

Purpose

The purpose of the Farmland Preservation Plan is to help provide guidance for use of agricultural and rural lands while trying to minimize conflicts between farm and non-farm land uses. The State of Wisconsin Farmland Preservation Program has been in existence since 1977 and available in Jackson County since 1986. Individual Farmland Preservation Program (FPP) agreements are utilized by county farmers to participate in receiving state tax credits. Currently there are six FPP agreements existing in 2016 with five of them to expire by March 2019. There has been no interest by farmers to form Agriculture Enterprise Areas or Agricultural Zoning Districts for the FPP.

The intent of this plan is to meet the minimum requirements of Chapter 91 of Wisconsin State Statutes as well as to provide information to assist in the preservation of farmland and agriculture related businesses in Jackson County. The Farmland Preservation Plan will be referenced and coordinated with the Jackson County Comprehensive Plan. If there are inconsistencies between the Farmland Preservation Plan and the County Comprehensive Plan the Farmland Preservation Plan supersedes the Comprehensive Plan.

County Comprehensive Plan and Farmland Preservation Goals, Objectives, and Policies

Listed on Page 12, Section 2.4.2 of the Jackson County Comprehensive Plan

Goal: Preserve farmland and the rural landscape as a viable foundation for a strong agricultural economy

Objectives:

1. Minimize the development and fragmentation of agricultural land, while preserving choices for farmers.
2. Manage the density and site design of new development near existing agricultural operations and agricultural land.

Goal: Minimize land use conflicts between farm and non-farm uses, as well as between farms

Objectives:

1. Maintain sustainable farming and forestry operations.
2. Ensure that residents understand the “Right to Farm” law and are familiar with the effects from acceptable farming practices.

Goal: Protect sensitive environmental areas, wildlife habitat, rural vistas, and local cultural resources for current and future residents of Jackson County

Objectives:

1. Ensure the long-term preservation of sensitive environmental corridors and networks of open space in Jackson County.
2. Ensure the long-term preservation of groundwater resources and air quality in Jackson County.
3. Identify and promote the preservation of the County’s cultural, historic, and archaeological resources that celebrate the County’s heritage.

Criteria for Determination of Eligible Farmland Preservation Areas

- Lands depicted on Town and County comprehensive plan future land use maps as agriculture.
- Lands that have historically been in agricultural, forestry or other agricultural related use, including farm residences.
- Lands containing soils compatible for agricultural use.

Criteria for Determination of Ineligible Farmland Preservation Areas

- Any existing residential parcels.
- Any plotted subdivisions and any group of parcels that resemble a subdivision (small parcels typically less than ten (10) acres, access road to all parcels, and road frontage to all parcels)
- Wooded lands under 40 acres with a residence (considered developed for mapping purposes).
- Parcels with a Conditional Use Permit or Land Use Permit not related to agriculture.
- Existing land uses that are in conflict with Farmland Preservation, this includes current or proposed non-metallic mining activity.
- Any parcels that are tax exempt, such as churches, cemeteries, nonprofit entities, government-owned lands, utilities and railroads.
- All incorporated (villages, cities) in the County.

Population

The Jackson County population has grown in the past decades as indicated by Table 5.1 Population and Age Distribution on Page 5-1. In 2010 the Jackson County population was 20,449. The Department of Administration projects that the County population in 2014 was 20,630 and should continue to increase by approximately 23% through 2030. Further Population details can be obtained from Section 5.1.

Housing

Jackson County housing has increased 65% from 1970 to 2010 to 7,843 total households. It is projected to increase 30.4% by 2030 to 9,443 total households. Since 1970, the number of persons per household has been decreasing in Wisconsin. In Jackson County, the number of persons per household has decreased from 3.22 to 2.44, according to the 2010 US Census, a trend that can be attributed to smaller family sizes and increases in life expectancy. See Section 5.2 on Page 5-4 for specific details related to Housing in Jackson County. Please refer to Section 2.1 Housing on Page 2-2 for more details related to Vision, Goals, Objectives and Policies.

Transportation

Jackson County has various transportation networks available including roads, railroads, all-terrain vehicle trails, an airport. There are two railroads serving the County, Canadian National

and Union Pacific. There are approximately 40 miles of Interstate 94, 146 miles of other state roads, 231 miles of county roads and 1,061 miles of local roads in Jackson County. Many miles

of the state, county and town roads are in need of replacement or significant repair. Goals and Objectives related to Transportation in Jackson County are listed on Page 2-5, 6, 7 Further Transportation details can be obtained from Section 5.3 on Page 5-9.

Energy, Utilities, Communications, Waste Management and Community Facilities

Section 2.3 on starting on Page 2-7 provides an analysis and potential direction of the various Energy, Utilities and Community Facilities. There are further details provided in Section 5.5.1-5.5.3 starting on Page 5-39. In the past three years there have been further utility developments. A propane distribution center with rail and truck access was built in Hixton. Additional natural gas lines have been installed to service communities in the County with more to be installed in 2016. A major transmission line upgrade is being planned to replace existing lines traveling through the County starting in 2016 or 2017. Communication towers continue to be erected for various private companies and the County Law Enforcement and Emergency Management communication system has been recently upgraded. The City of Black River Falls replaced the city-owned dam that provides electricity to its residents.

The first methane digester became operational on a dairy farm in the county two years ago. The farmer is now producing electricity from methane gas generated from the digester as well as re-cycling the solids from the manure for cattle bedding and compost material.

The County has previously managed a county-wide recycling program that is operated by each individual municipality. White goods recycling and a used tire recycling program continue to be maintained by the County. Every other year a Clean Sweep Program for recovering hazardous items has been sponsored by various organizations and businesses in the County. The program has safely eliminated tons of dangerous substances from further contact with residents or the environment. The agricultural sector is always encouraged to participate in these programs.

Economic Development

Section 2.5 starting on Page 2-15 provides an analysis of the Goals, Objectives and Policies related to Economic Development. Goal 2 – Maintain a predominately agricultural/forestry based economy within rural portions of the County.

Jackson County's location and existing agricultural businesses have a positive influence for marketing and transporting the products produced. Recently a cooperative continued to increase its grain processing and drying facilities in Hixton. There are two feed mills in the county operating with others across the county line. One cooperative in the Jackson County has specialized in providing services to the many cranberry producers located in Wood, Juneau, Monroe, Jackson, Clark and Eau Claire counties. An independent agricultural chemical distribution center is located in Black River Falls.

Jackson County dairy producers have many local options to sell milk with dairy plants in surrounding counties. Transportation by truck to more distant locations is aided by the many state and federal roads.

There are different marketing facilities and locker plant facilities for various livestock types located in adjacent counties.

Grain producers have different market options available, including ethanol plants in Stanley and Necedah, Gold n Plump in Arcadia, shipping by barge on the Mississippi River and possibly rail in Hixton.

There continues to be an expansion of organic farming in Jackson County. Many of the organic farmers use markets in Vernon County to sell their products.

The County is serviced by two rail lines, Union Pacific and Canadian National, that travel through the communities of Taylor, Hixton, Alma Center, Merrillan, Black River Falls, and Millston. There are various sites along the tracks that can be accessed for loading of different agricultural products.

Existing conditions are listed starting on Page 5-47 5.6 Economic Development. According to Table 5.28 - Employment by Industry, 10% of the Jackson County workforce is involved in Agriculture, Forestry, Fishing, Hunting and Mining compared to the Wisconsin average of 2%.

Municipal Expansion

In the Jackson County Comprehensive Plan the topic of municipal expansion and housing in rural areas covered by Section 3.2 Future Land Use Plan – Approach and Section 3.3 Future Land Use Descriptions. On Page 3-8 there were changes to the paragraph “Towns not participating in the Multi-jurisdictional Project”. The Towns of Komensky, Curran, and Hixton did not participate in the County Comprehensive Planning process, nor do they have their own Town Comprehensive Plan. The Towns of Manchester, Adams, Alma and Irving did not adopt the County Comprehensive Plan. The County Comprehensive Plan Steering Committee planned for future land use in each town. Each municipality is listed by Community starting on Page 3-3 – Page 3-7. The following sections briefly describe differences between future land use planning between Incorporated and Unincorporated Areas.

3.2.1 Future Land Use Plan – Incorporated Areas Page 3-7

3.2.2 Future Land Use Plan – Unincorporated Areas Pages 3-7 – 16

There has been little growth of the incorporated municipal boundaries in the past 30 years. The Village of Hixton annexed approximately 60 acres in the past fifteen years. Very little was cropland, 20 acres were converted to an agronomy and liquid petroleum distribution center. The Village of Melrose annexed approximately 20 acres in the past fifteen years to build a new water tower. The City of Black River Falls has annexed approximately 640 acres in the past 15 years. There was 60 acres of agricultural land annexed, with approximately 40 acres removed from agricultural use.

The Village of Alma Center, the Village of Taylor and the Village of Merrillan have not annexed any land in the past fifteen years.

Agricultural Trends

There continues to be a variety of agricultural enterprises in Jackson County including: Timber and pulp production, moss harvesting, Christmas Trees and Nursery Stock production, Cranberries, Honey, Blueberry and Apple orchards, Dairy, Steers and Beef Cattle, Hogs, Broiler chickens, fresh vegetables, and fish raising.

Some trends in Jackson County agriculture in the past few years:

- In 1998 there were 42,800 acres of corn planted, in 2014 there were 52,400 acres of corn planted
- In 1998 there were 5,700 acres of oats planted, in 2014 there were 5,700 acres of oats planted
- In 1998 there were 12,200 acres of soybeans planted, in 2014 there were 23,300 acres of soybeans planted
- In 1998 there were 24,700 acres of alfalfa in production, in 2014 there were 19,000 acres of
- In 1999 there were 36,000 cattle of all types present, in 2015 there were 44,000 cattle of all types present
- In 1999 there were 15,800 dairy cattle present in 271 herds, in 2013 there were 14,700 dairy cattle present in 143 herds

The conversion of agricultural land to other uses has grown very little over the last fifteen years according to Wisconsin Agricultural Statistics.

In 2000 there were 50 agricultural land transactions – 48 properties totaling 2,610 acres remained in agriculture, 2 properties totaling 138 acres were diverted to other uses.

In 2005 there were 31 agricultural land transactions – 29 properties totaling 2,565 acres remained in agriculture, 2 properties totaling 123 acres were diverted to other uses.

In 2010 there were 23 agricultural land transactions – 23 properties totaling 1,438 acres remained in agriculture.

In 2013 there were 17 agricultural land transactions – 17 properties totaling 1,099 acres remained in agriculture.

In 2015 there were 39 agricultural land transactions – 33 properties totaling 1,464 acres remained in agriculture, 6 properties totaling 191 acres were diverted to other uses.

There continues to be a growing number of Confined Animal Feeding Operations (CAFO) in the County. In 2009 there were four CAFOs over 1000 animal units. There are currently six CAFOs in the county with at least seven more sites between 500-1000 animal units. Some of the sites just under 1000 animal units will likely expand over 1000 animal units in the next five years based on their rapid growth of animal units. There has been an increase of Amish population in the county. In addition to lumber manufacturing and growing livestock, some of the Amish farms have been raising fresh vegetables for marketing to stores in Minnesota and Wisconsin. The cranberry growers have expanded their acreages – 2007 there were 3027 acres, in 2012 there were 3122. There continued to be new cranberry beds developed after 2012.

Most of the current infrastructure that exists in the county has been adequate to provide for the production, processing, supply and distribution of agricultural products in the County. The town and county roads are receiving increasing amounts of heavy truck and machinery related to agriculture use causing an accelerated rate of deterioration of road base and road surface. Manure hauling equipment, feed delivery trucks, grain and hay hauling trucks and equipment, and milk tankers use town roads daily that were never intended to handle the daily traffic that is now occurring. Town boards and the county highway department are challenged by increased volume and the weight on the roads with little or no notice given by the agricultural producers prior increasing their use of the roads.

The future of agriculture in Jackson County appears to be a mixture of farm sizes and livestock operations. Some farmers are likely to expand their farming operations by operating more cropland acreages, from several hundred to a several thousand acres. Small farm acreages will to continue exist with small animal unit numbers and cropland acreage. Corn and soybean acreage seem likely to grow. The beef and dairy operations continue to expand their herd sizes. The hog operations have not expanded their numbers in the past few years and that trend seems likely in the future. The existing markets for commodities and livestock in neighboring counties will likely be the prime locations for selling agricultural products. The final cheese processing facility closed in Jackson County two years ago. More farmers are likely to continue to build and expand their grain storage facilities. The Federation Cooperative has increased the storage market for grain products in Hixton in the past two years. There are independent implement dealers in the County and a few self-employed implement repair shops. Major brand name implement dealers are located in adjacent counties that are within an hour of most farms in the county. There are custom harvesting and planting enterprises in the county that are readily available for hire by farmers that don't want to have a large line of machinery. Custom manure handling continues to be an expanding business with at least three such businesses in the County and more available in adjacent counties. As larger manure storage structures are installed the demand for that business is likely to continue to expand.

There has been an increase of Industrial Sand Mining in Jackson County in the past few years. The acreage that has been purchased or leased for mining is a mixture of cropland and forestry. At the end of 2010 there were 448 active mining acres in Jackson County. By the end of 2015 there were 1273 active mining acres in Jackson County. Most of the increased acres can be attributed to industrial sand mining. The 2012 Census of Agriculture lists Jackson County with 139,347 cropland acres. Jackson County is comprised of 640,000 acres. The reclamation of the mined acres has been a diversity of cropland, oak savanna forest, ponds, prairie, wetlands, and wildlife habitat. The current reclamation plans for most sites are predominately for agricultural and forestry uses after mining has been completed. The acres that are not currently being mined have continued in their original use of forest land and cropland. The mining companies have required their land renters to comply with the State of Wisconsin agricultural performance standards and periodic meetings with federal and county conservation staff for site inspections.

Another trend that has developed in recent years is the purchase of tracts of land with existing buildings that have been used in the recent or distant past for raising animals. The new landowner then decides to raise animals at a site that has limitations such as:

- The site is too close to a stream/wetland which means a variance needs to be granted from the Board of Adjustment along with a Livestock and Animal Facility License issued prior to utilizing the site.
- The number of animal units and management strategy for the site is not practical to meet the state and county environmental standards.
- Adequate cropland and pasture is unavailable so manure is over applied to cropland or simply runs off on to neighboring property or streams. Sometimes smaller tracts of land with the building site have been sold with the new property lines set within a few feet of the existing building.

- The existing livestock facilities and previous management has not met current environmental compliance standards.
- Existing manure storage structures are either not compliant with current standards or were designed for smaller herd sizes so applying manure to fields more frequently occurs.

Some of these situations can be avoided if the potential purchaser would review the site for these potential issues prior to buying it.

Agricultural Land Preservation

Excessive tillage of cropland, improper manure management, diminished use of best management practices and converting marginal land into cropland is the largest threat to agricultural preservation in Jackson County. The larger planting and tillage equipment pulled by various types of equipment can go on steep slopes and wet areas that were avoided by most farmers in the past. Excessive tillage of crop fields along with tilling and planting through concentrated flow areas where grassed waterways should exist have caused thousands of tons of soil to be eroded on to the neighbor's property, into road ditches, wetlands and into streams. The excessive tillage with increased commodity crop production along with decreased conservation practices and more intense rainfall events are visible on the landscape. The soil and water resources that are being used to grow crops are being threatened the most by some of the very people that use them daily. In recent years during runoff events rill and gully erosion has been more prevalent on many cropland fields. The streams in the County are discolored with greater frequency and duration during runoff events. Impoundments downstream, especially in neighboring counties, are being filled with sediment and nutrients causing those municipalities to take action to deal with the pollutants.

There has been an increase of acres planted to commodity crops in the past few years, with less hay being grown. Some, but not all, of the increased runoff problems can be attributed to the commodity crop acreage increases. There are commodity crop producers that use a combination of conservation measures to reduce the erosion potential below the tolerable soil loss value on a variety of slopes and soil types and have been financially successful doing so.

More emphasis by the agriculture industry to require all farmers to comply with State of Wisconsin cropland erosion prevention measures would help protect the cropland that is currently in production.

There are a variety of Farmland Preservation programs that can assist in helping to preserve agricultural land. The County can assist local municipalities and landowners should they wish to pursue these various options.

Agricultural Conservation Easements

Agricultural Conservation Easements are deed restrictions that landowners voluntarily place on their properties to protect productive agricultural land. They sell a conservation easement to a government agency or private conservation organization. Landowners retain full ownership and continue to pay property taxes, and manage and operate the farm. Conservation easements are tailored to each property: purchasers and landowners decide which activities, such as residential development, should be restricted or limited. When the landowner eventually sells the farmland, the development restrictions are passed on the new owner.

Purchase of Development Rights

In Purchase of Development Rights, the government agencies buy the development rights to a property. The program does not give the government agency the right to develop the agricultural land. It simply permits it to extinguish those rights in return for appropriate compensation.

Transfer of Development Rights (TDR)

This type of program allows landowners to transfer the right to develop one parcel of land to a different parcel of land. The programs are usually established by local zoning ordinances, and they are used to shift development from agricultural areas to designated growth zones closer to municipal services. The parcel of land where the rights originate is called the “sending” parcel. Once the development rights are transferred from a sending parcel, the land is restricted with a permanent conservation easement. The rights are transferred to a “receiving” parcel, which allows an owner purchasing the rights to build at a higher density than ordinarily permitted by the base zoning. Most TDR transactions are between private landowners and developers. Local governments approve transactions and monitor easements. Some jurisdictions have created “TDR Banks” that buy development rights with public funds and sell them to developers and other private landowners. TDR programs can prevent non-agricultural development of farmland, reduce the market value of protected farms and provide farmland owners with liquid capital that can be used to enhance farm viability.

Farmland Preservation Zoning

Agricultural protection zoning ordinances allow some residential development but can restrict density. Such constraints on development potential can limit land speculation and keep land affordable to farmers. Keeping large areas of agricultural land relatively free of non-farm development can reduce the likelihood of conflicts between farmers and their non-farming neighbors. Jurisdictions can use this zoning to conserve agricultural land and keep individual farms from becoming isolated.

Tax credits for land under Farmland Preservation Zoning:

- \$10 /acre for parcels with zoning and located in an Agricultural Enterprise Area.
- \$7.50/acre for parcels with zoning.

Agricultural Enterprise Areas (AEA)

Agricultural Enterprise Areas is the new method for farmland preservation stated in Wisconsin State Statute Chapter 91. Designation of an AEA identifies the area for current and future agricultural use. Eligible farmers in an AEA can receive state income tax credits with an agreement with the Wisconsin Department of Agriculture, Trade and Consumer Protection.

General eligibility requirements are:

- Five eligible landowner petitioners.
- All land in the proposed AEA must be in a farmland preservation area.
- Land must be contiguous.
- Land must be primarily in agricultural use.

A benefit of the AEA designation is that the land is identified as important for agricultural preservation.

Eligible landowners enter in to a voluntary Farmland Preservation Agreement that allow them to claim a tax credit in exchange for keeping land in agricultural use for 15 years and meeting conservation standards.

Tax credits for land enrolled in an AEA:

- \$5/acre if the parcel is in an AEA.
- \$10/acre for parcels with zoning and located in an Agricultural Enterprise Area.

The Jackson County Comprehensive Land Use Plan, Section 2-4, also provides a Goal, Objectives and Policies to help protect agricultural land from housing of non-farm residences.

Agricultural Development

There are many different farm groups that promote agriculture and agricultural development in Jackson County. The groups include the Jackson County Beef Producers Association, Jackson County Dairy Promotion Committee, Corn and Soybean growers, the Wisconsin Cranberry Growers Association, Farm Bureau, National Farmers Organization, Farmers Union, the Coulee Region Grazers Association, Organic Farm Businesses, the Jackson County Fair Board, and Future Farmers of America Chapters.

In addition the University of Wisconsin Extension office has professionals such as the County Agriculture Agent that provides numerous agricultural educational activities on a wide array of topics. These sessions are provided throughout the year in various locations in the County and neighboring counties.

In 2007, Jackson County donated \$100,000 to help with the construction of a small animal barn for the reconstruction of the Fair Park. In 2008, the County donated another \$500,000 for the Fair Park reconstruction project. In 2013, another \$10,000 was donated to the Agricultural Society for the annual County Fair. The County continues to donate \$4,000 annually towards ribbons for fair projects which includes agricultural exhibits. All of these donations help recognize the efforts of agriculture in our community.

Environmental Preservation

Section 2.4, Agricultural, Natural, and Cultural Resources in the County Comprehensive Plan, beginning on Page 2-11 describes the Goals, Objectives and Policies related to the county's natural resources. Section 2.7 Land Use, with the Goals, Objectives and Policies, beginning on Page 2-20 also describes some ways to help the county's natural resources.

In the County Comprehensive Plan - Chapter 5: Existing Conditions lists the various areas of water in the County –

Page 5-24, 5-25 Groundwater; Page 5-26 Stream Corridors; Page 5-27 Surface Water; Page 5-28 Outstanding and Exceptional Waters/ Impaired Waters; Page 5-29 Floodplains; Page 5-30 Wetlands

The Jackson County Land and Water Resource Management Plan 2013-2017 lists two major goals:

Goal One – Improve manure management and reduce manure runoff to the waters of Jackson County.

Goal Two – Continue work to bring all cropland fields below T-Value and decrease sedimentation from other sources.

The County, through the Land Conservation Department and the County Zoning Department, utilizes different ordinances and programs to help implement the two goals that help environmental protection:

Land and Water Resource Management Plan Program - cost-sharing for best management practice installation.

County Conservation Cost-Share Program – cost-sharing for best management practice installation.

Animal Waste Management and Manure Management Ordinance - construction of any manure storage structure meets proper standards to protect surface and groundwater.

Livestock and Animal Facility Licensing Ordinance – new or expanding livestock and animal facilities are to be managed to meet the state performance standards for preventing manure runoff.

Non-Metallic Mining Reclamation Ordinance – all sites are to meet the standards of NR 135 for site reclamation

Wisconsin Administrative Rules NR 151 – all farmers, landowners and property are to manage land to be compliant with the rules to prevent non-point pollution.

Notice of Discharge and Targeted Runoff Management Grant Programs - work with farmers and landowners to correct non-compliant manure and sediment runoff sites with cost-sharing from the State of Wisconsin.

Farmland Preservation Program – following state performance standards for non-point pollution and preserving farmland allows an annual tax credit or payment to the landowner.

Conservation Reserve Enhancement Program – converting crop land near stream corridors into grass or woodland to prevent soil erosion on the enrolled acres and buffer other crop land erosion from entering the stream.

County Shore Land Zoning – all new or expanding livestock facilities are to be located at least 300 feet from all navigable streams.