

St. Croix County Farmland Preservation Plan Update

Policy Development Workshop

Monday, June 20, 2011

Baldwin Ag Center, 1960 8th Ave.

Baldwin, WI

10:30 – 1:00 p.m. (14 attendees)

Attendee Comments are Highlighted in Yellow

Goal 1: *Preserve farmland to maintain and grow St. Croix County's agricultural industry and to enhance the rural landscape.*

1A. Preserve productive soils identified by county land evaluation system.

- If a productive soil is identified and the landowner receives tax benefits, conservation help, etc., the land should be zoned exclusive ag and not allowed for mineral development, housing, retail, industrial, etc. unless stiff penalties are PAID.
- Make farming profitable – how – ag economy, production costs, climate control, and farmers make good neighbors. Family farms = “sweat shop” in other countries.
- How can we create map of best economic farm production – land to keep production viable

1B. Support public and/or private initiatives that preserve farmland.

- Examine the concept of a payment per acre not to develop land for 20-25 years – a county preservation plan.
- Consider a small increase in the county sales tax to fund land preservation. ¼ of 1% was used in some eastern U.S. states. Probably need to wait for improved economic conditions to try this.
- Development can help preserve farmland, tax fee, etc.
- Encourage and maintain current property use-value tax system on crop and pasture land
- Look at private (land trust) and government programs (local TDR/PPR program) to keep land in agriculture.
- Keep exclusive ag zoning in the towns that have adopted it.
- Stay in touch with your legislators to keep farmland preservation in mind when voting on ag issues
- Create/enhance economic development for ag – currently only focusing on getting business to move here from Minnesota.
- How can we prepare for innovative farm production (organic)
- Farming is the backbone of the country.
- Pete, Dave, and Ellen, Jeff: This question rises in my mind a second concern. First, let me say that because of the way in which I was brought up, I have a profound reverence and deep respect for our county's ag community. I am hearing that foreign investors are acquiring ag land at an increasing rate. While I respect and appreciate a land owner's right to do with their land whatever seems best for their needs, I fear for what this possible takeover of ag land might do to the fabric and backbone of our rural communities. Buzz.

- Explain and educate public on why preserving ag land is important, including food production, wildlife habitat, and economic importance to community.
 - Educate the public of the need to preserve farm land.
- 1C. Minimize the loss and fragmentation of farmland in rural areas.
- Create farmland continuous corridors for farming
 - Encourage use of cluster/conservation designs developments, leave larger blocks for farming
 - Smaller minimum lot size for house construction – minimizes loss of farmland
 - Education in big cities – St. Croix County is just a pin point to our nation’s ag industry, but is important to maintain especially near large cities. History shows that a county with a strong ag source is a strong county – is not dependent on others for food.
- 1D. Encourage preservation of open space and scenic areas and structures.
- Enforce strict zoning
 - Engage in collaborative efforts (private landowners, wildlife organizations, education institutions) to identify and protect “wild” spaces.
 - Identify area that should be preserved – work with locals to form group to go necessary legislators or others who can help lead the preservation plan.

Goal 2: Promote agricultural development to support St. Croix County producers, businesses, and communities.

- 1A - Maintain and strengthen a farm operator's right to farm using accepted practices that do not threaten public health or safety.
- Educate, communicate “Rural Living Guide” @ town, road safety – driver’s ed training (use flashers)
 - Have each town in St. Croix County develop a pro-farmer policy statement which is given to every new building permit applicant.
 - It’s important, I think, to recognize and accept the knowledge, wisdom and experience which farmers bring to their profession.
 - Articles in “all” local papers/radios about the right to farm. People that moved out of the cities have to be educated on what they will have to put up with – noise, smell, dirt/mud on roads, etc. We do our best to be good neighbors, but what we expect may not be what a new resident might expect. Towns should prepare information on the right to farm land out to new residents.
 - Keep farmer operating rights to operate farm
- 2B. Support economic incentives for landowners to keep productive agricultural land in agricultural use.
- Given the economic impact which agriculture has on Wisconsin, in general, and on St. Croix County, in particular, it’s critical to maintain and/or increase economic incentives which enable farm operators to successfully operate
 - Tax use value – spot zoning?
 - Provide options and incentives for all size farms and production
- 2C. Support efforts which increase the viability and diversity of agriculture throughout the county.

- Dollars are needed for each of these ideas. Are citizens willing to support diversity and or innovation regardless of farm size?
 - Educate non-farm public on changes in agriculture and how increase in farm size is directly related to viability.
 - See comments made with respect to question 2B.
 - Provide and maintain networking with groups, farmers' markets for specialty crops, educational/promotional events such as Farm City Day.
- 2D. Encourage bio-energy production to diversify energy resources and the agricultural economy.
- Encourage bio-energy production
 - Need to contact larger energy businesses or organizations and see where it might lead.
 - This seems to be a sustainable means by which both reduce contamination of watersheds while at the same time conserving fossil fuel energy sources by vitalizing what would otherwise be wasted.
- 2E. Support agricultural processing and marketing initiatives for local, regional, and global markets
- Given the transportation costs involved in getting ag products to the market, it's important, I think, to build an economy predicated on the "grown locally" premise.
- 2F. Maintain and strengthen the county farm economy
- Encourage young people to seriously consider pursuing an ag related education and to also consider entering agriculture as a profession.
- 2G. Identify, develop, and maintain agricultural infrastructure to support agricultural operations.
- Help livestock producer with fencing problems with neighbors.
 - Identify repair shops, seed retail, vet service, consultants, work with various companies again through promotional activities. If we can maintain strong farm economy, these will be maintained as well.
 - I think our present infrastructure is good enough, with some local ordinances to govern the way heavy vehicles use town roads. I.e. drive down center of road to help prevent road crowning, etc. when possible.
 - See response to 2 F.
- 2H. Provide assistance to farmers seeking to innovate or modernize their operations.
- #1 thing is to maintain our UW-Extension service system.
 - This can be done through dialogue with professionals such as those at the Baldwin Ag Center in generally and by Ryan Sterry and Pete Kling in particular.

Goal 3: Guide or manage development patterns that will preserve farmland and promote agricultural development

- 3A. Guide urban growth into developed areas consistent with the community's willingness and ability to accommodate growth.
- Town plan development needs to reflect community's growth expectations and limitations.
 - Encourage low property tax rates for homeowners/business/commercial that stay in cities/villages versus moving to "cheap" land in townships.

- Use LESA. Keep development in areas that are non-productive.
 - Through zoning making within reason
- 3B. Discourage rural nonfarm development on productive agricultural land
- Enforcing laws keeping farmland in farming
 - Utilize LESA information to direct placement of nonfarm/non ag use.
 - Tough laws should be enforced to keep farmland in farming. Too often current landowners want the farming benefits and want to sell the land for uses other than farming.
 - Preserve farmland by passing strong laws to limit use of productive farmland for any purpose other than agriculture. E.g. transfer development rights and save farmland to trade for non-productive farmland.
 - Most can be done with zoning but will it be accepted?
- 3C. Guide rural development to locations that will not convert productive agricultural land.
- Use LESA to keep farming land in farming
 - Must differentiate between farmland and livestock operations (grain or other). There should be different ag zoning for each.
 - Devise a program where those with good farmland can sell developing right to poor land
 - Need clear definition of "ag"
- 3D. Encourage conservation design development and private conservancy as methods for preserving productive agricultural land
- If you get any subsidy for producing corn/soybeans must keep in farmland an mandate the operator use conservation practices.
 - When land is removed from farmland for housing/commercial then make developer pay impact fees. Etc. like cities make developers pay into a reserve for parks/open space
 - Educate constituents and incorporate conservation design in town plans
 - Like idea of CRP program – should keep it going and not encourage people to get out. ? transfer of development rights.
- 3E. Guide low density rural development to non-productive agricultural land
- Enforce exclusive ag zoning
 - Offer incentives (how finance) to not sell productive land for housing
- 3F. Discourage isolated non-agriculture commercial and industrial uses in agricultural areas.
- Change commercial property regulations so one size doesn't fit all.
 - Keep non-ag commercial and industries out of exclusive ag areas.
 - Penalize (severely) landowners who opt out of exclusive ag because of personal reasons. Farmland should not be considered a retirement plan.

Goal 4: Conserve availability and quality of natural resources for agriculture.

- 4A. Encourage the conservation of groundwater and surface water quality and quantity.
 - Work with power companies, DNR, farmers
 - Make and enforce rules governing the operation of irrigators. Should not be allowed to run irrigators during the day-especially sunny, windy days, as too much water is lost. Allow only a certain length of time
 - Enforce rules governing discharge from manufacturing; do not let large corporations buy out legislators to ease up on rules to keep quality of water.
 - Leave water ways, increase conservation practices, increase funding for practices.
 - Encourage livestock operations to encourage production of hay and pasture
- 4B. Encourage and promote farming and forestry operations to follow best management practices and maintain strong stewardship principles.
 - Put back what take out, keep soil quality, and build soil quality over time.
 - Enforce rules governing runoff, planting in strips if necessary, and many farms are becoming too open and clearing out tree lines in order to put in irrigators – the trees are needed to keep topsoil from blowing off.
 - Encourage “strip” culture to avoid erosion (maybe this is done already?)
- 4C. Maintain soil productivity through appropriate agricultural practices.
 - Webbased/printed newsletter/quarterly (seasonal), put all the information from multiple agencies together in one place.
 - Again, enforce rules as far as farm plan planting; encourage soil sampling – educate farmers about farms plans.
 - Promote small beef cow herd or sheep, etc. Grass production would prevent land tilled fence to fence – no or little control of erosion.
- 4D. Discourage the conversion of agricultural land adjacent to established habitat areas.
 - Educate and develop multiple programs if set backs aren’t met. Payment – DNR or state money.