

REPORT SUMMARY

VISION STATEMENT

“To preserve its economically viable agriculture and rural character, Ozaukee County will create a plan to support and implement policies and programs that balance sustainable rural land uses with urban land uses by preserving productive farmland and ensuring orderly development.”

INTRODUCTION

In 2009, the Wisconsin Legislature enacted Wisconsin Act 28, which repealed and recreated the Wisconsin Farmland Preservation Program set forth in Chapter 91 of the *Wisconsin Statutes*, and related tax credits under subchapter IX of Chapter 71 of the *Statutes*. The new program, which is also referred to as the “Working Lands Initiative,” created new tools to help identify and preserve farmland. The law also requires counties to update their farmland preservation plans. The Ozaukee County farmland preservation plan adopted in 1983 must be updated and recertified by the Wisconsin Department of Agriculture, Trade and Consumer Protection (DATCP) by the end of 2013, under an extension approved by DATCP, to enable the County and local governments within the County to continue participation in the State farmland preservation program. With assistance from the Southeastern Wisconsin Regional Planning Commission (SEWRPC), Ozaukee County in cooperation with UW-Extension and ten cooperating local governments has prepared an updated farmland preservation plan to meet the requirements set forth in Chapter 91 of the *Statutes*. A Farmland Preservation Plan Citizen Advisory Committee was formed to help guide the planning work and to encourage public participation throughout the process. The updated County farmland preservation plan updates and replaces the plan adopted by the Ozaukee County Board of Supervisors in 1983.

The intent of the original farmland preservation program was to encourage farmland preservation by providing tax credits to eligible farmland owners who voluntarily chose to enter into an agreement with the State through farmland preservation agreements, or through the enactment of exclusive agricultural zoning by the local government in which the land is located. The new Wisconsin Farmland Preservation Program provides landowners the opportunity to continue to claim farmland preservation tax credits through zoning or through agreements with DATCP for areas within Agricultural Enterprise Areas (AEAs). The new State program also includes a process for establishing AEAs and created a Purchase of Agricultural Conservation Easements (PACE) Program.

Agriculture is considered an important part of the County’s economy and, due to changes in agricultural practices as well as the demand for new agricultural products and technologies, there is potential growth for agricultural industries and supporting businesses. In addition to its impact on the economy, farmland preservation is considered important to providing scenic beauty, preserving natural ecological systems, producing fresh locally-grown produce, and preserving the rural character and lifestyle in much of the County. The agriculture industry continues to be a vital element of Ozaukee County’s economic, cultural, and ecological landscape. To retain these attributes, implementing a farmland preservation plan is essential, and provides a foundation and guide for many preservation methods and tools that can be utilized by County and local governments and nonprofit conservation organizations to protect farmlands.

PLANNING COMMITTEE AND PROCESS

In 2010, the Ozaukee County Farmland Preservation Plan Citizen Advisory Committee (FPPCAC) was established by the Ozaukee County Comprehensive Planning Board (CPB) to guide the preparation of the updated farmland preservation plan for Ozaukee County. During the process, the FPPCAC also prepared a public participation plan, created a vision statement, reviewed draft plan chapters and other plan materials, and

developed a recommended farmland preservation plan for consideration by the County Land Preservation Board (LPB) and CPB. All cities, villages, and towns within the County were invited to appoint a representative to serve on the FPPCAC. Subsequently, the Advisory Committee was comprised of one representative each from the City of Mequon and Villages of Newburg, Saukville, and Thiensville; one representative from each Town in Ozaukee County, and 16 citizen members. Throughout the planning process, the active participation and input of citizens, farmers, landowners, County and local government officials, and interest groups were essential for identifying important issues and preparing a farmland preservation plan with realistic goals.

INVENTORY AND ANALYSIS

The inventory and analytical data presented in the report includes information about agricultural and natural resources, existing demographic and economic levels, past and present land use patterns, and adopted plans, programs, and regulations affecting farmland preservation. The data is essential for identifying farmlands suitable for preservation and for designing a plan to accomplish long-term preservation. The following provides some key information regarding the data in the report. The information is summarized more thoroughly in the Summary section at the end of Chapter II.

Agricultural and Environmental Resources

The inventory consists of soils and agricultural resources data, which identified and mapped soils suitable for agriculture and those that are vulnerable to erosion or contain wet soils, shallow bedrock, or other features that could limit development or farming. Natural and cultural resources data, which identifies wetlands, woodlands, environmental corridors, natural areas, water resources, floodplains, and National, State, and local landmarks in the County are identified. Preservation of these resources helps achieve strong and stable physical and economic development as well as maintaining community identity.

Environmental corridors and isolated natural resource areas include the best remaining concentrations of woodlands, wetlands, plant and wildlife habitat areas, and other natural resources and have truly immeasurable environmental and recreational value. In 2000, about 32 square miles, comprising about 14 percent of the County, were encompassed within primary environmental corridors. Secondary environmental corridors encompassed about eight square miles, or about 3 percent of the County, and isolated natural resource areas encompassed about six square miles, or about 2 percent of the County.

Demographic Information and Existing Plans and Ordinances

Existing and historical population, household, and employment data are included to provide a context for projections that anticipate changes in these factors in the foreseeable future. Existing plans and ordinances that affect farmland preservation were inventoried, including land use and comprehensive plans, park and open space plans, water quality and supply plans, and zoning and land division ordinances.

LESA Analysis

An analysis using the Land Evaluation and Site Assessment (LESA) system for rating potential farmland preservation areas in Ozaukee County was conducted in 2007 as part of the County multi-jurisdictional comprehensive planning process. Land evaluation (LE) ratings are determined by the Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) based on soil type, slope, agricultural capability class, and soil productivity for producing corn and soybeans. The site assessment (SA) component of the LESA rating system is based on geographic variables, which were determined specifically for Ozaukee County by the LESA Technical Advisory Workgroup.

A total of 3,620 parcels encompassing 71,210 acres in agricultural use were analyzed. Parcels received a score ranging from 1 to 10, with 10 identified as the best land for long-term agricultural use and 1 being the least suitable. The average score for the parcels analyzed was 6.3, and the median score was 6.4 (half of all parcels received a higher score and half received a lower score than 6.4). A total of 54,674 acres, or 77 percent of agricultural lands in the County, scored 6.4 or higher, and the remaining 16,536 acres, or 23 percent of the area analyzed, received a score below 6.4.

Existing Farms and Agricultural Products

In 2007, there were 513 farms in Ozaukee County, and the average farm size was 138 acres, while the median farm size was 56 acres. This compares to 194 acres and 95 acres, respectively, for farm sizes in the State. Of the 513 farms in Ozaukee County in 2007, 448 farms, or about 87 percent, were between 10 acres and 499 acres in size; 35 farms, or about 7 percent, were less than 10 acres in size; and 30 farms, or about 6 percent, were 500 acres or greater in size. Dairy farming was the predominant source of agricultural revenue in the County in 2007, accounting for about 56 percent of total agricultural sales revenue. Grain crops and horticulture were the second and third predominant sources of agricultural revenue, respectively, each accounting for about 14 percent of agricultural revenue.

Land Use-Related Information

Information about existing land uses, utilities, and community facilities, including the historic conversion of rural lands to urban use, is also provided in Chapter II. In 2007, urban land uses encompassed about 62 square miles, or about 26 percent of the County. Residential land comprised the largest urban land use category in the County, about 34 square miles, or about 15 percent of the total area in the County. Nonurban land uses, such as agricultural lands, natural resource areas, landfills, nonmetallic mining sites, and other open lands encompassed about 175 square miles, or about 74 percent of the County in 2007. Agricultural land was the predominant land use in the County in 2007 as it encompassed about 122 square miles, or about 51 percent of the total County. Agricultural uses include croplands, pasture lands, orchards, nurseries, and farm buildings, including farm residences on agricultural parcels of 20 acres or more. Residential buildings on parcels less than 20 acres were included in the residential category. Natural resource areas consisting of surface water, wetlands, and woodlands combined to encompass about 41 square miles, or about 17 percent of the total County.

The amount of land in agricultural use in the County declined by about 22,950 acres, or about 22 percent, between 1963 and 2000. This represents an average annual loss of about 620 acres of agricultural lands over this period. Most of the loss occurred within and near urban (sewer) service areas.

TRENDS AND PROJECTIONS

Section 91.10(1)(b) of the *Wisconsin Statutes* requires County farmland preservation plans to identify, describe, and document trends, plans, or needs related to population and economic growth, housing, transportation, utilities, communications, business development, community facilities and services, energy, waste management, municipal expansion, and environmental preservation, which may affect existing and future farmland preservation. The farmland preservation plan identifies the quantity and spatial distribution of agricultural land that should be maintained in agricultural use, areas of environmental significance which should be maintained in essentially natural open uses, and areas which are anticipated to be converted to urban use. Information regarding existing and anticipated future population, household, and employment levels in Ozaukee County is also required to help determine the amount and location of areas that may be required for conversion to urban development. The following provides information regarding the trends and projections of the report. Information on trends and projections is summarized more thoroughly in the Summary section at the end of Chapter III.

Population, Household, and Employment Projections

Local governments in Ozaukee County developed population and household projections for 2035 as part of their local comprehensive plans. These projections were used to plan for land use, housing, transportation, utilities, and other community facilities in each local comprehensive plan through the planning design year of 2035. The population projection for Ozaukee County (not including the Villages of Bayside and Newburg which lie largely in Milwaukee and Washington Counties, respectively) would increase from 86,209 persons in 2010 to about 116,186 persons in 2035, or an increase of about 35 percent. The number of households in the County would increase from 34,148 households in 2010 to 46,260 households in 2035, or an increase of about 36 percent. In 2010, there were about 53,700 jobs located in the County and a total of 62,135 jobs are projected in the County in 2035, an increase of about 16 percent. Agricultural employment is expected to decrease by 19 percent, from 5,900 jobs in 2000 to about 4,800 jobs in 2035, in the seven-county Region due to continued technological advances in genetics and mechanization, cost pressures from National and global competition, modern management practices, and continued conversion of farmland to urban uses.

Agricultural Products

In Ozaukee County, 513 farms sold \$59,056,000 of agricultural products in 2007, which is about 84 percent more than the 1997 level of about \$32,047,000. The average market value of agricultural products sold per farm in Ozaukee County was \$115,120 in 2007, which was an increase of about 53 percent from the 1997 level of about \$75,052. Dairy farming continues to be the predominant agricultural industry in Ozaukee County as dairy sales totaled about \$33.2 million in the County, and increased about 73 percent from 2002 to 2007. Dairy sales comprised about 56 percent of total agricultural sales in the County in 2007, a 6 percent increase since 2002.

Agricultural Innovations

Although traditional farming practices are the predominant agricultural business, agricultural innovations are providing farmers with primary or supplementary agricultural opportunities and income. Examples include alternative goods and products, where farmers produce non-traditional crops or raise specialty livestock; direct marketing, including roadside stands, Farmers' Markets, participation in community-sponsored agriculture (CSAs), or allowing consumers to independently pick the product (U-pick); public events, such as farm breakfasts or festivals on a farm; hospitality and tourism, such as operating a Bed and Breakfast or offering tours of the farm while providing opportunities for consumers to purchase products; and educational activities, where farmers provide instruction and demonstrate do-it-yourself opportunities. Other alternative enterprises include farmers selling carbon offsets by installing methane capture systems over animal waste lagoons and wind power generators and cell towers, where farmers lease land for wind or cell towers.

Agricultural diversification is the re-allocation of a farm's productive resources, such as land and capital, to new activities and is an important mechanism for sustainability and economic growth. Some methods of diversification farmers may consider include organic farming or dairying, aquaculture, aquaponics, hydroponics, specialty crop and food production, orchards, horticulture, agri-tourism, value-added agriculture, or renewable energy sources. Agricultural diversification may provide stability and profitably to farming businesses and industries in Ozaukee County.

Because of technological improvements in agricultural production and food processing systems, farmers continue to produce higher-valued products, as well as gain a better perspective on changing consumer preferences. Developments in science and technology have contributed to better soil, nutrient, water, and pest management, and more efficient methods of harvesting, storing, processing, and transporting farm products to the market. As a result of these recent agricultural innovations, producers have been able to increase crop yields and increase flexibility and control. Biotechnology and biofuels, such as biodiesel and ethanol production, may create demand for additional agricultural products.

The State of Wisconsin, in cooperation with county and local governments, institutions, businesses, and organizations, has been developing and promoting an increasing number of programs that support farmland preservation and local agriculture. These programs include the implementation of various marketing strategies intended to promote locally produced agricultural products through marketing and tourism. Some examples of programs or methods that promote local agriculture while acknowledging the need to preserve local farmlands include promoting and marketing locally grown foods, the Buy Local/Buy Wisconsin Program, Community Supported Agriculture (CSA), farmers' markets, community gardens, and farm to school and restaurant programs.

PUBLIC INVOLVEMENT

For any planning process, it is good practice to provide opportunities for the public to become acquainted with the planning process and to solicit public involvement in the development of plan recommendations. To ensure community involvement, a public participation plan (PPP) was adopted by the Ozaukee County Comprehensive Planning Board specifically for the preparation of the plan. The PPP outlined a series of outreach efforts and public participation sessions designed to gain input from County farmers as well as residents and business owners throughout the farmland preservation planning process. In addition to input by an Ozaukee County citizen advisory committee and review boards, public participation efforts included County farmland preservation kick-off and local information meetings; a countywide public opinion mail-out survey; three Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, and Threats (SWOT) analysis workshops; and two agriculture focus group sessions. The comments

and suggestions obtained were used to help guide the preparation of a vision statement and the goals, objectives, and plan recommendations contained in the plan.

An overall general consensus obtained from these public input methods is the desire to preserve farmlands and other related natural and cultural resources as well as the County's rural character.

FARMLAND PRESERVATION AREAS

Ozaukee County encompasses significant amounts of farmland and environmentally sensitive areas as well as expanding urban areas. In recent decades, there has been a substantial conversion of farmland and other open land to urban uses. Future population and employment increases are expected, which may result in converting additional land in the County from rural to urban uses. The plan is focused on attaining orderly development in Ozaukee County, and minimizing, insofar as practicable, the loss of productive farmland and other important components of the natural resource base.

In accordance with Section 91.10(1)(d) of the *Wisconsin Statutes*, a county farmland preservation plan must clearly identify areas that the county plans to preserve for agricultural and agricultural-related uses. Criteria for identifying farmland preservation areas (FPAs) were developed as part of the planning process. In accordance with the *Statutes*, FPAs include undeveloped natural resource and open space lands, but do not include areas planned for nonagricultural development. Parcels met the following criteria to be included in a FPA:

- Parcels must be located entirely within the City of Mequon or a Town in Ozaukee County, and the local government must agree with the County to designate FPAs within the City or Town;
- Parcels must be located entirely outside a planned sanitary sewer service area adopted by a community and approved by the Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources;
- Parcels must have a LESA score of 6.4 or higher;
- Parcels must be located entirely within certain planned (non-urban) land use categories based on the adopted Ozaukee County comprehensive plan; and
- Parcels must be located entirely within specific identified (non-urban) zoning districts based on each participating local government zoning ordinance.

FPAs are shown on Map V-1 in Chapter V and occupy about 29,109 acres, or about 19 percent of Ozaukee County. The FPAs include entire parcels, which include portions of lowland and upland conservancy lands, which are shown as overlays on Map V-1. FPAs have been identified in the Towns of Belgium and Fredonia, which agreed with Ozaukee County to identify farmland preservation areas in each Town. Uses allowed within farmland preservation areas, which are set forth in Chapter 91 of the *Statutes*, include crop production; keeping livestock; beekeeping; nursery, sod, and Christmas tree production; floriculture; fur farming; forest management; agricultural equipment dealerships; storage and processing facilities for agricultural products; and land enrolled in a Federal or State agricultural land conservation or agricultural commodity payment program. Additional uses specified in Section 91.46 of the *Statutes* may be permitted by conditional use permit if included in a local government farmland preservation zoning district.

The farmland preservation plan for Ozaukee County is shown on Map V-4 in Chapter V. The plan map depicts portions of parcels in FPAs that are outside lowland and upland conservancy areas (generally, lands in agricultural use), which occupy 25,383 acres, or about 17 percent of the County. For the remaining areas on the plan, other agricultural and rural lands occupy 29,517 acres, or about 20 percent of the County; existing natural resource areas (conservancy areas) occupy 34,910 acres, or about 23 percent of the County; and existing and planned urban uses occupy 60,784 acres, or about 40 percent of the County.

The farmland preservation plan is designed to help achieve the objectives identified in the report based, in part, on public input and adopted local comprehensive plans and zoning ordinances and maps. The plan provides information for County and local officials to use over time when making decisions about land development and preservation in Ozaukee County.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Planning is a rational process for formulating and meeting goals and objectives. A set of planning goals and objectives, along with supporting policies and programs, were formulated as part of the farmland preservation plan. A “vision” statement, located at the beginning of this summary, was also developed by the Ozaukee County Farmland Preservation Plan Citizen Advisory Committee, Land Preservation Committee, and Comprehensive Planning Board to help provide an overall framework for farmland preservation in Ozaukee County.

Planning goals and objectives were developed to refine the vision for farmland preservation. The goals and objectives provide the framework for preserving farmlands and other related natural resources in Ozaukee County. Each set of goals and objectives also include a set of recommended policies and programs to facilitate and help attain the goals and objectives. These goals and objectives were based, in part, upon inventory data, public input results, and past and current planning efforts. Other interrelated goals, objectives, policies, and programs that affect farmland preservation were also established and pertain to natural resources, invasive species, water quality, cultural resources, land uses, housing, transportation, utilities and community facilities, and economic development.

IMPLEMENTATION

The farmland preservation plan recommendations are not complete until the steps required to implement the plan have been specified. This includes a description of the plan adoption and amendment processes in compliance with the *Wisconsin Statutes*; the integration of the plan as an amendment to and component of the Ozaukee County Multi-Jurisdictional Comprehensive Plan; the consistency requirement between the farmland preservation plan and County comprehensive plan; the identification of priority programs relative to farmland preservation; and identifying farmland preservation tools and techniques that Ozaukee County farmers and the County and local governments can use to protect farmlands and other valuable natural resource areas. Farmland preservation tools and techniques described in Chapter VII include farmland preservation area certification and zoning, conservation easements, conservation subdivision design, lot averaging, and incentive-based development. The designation of farmland preservation areas is also a pre-requisite for landowners to be eligible to claim farmland preservation tax credits under local farmland preservation zoning, to request designation of an Agricultural Enterprise Area, or to participate in the Purchase of Agricultural Easements (PACE) program.

The plan also recognizes the importance of continuing intergovernmental cooperation, which would provide effective communication and coordination between units of government with the goal of establishing consistent development policies for urbanized areas and the preservation of farmlands. Implementation of the plan also includes identifying and utilizing funding and support programs for farmland preservation. All require continuing intergovernmental cooperation and commitment by County and local governments to implement the plan. Cooperation is especially important with regard to implementation of the plan, because Chapter 91 of the *Statutes* assigned the responsibility for identifying farmland preservation areas to the County; but the authority to adopt and map farmland preservation zoning districts is under the authority of the participating Towns.

CONCLUSION

The main purpose of the County farmland preservation plan is to provide information and recommendations that the general public, County and local officials, and landowners can use when making decisions about future development and the preservation of agricultural lands and environmentally significant areas in Ozaukee County. The plan provides farmers and other private interests, such as supporting businesses that provide supplies and services to the farmers, a clear indication of the County’s agricultural planning objectives. This enables farmers, developers, and the public to understand the objectives when development and redevelopment proposals are prepared or reviewed. It also provides the basis for the enactment of farmland preservation zoning in participating local governments, and makes owners of parcels within designated farmland preservation areas eligible to receive tax credits available under the Wisconsin Farmland Preservation Program if other statutory requirements are met.

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