOOLS

USE VALUE ASSESSMENT

In 1974 the Wisconsin Legislature amended the Rule of Uniform Taxation (Article VIII, Section 1) in the Wisconsin Constitution to permit the preferential treatment of agricultural land. The 1995-1997 Budget Act changed the standard for assessing agricultural land in Wisconsin from market value to use value. The goal of this legislation, known as ‘use value assessment’, was to protect Wisconsin’s farm economy and curb urban sprawl by assessing farmland based upon its agricultural productivity, rather than its potential for development. Specifically, the value of agricultural land for assessment purposes was changed from market value to use value.

In a use value assessment system, the use of the land is the most important factor in determining its assessed value. Use value in Wisconsin is specific to land only. The use value legislation passed in 1995 requires that the assessed value of farmland be based on the income that could be generated from its rental for agricultural use. Income and rental from farming are a function of agricultural capability. Because any land could theoretically be used for agricultural purposes, statutes and administrative rules limit the benefit of use value assessment to only those lands that qualify as

land devoted primarily to agricultural use. The implementation of use-value assessment in Wisconsin has helped farmers maintain lower property taxes on their agricultural land.

MANAGED FOREST LAW

Wisconsin's Managed Forest Law promotes sustainable forestry practices on private property by providing significant tax savings to property owners. Parcels with at least 10 acres of forestland used for wood products are eligible.

The goal of the Managed Forest Law (MFL) program is to encourage long-term sound forest management. MFL is a tax incentive program for industrial and non-industrial private woodland owners who manage their woodlands for forest products while also managing for water quality protection, wildlife habitat, and public recreation. In return for following an approved management plan, property taxes are set at a lower rate than normal.

4. PLANNING TOOLS

COMPREHENSIVE PLANS

Comprehensive Planning is an essential method of defining a long range, citizen driven vision for land use planning. Although the planning process is involved and can take a year or more to complete, depending on the size of the jurisdiction, a comprehensive, citizen driven plan that articulates a vision and the objectives required to implement the vision can be a very effective tool in shaping local land use policy and regulation. In addition, comprehensive plans can serve to assure granting agencies, conservation organizations and other potential partners in a publicly supported vision, resulting in a greater likelihood of participation by potential partners in farmland preservation. Comprehensive plans can also provide support to local decision-making bodies when difficult land use decisions need to be made.

Under Wisconsin's Comprehensive Planning Law, Wisconsin Statute Section 66.1001, nine elements must be included in a comprehensive plan: (issues and opportunities; housing; economic development; transportation; utilities and community facilities; agriculture, natural and cultural resources; land use; intergovernmental cooperation; and implementation). These nine elements offer an organized method of comprehensively addressing and analyzing farmland preservation impacts on the community.

The State of Wisconsin Department of Administration commissioned the creation of element guides after the Comprehensive Planning legislation was passed in order to provide guidance on each section of the comprehensive plan. The 'Guide to Planning for Agriculture in Wisconsin, 2002' is available online at the Department of Administration's website: http://www.doa.state.wi.us/dir/documents/ag_guide.pdf. This element guide provides excellent guidance on farmland preservation inventory techniques and implementation strategies.

The land use element of a comprehensive plan typically includes an inventory of the planning area's resources. Modern Geographic Information Systems (G.I.S.) provide a valuable tool for analyzing land information data in layers to best understand where valuable agricultural resources exist.

Typically, the implementation element of a comprehensive plan will offer short, medium and long-range objectives and an action plan to accomplish each objective which can articulate the tools needed by community officials to accomplish the objective. This section is particularly helpful in setting annual priorities for the community and a quick reference for officials to understand the tools available to accomplish planning objectives.

SEWER SERVICE PLANS

Wisconsin Administrative Code, NR 121 establishes sewer service area (SSA) planning in order to provide structure to wastewater treatment for both individual communities and communities sharing wastewater treatment facilities. The WDNR is responsible for working with local agencies to develop Sewer Service Area plans that guide publicly sewered growth to protect water quality.

Sewer service area planning helps protect communities from adverse water quality impacts by anticipating growth patterns in the planning area and making recommendations on growth patterns that best serve water quality goals. A sewer service area plan identifies land most suitable for new development and land use planning options that can mitigate adverse water quality impacts on the community. Plans typically identify environmentally sensitive areas where development would have an adverse impact upon water quality that may be considered for farmland preservation initiatives. Geographic information systems can be a useful tool in analyzing layers of geographic data that can serve both farmland preservation initiatives and water quality preservation goals.

5. REGULATORY TOOLS

URBAN GROWTH BOUNDARIES

According to the Farmland Preservation Center, Wisconsin has seen the conversion of over 500,000 acres of agricultural land to urbanization since 1982 prompting debate over whether or not regulatory control over urban sprawl is necessary to protect prime agricultural lands around urban centers.

Urban growth boundaries are defined as a regional regulatory boundary that is set in place in an attempt to control urban sprawl and mandate certain land use densities in and out of the boundary. Urban growth boundaries are a planning tool that can serve to promote urbanization while protecting valuable agricultural assets in a region.

Arguments for urban growth boundaries cite the importance of promoting urban infill, utilizing existing infrastructure investment to its highest and best use and discouraging costly sprawl and protecting the rural aesthetic. Cons include the potential for higher real estate prices within the urban area and the removal of market options for landowners outside the boundary.

Urban growth boundaries must be considered carefully due to these factors and may be considered along with other tools such as the purchase of development rights (PDR) or conservation easements.

Urban growth boundaries are commonplace around the world from the ‘greenbelt’ cities of Europe and Canada to Scandinavian countries which have a more abrupt transition from urban to rural land use patterns.

INFILL DEVELOPMENT AND INCREASED DENSITIES IN URBAN AREAS

Local units of government may use density bonuses as part of their development review and/or subdivision approval process. This approach assumes that if specified criteria are met, then a proposed development would be approved with more use of a site (such as more dwelling units per acre) than would otherwise be permitted by the community. That is, greater development density would be allowed if certain conditions are met. These “density bonuses” are a form of incentive that a community can offer to a developer who does the kind of development that a community seeks. Thus, a local government can legally and equitably say to each developer: if you do what we would like in your development, then you can increase the amount of development and thereby pay for more of the improvements we request.

Density bonuses may be used to achieve a wide array of community objectives, such as preservation of agriculture land, open space, and view sheds, and conservation of wetlands, water bodies, forests, meadows and other natural features that the community values. A list of density bonus criteria is not a freestanding document but would need to be incorporated into a community’s subdivision, zoning, or other development review regulations.

- ◆ Allows for the protection of environmentally sensitive areas while providing development to occur on the property
- ◆ Does not impose any direct costs on landowners and developers
- ◆ Neighbors may oppose due to concerns of increased density of development
- ◆ May not be mandatory tool, thus there is little assurance that desired project designs will be implemented by developers
- ◆ Can be difficult for local officials to enforce unless bonus criteria are clearly spelled out in an ordinance or policy document

Key Terms in This Chapter

Use Value Assessment – the assessment of farmland based on agricultural production rather than on its potential for development.

Transfer of Development Rights (TDR) – the transmission of a parcel’s bundle of development rights to another parcel slated for development in order to preserve an intended use such as agriculture on the transferring parcel.

Conservation Easement – a legal restriction recorded on a parcel intended to preserve the parcel from certain levels of development.

Urban Growth Boundary – a regional boundary placed to control urban sprawl and mandate certain levels of development density in and out of the boundary.

Conservation Subdivision. - Wisconsin’s ‘Smart Growth’ Law defines a conservation subdivision as “a housing development in a rural setting characterized by compact lots and

TRADITIONAL AGRICULTURAL ZONING

Agricultural protection zoning designates agriculture as the preferred primary land use. Its defining characteristic is the extent to which it permits new non-agricultural development. It keeps agricultural land contiguous, maintains a sense of rural character, and prevents large-scale residential developments whose residents may find agricultural activities to be a nuisance. It usually establishes a large minimum requirement for parcel sizes, usually around 35 acres. This type of zoning, however, does not permanently preserve agricultural land and does not protect it from annexation.

- ◆ Helps prevent agricultural land from becoming fragmented by residential development
- ◆ Clearly identifies agriculture as primary land use
- ◆ Easily implemented by municipalities
- ◆ Able to protect large areas of agricultural land
- ◆ Does not permanently preserve agricultural land
- ◆ Does not protect agricultural land from annexation

Large lot zoning, also known as low-density residential zoning, is a zoning technique creating lot sizes 40 acres or more. The perceived effectiveness of large lot zoning is based on the theory that limiting development density will preserve the open space and agricultural character of an area. The premise of large lot zoning is to select a minimum lot size that is large enough to prevent fragmentation of agriculture and to discourage non-farm homebuyers from purchasing land to build on in the country. Lot sizes ranging from three to ten acre-lots have proven ineffective in preventing non-farm homebuyers from purchasing agricultural land for residential development. In areas where farmland preservation is particularly important to the community, individual lot sizes of 40 to 160 acres may be applicable. Minimum lot sizes in this range may be utilized by niche agricultural industries such as gardening and greenhouses.

Large lot zoning, however, is generally not considered to be an effective farmland preservation tool since low density development patterns create parcel sizes which are “too big to mow, but too little to plow”. In areas of marginal farming production, this technique can have a detrimental effect by requiring large lots for individual homes and taking large parcels out of production for that purpose. This technique may be effective in maintaining rural character, but not farmland. Maintenance of rural character is enhanced if low residential densities are combined with conservation subdivision design in communities that wish to accommodate residential development.

CONSERVATION SUBDIVISION DESIGN

Conservation or cluster development is a development pattern for residential, commercial, industrial, or institutional uses, or a combination of these uses, in which buildings are grouped together rather than evenly spread over the land as in a conventional development. The intent of conservation development is to concentrate structures in those areas most suitable for building while preserving natural or cultural features¹. Residential conservation subdivisions cluster houses on smaller parcels of land while additional land that would have been allocated to individual lots is preserved as open space.

Conservation developments can keep land available for agricultural use, but generally the land is kept as open space. In a typical conservation subdivision, each homeowner has access to all of the open space areas, which may be permanently preserved by a conservation easement. To provide maximum protection of subdivision open space, the conservation easement should be assigned to organizations such as a homeowner’s association, a government agency, or a land trust. This tool can achieve a variety of comprehensive planning objectives such as reducing the visual impacts of development, preserving rural character, natural features, environmentally sensitive lands, permanent open space or agricultural land, creating opportunities for nonpublic ownership of open space, and increasing the efficiency of infrastructure development

Figure 1 illustrates how conservation/cluster zoning can accommodate development and conserve natural/open spaces. Although not commonly done in Southeastern Wisconsin to date, conservation subdivisions can also reserve areas for farming within the subdivision as shown in Figure 2.

It is important that when implementing a conservation/cluster



Figure 1. Conservation / cluster zoning

ordinance that a community incorporates design principles for rural character preservation such as preserving open space adjacent to existing perimeter roadways, clustering houses, separating cluster groups and providing open space adjacent to each lot. If design principles are not taken into account, developments may look more like a conventional subdivision layout and will not likely achieve the goal of preserving rural character.

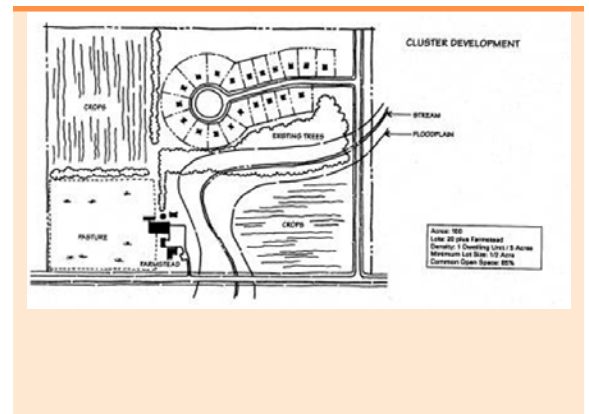
The Town of Caledonia in Racine County provides a good example of a conservation subdivision ordinance (See Appendix B for Town of Caledonia ordinance). Conservation subdivisions can also be accommodated through a local zoning ordinance.

Benefits

- ◆ Helps maintain a rural character of an area
- ◆ Provides permanent open space protection for a community
- ◆ Protects best natural resources of an area
- ◆ Developers may experience greater profits by selling parcels next to open space
- ◆ Reduces impact of development on watersheds
- ◆ Less expensive to provide municipal public services to development depending on how clustering can be accomplished

Limitations

- ◆ Maintenance costs of created open space
- ◆ Limited accessibility to low-income households
- ◆ Protected land is typically owned by a homeowner’s association – little to no public access
- ◆ Improper implementation of tool may create conventional subdivisions
- ◆ Minimum lot sizes may not be small enough to offset costs of land preservation
- ◆ Limits, but does not stop residential development in agricultural areas



STATE-CERTIFIED FARMLAND ZONING

La Crosse County has chosen to adopt and have County-wide certified farmland preservation zoning ordinance to ensure that landowners covered by the ordinance are eligible to claim farmland preservation tax credits, (ch. 91, Wis. Stats.). Certification of a local farmland preservation zoning ordinance must be obtained through application to the department. A farmland preservation zoning ordinance does not qualify for certification under s. 91.36, if the farmland preservation zoning ordinance allows a land use in a farmland preservation zoning district other than the following:

- (a) Agricultural uses.
- (b) Accessory uses.
- (c) Agriculture-related uses.
- (d) Nonfarm residences constructed in a rural residential cluster.
- (e) Undeveloped natural resource and open space areas.
- (f) A transportation, utility, communication, or other use.
- (g) Other uses identified by the department by rule.

Dwellings in Agricultural Districts

Goals

- Preserve prime agricultural land for use by future generations.
- Provide adequate opportunities for those who desire to live in a rural setting.
- Create equitable systems under which similarly situated landowners have similar ability to preserve areas as well as opportunities for development.

Policies

1. Encourage development on non-productive agricultural lands, which includes poor soils and cropland in productive fields smaller than 5 acres.
2. Encourage the rehabilitation of existing farm and non-farm homes.
3. Encourage (re)development within existing homesteads.
4. Discourage development on productive agricultural lands best suited for continued agricultural production.
5. Explore metrics that consider the shape and size of land, and limit development restrictions on areas not sufficient for modern agricultural practices and equipment.
6. Require lot sizes sufficient for a primary Private Onsite Waste Treatment Systems (POWTS), as well as a secondary site in the event replacement is necessary.
7. Utilize data published by government agencies, such as the Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS), to inform decisions regarding development in agricultural areas.
8. Discourage development in locations that will require driveways unsuitable for emergency vehicle travel.
9. Discourage multiple dwellings accessed from a single private driveway to ensure emergency vehicle response.
10. Discourage land use decisions that rely on individual relationships (e.g. family member) or circumstances (e.g. current size of owner's machinery or production practices).

Farmland Preservation Areas: As part of certified Zoning, there are two farmland preservation Areas mapped in La Crosse County. These mapped "Tiers" are administered using program incentives, but also, especially certified Zoning Ordinances. The following is a description of the Tiers:

Farmland Preservation Area Tier I

Land Uses in Tier 1 include All agricultural uses, including farmsteads, agri-business, agricultural buildings, primary residences, limited additional residential uses, wetlands, open water, open space and all other areas not planned for any type of development other than agriculture and agri-business. This area was delineated using the criteria adopted by the Farmland Preservation Steering Committee. All available farmland preservation program incentives, including income tax credits should be made available on a voluntary basis to landowners within Tier I areas.

Farmland Preservation Area Tier II

Land Uses within Tier II include all of the land uses as in the Tier I area. The only exception is that the vacant land in the Tier II category has been identified by the County Future Land Use Map as planned for future non-agricultural development. This development, however, is not projected to occur within the next 15-years. Therefore, these Tier III areas can benefit from short term farmland preservation program incentives. These Tier II areas must also remain within a certified farmland preservation zoning district while they receive program incentives. Periodically, when the County Farmland Preservation Plan is updated, portions of this Tier II area must be remapped, based on the 15-year forecasted land use demand. Only short-term farmland preservation program incentives should be made available on a voluntary basis to landowners within this Tier II area.

TRANSFER OF DEVELOPMENT RIGHTS

The County could establish a program that allows individuals to shift a "bundle" of development rights from a parcel in a defined "sending" area to a parcel in a defined "receiving" area, an area designated as appropriate for development. This allows a community to preserve natural features and agricultural land, while at the same time, helps it to concentrate development around existing population centers and infrastructure. The process is managed through dual zoning that provides property owners a choice whether or not to participate. Owners who sell development rights are properly compensated without having to endure complications of actually developing the site. They can also continue to generate income from agricultural, forestry, or other natural land uses. It is noted that because of this complexity TDR's require additional government resources to manage and are only feasible in areas where there is pressure for high density urban development.

The Transfer of Development Rights (TDR) is a tool that establishes areas within a community, called zones, that define areas for preservation (sending zones), and areas for more growth (receiving zones). Sending zones can be areas of agricultural land, open space, historic properties or any other properties that are important to the community.

Receiving zones are areas that the community has designated as appropriate for development. Often these areas are selected because they are located close to existing development, jobs, shopping, schools, transportation, infrastructure and other urban services.

In a traditional TDR program, sending area properties are rezoned to a form of dual zoning that gives the property owners

a choice. The owners can choose not to participate in the TDR program and instead use and develop their land as allowed under the baseline zoning. Alternatively, they can voluntarily elect to use the TDR option. Under the TDR option, the sending site owner enters into a deed restriction that spells out the amount of future development and the types of land use activities that can occur on the property. When that deed restriction is recorded, the sending site owner is able to sell a commodity created by the community's TDR ordinance called a transferable development right or a "TDR". By selling their TDR's, sending site owners often are fully compensated for the development potential of their property without having to endure the expense and uncertainty of actually trying to develop it. Also, when the sending sites have income-producing potential from non-urban uses, such as farming or forestry, the owners can continue to receive that income. A traditional TDR ordinance creates a form of dual zoning for receiving areas as well. Developers can elect not to use the TDR option provided under this dual zoning. Under the baseline option, they do not have to acquire TDR's, but they also are limited to a lower, less-profitable level of development. Under the TDR option, developers buy and retire a specified number of TDRs in order to achieve a higher, more-profitable level of development. The price of TDR's is typically freely negotiated between willing buyers and sellers. The TDR ordinance can influence the price through the number of TDR's that the sending site owners are allowed to sell. When TDRs remain affordable, developers are able to achieve higher profits through the extra development allowed under the TDR option despite the additional cost of the TDR's.

- ◆ Permanently protects land from development pressures
- ◆ Landowner is paid to protect their land
- ◆ Local government can target locations effectively
- ◆ Low cost to local unit of government
- ◆ Utilizes free market mechanisms
- ◆ Land remains in private ownership and on tax roll
- ◆ Can be complex to manage
- ◆ Receiving area must be willing to accept higher densities
- ◆ Difficult program to establish, especially in areas without County zoning
- ◆ Program will not work in rural areas where there is little to no development pressure on the area to be preserved
- ◆ Limited to Cities/Villages/Towns, no statutory authorization in Wisconsin for countywide program
- ◆ May require cooperative agreements among several local governments to establish sending and receiving zones

6. RIGHT-TO-FARM LAWS

The County should be proactive in distributing information on policies that protect agricultural activities from overly restrictive land-use regulations. These state laws protect agricultural activities from threat of nuisance-based lawsuits. The County may consider requiring those selling property near farms to disclose information about these laws.

Right-to-farm laws are a state policy that states commercial agriculture is an important activity. The statutes help support the economic viability of farming by discouraging neighbors from filing lawsuits against agricultural operations. Twenty-three right-to-farm laws also prohibit local governments from enacting ordinances that would impose unreasonable restrictions on agriculture.

Wisconsin's "Right-to-Farm Law" (Sec. 823.08 Wis. Stats) was enacted in 1981 to protect farmers from lawsuits, or the threat of lawsuits, where a plaintiff alleges that a normal farming practice poses a nuisance. The law was designed to protect farm operations, which use good management practices from nuisance lawsuits that challenge acceptable farming practices and the ability of farmers to responsibly continue producing food and fiber. The "Right-to-Farm Law" was strengthened in 1995 to provide recourse for farmers to collect on expenses they incurred from frivolous nuisance lawsuits brought against their operations.

Local communities may supplement the protection provided by the State with their own, more protective ordinance. Local ordinances may require that buyers of land in agricultural areas be provided with an Agricultural nuisance notice. Such notices inform buyers of agricultural land that agriculture is the primary economic activity of the area and that the buyer may experience inconvenience or discomfort arising from accepted agricultural practices. In some cases, the notice may be recorded on the deeds to new homes. Such notices may help to ensure that people who purchase houses in agricultural areas will recognize and be more tolerant of the sometimes-inconvenient impacts of agricultural activities.

7. VOLUNTARY TOOLS

AGRICULTURAL ENTERPRISE AREAS

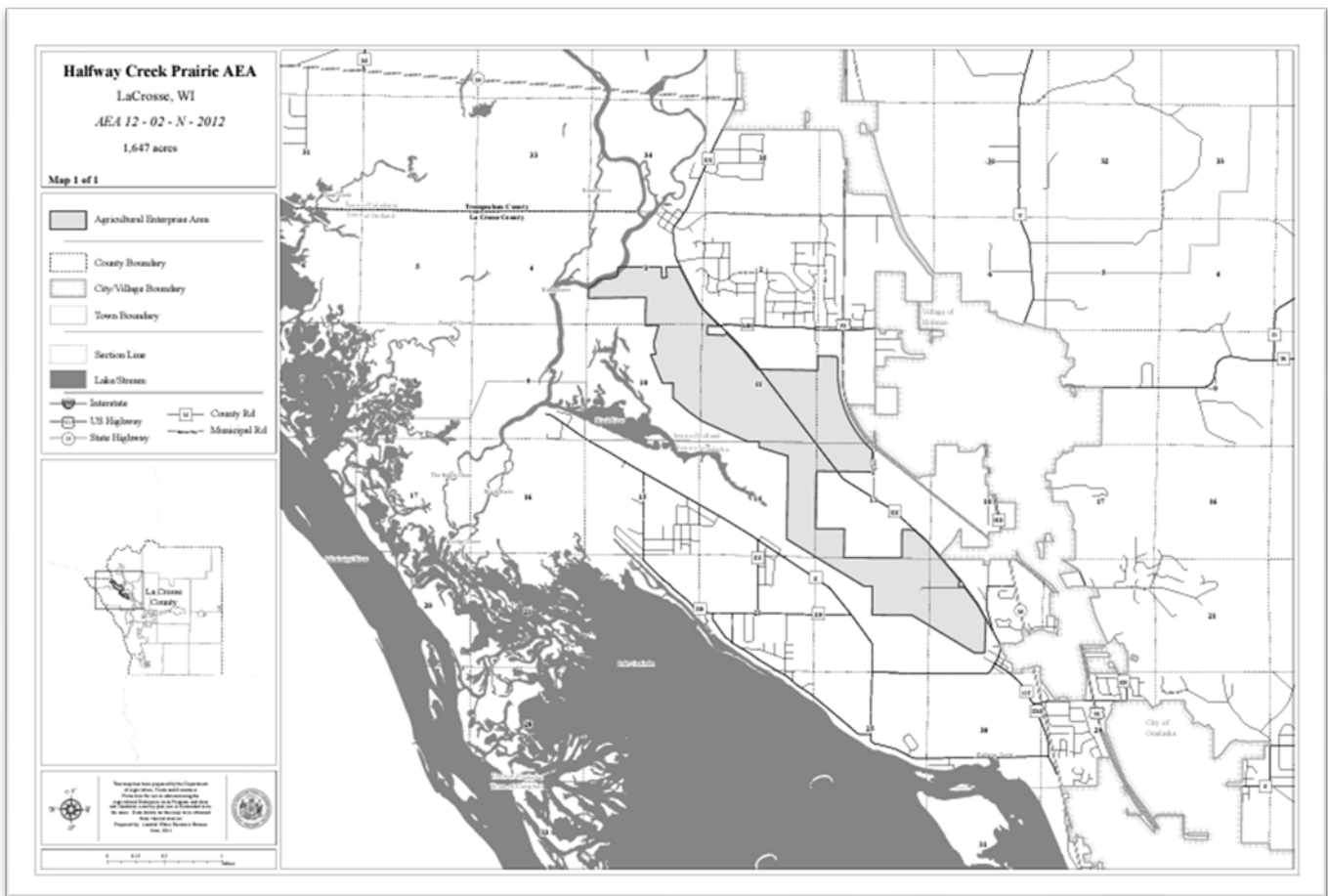
An agricultural enterprise area (AEA) is a significant prong of the 2009 Working Lands Initiation. By definition, an AEA is a contiguous land area devoted primarily to agricultural use and locally targeted for agricultural preservation and agri-business development. The program currently has 45 AEAs located throughout the state. Due to its success the program has increased its cap from 1,000,000 acres to 2,000,000 acres. If land is in an AEA, subject to a farmland preservation agreement, and meets eligibility and conservation requirements, the farmer can receive a tax credit of \$5 per acre. Land in an AEA is not required to be within a certified farmland preservation zoning district. However, if it is, the tax credit can go up to \$10 per acre. The designation of an AEA is voluntary and can be initiated by landowners by filing a petition with the Wisconsin Department of Agriculture, Trade and Consumer Protection (DATCP). Petitions filed with DATCP must meet minimum criteria, but additional evaluation criteria may be used to review competing petitions. As a minimum, the land subject of the petition must be identified as being in a farmland preservation area in the county's farmland preservation plan, be a contiguous land area, and primarily be used for agriculture. There must be a minimum of five separate landowners who sign the petition. Petitioners must also gain support from the local political sub-divisions, (towns/ villages). Once an AEA is accepted and established, the landowners will sign a farmland preservation agreement, in order to collect the tax credits, and continue to promote agricultural land use within the AEA. [More information can be found at https://datcp.wi.gov/Pages/Programs_Services/DesignatedAEAs.aspx](https://datcp.wi.gov/Pages/Programs_Services/DesignatedAEAs.aspx)

Purposes

- ◆ The preservation of valuable agricultural land use
- ◆ Promotion of agri-business
- ◆ Locally identified and locally supported
- ◆ Cooperation between the AEA landowners
- ◆ Additional tax credits to landowners to infuse capital into the local agricultural economy

Halfway Creek Prairie AEA

La Crosse County has one AEA totaling 1,647 acres located in the Towns of Holland and Onalaska. The Petitioners have operations ranging from cash crop to large dairy, to a swine livestock facility, grain elevator service, manure composting facility, along with the US Fish and Wildlife Service, a portion of the Upper Mississippi Wildlife Refuge and a Private Land Trust. Several of the Petitioners were raised in Wisconsin’s Halfway Creek Prairie. From the time of settlement of this area, up to current times, its residents have embraced and protected the beautiful natural resources, while establishing a complementary agricultural heritage as a legacy for their families and others who have similar ideals. A majority of the Petitioners are 3rd and 4th generation farmers whose families farmed the land before them. Their agricultural businesses are diverse, successful, and provide jobs as well as economic support to other businesses in the area, such as feed stores, implement dealers, veterinarians, and farm supply stores, and also bring active recreation for locals and tourists to the area.



INCENTIVE PROGRAM FOR DEVELOPMENT IN RURAL SANITARY DISTRICTS

Water and sewer service networks are important in managing and directing development in the County. Urban development requires community or multi-use water and sewer service; urban growth is directly dependent on expansion of this service. However, individual water supply and septic systems, as well as shared facilities, can only support relatively low-density development. Water and sewer management that provides for adequate water supplies, healthy drinking water and appropriate sewage disposal methods

promotes public health and environmental quality. Water and sewer systems provide the basic building blocks for a modern, growing and environmentally healthy community. Water and sewer planning is critical to the staging and promotion of orderly growth of communities and the prevention of urban sprawl. Therefore, water and sewer planning must be based on consideration of geographical features and environmental factors, community needs as expressed in the County's land use and development policies, Federal and State policy guidance, and public health requirements. The contextual framework for water and sewer planning includes the natural environment, community planning and development, and legal requirements. La Crosse County currently has four (4) sewer systems that serve the following unincorporated communities:

- Shelby
- St. Joseph Ridge (Town of Greenfield)
- Maple Grove (Town of Hamilton)
- Mindoro (Town of Farmington)

incentives (from the County) for development where public water and sewer service can be provided also serves to preserve the County's rural, agricultural, and environmentally sensitive land (Farmlands).

SEE MAP 3.8 in the appendix

FEDERAL PROGRAMS

The Farm and Ranch Land Protection Program (FRPP) provides matching funds to help purchase development rights to keep productive farm and ranchland in agricultural uses. Working through existing programs, USDA partners with State, tribal, or local governments and non-governmental organizations to acquire conservation easements or other interests in land from landowners. USDA provides up to 50 percent of the fair market easement value of the conservation easement.

To qualify, farmland must: be part of a pending offer from a State, tribe, or local farmland protection program; be privately owned; have a conservation plan for highly erodible land; be large enough to sustain agricultural production; be accessible to markets for what the land produces; have adequate infrastructure and agricultural support services; and have surrounding parcels of land that can support long-term agricultural production. Depending on funding availability, proposals must be submitted by the eligible entities to the appropriate NRCS State Office during the application window. More information at: www.nrcs.usda.gov/programs/frpp

BARGAIN SALES AND PROPERTY DONATIONS

If there is a willing seller, a government institution or non-government (conservation) organization may consider permanent protection by purchasing full title to property, which includes the full "bundle of development rights" that come with it. The parties may also structure transaction as a "bargain sale" where owner sells at a below-market price, and contributes the remaining value as a charitable gift, which the owner can claim as an income tax deduction. The buyer can also consider leasing land back to previous owner to generate rent. Fee-simple purchase work best in time- sensitive situations or where there is a vision of community use for the land. The buyer should consider the increased costs of owning land and government institutions should note that a purchase may lower value of parcel, thereby reducing tax revenues. This loss may be offset, however, as it may increase the property values of adjoining parcels.

There may be instances where a property owner seeks to transfer his/her land title to government institution or non-government (conservation) organization as a charitable gift (or to benefit from tax incentives). This donation may take place immediately, or be a reserved life estate, where owner continues to own and live on property until death. The recipient should consider that more resources may be needed for continued operation and maintenance of the property.

8. SUMMARY OF TOOLS AVAILABLE FOR TOWN/COUNTY IMPLEMENTATION

Table 5.1 provides a summary of those tools that the towns and the county can use to protect farmland from development.

Table 5-1. Summary of Farmland Protection Tools Available for Town/County Implementation

| Tool | Benefits | Limitations | Funding Requirements and Availability | Status of Current Implementation |
|--|--|--|---|---|
| “Options” Review for Developers | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Provides opportunity to incorporate farmland and open space preservation into a development project Voluntary | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Voluntary nature Can result in sized Farmland Parcels may not be permitted by local regulations | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> no additional funding would be required if able to manage with existing staff | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Currently not a required step in the development review process |
| Sewer Service Plans | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Restrains development from encroaching on agricultural and other natural lands | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Does not ensure long-term protection Only defines higher density development | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Current cost is an on-going expense | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Already in practice |
| Urban Growth Boundaries | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Establish clear line between growth and preservation areas Promote efficient use of exist. infrastructure | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> difficult to reach agreement boundaries Require additional regulations to implement Would need to amend comprehensive plans | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Funding for amending comprehensive plans and implementation would be required | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Not being done |
| Infill Development and Increased Densities in Urban Areas | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Efficient use of exist. infrastructure Does not impose any direct costs on property owners or developers | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Nearby residents may oppose increased density Does not help to ensure preservation if density bonuses are not mandatory | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Aside from potentially revising local regulations, no additional funding would be required | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Some municipalities along with La Crosse County encourage infill in their comprehensive plans |
| Transfer of Development Rights (TDR) | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Permanently protects farmland Farmers get “development value” targets specific areas for protection Land remains on tax rolls and in private ownership | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Implementation can be complex and an ongoing commitment May be difficult to craft a countywide program including cities and villages Nearby residents may oppose increased density | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Cost involved with revising local regulations Would likely require additional institutional resources to manage | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Not being done – there are a few examples elsewhere in Wisconsin |
| Conservation Subdivision Design | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Permanently protects farmland Promotes more efficient use of new transportation and utility infrastructure May increase values of adjacent residential properties | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ongoing maintenance obligations for homeowners association May be limited access to open space May limit home ownership opportunities for some households | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Aside from potentially revising local regulations, no additional funding would be required | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Not a general requirement but authorized in the updated zoning ordinance |
| Incentives for development within un-incorporated areas served by public utilities | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Adds density to suburban areas Adds revenue to small utilities, provides the ability to develop at higher densities | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Minor cost to the public for initial development incentives Does not ensure permanent preservation | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> No additional funding required | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Fairly easy to put in practice, a simple decision by La Crosse County to provide this incentive |
| State-Certified Farmland Zoning | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Property owners are eligible to receive state income tax benefit Allows non-farm land divisions | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Does not ensure permanent protection Conversion fee required if rezoning is approved by the jurisdiction | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Land development regulations may need to be revised to meet state requirements and certification process | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Already in practice |
| PACE Program | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Property owner is eligible to receive income tax benefit Permanently protects farmland Can reduce future land-use conflicts Land remains in private ownership and on tax rolls Voluntary involvement | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Requires two willing parties Negotiations may be complex A competitive process is used to only fund the top-rated applications – state funding is not guaranteed | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Petitioner needs to secure 50 percent of the cost of the easement cost from a participating entity such as a local or statewide land trust or a governmental jurisdiction | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> This is a new state program already authorized and administered by La Crosse County |
| Designation as an Agricultural Enterprise Area (AEA) | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Property owner is eligible to receive income tax benefit Promotes agricultural businesses Voluntary involvement | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Does not ensure permanent protection Difficult to find qualified and willing areas Agreement is for 15 years only funds the top-rated applications | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> No governmental expenditure required other than the adoption of a resolution of County Board supporting the petitioner’s application for designation as an AEA | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Not being done |

Chapter 6 IMPLEMENTATION

1. CHAPTER OVERVIEW

The farmland preservation plan, by its nature, covers a wide number of topics. Although there is much to address, it is also necessary to identify the most important issues. This helps to focus our goals, recommendations and implementation strategies. The plan will develop detailed recommendations that address the following:

Chapter Contents

| |
|---|
| 1. Chapter Overview |
| 2. LESA Analysis |
| 3. Issues and Opportunities |
| 4. Goals, Objectives, and Policies |
| 5. Designation of Farmland Preservation Areas |
| 6. Action Plan |

(a) **Varied Growth Management Needs.** Address the growth management and land use planning needs of urban, rural, and suburban regions in the County. For Example, by increasing demand and density in the urban and suburban areas, the demand will be reduced in the rural areas, promoting the preservation of important farmland.

(b) **Quality of Life.** Identify the distinct factors that contribute to the livability of La Crosse County. Evaluate and develop strategies to maintain and enhance these features.

(c) **Improved Local & County Decision Making.** Develop a framework that encourages informed planning, zoning, and development review decisions at the local level. Continue to support County coordination, oversight, and facilitation of these efforts.

(d) **Policies for Agricultural Transition Areas.** Develop clear criteria to guide any changes in areas that are currently agricultural use, but planned for other uses after the 15 year window. As this is a 10-year plan, consider both short and long-term policy.

(e) **Prime and Productive Agricultural Lands.** Develop realistic strategies to protect prime and productive agricultural lands from the encroachment of development. Define and differentiate between lands with high and marginal agricultural value.

(f) **Maintain Natural Resources.** Continue to protect the various natural resources that exist in different parts of the County as they significantly contribute to the quality of life. Promote consistency among different standards managed at the Federal, State, County, and local levels.

(g) **Regional Economic Coordination.** Identify strategies that promote cooperation in economic development efforts that promote the agricultural economy. Include Local and County governments and all levels of educational institutions within and adjacent to La Crosse County.

(h) **Strategy for Transportation Options.** Plan for a variety of viable transportation options that meet the projected needs of residents and businesses. This transportation infrastructure should be designed with agriculture in mind, and not fragment viable agricultural operations.

(j) **Efficient and Effective Services.** Maintain the efficiency and quality of County services while identifying areas for improvement.

(k) **Implementation.** Identify feasible implementation tools that the County and local governments can utilize to implement the plan.

2. ISSUES AND OPPORTUNITIES

Throughout the planning process a range of issues and opportunities were identified and are described in this section. Most of these relate specifically to agriculture, while some relate to the state's farmland preservation program and its implementation. They are grouped together for organizational purposes.

- ◆ **Organic foods.** In recent years, the demand for organic food has been steadily increasing. While some consumers have always been interested in eating a healthy diet, commercial food stores are now stocking and promoting a growing variety of organic foods.
- ◆ **Eat local.** When you buy direct from local farmers, your dollars stay within your community, and strengthen the local economy. More than 90¢ of every dollar you spend goes to the farmer, thus preserving farming as a livelihood and farmland. This is important because as mergers in the food industry have increased, the portion of your food dollar paid to farmers has decreased. Vegetable farmers earn only 21¢ of your dollar; the other 79¢ goes to pay for marketing, distribution, and other costs.
- ◆ **Food as medicine.** Increasingly, food is not only as necessary for sustenance, it is seen as vital for maintaining good health. . . . (See inset box)
- ◆ **Distrust of state programs.** Some farmers harbor a strong distrust of state programs and regulator controls. In order to overcome this and ensure participation, this plan will need to fully and transparently inform landowners of the programs components. Even then, some landowners will continue to be unwilling.
- ◆ **Conservation compliance** – Under the Working Lands Program, farmers who claim a farmland preservation tax credit must comply with state soil and water conservation standards. Some farmers view conservation compliance as a cost prohibitive to implement nutrient management plans, a conservation plan and implementation of appropriate conservation practices. It will be important to utilize local staff, and cost share programs to include additional incentive for this level of compliance. Please refer to *The La Crosse County Land and Water Resources Management Plan - 2011* for details on the administration of this important feature of Farmland Preservation in La Crosse County
- ◆ **Incentives too low.** It has become clear that many landowners feel the incentive to participate in these programs is not at a sustainable level. This will continue to be a difficult discussion, due to the current economic conditions and the resulting lack of political support for increased incentive levels.
- ◆ **Extraterritorial jurisdiction of cities and villages.** Once a positive tool for planning development in Wisconsin, extra-territorial sub-division jurisdiction allows those incorporated municipalities adjacent to Wisconsin Towns to have a signature and approval process for sub-divisions proposed within those towns. This tool has now become a divisive argument creating animosity between Towns and Incorporated Municipalities due to the political leveraging and animosity created by strong annexation legislation. The farmland preservation planning process should encourage additional boundary agreement discussions, and the importance of mutual respect between municipalities and the importance of continued farmland preservation, even in extra-territorial jurisdictions.
- ◆ **Aging of farm operators.** • Farmers are aging. From 2012 to 2017, the average age of a farmer increased from age 57 to 59. And the number of farmers aged 75 years or older increased by 20 percent over the same period, meanwhile, the number of operators under 25 years of age decreased by 30 percent.
- ◆ **Size of operations.** As is true in many economic sectors, the size of farm operations in acres per operation has increased. Farm consolidation has been an ongoing trend. Expanded operations take advantage of economies of scale. While most operations have grown in size, there have been an increasing number of small operations who do not require a large land base. Those growing a specialty crop are prime examples.

Case Study – NuGenesis Farm

ProHealth Care, with hospitals in Waukesha and Oconomowoc, recently partnered with local businesses, educational institutions, and a non-profit to establish an organic farm on 37 acres in Waukesha County – but with a twist. The farm will produce vegetables, fruits, nuts, herbs, and spices that have been scientifically proven to prevent and fight disease while promoting excellent health. In addition to growing these healthy foods, the center will be involved in research and education. Waukesha Memorial Hospital plans on purchasing food produced on the farm for its kitchen.

www.nugenesis.org

- ◆ **Local control.** Throughout the preparation, review, and adoption of this plan, there was one common theme – retain local control and input. The county’s comprehensive plan was built on the direct input from the towns and the future land use maps prepared by the Towns.

Case Study – Rock County Jail Inmates Growing Food for Local Food Pantries

Rock County UW Extension and the master gardener program partnered with the Rock County Community Corrections Bureau to establish a gardening program for inmates. More than 4,300 pounds of food was grown in 2008 which was donated to local food pantries.

- ◆ **Specialization.** Farming operations in Wisconsin have historically been diversified. It was not uncommon for a farming to raise a variety of crops and animals. Increasingly the norm is to specialize in a particular area. For example, those in the dairy industry may specialize as a calving operation. Mega Dairies and milk processing facilities have also seen a strong increase over the past 10 years.

Case Study – La Crosse Farm to School

The program is a collaboration between the four largest school districts and County Health Department. Local produce from small- and medium-scale growers is purchased and sent to a local, small-scale food processing facility where it is processed, frozen, and shipped to the schools via a traditional vendor. Exploiting economies of scale, coordinating ordering and deliveries, and minimizing school district labor, the program is delivering minimally-processed local produce at competitive prices. It also provides nutrition education to the schools, including chef-led cooking classes using local ingredients, lesson plans for elementary teachers, parent handouts and monthly taste testing in school cafeterias. All educational activities center around the "Harvest of the Month", a monthly, featured local food.

- ◆ **Commodity prices.** In the past two years, cash receipts for crops statewide rose 34% with corn up 46% and soybeans up 24% this has spurred a slow-down in acres being diverted from agriculture to development. In La Crosse County in 2008, there were only 36 acres diverted from Agriculture. Statewide the number of acres being diverted from agriculture decrease 43% and the value of agricultural land rose 12%. This is due to the slow economy in development and the economy of commodities finally catching up modern values. However, we cannot expect this trend to continue and must use this short reprieve to put in place farmland preservation measures.

- ◆ **On-farm energy production.** Production of energy from farm resources such as ethanol is making news, but another source of energy is sometimes forgotten. A company called USEMCO from Tomah, WI has developed an anaerobic digester to efficiently process electricity from manure generated at an average size dairy farm. The following grant was awarded to USEMCO in 2009. A \$200,000 project conducted by USEMCO in Tomah to develop and demonstrate an anaerobic digester that is cost effective for small farms. Wisconsin has nearly 13,000 dairy farms, with an average herd size of fewer than 100 cows. By bringing the economy of scale down for manure digesters, many more farms will have the ability to take a potential disposal cost and turn it into a source of homegrown, renewable energy. In other parts of Wisconsin, wind energy can be another form of on farm energy production. due to our topography, this is not a likely scenario in La crosse county unless technology advances, due to low wind speeds. Solar energy is, however, becoming an increasingly popular form of energy production. at this point, we have only seen small personal solar arrays being installed. La crosse County has streamlined our permitting process for these arrays to encourage landowners to consider this energy alternative. There is also increasing discussion about placing larger “solar farms” in agricultural areas of La crosse county. This process is currently addressed through conditional use permits and rezoning from agriculture to industrial, however, there is debate and discussion about amending the zoning ordinance to allow this as an authorized use to promote this type of energy production. This plan encourages that discussion, as it is a core value of this plan to promote sustainable practices.

- ◆ **International trading policies.** Agricultural export opportunities are hindered by daunting MRL challenges due to confusing and burdensome import regulations on pesticide residue levels for U.S. ag exports. Agricultural trade operates in a global market and is subject to the capricious nature of governments, weather and evolving trade agreements. Economic Development policies for agriculture in La Crosse County should explore the ever- changing landscape of commodity markets and offer insight in ways to take advantage of international trade.

- ◆ **Perceived decline in agriculture’s role in economic structure of La Crosse County.** There is a general perception that the agricultural sector is not important to the County’s overall economic strategy. As the importance of other economic sectors have grown in scale and influence in the county and region, the role of the agricultural sector in the local economy has diminished.

3. GOALS, OBJECTIVES, AND POLICIES

Overall Goal To acknowledge that the general physical characteristics of La Crosse County, being its topography and access to natural resources, has greatly influenced the patterns of social and economic development presently existing in La Crosse County. That it is desirable to preserve our land and water based resources and that to do so will preserve the quality of life in La Crosse County.

Additional Goals:

I. Preserve the rural character of large areas of La Crosse County

1. Utilize Farmland preservation tools encouraging landowners to preserve their farms’
2. Encourage landowners to cooperate to preserve contiguous tracts.
3. Utilize Zoning and Sub-division Ordinances to protect areas planned for Agriculture.

II. Preserve a strong agricultural economy

1. Promote Educational tools to encourage “buy Local” programs
2. Provide incentives to promote value added agriculture
3. Maintain Use Value Assessment
4. Promote Home based businesses in agricultural areas.

III. Preserve a healthy natural environment

1. Provide additional funding and technical assistance for conservation practices.
2. Promote the preservation of open space, and agricultural land adjacent to important resources.
3. Promote sustainable agriculture, organic practices and local food supply planning.

IV. Promote a strong balance of landowner rights and community benefit

1. Ensure that the public participation is encouraged and utilized in drafting plans.
2. Promote open and transparent government.
3. Policy must be made while respecting the landowners comments.

V. Foster effective, cooperative government units

1. Include all levels of local government in decisions.
2. Respect the activities of local governments.
3. Build open, honest and supportive relationships between government units
4. Collaborate, cooperate and compromise

VI. Support agriculturally related businesses

1. Promote Agricultural Enterprise Areas
2. Educate the public on the benefits of local agri-business
3. Support agri-business with technical assistance and revolving loan funds.
4. Include agriculture in Economic development discussions.

VII. Promote Aesthetic Beauty and Bluffland Preservation

1. Support public/ private partnerships which promote bluffland preservation.
2. Promote an active recreational use of preserved blufflands.

VIII. Respect local Comprehensive Plans and encourage Development that is consistent with those Plans.

1. Ensure that the Farmland Preservation Plan and Comprehensive Plans are consistent.
2. Promote Development with density bonuses and streamlined approval processes in areas planned for development.

4. DESIGNATION OF FARMLAND PRESERVATION AREAS

Below is the adopted criteria for the designation of FPAs. These criteria: once adopted allowed the steering committee to draft an appropriate map of these areas. “The criteria were developed with assistance from similar criteria from a number of other counties in the state in a similar time frame of adopting farmland preservation plans. These criteria, however, are unique to La Crosse County, showing respect to public input activities, and the unique personality of the Countyitself.

Criteria for Delineating Farmland Preservation Areas

The Committee Used the Comprehensive Plan Core values in determining the future land use map. The future land use categories had a significant impact on the farmland preservation areas. In addition, the steering committee and the Planning Resources and Development Committee of La Crosse County, used the above Goals for Farmland Preservation as their basis for adopting the following five criteria for mapping Future Land Use classes and Farmland Preservation Areas:

Criteria

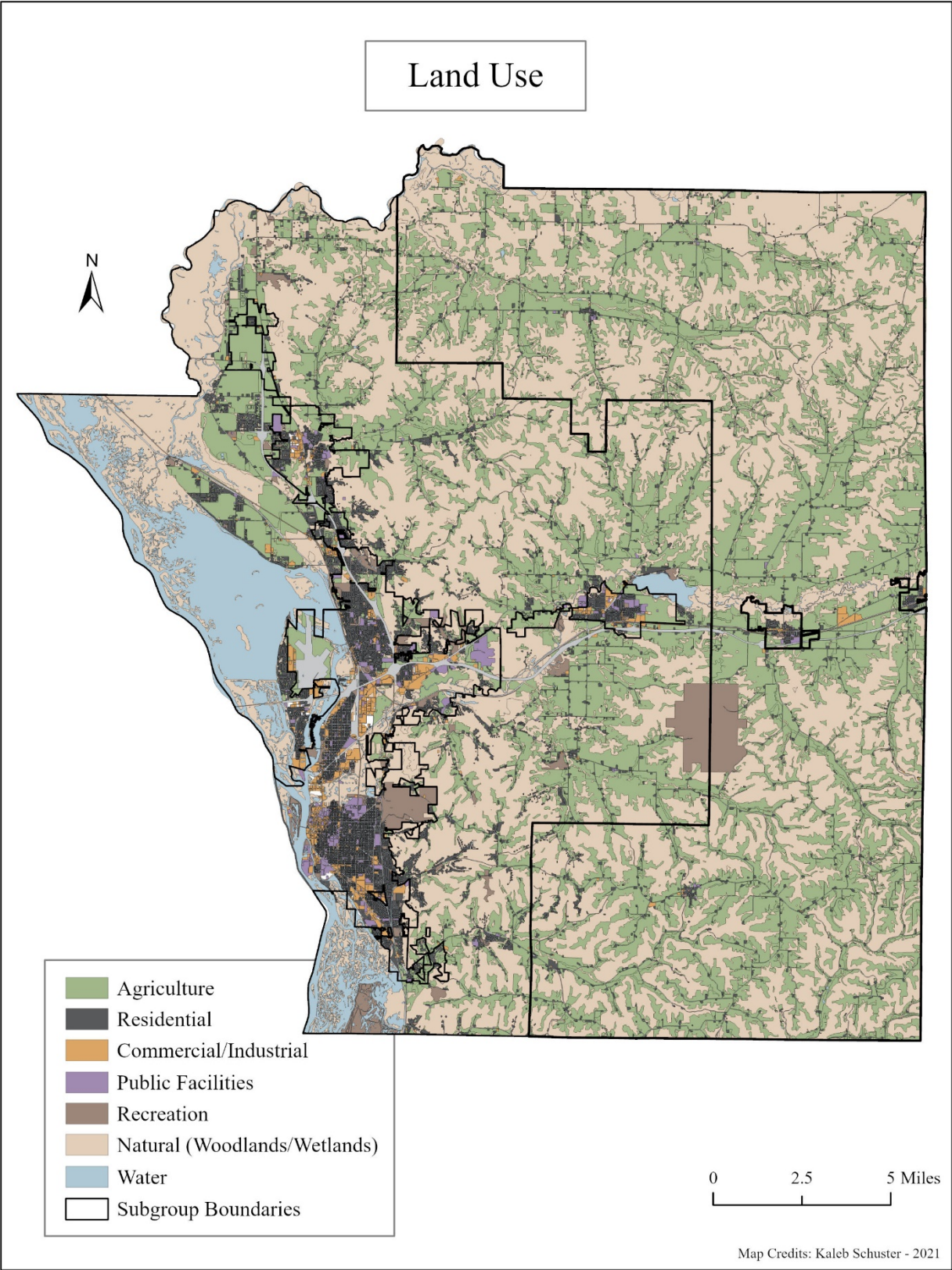
1. Productive agricultural soils (see map 3.2)
2. Consistent with future land use plan (see map 2.2)
3. Large contiguous farmland preservation areas (see map 3.3)
4. Proximity to protected or important open space (see map 3.4)
5. Cooperative input from local municipalities

In table 6-1 below are the activities specifically defined within this Farmland Preservation Plan to assist in the preservation of farmland at the local and statewide level in an easy to find and implementable format:

| Action | Who is Responsible | Schedule |
|---|---|---------------------------|
| Certified Zoning Ordinance | County or Town Board | December 2022 |
| Certified Farmland Preservation Plan | County Board | April 2022 |
| Develop a PACE education program | County Land Conservation and Planning Staff | Complete |
| Assist in the development of Cooperative Boundary Agreements. | County, City, Village and Town Planning Staff | Ongoing |
| Update County Subdivision Code. | County Planning and Zoning Committee | 2022 |
| Develop Standards to review plan implementation progress. | County Staff | Annually starting in 2022 |
| Develop Standards to judge consistency of land use decisions with adopted comp plan | County Staff | 2022 |
| Local Farmland Planned Areas | Town and County Staff | 2022 |
| Local Zoning/ Sub-division and Incentive Programs | Town and County Staff | 2022 |
| Develop Standard Ag Enterprise Area Petition for General Landowner Use | County Staff | Complete |

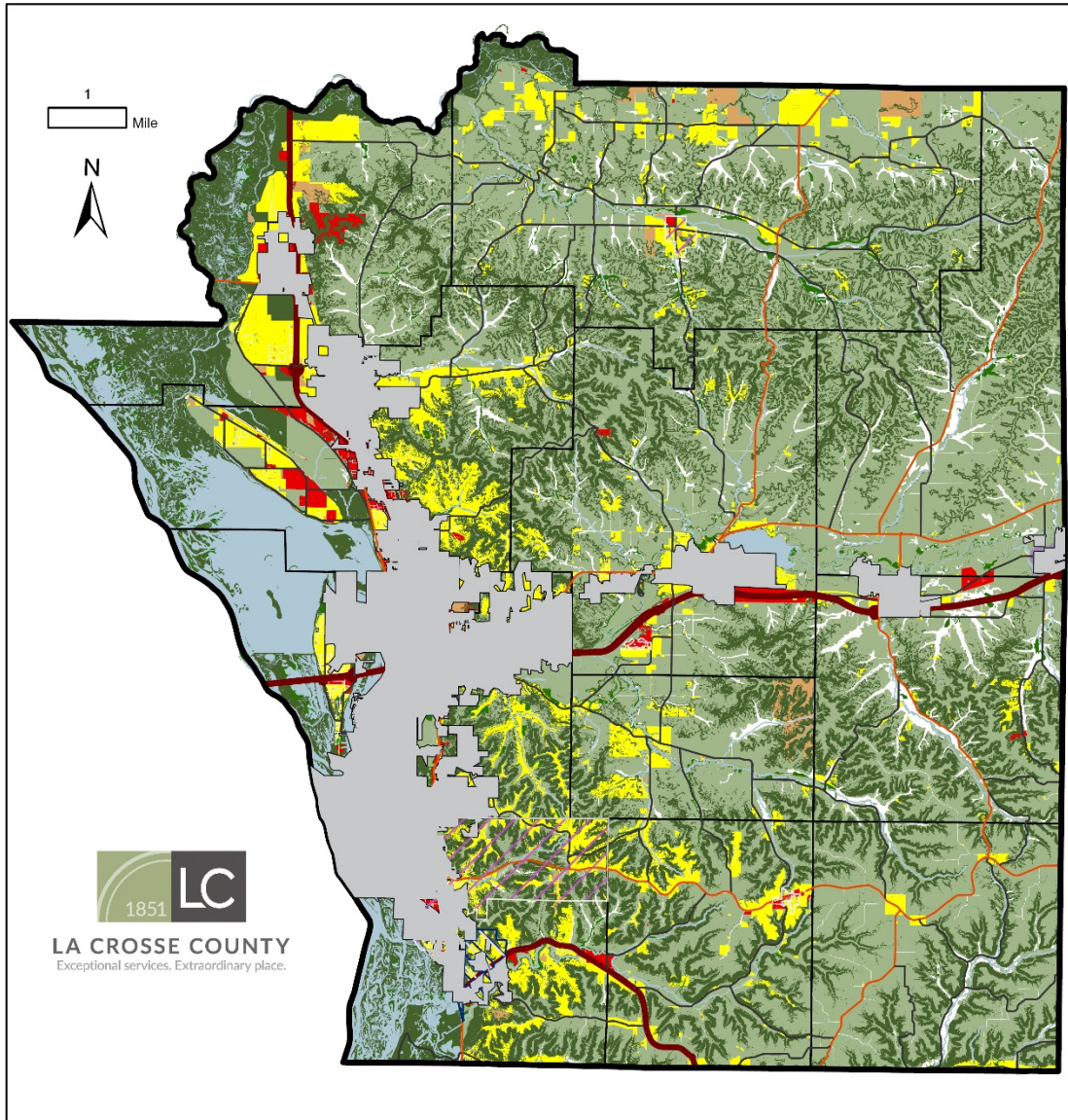
| | | |
|---|-----------------------------|----------|
| LESA Analysis for PACE applications and Rezoning requests | County Staff and Committees | Complete |
| Update Land and Water Resource Management Plan | County Staff and Committees | 2020 |

Appendix



Map 8 Existing Land Use

Map 7 Future Land Use



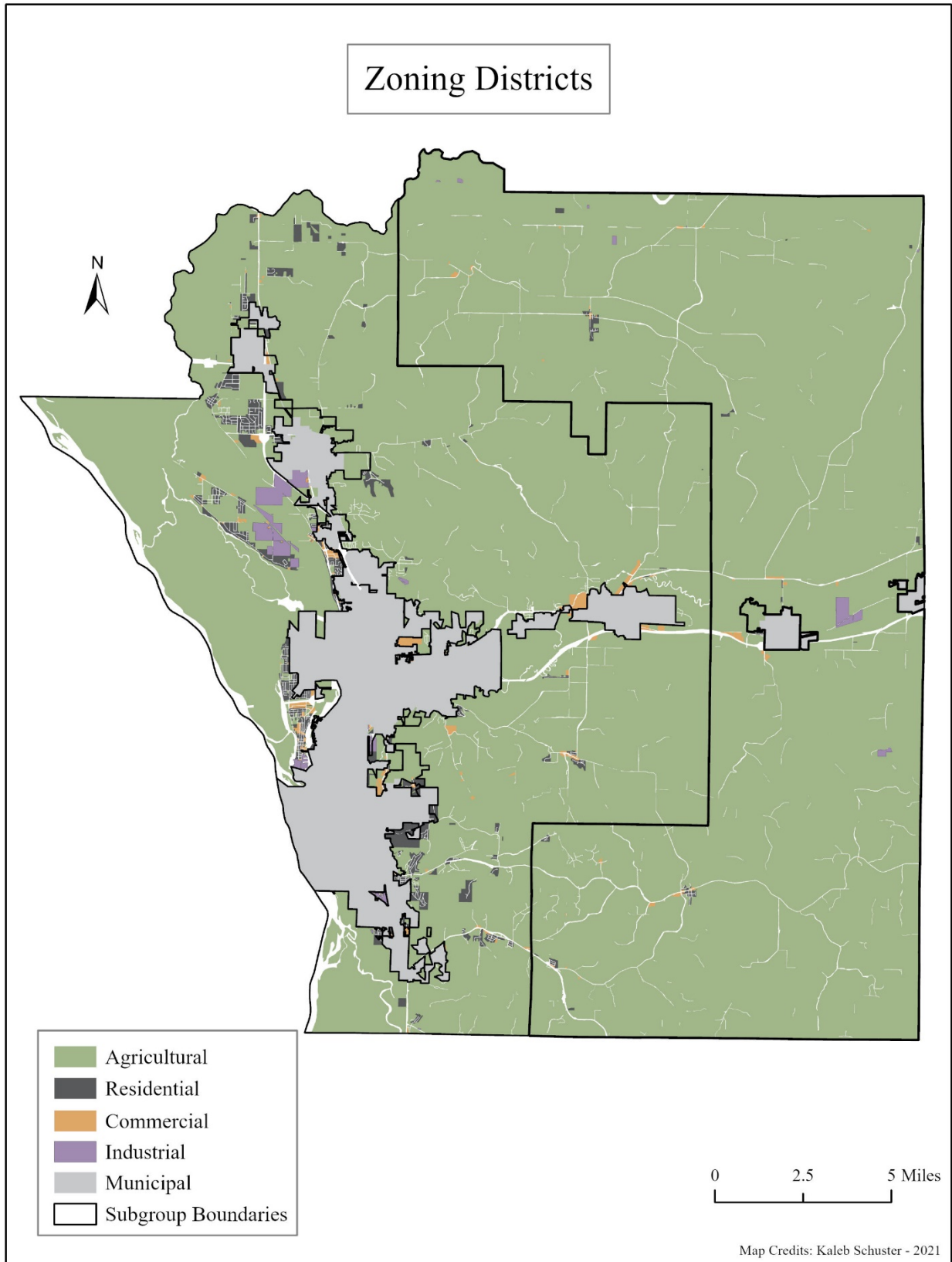
- | | | | |
|-------------------------|-----------------|--------------------|----------------|
| Municipal Boundaries | Roadways | Environmental | Planned Growth |
| Boundary Agreements | Federal | Non-Residential | Water |
| Sanitary Districts | State | Public Institution | Exclusive Ag |
| City/Village Boundaries | County | Residential | |

Future Land Use: La Crosse County

2021-2022 Comprehensive Plan

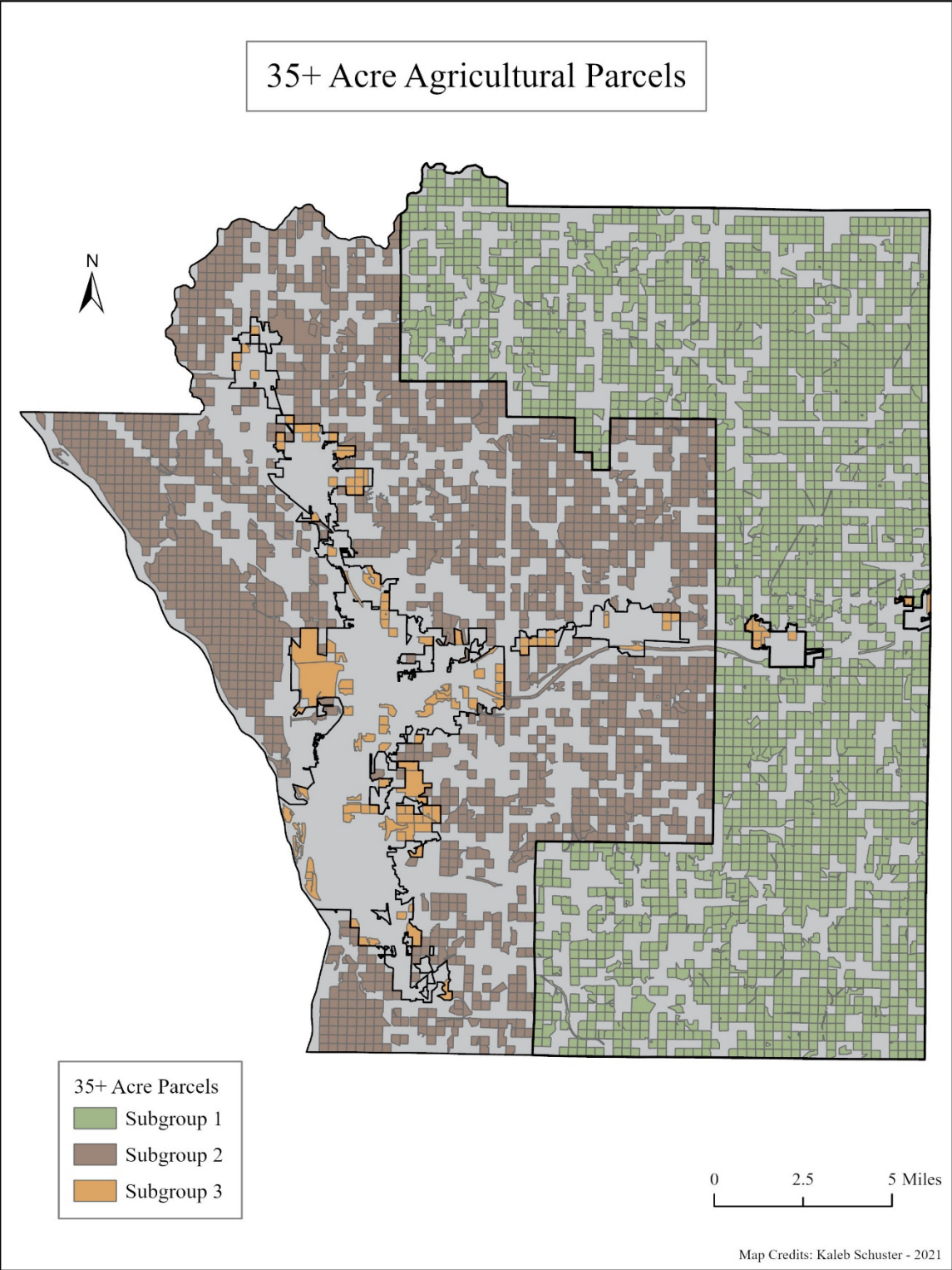
Map 9 Farmland Preservation Areas

Map 10 Zoning Districts

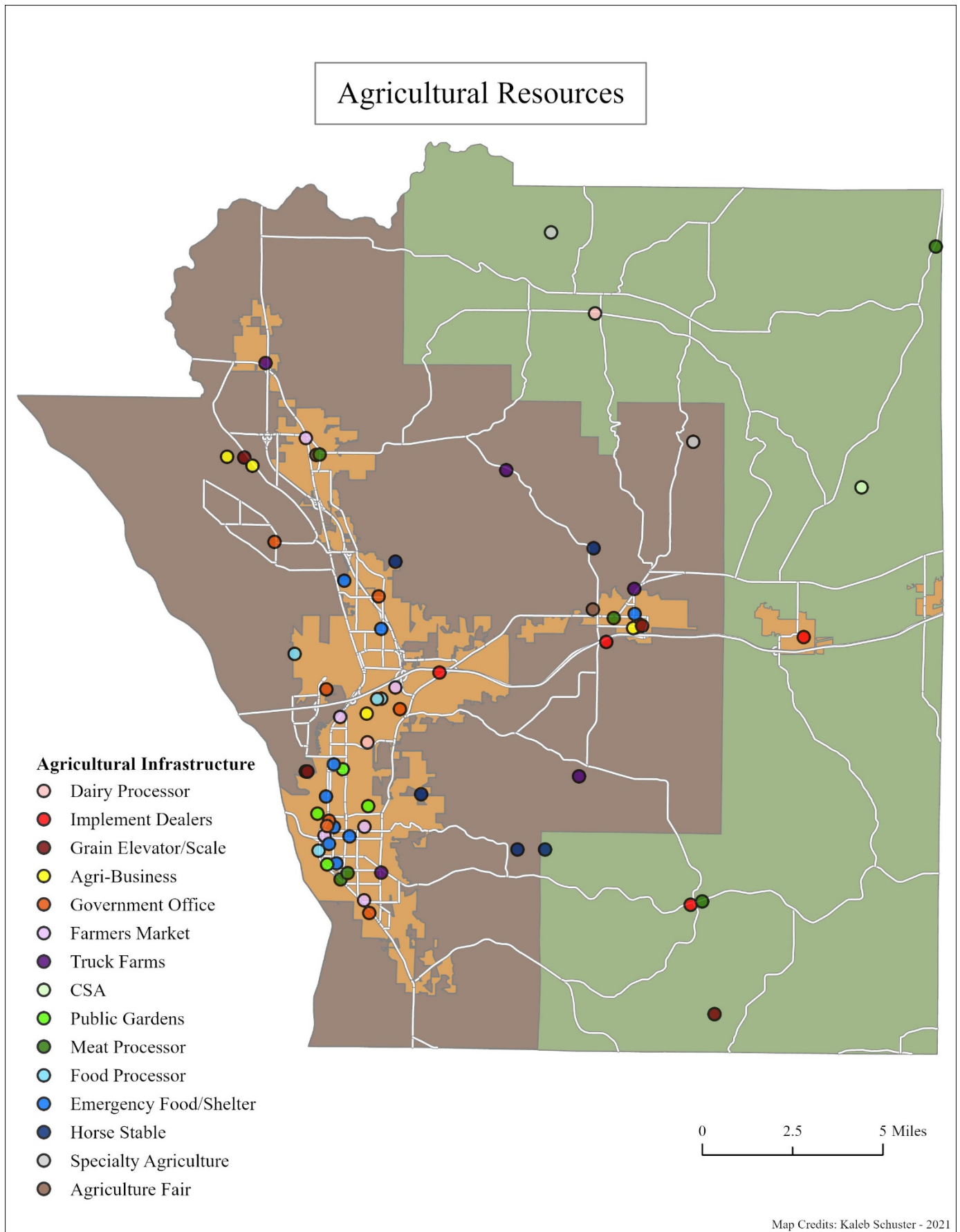


Map Credits: Kaleb Schuster - 2021

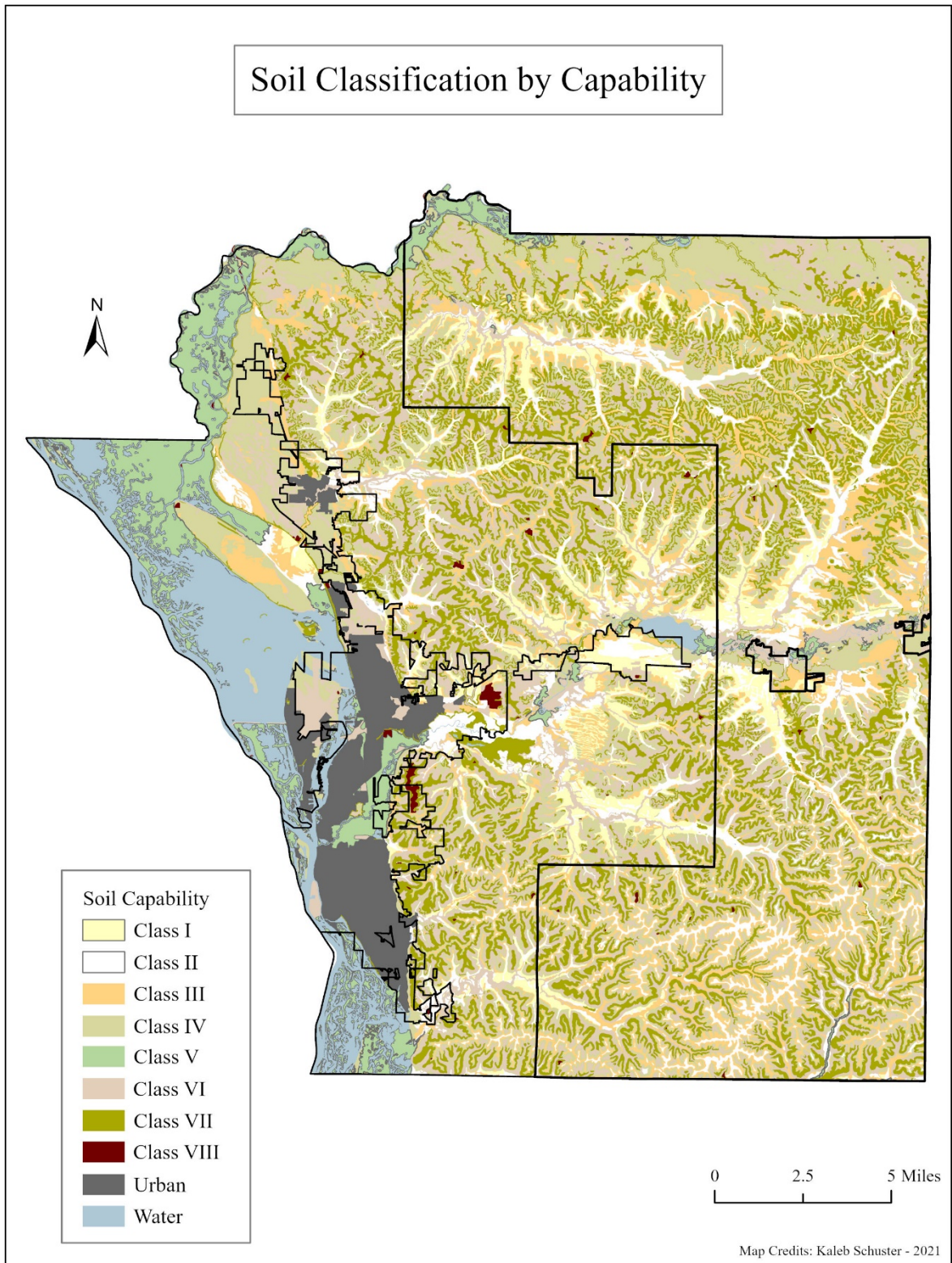
Map 11 Large Landowners



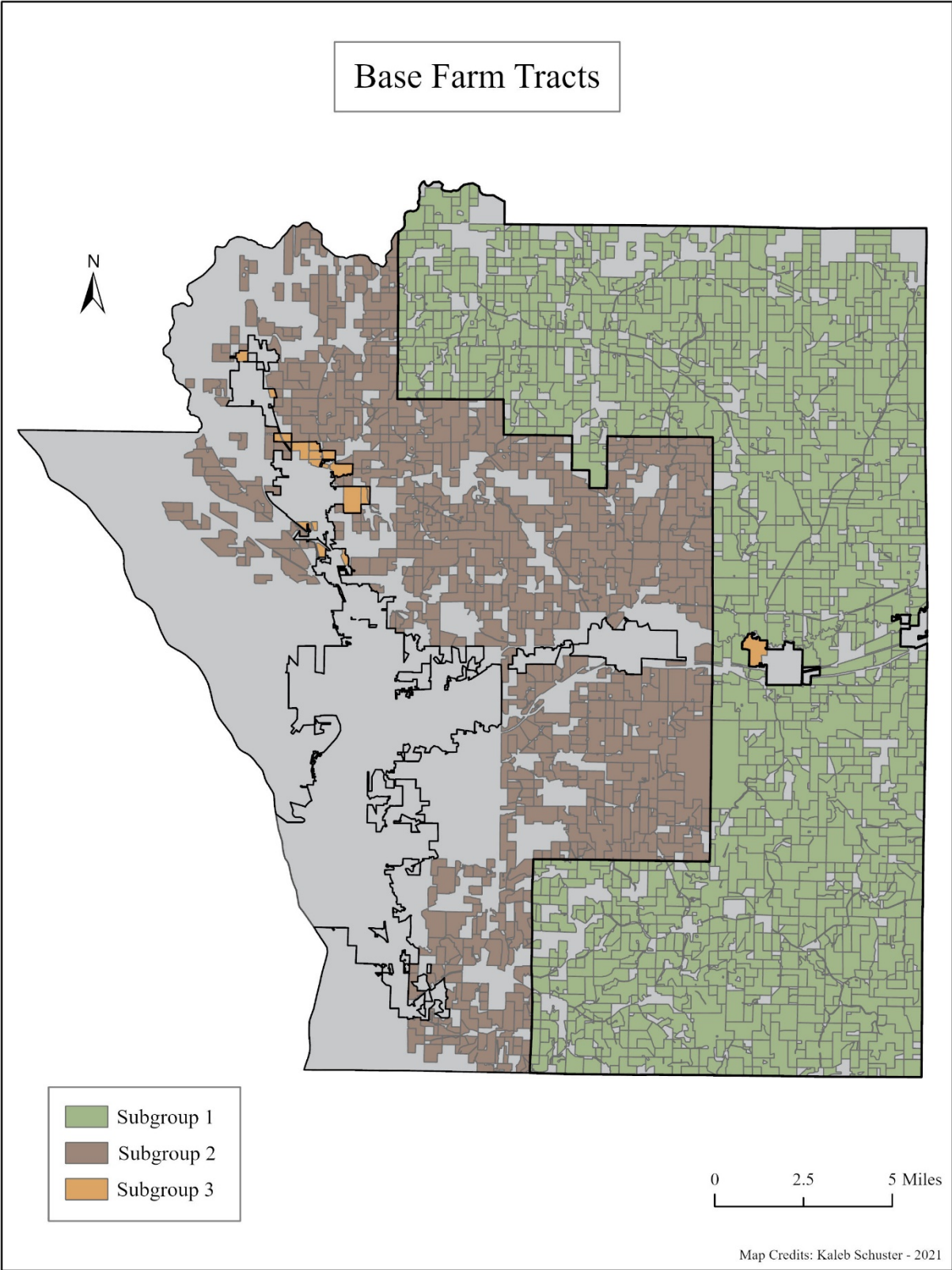
Map 12 Agricultural Resources



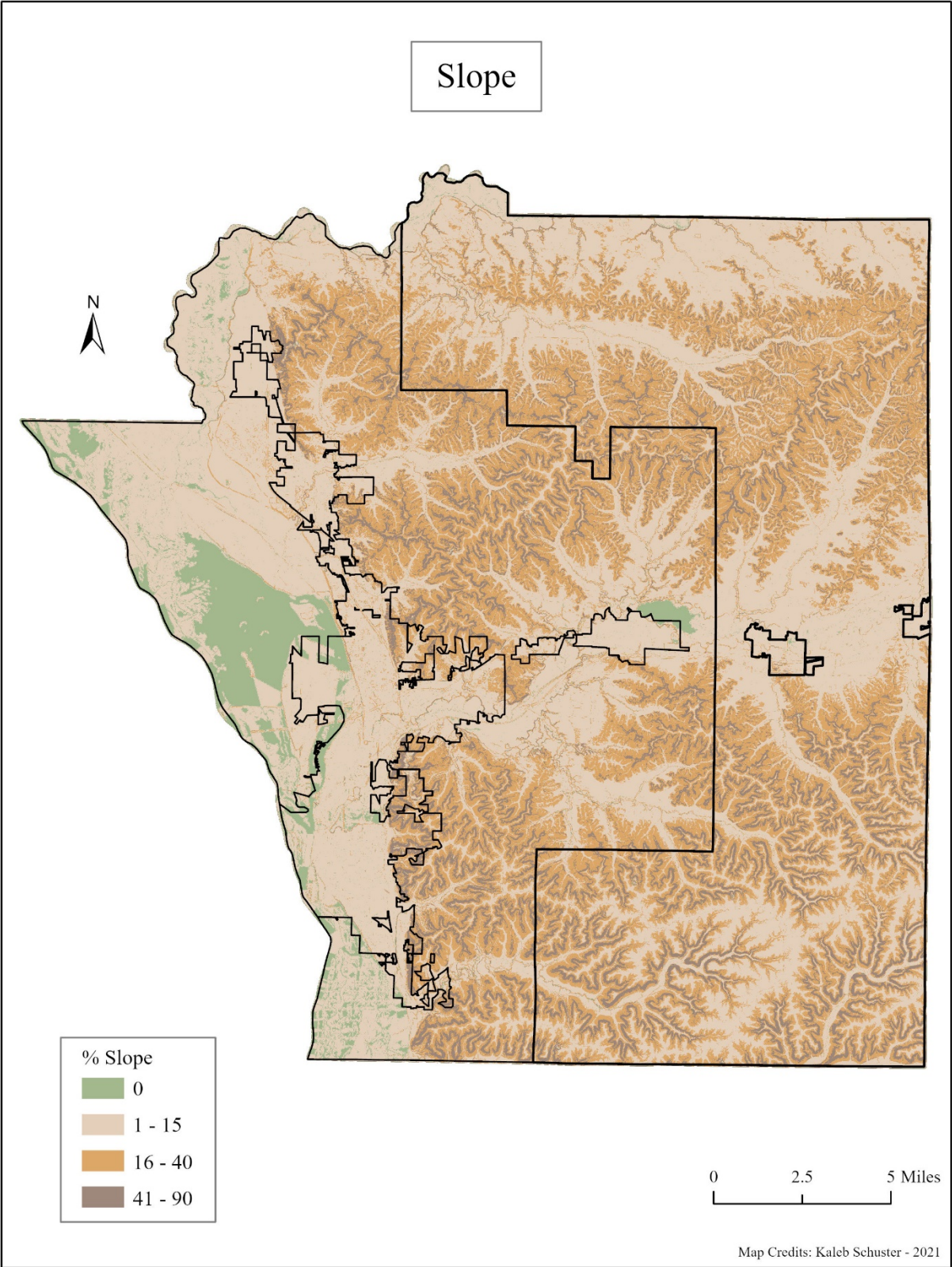
Map 13 Soil Classification



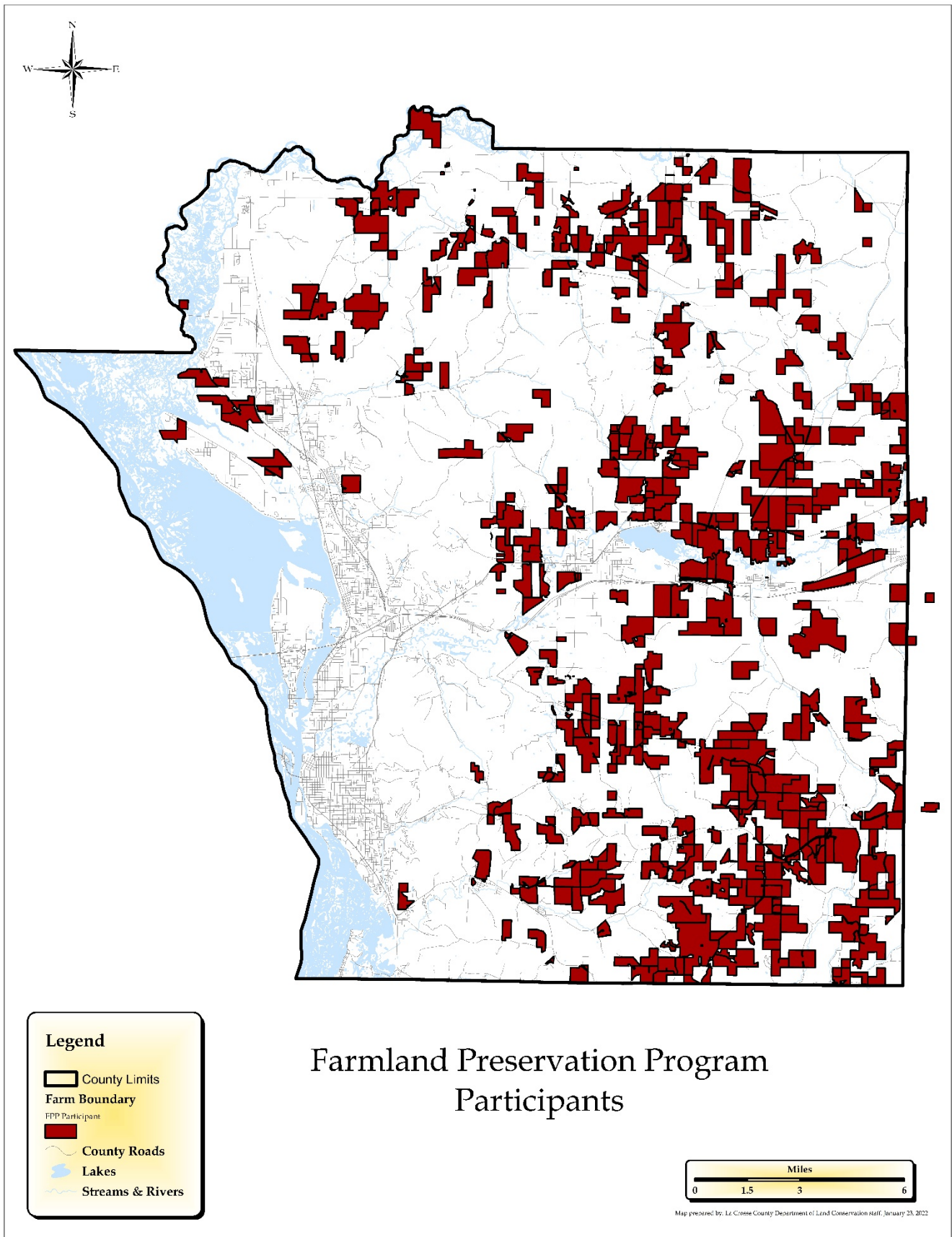
Map 14



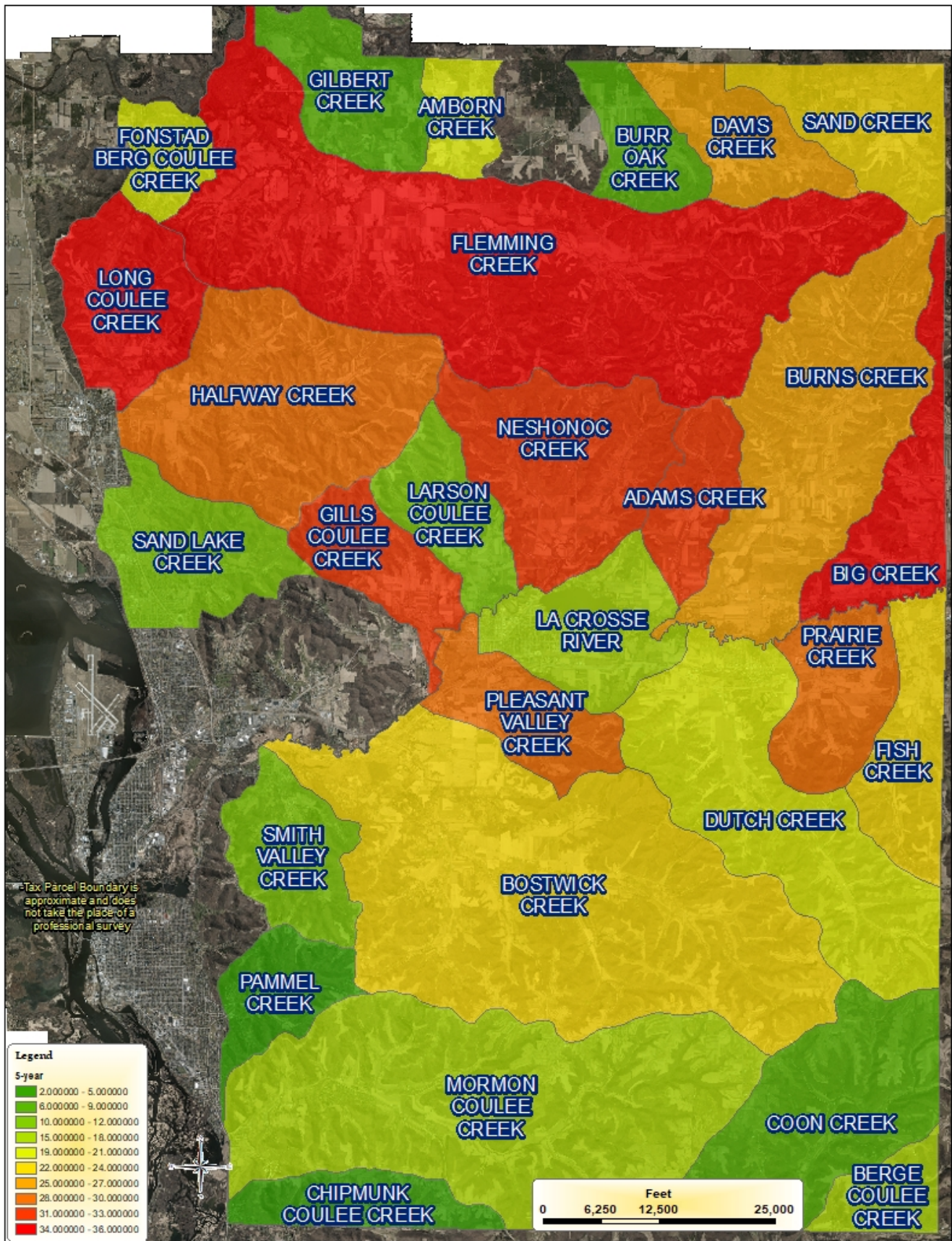
Map 15 Slope



Map 16 Farmland Preservation Participants



Map 17 Watersheds



Map 18 Outstanding Waterbodies

