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Overview of Emerging Conflicts over Agricultural Land Use

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I'd like to use my opening comments today to set the stage for the rest of the program. But first, a few words about my background. I'm a sociologist and an economist trained in the dynamics of change in the farm sector. I help direct a research and outreach unit called the Program on Agricultural Technology Studies that tracks the impacts of new technologies and public policies on farm families, and only came to the world of land use planning through the back door. Specifically, as we've worked with farmers across the state in the last five to seven years, land use issues began to come up as an increasingly important part of farmers' lives, both in a positive way and a negative way. As a result, we began to direct some of our program resources to examining that issue. In the last year and a half, I have assumed additional responsibilities as a co-leader of a workteam within UW-Extension that is developing educational programs for local decision-makers concerning agricultural trends and agricultural land use. I'll call your attention to a display in the back of the room that illustrates some Town-level land use trend data that our team helped collect in the last few years. A number of you may have received copies of our Town Land Use Databooks in recent months. I know we sent them out to a lot of agencies and local government officials. In my comments I will be using some maps and images that are based on those data. Finally, I am a member of the faculty in the Department of Urban and Regional Planning and have become much more familiar with the formal world of planning and zoning through my colleagues there.

In any case, one of the best things about today for me right now is the fact that I do not know a lot of you. This is certainly not the first

conference or opportunity to meet and discuss land use issues in Wisconsin, and I have begun to recognize a number of familiar faces at the various forums that have been held recently. In the design of this program, we hoped to draw a large number of new people – particularly local government officials and citizens who have been making land use decisions in their day to day lives, not just those of us who work in the academy or those who run public or private interest organizations. Most of the following speakers will be people who represent communities that have struggled with conflict over agricultural land use and generally emerged relatively unscathed on the other side. I hope that they will have some positive stories and lessons to share with you. I think we've come to a point in time where we all know that land use is an issue in Wisconsin and we know that agricultural land use is one of the biggest pieces of that puzzle. But we don't necessarily know *what* to do about it and sometimes we even don't know how to begin to grasp our hands around that animal.

The focus today is to leave you with a vision that there are things that can be done to both manage conflict over agricultural land, and also to develop reasonable policies to balance the public and private interests over farmland resources. We may not give you all the answers, or give you *the* plan, or give you a particular policy that you want to adopt, but we will give you a vision of how some communities like your own have grappled with this issue.

Why is land use an issue? Like I said, I got to the issue of land use through working with farmers, so to me it was all about agriculture. From time to time, I have to remind myself that it's a lot more than agriculture. Indeed what I

Introduction

Why is Land Use an Issue?

- Fiscal impacts of growth & development
- Transportation or housing issues
- Natural resource concerns
- Agricultural lands & open space

Community Efforts to Address Land Use in Wisconsin are Increasing

- Local land use planning and policy
 - New “Smart Growth” Law
-

think drives a lot of the statewide discussion are concerns about other issues like the fiscal cost of development. Is local government experiencing fiscal problems as they try to meet the increased service demands that come with development? Are there problems with transportation, traffic jams, difficulty with finding appropriate and affordable housing? Are there issues of natural resource importance and preservation? Clearly all of these things are important drivers of the land use issue.

At the same time, I think there are a lot of people who are quite interested in the preservation of farms and farmland. I will note that a lot of discussions about agricultural lands blend with discussions of open space. And yet they are, in many respects, somewhat different issues. I get at it when I teach my students about land use by pointing that there are usually two groups within most farmland preservation meetings: those who are primarily interested in saving *farms* and those who are primarily interested in saving *farmland* or the open space. Now I don't think these two groups disagree on everything. In fact, I think they have considerable areas of overlap. But as we move forward with this conversation today, we need to recognize when and which policies might work towards keeping more farmers on a working landscape, and which ones are most likely to keep farmland open or free from development. Ultimately, I think it is healthy to have that debate.

The other issue is that – love it or hate it – a lot of folks are getting dragged into agricultural land use decision making. I spend a lot of my time going out and talking to town and county groups who don't know exactly what to do but know this is an issue they are being forced to reckon with. The pressure is only stepped up now that we have a state law – dubbed the “Smart Growth” law – that is going to at the very least encourage, if not virtually ensure, that all municipalities will go through some kind of land use planning process over the next 10 years. My biggest fear when I learned about the law is that an awful lot of communities that I was addressing – the very rural towns and counties who are new to the world of planning – are going to need a lot of support to address the agricultural element of that plan because it is clearly what a lot of their time is spent dealing with. It is also one of the areas where we are least certain of what public policies or strategies might be most effective.

Agricultural Land Use

Agricultural Lands Important to Wisconsin

- Over half of our land cover is in agriculture
- Generates ~ \$4-5 billion in gross farm sales
- Generates ~ \$15-20 billion through sales to farmers & processing of farm products
- ☼ Most housing growth on agricultural lands

Decisions about Farmland Dominate Local Government Agendas

- Particularly in towns and counties
-

Agricultural lands are very important to Wisconsin, about half of our land cover is in agricultural uses. And when you count all of the wetlands and forests that fall within farm boundaries, it's clear that farmers are probably the biggest decision-makers when it comes to the future of Wisconsin's rural lands. Agriculture is also a huge though very diverse and dispersed industry. Farmers generate four to five billion dollars every year in gross sales. You will find no other single industry that does that, particu-

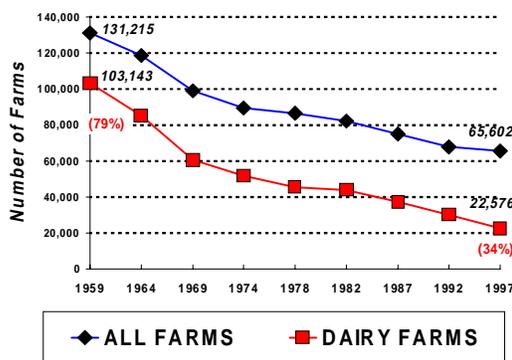
larly when you take into account all the peripheral economic activity that comes from the selling of services and inputs to farmers and the processing of farm products. As an example, dairy farmers take in about three to four billion dollars a year in receipts for their milk. Our economists on campus estimate that generates about thirteen billion dollars worth of cheese.

Finally, there is a very explosive issue emerging around farmland that comes from the fact that most housing growth in Wisconsin is occurring on agricultural land of some type. Not all of it is at the urban fringe, and not all agricultural lands are being built to wall to wall housing, but my research does suggest that residential development is clearly the biggest issue in deciding the fate of agricultural land. As an indication, the number one issue on the agenda of most monthly town or county government meetings is the discussion of proposals to allow some kind of housing development on agricul-

the current crisis in agriculture is the continuation of a fifty or sixty year long process of slow structural change. If you go back to 1959 – not all that long ago – we had 130,000 farms in Wisconsin, about 80% of which milked cows. When you move up to 1997, the most recent data for which we have census records, we have about half as many farms overall and we only have a third of them now that are dairy farms. In other words, Wisconsin has lost about 80% of its dairy farms within the last forty years. Now, since total farm numbers have not fallen as rapidly, this graph also suggests that the decline in dairy farm numbers is actually balanced somewhat by real growth in the numbers of other types of farms.

What’s not apparent from that last graph, which shows you the total number of farms (or net change) at the end of every year, is that there’s actually a lot more people leaving agriculture than net change figures will suggest. When I get calls from journalists that suggest we lose three to four dairy farms a day, I say hey, wait a minute, we actually lose five to seven dairy farms a day! What we forget is that there are people getting into agriculture at the same time. One illustration of the importance of entry, in a positive and negative way is this graph, which shows you in the black bars the net losses every year, which would have showed up on that previous chart. For example, in 1978-1982, we

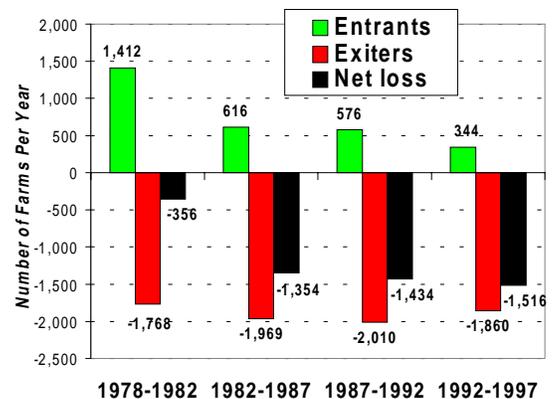
Trends in WI Farm Numbers



tural land. I live in a rural town here in Dane County and get involved periodically in land use activities and that’s exactly what we spend most of our time debating – do we re-zone land out of agricultural use into another use.

Some background: agriculture is in a period of transition. I guess I’m a little out of step with some of the alarmist feelings of today when I suggest this transition is not new. In fact,

Entry, Exit and Net Loss in WI Dairy Farm Numbers



lost about 360 dairy farms a year. In the last few years we've lost about 1,500 dairy farms a year. What you may not appreciate is in fact back in the late 1970s and '80s we actually lost almost 2,000 dairy farms a year, but we had another 1,400 new entrants every year. What is different about the 1990s in Wisconsin, and in the dairy sector, is not that we have a lot more farms going out of business. It is that we have vastly fewer farms getting into business. And I will argue that land use pressure is one of, and not the only, key reasons why entry is depressed in Wisconsin.

Within the dairy sector, it is a very dynamic industry, and while I don't want to belabor the point, we've seen significant growth in the size of most dairy farms in the last generation. From a historical point of view, this growth is not really a new phenomenon. Rather, since the 1950s Wisconsin has seen dairy herds growing fairly steadily at about 3% a year, and that's about what we see today. Most farms grow fairly gradually and incrementally, usually in order to keep family income up in the face of declining average milk prices. The average herd now is about 70 milk cows, a significantly larger operation than most dairy farmers imagined they'd be operating 25 years ago. We also have more and more of what we call 'very large' dairy herds, often with 500 cows or more. And those are increasingly visible in the community and hence a growing part of the public land use debate about the future of agriculture.

From the perspective of a community struggling with land use issues, it is important to try to figure out who your farmers are and where they are going to be in the next 5-10 years. I find myself often reminding folks that – at least in Wisconsin – almost every dairy farm is still predominantly a family scale operation. This means that family members provide virtually all the ownership, management, and labor on that farm – often from the same person or farm couple. Most of these farms have less than a hundred cows, and there are many farms that are

Changes in Dairy Farming

Increased Size of Herds

- Most farms grow gradually, some dramatically
- Average herd now ~ 70 milk cows
- More very large herds (500+ milk cows)
- Most WI dairy farms still family-scale (< 100 cows)

Increased Use of Technology

- High Production, Confinement systems
- Management Intensive Rotational Grazing (MIRG)

Stagnant Milk Output, Volatile Prices

run entirely by family labor with as much as 200-220 milking cows. As you try to plan for agriculture in your community, you should critically examine who the commercial farmers are. I will bet that they will often be people whose operations look very much like farms that most of us have some very positive feelings about.

There is also increased use of technology in the dairy farm sector. On the one hand, some producers have moved towards a high production, confinement-oriented production system that includes large-scale automated milking parlors and open air freestall housing barns. At the other end of the spectrum, many producers have moved towards intensive rotational grazing, a much less capital and labor-intensive kind of operation that also seems to flourish in our landscape. In my research, I see these two contrasting systems as the two main growth areas in the Wisconsin dairy industry.

Overall, however, on the economic front things are not quite so bright. There's been relatively stagnant growth in milk production in Wisconsin for about the last ten years, after many, many generations of steadily increased milk production. In other words, the rate of herd expansion and productivity improvements no longer compensate for high rates of net farm losses, and it has been difficult to keep milk production levels up. We've also seen tremendous increases in the volatility of milk prices.

Over the last year we had both historic highs and historic lows in the milk price received by Wisconsin dairy farmers. These have changed the calculations on dairy farms about their economic fate, leading a growing number to

institutions who are attempting to provide information about farming and rural land management. They also can change the tenor of politics at the local community level.

Change Away From Dairying

What replaces dairy farms when they quit?

- Other Commercial-Scale Farms
 - Cash Grains
 - Beef and Hay
 - In Urban Areas: Specialty Crops & Horticulture
- Small, Part-Time Farms
 - Former commercial farmers
 - People who grew up on farms
 - Urban folk new to farming

question their future in the industry.

Aside from changes taking place *within* dairying, we had a lot of farms moving *away from* dairying. It's an open question, actually, about what happens to the land and the farmer when Wisconsin dairy farms quit milking cows. Many of them become other types of commercial scale farms. In the southern counties, cash grain production is increasing. Elsewhere, beef and hay is the main kind of farming that ex-dairy farmers move towards. And in some urban areas and even outside of some urban areas, we see growth in the specialty crop, high value forms of relatively small acreage agriculture.

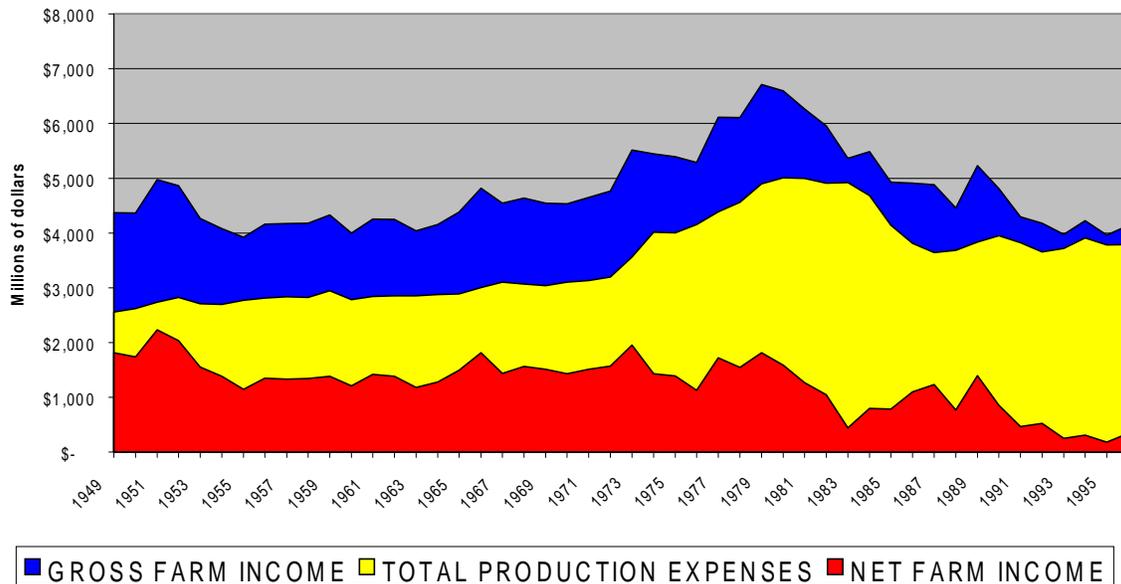
I think that the biggest growth sector in farm numbers is the small and part-time farm. Many of Wisconsin's small farms are former commercial farmers who are downsizing. Many are people who have farm backgrounds, who never have operated at a commercial scale but do farm as a serious part of their life and probably rely more on off-farm income. Finally, we have a flood of urban folk in the 1990s who are moving into farming. These people pose new challenges to public research and extension

The next chart is one that I used to feel bad about showing to farm groups, but for whatever perverse reason I have found that farmers (particularly) tend to like it. At one level, what it shows you is how tough the times are in agriculture, particularly in the broad sweep historic perspective. I'll go through it real quick with you. The blue line at the top reflects the gross receipts (or dollars all farmers took in) on an annual basis in Wisconsin agriculture, adjusted for inflation. What you'll see is there was a period of relative stability from the 40s through the 60s, and in the 70s we saw real growth in gross farm income. The yellow line reflects the dollars farmers spent and the red line reflects the dollars that they had to take home. One of the things that many scholars and historians of agriculture have noted is that agriculture, because it is such a competitive industry, does not usually get ahead. In other words through periods of innovation and change, what you really seek to do is to maintain your own. And indeed farmers throughout the 70s did basically maintain their own.

We went through a very complicated economic turn of events in the 1980s, which I have a whole lecture and a half about if you wanted to stay, that was characterized by a decline in commodity prices and the collapse of agricultural land markets. During that period, however, expenses weren't able to fall as quickly. As a result, many farmers in Wisconsin in the 1980s suffered through what we call now the Farm Crisis years – a period of low income, relatively difficult times. We saw net farm income creep back up in the late 1980s, but – as surprising to a lot of folks – the 1990s have proven to actually be the longest sustained period of low net farm income Wisconsin has seen since before World War II. What this reflects is both the shift away from dairy (which as bad as dairy can be, it is still among the

Farm Income Trends

Gross Receipts, Farm Production Expenses, and Net Farm Income in Wisconsin, 1949-1996
(Adjusted for inflation; 1982 \$)



most lucrative sectors in Wisconsin's agriculture) as well as general price pressure and adverse terms of trade to farmers throughout the industry.

It also means that the farm economy has been toughest at the same time that there has been unprecedented sustained economic growth in Wisconsin's non-farm sector. Indeed, the confluence of those two events has led us to a point where the future of agricultural lands is very much in question. The farmers are very skeptical about their futures and the folks who are outside of farming have the money to think about living in the country. These history events certainly set the stage for a lot of what we're doing here today.

There are other implications of these changes. As you lose a critical mass of farmers, you lose your infrastructure. Now most of Wisconsin, as hard as times have been, is not on the verge of losing its agriculture outright. Perhaps it is not apparent from my talk to this point, but I hold to the view that there is still a long and rich future for agriculture in Wisconsin. Agriculture will be here. But there are areas where the farm supply sector has been forced to consolidate, where in some cases we've lost a lot of the infrastructure because farm numbers fall below that critical mass. We also see our farmers relying much more on off-farm income. Statewide about three-quarters of our farms rely principally on off-farm income. This is true across the nation. Dairy farming, in fact, is one of the only commodities you can find where the

Other Implications of Changes

Consolidation in Farm Supply Sector

- Critical mass of farmers

More Reliance on Off-Farm Income

- Change in community reliance on agriculture
- Change in farm family decision-making

Less Intensively Managed Landscapes

- Implications for natural resources

Increased farmer willingness to sell land for non-farm purposes

vast majority of farmers support their families principally on what they can get from farming their land. As a result, communities are less reliant on agriculture. Some rural towns are suffering from the economic consequences of agriculture's decline; others are adapting by seeing their economy grow in other sectors. This has also led to changes in how farm families make decisions about the degree to which farming is going to continue to be the basis of their survival.

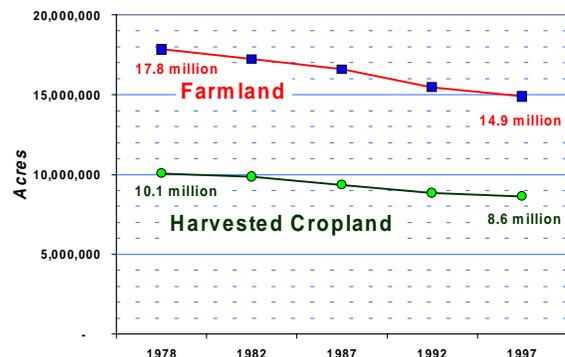
Third, we see less intensively managed landscapes. This is a very important phenomena, and very few people really understand what it's going to mean. In particular, I've worked with a number of wildlife biologists who have begun to examine what happens when some farmers shift to less intensive forms of agriculture (often hay and pasture) or cease to work their land by taking it out of crop production altogether. In these cases, the land may well grow up in grasses, shrubs, or trees. Is that a good thing for the environment or is it a bad thing for the environment? The answer will depend a lot on whether the people that own that property choose to manage that property or simply let it go. In many cases, the intensively managed landscapes — even outside of agriculture — may provide more natural resource benefits for wildlife, water recharge, and nutrient cycling.

Finally, these historical trends have led to increased farmer willingness to sell land for non-

farm purposes. The fact remains that there is a market for farmland from nonfarmers, and if the farm economy is not giving them returns that historically were there, developing that land will be more attractive.

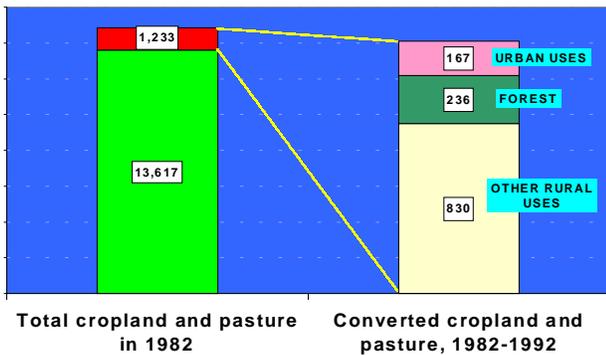
What has all this meant for the amount of farmland in Wisconsin? There are a lot of measures for farmland. They all disagree in exact numbers, but they basically tell similar kinds of stories. This chart reflects the results of the U.S. Census of Agriculture that is conducted every five years. The Census data suggests that we've gone from about 18 million acres to about 15 million acres of farmland over the last twenty years. That's roughly a net loss of 150,000 acres of farmland a year. Other estimates suggest numbers more like 100,000 acres a year, a more conservative estimate of land that's removed from agriculture. Now when I say farmland, most people I talk to have in mind the picture of a crop field with long parallel rows of grain stretching off into the horizon. One of the things you need to recognize is that farmland as counted in the US Census is not all harvested crop land. Indeed, the bottom line in the chart indicates that only about 60 percent of our farmland is actually harvested cropland. While we've lost harvested cropland in the state, we have lost it a lot less rapidly, more like 40,000-75,000 acres a year. Put differently, a good deal of the land pulled out of agriculture is actually

Acres of Farmland in Wisconsin, 1978-1997



land that is not harvested cropland.

Where is Agricultural Land Going?



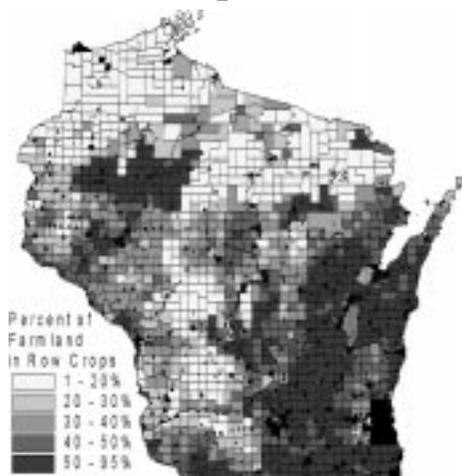
Where does agricultural land go when it is “lost”? Now this is a Holy Grail that none of us know the precise answer to, but the results of some USDA data between 1982 and 1992 suggest some very interesting patterns. We’re in the process of updating this through 1997, but don’t have the picture for it. Take these numbers with a grain of salt, but one way to look at this is that back in 1982 we had about 15 million acres of cropland and pasture in the state. Over the next 10 years, 1.2 million acres of this land were

converted to some other kind of use that is not cropland or pasture. You should recognize as well that when land leaves agriculture, in some cases it can go back to agriculture, and there is a lot of movement in both directions. But of that 1.2 million acres, 170,000 of it went to what the USDA calls urban uses. These are hard targets, fairly dense packets of commercial and residential development, usually at the urban fringe. About 240,000 acres went back into forest, and about 830,000 acres went to what is called “other rural uses.” What are these “other rural uses?” They likely include some croplands that were idled under the federal Conservation Reserve Program (CRP) for 10 year periods. These lands may be relatively easily returned to farming in the future. Other important rural uses include much of the low-density rural residential development and recreational land purchases that we see across most of our state’s landscape.

The results of studies like these suggest that farmland conversion is more than just an urban fringe phenomenon. Indeed there’s some interesting spatial patterns in the way farmland is lost in Wisconsin. This slide shows two maps

Spatial Patterns of Farmland and Development

Density of Row Crops



Growth in New Housing 1990-1997

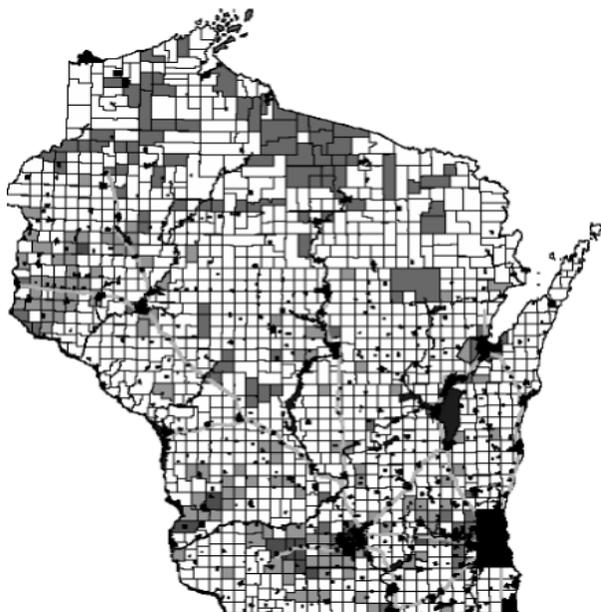


that illustrate one of the underlying problems facing Wisconsin farmland preservation. On the left you have an indication of where we have some of our best state farmland planted to row crops. These tend to be concentrated in the Southwestern third of the state, particularly in a band between Madison and Green Bay, up through Appleton, and down toward Rock County and over toward Milwaukee. On the right hand side is one of a dozen maps I could show you about population density or housing growth or other forms of urban development and pressure. What you'll note is that the regions of greatest development pressure tend to co-exist with some of our richest agricultural resources. The places where our agricultural resources are most intensively managed are often the places seeing the most pressure. Given these patterns, the fact that the future of agricultural lands is on our state's agenda should come as no surprise. You will also note some places out there on the more rural landscape – places that are decidedly not urban fringe communities – that are also

seeing high rates of housing development. This primarily reflects the development of recreational or second home properties in the north and to some degree in the west-northwest.

What does this mean for spatial patterns of farmland loss? The next image is a complicated picture that shows the towns (or townships) that lost significant amounts of farmland during the 1990s. The purple townships are places that lost over half their farmland in the 8 year period. If you look closely, you may note that they tend to be places that do not have a lot of farmland in the first place – typically they are located either in the lake districts of the northern woods, or are located very near our major metropolitan centers in the Madison-Milwaukee-Green Bay triangle. The green and red colored townships are places that lost over 1000 acres of farmland off their tax rolls during this seven year period. These reflect the places with significant agricultural resources but who are losing it at a relatively rapid rate. I think the chart demon

Where is farmland lost most rapidly?



Towns with Significant Farmland Loss 1990-1997

- Over 50% Loss
- Lost 1000-2000 Acres
- Lost more than 2000 acres
- Major Hydrography
- Cities and Villages
- Major Highways

strates that while there is a strong urban determinant of farmland loss, there are also places on this map that show up as high-loss areas that are clearly not urban fringe communities but places that are seeing pressure from something else.

Different Patterns of Rural Residential Development

Urban Fringe Developments

- Dense (often traditional subdivisions)
- Incompatible with most commercial farms

Near-Urban Fringe Residential Housing

- Low-density, large-lot
- Intermixed with farming

Rural Recreational Housing

- Low-density, large-lot or lakeshore
 - Part-time residence
-

Another way to think about this is to conceive of three distinct types of rural residential development. I think that any community that begins to write a land use plan or engage in land use planning needs to figure out which of these are the issues in their community, because it's going to be different in every place. On one hand, you have urban fringe development. This includes very dense, often sub-division development with many houses on relatively small lots. A lot of this form of growth is occurring on the outskirts of our cities on land that's in towns and outside of incorporated municipalities. Urban fringe development, I don't believe, is very compatible with commercial agriculture. With such high levels of density, although you may preserve open space and public property, it is not going to be a very friendly environment for successful commercial agriculture over the long run.

On the other hand, Wisconsin has an awful lot of what I call "near urban fringe" residential housing development. This is characterized by lower-density development, often with quite large lots, five, ten, thirty-five or forty acres

with a house stuck out there on the rural landscape. These also tend to be intermixed throughout currently active agricultural areas, and while not as incompatible with commercial farming as dense urban fringe growth, the near-urban fringe houses can pose significant challenges to neighboring farmers in ways that I'll elaborate on in a moment. Finally, and equally important, there's a lot of rural recreational housing development in Wisconsin that is also very low density, typically large lots, sometimes lakeshore development. It's distinctive feature is that the landowners are usually not full-time, year-round residents. Each of these three patterns of development raise different costs and benefits to local governments and communities, and may or may not be a threat to farming depending on how they

Why is the General Public Concerned about Farmland?

Economic Contributions of Farming

Preserving Agricultural Character of Area

- Landscape aesthetics & quality of life
- Cultural & social ties

Farmland = Fiscally Beneficial

Environmental Benefits (vs. Development)

- Wildlife habitat
 - Water recharge
 - Nutrient recycling
-

are configured.

Why are we concerned about farmland in the state of Wisconsin? I'll start with the general public, which actually appears to care a lot. There has been a series of land use opinion surveys done by the On Common Ground Foundation in Wisconsin. In last fall's issue, their magazine reported on the level of public concern about farmland. The poll organization from Virginia was quoted in the paper as saying they were surprised and shocked at how universal support for farmland preservation was across our general population. Now I'm not saying the general population has thought deeply about the issues or are willing to make difficult choices to preserve farmland, but clearly there's latent

support. And it comes from a lot of sources. One is the economic contribution of farming. What does farming mean to the state, to your community? I think equally important to the general public is a concern to preserve the agricultural character of an area, keeping a landscape the way we think Wisconsin should look. And you need to look no farther than our brochures from the Department of Tourism, or in the images used in most forms of advertising to appreciate how important those red barns with a silo, and a herd of black and white cattle out on pasture eating grass are to our subconscious sense of what the “good life” includes. A rural aesthetic and agricultural character defines what a lot of people associate with living in Wisconsin and living around farming landscapes clearly affects our individual and collective quality of life. Even when they no longer farm themselves, many rural Wisconsin residents still maintain strong social and cultural ties to farmers in their community and want to support those people.

In addition, as I said at the outset, there’s a great debate over the fiscal costs of development. Many people believe land in farming is much more beneficial for local tax roles than land that’s going into development, particularly residential housing. The actual fiscal impact really depends on how much each proposed development project will pay in taxes versus what that development is going to cost the local municipality to service (through schools, libraries, roads, police and fire protection, and other public services). Different developments might pencil out differently, but clearly there’s a belief that farmland – since it generates significant property tax revenue without demanding many local services – can be very fiscally beneficial to local governments.

Finally, there’s a debate over the environmental benefits that agriculture may provide. Now I appreciate that agriculture isn’t always put in the position of being seen as an environmental benefit, particularly if you have witnessed controversies over manure and nutrient manage-

ment in the last few years. But some scholars have begun to recognize that agriculture does provide some important ecological services to the rest of society – through water recharging, nutrient cycling, and providing wildlife habitat – particularly relative to some forms of development that might replace it. Dane County, for example, were it to lose its agricultural lands and see them built up, would lose an awful lot of its groundwater recharge capability. Cities are also increasingly relying on farmland as a way of disposing of nutrients generated by urban dwell-

What are the interests of the farmers in the debate?

Similar concerns to the general public

Development pressure can make farming more difficult

- Makes entry more expensive (land prices)
- Can raise taxes, generate conflicts

Farmland owners also benefit from appreciation in land values

Retiring farmers worry about restrictions on their ability to sell their land

ers.

What about the interests of farmers in the land use debate? Farmers certainly share many of the same concerns as the general public. There are also very few audiences of farmers that I have worked with and talked with that do not have a general support for the idea that agriculture would be worth preserving. Development pressure can make farming more difficult, as they have pointed out. It makes entry more expensive. It makes property taxes go up. It often can generate conflicts and complaints and nuisances that farmers aren’t used to dealing with. We should also recognize though that farmland owners also benefit from development. Let’s not be blind. If you’re in an area like Dane County that’s seeing tremendous growth, you have appreciable value in your land that you would not have were you to live in other regions that are not seeing such growth pressure. But clearly there is a mixed feeling farmers have.

Farmers' land use views: Results of 1999 Farm Poll

- 64% agree that "Local government should restrict non-farm devt. in important ag. areas."
 - 61% agree that "Farmers should be paid if they agree NOT to sell land for non-farm development."
 - 46% agree that "If farmland is to be protected, farmers will need to accept restrictions on their ability to sell their land."
 - 37% agree that "Farmers in my area should be allowed to sell cropland to people who want to build houses or cabins."
-

They're caught between recognizing that they have some problems with development but also recognizing that it's important to them when and if they decide to quit. In particular, the retiring generation of farmers are concerned about any restrictions on their ability to sell land. This is not news to many of you – since it is clearly one of the main themes in local town meeting discussions – but reflects the fact that they often don't have resources to allow them to retire short of cashing in on the land appreciation of that property they've worked often throughout their life.

Our research program also conducted a poll last year of farmers across the state and I'll just share some of the highlights of our findings. What do farmers think about land use policies? I think it is fair to say that there is widespread and latent support among farmers for the idea that land use policies could do more to help agriculture. In particular, about two-thirds of them thought local governments should restrict non-farm development in important agricultural areas. That's different from saying should it be restricted on your own farm, but the principle of local land use planning is something that most farmers appear to think might be acceptable. Note also that about sixty percent also thought that if you're going to tell farmers they can't sell their land for development, they ought to be compensated. And again, we don't talk about how much we might compensate them or who is

going to pay for it, but boy, who's opposed to paying farmers if you're a farmer? Apparently forty percent were, I don't know who they are...! Just under half of our sample said that if farmland is going to be protected, farmers will need to accept restrictions on their ability to sell land. I think this is the most realistic question in the survey. In one sense, you may be surprised at the number of farmers who would agree with this statement. Yet it underscores that there is great disagreement within the farm community about how restrictive policies protecting agriculture should be. Recognize that the 54% left over did not necessarily disagree, there is probably 20% in each of these that were in the middle, where they weren't sure how they felt and didn't take a stand. The last item indicates that a little over a third of the farmers in the study agreed with the statement that farmers in their area should be allowed to sell cropland to people who want to build houses or cabins.

Should we act? Public Interests vs. Private Property Rights

Key: should nonfarm development be restricted on agricultural land?

- Changes in rules affect landowners the most

Land Use Planning = a community discussion to agree on common rules

- What do you want community to look like?
 - Whether to restrict individual choices at all?
 - Tradeoffs and compromises required
 - What level of government should decide?
 - THERE IS NO PLAN SITTING OUT THERE
-

Should we act? This is the question for a lot of communities. Okay, we've got this problem, we recognize the difficulties, but what *can* we do or what *should* we do about it? In your handout there's a nice publication by Ohio State University and the Farm Foundation that looks at this issue of what you can do. One of the options that's outlined there is that you do nothing. You rely on market forces to be the arbiter of the future of our land. There's a very strong community and a lot of folks who I think believe that

this is a viable approach, and I think it's an approach that everyone should be willing to consider. There is also a listing of a variety of other approaches, ranging from zoning and planning to purchasing development rights and some other options. I encourage you to look through that because I think it is one of the most even handed and balanced presentations of the options that are out there. Ultimately, the issue boils down to balancing the public interest –in keeping taxes down, keeping the environment protected, keeping a community looking the way it does and protecting everyone's property values – against the individual private property interests of landowners.

The key question for most of us today is should non-farm development be restricted on agricultural lands in Wisconsin, and if so, what should those restrictions be? As we answer that question, we cannot ignore the fact that the folks that are most affected by the answer to that question are the landowners. I have heard many examples of people in the farm community who have gone through life changes that force them to sell, many of whom were advocates of restrictive policies but who were forced to make a choice between say, taking a half a million dollars from a dentist in Racine for a property or \$250,000 from a struggling young dairy farmer who could barely scrape that together when the time came to sell their dairy farm. To ask that farmer to take a quarter of a million dollar hit for the purposes of helping one young struggling dairy farmer (or to promote the community interest in a rural landscape) is a lot to put on his shoulders. In many cases, I don't have any blame on farmers who choose to do what's in their economic interests. We need to recognize how changes in land use rules are affecting landowners and deal with that issue directly.

That said, land use planning is, as I said at the outset, something all of us are going to be forced to go through to some guise. And I'll be a little daring and say that I think that this is a good thing! Land use planning is to me a com-

munity discussion about what our common rules are going to be. It does not presuppose that there is an answer. You want to decide what you want your community to look like. You try to decide what kinds of land uses you want to protect, which ones you want to encourage. You might have to decide if you want to restrict choice at all, and if you say no at that point your job is simple. If you say yes, you've got a complicated set of choices about where you're going to draw the line. What are those rules going to be? In every successful case, and I hope you'll hear it from all our panelists today, you only succeed if people on both sides of the issue are willing to make compromises. If one group or another in your community tries to win on the whole issue, either for or against restrictive rules, typically it fails. Even if you pass a restrictive land use policy, if it is not owned and embraced by that community (and its leaders) it typically is not well enforced. You need to be willing to make trade-offs and willing to have that difficult conversation about compromise.

Finally, and I won't engage this much today, but we're going to need to have a conversation about what level of government should make important land use decisions. Wisconsin has made a choice not to do this at the state level but to try to encourage counties and towns to be the decision-makers. I think local governments need to embrace this opportunity to rise to the challenge. On the other hand, for those of you who are from towns and counties, you know that there is an ongoing issue with the powers of towns and counties vis-a-vis cities and villages in Wisconsin. These include debates over who has powers of annexation and extra territorial land use authority. Certainly, these are going to complicate a town's land use planning work if they are in a place that borders on a city or a village.

Ultimately, I guess I'd make the point that there is no single plan sitting out there that anyone is going to ask you to adopt. I stress this when I address my skeptical rural government

audiences. We need to continuously remind ourselves that you can enter into the land use planning process and come out with anything. You can say you want to validate what is happening already, and write a plan to facilitate more of the same. You can also identify areas where there is a general consensus that reasonable limits are required, and adopt strategic plan language to protect community resources that you all value. All of these outcomes are par for the course, and we have tried to include panelists today that can convey the breadth of outcomes that are possible.

Why we are here today

Learn from those who have tried

Focus on two key elements:

- the PROCESSES & STRATEGIES used by communities to facilitate the conversation
- the specific POLICIES and TOOLS adopted to minimize conflict and manage development

We can move forward

To conclude, I'll try to answer the question of why we are here today? We want to learn from those who've tried. We've tried to dominate the program with people who are doing land use planning already (unlike myself who doesn't do it very often). This afternoon, we've invited some very insightful minds to provide commentary on what you're going to hear today, and to reflect on the experiences of the practitioners.

Throughout it all, we're going to focus on two key elements. I think they're important to separate. One is the *process or strategy* that communities use to facilitate a conversation. Do not expect this land use discussion to be easy and do not expect it to be something that is straightforward, that you walk into land use planning and have a couple of meetings and figure your way through the muddle. You need to be conscious about working with people who know how to facilitate a process, to have a constructive community dialogue that doesn't lead to people throwing darts at each other. That involves some

careful consideration of taking the time to do it right and bringing some people that work with you to help you through that process and that strategy of facilitating a conversation. Second, you want to talk about *the specific policies and tools* that you might adopt to minimize conflict, manage development, avoid an outcome that no one wants. I think in every case our panelists today will touch on both those issues. I encourage you in the time we're going to have for questions and the time we're going to have during the break for you to approach these panelists with any specific questions or reactions you might have about their process, strategies, policies, or tools.

As I said at the outset, I think we can move forward. Ag land use is kind of a hot potato for a lot of folks and they don't want to touch it. They say there's no easy way out, the farmers are grumpy, they all want to sell their land, the non-farm community is unreasonable in their demands for the restrictions they're asking for. Why open that can of worms? I think you have to open the can of worms because if you don't it's going to open itself. And I guess it is a much better experience to have some control over where those worms are during the discussion.

