



“The growth of an emotional tie with the land often goes hand and hand with an increased knowledge and familiarity with it.”

*Town of Dunn (Dane County)
Open Space Preservation
Handbook*

FarmLand

The scenic value and cultural aesthetic of well managed farmland is, for many people, a major reason why many people move to rural areas. Farming, if done in an environmentally sound manner, provides another way to protecting open space.

Advantages

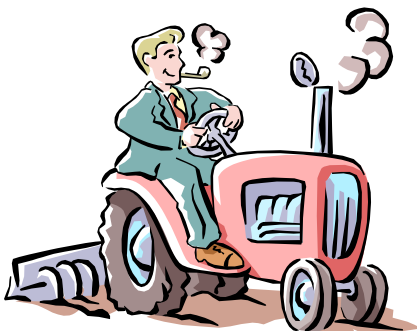
- Farming provides an income from the land which other uses do not.
- Working farmland may be taxed at a lower rate than land in “non-agricultural” use.
- Farming maintains the “open” in open space. Farming does not interfere with scenic views and creates a rural atmosphere many people enjoy.
- Active farmland provides much needed food for a growing world population. Loss of cropland may emerge as a critical concern if world wide demand for food rises.

Disadvantages

- Done improperly, farming may degrade the land and pollute the water.
- More maintenance dollars required for fencing, fertilizer, weed and pest control and erosion abatement.
- Possible loss of wildlife habitat.
- Noise and odors may be objectionable to neighbors.

Through proper planning and management practices many of these negative aspects of farming may be minimized.

It would be advisable to consult with farm experts in your local Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) or UW Extension Service to help evaluate the land’s suitability for agriculture. These experts can also help to explain the expected income and cost of farming and assist in making arrangements with neighboring farmers to rent the land. Social and aesthetic factors may weigh in on your decision to farm or not to farm. Does farming fit into your aesthetic concept of open space? Will the presence of farmland and farm activities be compatible with the neighborhood?



FarmLand



Hay fields can provide wildlife habitat and income. Just be sure to restrict haying during the ground nesting bird season, May to mid June in Southeast Wisconsin.

Farming Alternatives

There are two options for farming open space: grazing or cash crops. Which type of farming is best depends upon soil type, slope, the landowner's financial situation, social compatibility and aesthetics.

Grazing:

Many private landowners own small hobby farms or "farmettes" and use their open space as pasture for grazing horses, sheep, goats or llamas. A more common scenario on larger tracts is to receive an

income from the land by renting it to a nearby farmer for grazing beef or dairy cattle.

Lightly grazing livestock is a relatively easy, low cost and environmentally sound alternative to growing crops on open space. Restoration of old, degraded pasture land may require the addition of fertilizer or organic matter to the soil; reseeding, weed control, fencing and a water source may also be necessary. There should be little in the way of maintenance or expense after sod cover and proper animal density is established. Wetlands, woodlands or very steep slopes, which are not appropriate for grazing, should be left in their natural condition.

Cash Crops:

The most common farming option for use of open space is for the owner to lease land to a local farmer for raising cash crops such as corn, soybeans or alfalfa. Less common specialty crops include: berries (pick your own), flowers, nuts, fruit trees (orchard crops), and vegetables. Some landowners may wish to seek out organic farmers to lease their land. Organic farming uses slow release organic sources of fertilizers, such as composted manure and plant material; and limits use of pesticides. Compared with other potential income generating land uses, leasing your open space to grow cash crops usually provides the greatest financial return.



Great care should be taken by both the landowner and the renter to ensure that proper farming practices are followed to prevent erosion, siltation and water pollution. Mismanagement not only deteriorates land and water on the owner's property, but also creates off-site problems with neighbors and people miles downstream. It is important that both parties work together to minimize environmental damage and maximize food production. Farm experts (NRCS) can design a Farm Conservation Plan to meet both objectives. They will recommend best management practices to meet the objectives of the two parties.

Conservation Management Practices

Every effort should be made to prevent degradation of soil and water and provide environments for wildlife by utilizing some or all of the following management techniques. Others may be suggested by a farm conservationist. Visit your county land conservation department, UW-Extension office, or Natural Resources Conservation Service office to learn more.

No Till

This is a technique where crops are planted directly into the soil without disturbing the soil with plowing or disking. Old stubble and plant parts from past crops are left on the surface of the ground to lessen erosion by rain drops and runoff.



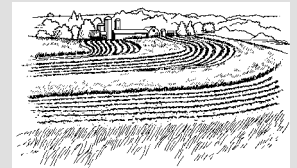
No Till Corn Field

Nutrient Management

Managing the amount, source, placement, form and timing of the application of nutrients (includes commercial fertilizer and manure).

Contour Strip Cropping

Planting alternating strips of row crops and hay to slow down erosion. Strips follow contour lines perpendicular to runoff.



Contour Strips

Rotational Grazing

Grazing land is divided into paddocks which are allowed limited grazing on a rotational basis. Rotational grazing prevents erosion and deterioration of pasture due to overgrazing.

Grass Waterway

A broad shallow channel natural or constructed lined with grass cover to shunt water off fields with minimum soil erosion.



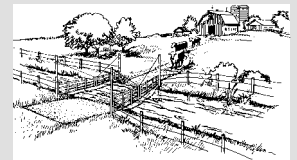
Grassed Waterway

Buffers

Strips of grasses, trees or shrubs that filter runoff and remove contaminants before they reach bodies of water or wells. Buffers also prevent erosion along streams and lakes.

Fencing Buffers

Excluding livestock from buffer strips enhances the effectiveness of the buffer by preventing trampling of vegetation and subsequent exposure of erosion-prone bare soil.



Fenced Buffer

Upland Wildlife Habitat

Creating, restoring, maintaining or enhancing areas for food, cover and water for upland wildlife and species which use upland habitats for a portion of their life cycle.

Wetland Enhancement

Wetland Enhancement. Planting native wetland plants and controlling weeds in wet areas for wildlife and aesthetic value.

Organic Farming

A way of farming using slow release organic sources of fertilizer such as composted manure and plant material and no or limited use of pesticides.

Integrated Pest Management

Using environmentally sensitive techniques and strategies to manage weeds, insects, diseases and other organisms that can damage crops



Farmland



Contacts:

Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) A federal organization that works with private landowners to conserve natural resources. NRCS manages a number of programs that provides financial assistance for conservation on active, or formerly active, farmland. Find your local office at:

http://www.wi.nrcs.usda.gov/contact/office_search.html

US Fish and Wildlife Service (FWS) The principal federal agency responsible for conserving, protecting and enhancing fish, wildlife and plants and their habitats. Wetland protection is a major focus. Provides financial assistance for wetland projects. Several Wisconsin offices.

<http://www.fws.gov/midwest/maps/wisconsin.htm>

University of Wisconsin Cooperative Extension Service (UWEX) Most Wisconsin counties have one or two UWEX agricultural educators who can answer questions about farmland conservation practices. Visit this web link to find the location of the office in your county:

<http://www.uwex.edu/ces/cty/>

County Land Conservation Departments Provide information and manage programs that help rural landowners manage their natural resources. Most offices have staff with experience in farmland protection and conservation.

<http://www.wlwca.org/Pages/LCDWeb.html>

Michael Fields Agricultural Institute A non-profit organization with a mission to cultivate the ecological, social, economic, and spiritual vitality of food and farming systems through education, research, policy and market development.

<http://www.michaelfieldsaginst.org/>

Options for Open Space

A resource guide for private and public land owners and managers.

Produced by the Southeast Wisconsin Fox River Partnership Team to protect, restore and enhance the natural resources of the Fox River basin.

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<http://basineducation.uwex.edu/southeastfox/>

Publications and other sources of information:

Conservation Choices: Your guide to 30 conservation and environmental farming practices, U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) Natural Resources Conservation Service, Available at local NRCS offices.

Farmland Conservation Choices: A Guide to Environmentally Sound Practices for Wisconsin Farmers, UWEX Publication GWQ025

Country Acres: A Guide to Buying and managing Rural Property, Lowell Klessig and Mike Kroenke, UWEX Publication G3309, 52pp

