

Chapter 6: Agriculture Resources

6.1 Productive Agricultural Areas

General Considerations

Dane County is one of the most productive agricultural counties in Wisconsin. Wisconsin agriculture is a big economic driver contributing \$88.3 billion annually to our State's economy. Sales from food processing industrial sales total \$67.8 billion. The agricultural activities are dominated by dairy farms and production of row crops, grain, corn for silage, and soybeans. Dairy farm numbers have decreased but cow numbers have remained about the same as herd sizes per farm have increased. In 2015, farmers owned and managed 557,000 acres or about 73% of the county's land. According to the 2015 Dane County Land Use Inventory, 7,331 acres of land were under agricultural use in the Town of Verona.

Dane County is also one of the fastest growing counties in the State with an expected increase in population of about 84,000 every 10 years. Much of the residential development needed to accommodate this growth will come from the loss of farmland, which will challenge the county's potential for continued agricultural production and the rural atmosphere for parts of the county. The Town of Verona is not immune to these population pressures.

The State, in order to protect this important industry, created Wisconsin's Farmland Preservation Program. Under this program, the State provides income tax credits to farm owners who keep their property in agricultural use and the land is appropriately zoned. A county agriculture preservation plan is required for participation in the program. The Dane County Farmland Preservation Plan, adopted by the County Board on December 3, 1981, is largely a compilation of town land use plans.

On the opposite end, the number of large farms (over 1,000 acres) has also increased slightly since 1987. This has occurred due to older traditional farms having to continually expand in order to stay economically viable. The number of farms with 100 – 999 acres has decreased steadily from 1987 to 2012. Regardless of size, all farms are important to the local agricultural economy as a whole.



Farming in Verona Township

Soils

The Town of Verona was strongly impacted by glaciation that was responsible for the varied topography and the location of the different soil types. The Johnstown terminal moraine runs diagonally across the middle of the township from the southeastern region to the northwestern region. Additionally the Sugar River flood plain is evident in the southwestern region of the Town. Soils in the Town are in four soil associations:

- 1) soils underlain by sandy loam glacial till,
- 2) soils underlain at a depth of less than 40 inches over sandstone, dolomite, or shale,
- 3) soils formed in outwash material, and

4) soils formed in alluvium.

Soils in the (1) and (3) associations were formed from glacial till or glacial outwash deposits, while soils of association (2) were formed from residual unglaciated deposits of ancient seas. The formation of these soils was subsequently influenced by the deposits of windblown loess and predominant grassland vegetation. Soils of association (4) were formed over time from floodplain deposits of rivers and streams, including the Sugar River and Badger Mill Creek.

Map 6.1 shows the best agricultural soils in the Town. The highest productive soils are found along the Badger Mill Creek, the Sugar River, and north and south of Whalen Rd. Farmland of Statewide Importance is defined as land that with proper management may be as productive as prime farmland.

Number and Types of Farms in the Town.

From 2006 to 2016, there was not a major change in the number of acres farmed. The major change was the loss of dairy farms. In 2006 there were six dairy farms and now there are two. Some of the dairy



farmers converted to beef operations, and there are now 5 beef farms. The major crops are alfalfa, soybeans and corn. Only a relatively few acres are planted to wheat. Three large landscape companies and several smaller operations are in the Town. Other agricultural activities include an orchard and larger vegetable gardens. There are two horse boarding stables and one nonprofit farm animal rescue operation. (Information

sources: www.capitalarearpc.org/preservation_portal.html; Town tax records, surveys obtained from Comprehensive Planning process.) There is one small apple orchard in the Town.

6.2 Issues and Opportunities

Issues:

1. Preservation of the rural character of the Town as residential development increases
2. Preservation of the family farms
3. Preservation of the prime farmland for agriculture
4. Promotion of businesses that contribute to the agricultural community

Opportunities:

1. Additional open space, environmentally sensitive areas, and productive agricultural soils can be designated for preservation where appropriate, especially in the Sugar River/Lower Badger Creek Watershed.
2. New/revised zoning districts may provide better opportunities for agriculture and agricultural related businesses.
3. The adoption of the Boundary Agreement between the Town and City of Verona in June 2016 has provided some predictability related to what farmland is likely to remain in the Town and what land is likely to be annexed.

6.3 Goals, Objectives and Policies

GOAL

Preserve the Town's farmland for the purpose of continuing agricultural land uses in the Town, protecting existing farm operations from conflict with incompatible uses, and ensuring the rural character of the Town

Objectives:

1. Encourage concepts of development that will allow for the conservation and protection of farmland and environmentally sensitive lands.
2. Promote the preservation of open spaces to allow for farmland uses by placing a high priority on directing development in the Town away from areas that are in prime farmland (Map 6.1).
3. Encourage sustainable farming and land use policies, such as environmentally safe disposal of manure.
4. Maintain large, contiguous parcels of farmland to support farm-related businesses and allow for movement of equipment.

Policies:

1. Limit Rezoning of Agricultural Areas – The Town discourages the rezoning of an agricultural zoned district (Farm Preservation zoning districts) to a non-agricultural district unless the area is identified as such on the Future Land Use Map.
2. Limitations on Non-Farm Development – i) The Town will encourage any proposed non-farm residential development to be placed such that it minimizes impacts on neighboring agricultural uses, minimizes disruption of existing natural features, and prevents visual predominance over the surrounding landscape. ii) The Town will discourage placement of a residence in the middle of a productive agricultural field. iii) The Town will direct development that is incompatible with agriculture towards areas that are more appropriate.
3. Limit Operational Restrictions on Farms – The Town will protect farm operations from restrictions on noise, odor, movement of farm machinery, time of operation, and the keeping of animals associated with farm operations.
4. Farmland Preservation Tax Credits - The Town will adhere to the provisions of the *Farmland Preservation Law* to permit eligible landowners to receive tax credits under Chapter 91 of the Wisconsin Statutes.
5. Limit parcel splits - Limit nonfarm uses in agricultural preservation districts to one split per 35 acres owned as of 12/26/1981.
6. Nonfarm related business – Allow home occupations and farm family business on farm parcels to supplement farming income, following the allowable uses and standards in the current zoning ordinance.

