

## Chapter Three: Agricultural Resources

### AGRICULTURAL RESOURCE RECOMMENDATIONS SUMMARY

- Collaborate with the surrounding towns and Walworth, Jefferson, and Rock counties on farmland preservation initiatives.
- Keep non-farm development out of farming areas and limit exurban development in the City's extraterritorial jurisdiction.
- Promote and support opportunities for community gardens.
- Encourage and participate in the development of the State's bioeconomy.

### Chapter Introduction

This chapter provides information and recommendations to advance agriculture in the Whitewater area. The information will be used to guide future land use decisions designed to preserve agricultural land, support the farm economy, and help advance economic growth in Whitewater.

### Character of Farming

Agriculture is an important component of the regional economy and comprises much of the land surrounding the City. Farmland accounts for 62 percent of land in Walworth County and 70 percent of land in Jefferson County. In 2009, a fair amount of land within the Whitewater city limits was still in agricultural use. Agriculture is fairly diverse in Jefferson County—products include dairy, aquaculture, ducks, forages, nursery stock, pheasants, poultry, eggs, soybeans, and tobacco. Top agricultural products in Walworth County include a wide range of specialty meats, horticulture crops, and equine facilities, in addition to dairy and grain.

### Assessment of Farmland Viability

The Natural Resources Conservation Service groups soils based on their capability to produce common cultivated crops and pasture plants without deteriorating over a long period of time. These capability classifications are based on numerous criteria that include, but are not limited to, the soil's salinity, capacity to hold moisture, potential for erosion, depth, and texture and structure, as well as local climatic limitations (e.g., temperature and rainfall). Under this system of classification, soils are separated into eight classes. Generally, Class I and Class II soils are the best suited for the cultivation of crops.

Map 2 depicts the locations of Class I, II, and III soils around the City of Whitewater. Areas



of Class I soils are located south of the City, to the northeast and southwest of Whitewater Lake. The majority of soils within the City's immediate vicinity consist of Class II soils.

Therefore, the farmland around Whitewater remains very productive. Preservation of farmland is an important consideration within respect to development related decisions that are covered in this *Plan* and those of nearby communities and counties.

### Farmland Preservation Efforts

Lands located within City limits are, in effect, targeted for future development. The same may be said for most lands within the City's 2009 Sewer Service Area (see Map 2).

The continued viability of farming in the region largely depends on the commitment of not only the City, but also surrounding counties and towns. Lands in the surrounding towns are almost entirely zoned for exclusive agricultural use; these zoning districts are intended to preserve land for long-term farming in accordance with Wisconsin Chapter 91. Jefferson County has particularly restrictive policies for land development in areas targeted for long-term farming. Within Walworth County, the area in the Town of Whitewater immediately adjacent to the southern boundary of the City is in the agricultural land holding district—a zoning district intended to keep land in agricultural use until it is appropriate for development. This land is also within the City's Sewer Service Area.

Local farmers can participate in several federal and State programs and initiatives intended to preserve long-term farming activities. The 2008 Farm Bill reauthorized several federal programs, including:

- The Conservation Reserve Program (CRP), which provides technical and financial assistance to eligible farmers and ranchers to address soil, water, and related natural resource concerns on their lands in an environmentally beneficial and cost-effective manner.
- The Wetland Reserve Program provides technical and financial support to help landowners with their wetland restoration efforts.
- The Wildlife Habitat Incentives Program provides both technical assistance and up to 75 percent cost-share assistance to landowners to establish and improve fish and wildlife habitat on their property.
- The Grazing Lands Conservation Initiative provides technical assistance to help new grazers begin using rotational grazing methods. Trained grazing specialists work one-on-one with farmers, developing grazing plans including seeding recommendations, fencing, and watering plans.

#### STATE OF WISCONSIN FARMLAND PRESERVATION PROGRAM (“WORKING LANDS”)

Updates to Wisconsin's Farmland Preservation legislation were adopted by the State Legislature in 2009, completely overhauling a program that was introduced in the 1970s. Wisconsin's new Farmland Preservation legislation specifies the following:

- By 2015, every County in the State is required to have a new or updated farmland preservation plan.
- Farmland preservation plans must identify where farmland preservation zoning districts should be mapped and specify how the County intends to grow its agricultural economy.
- Farmland preservation plans must be incorporated into the County's comprehensive plan and must be updated every ten years (the same requirement as for comprehensive plans).
- Counties have the option of adopting a farmland preservation (exclusive agricultural) zoning district. Such districts must be adopted or updated by 2016.
- Counties are required to collect "conversion fees" whenever land is rezoned out of a farmland preservation zoning district. Collected fees are then provided to the State help pay for a purchase of development rights program, which is also part of the “Working Lands” initiative.

- The Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP) provides a voluntary conservation program for farmers and ranchers that promote agricultural production and environmental quality as compatible national goals. EQIP offers financial and technical help to assist eligible participants install or implement structural and management practices on eligible agricultural land.

In addition, the Wisconsin Department of Revenue offers two important farmland preservation programs, the Farmland Preservation Credit Program and the Farmland Tax Relief Credit Program.

The Farmland Preservation Credit Program strives to preserve Wisconsin farmland by means of local land use planning and soil conservation practices and provides property tax relief to farmland owners. To qualify for the credit, farmland must be zoned for exclusive agricultural use or be subject to a preservation agreement between the farmland owner and the State. All program participants must comply with soil and water conservation standards set by the State Land Conservation Board. This program was recently amended through the State's new "Working Lands" legislation, described in the sidebar.

The Farmland Tax Relief Credit Program provides direct benefits to all farmland owners. The credit is computed as flat per-acre payment of \$5, \$7.50, or \$10, based on the farmland owner's qualifying acres.

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## **Agricultural Resource Goals, Objectives, and Policies**

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### **Goal**

*Contribute to the preservation of the agricultural economy and productive farmland in the Whitewater area.*

### **Objectives**

1. Promote compact development patterns and maintain a "hard-edge" between City development and the countryside.
2. Direct new homes to City-sized lots in locations where housing and other development is already located.
3. Discourage land uses, land divisions, and activities that may conflict with agricultural uses or adversely affect farm investments in long-term farming areas outside the City.
4. Work with the surrounding towns and Jefferson, Walworth, and Rock Counties to help preserve farming as a viable occupation and way of life.
5. Support agriculture as a significant economic activity within areas identified for long-term agricultural use in Whitewater's planning area.
6. Promote business development in the City that capitalizes on and celebrates Whitewater's position and role in a rich agricultural region.

### **Policies**

1. Carefully consider the location of productive agricultural lands before making decisions on the expansion of City services or growth.
2. Work with surrounding towns and Jefferson, Walworth, and Rock counties to advance a land use pattern that directs more intensive development into the City; maximizes the intensity/density of use for lands in the City and future annexed lands to minimize the conversion of agricultural land; and minimizes conflicts between urban and rural land uses.

3. Work with surrounding towns and Jefferson, Walworth, and Rock counties to encourage the continuation of exclusive agricultural (farmland preservation) zoning for most lands in surrounding towns, and the continuation of policies to significantly limit non-farm development of such lands.



*Farmlands in and around the City of Whitewater represent an important part of community's character and the local economy.*

4. Utilize extraterritorial land division review procedures in the City's subdivision ordinance in conjunction with this *Comprehensive Plan*, limiting non-farm development in productive farming areas identified for long-term farmland preservation.
5. Encourage interim farming use of open lands within future City development areas and "Long Range Urban Growth Areas" identified on Map 5, until such lands are ripe for planned development per the policies in the Land Use chapter.
6. Work cooperatively with Jefferson, Walworth, and Rock counties and the surrounding towns to explore innovative techniques for preserving agricultural lands in the towns including purchase of development rights programs, provided that such a program does not conflict with City growth objectives as expressed in this *Comprehensive Plan* (e.g., development rights should not be acquired over lands within future City development areas and "Long Range Urban Growth Areas" identified on Map 5).
7. Collaborate with the surrounding towns and property owners to preserve farmland and limit non-farm development in future City development areas located outside the City's municipal limits (see Map 5) until a reasonable amount of planned and available lands in and closer to the City are developed, the land has been annexed to the City, and City utilities can be extended to serve the area.
8. Support agricultural business development (e.g., industries that process agricultural materials, agricultural-based tourism uses) and direct marketing opportunities (e.g., farmers market) that enhance markets for local farm products, provide tourism opportunities, and promote community sustainability.

## **Agricultural Resource Programs and Recommendations**

### **Collaborate on Mutually-Beneficial Farmland Preservation Initiatives**



Representatives of surrounding counties and towns, as well as some area land owners have expressed an interest in preserving farmland in the City's planning area. Jefferson County's Farmland Preservation Program, Walworth County's Farmland Preservation Tax Credit Program, and Rock County's Rock County Land Conservation Program all identify long-term farmland preservation as a priority. The counties have instituted and administered various strategies for achieving this goal, including "exclusive agriculture" zoning districts and the use of

urban service areas/sewer service areas to promote planned city and village growth. In addition, Jefferson County is pursuing a Purchase of Development Rights (PDR) program, which may be bolstered by a recently adopted state PDR program that provides funding matches.

The City believes that a healthy farm economy adds many benefits to the region. To this end, it supports and will help implement long-range farmland preservation in areas shown for future “Agricultural Preservation” use on the City’s Future Land Use map (Map 5). This map was prepared with close attention to the plans of the counties and other communities in the City’s planning area. The City will work to make sure that all farmland preservation initiatives are compatible with long-term City growth within the City’s identified future development areas and the “Long Range Urban Growth Areas,” as illustrated on the City’s Future Land Use map (Map 5). For example, the City does not consider these locations appropriate for development rights/conservation easement purchases.

### **Limit “Exurban” Development within the City’s Extraterritorial Jurisdiction**



Keeping non-farm development out of farming areas is a key component of an overall program of farmland preservation. Except for those areas that were already developed with some exurban (rural, non-farm) development at the time this *Plan* was written, the majority of the lands outside the City limits that are not planned for City development have been indicated on the City’s Future Land Use map (Map 5) as appropriate for continuation in agricultural use. The City intends to exercise its land division review authority within its extraterritorial jurisdiction to limit housing development in these areas, directing intensive development (e.g., large subdivisions, multi-family residential, commercial, and industrial) to the City or other incorporated communities.

Some of the lands outside the City’s municipal limits, but within the City’s extraterritorial jurisdiction, have been indicated on the Future Land Use map (Map 5) as either appropriate for future City development or, beyond that, as “Long Range Urban Growth Areas.” The City anticipates that “Long Range Urban Growth Areas” are not likely to be developed within the 20-year planning period. Therefore, although these lands provide logical long-term (20+ years) urban growth areas, in the shorter-term they should be preserved for mainly agricultural uses so as to maintain a well-defined edge between City development and the surrounding countryside and to ensure that these lands are “reserved” for City growth in the future.

Overall, the City will utilize its extraterritorial powers to achieve the following goals in areas intended for long-term City growth:

- Promote the continuation of agricultural uses in “Long Range Urban Growth Areas” over the planning period.
- Prohibit exurban (unsewered) housing development at gross densities higher than one house per 35 acres over all areas identified for future City development or “Long Range Urban Growth Areas” on Map 5.
- Discourage premature rural development over all areas identified for future City development or “Long Range Urban Growth Areas” on Map 5. Rural development could impede logical and cost-effective future utility and road extensions, result in an inefficient use of land since such developments need to accommodate large septic drain fields or buffers, and/or be incompatible with future surrounding urban growth.
- Discourage loud, unattractive, or malodorous rural businesses in areas that will likely be appropriate for future neighborhood development.
- Discourage uses and project designs that typify a rural level of improvements (e.g., gravel drives, metal buildings) that will not fit in the context of a future urban environment or may impede future investments in high-quality development in the surrounding area.

The City’s extraterritorial land division review policies in such areas are described in more detail in the Land Use chapter.

### **Promote Opportunities for Urban Agriculture (Community Gardens)**



Urban agriculture refers to the growing, processing, and distribution of food and other agricultural products in and around cities. There is vast potential for producing food in cities, and examples from around the country include municipal compost facilities, schoolyard greenhouses, community gardens, restaurant supported salad gardens, rooftop gardens, backyard orchards, window box gardens, and beekeeping. Community gardening and other forms of urban agriculture have been shown to provide a variety of benefits including economic benefits, environmental benefits, public health benefits, and reductions in crime—they are truly a sustainable approach to living in communities. Community gardens provide opportunities for recreation and can improve both the mental and physical health of residents, creating a place for social gatherings.

At the time this *Plan* was written, the City, in cooperation with a professor from the University of Wisconsin-Whitewater, had recently established a community garden in Moraine View Park. The garden offers a location for residents who do not otherwise have access to adequate land, such as people who live in apartments or have smaller or shaded lots. Also available are children’s garden plots. Organized gardening activities are available for children every Saturday.

Depending on the success of the City’s existing community garden, the City will consider the siting of additional community gardens as part of its next Park and Open Space Plan update. The City will also remain open to and support innovative and alternative locations and approaches for community gardens in the City. For example, in addition to public parks, utility rights-of way and school campuses have been used in other communities around the nation to sustain gardens. The City will also continue to support other potential partners who are interested in advancing urban agriculture goals, potentially including the School District and UW-Extension. Finally, the City may consider supporting, to the extent practical, unique approaches to providing water to garden sites, such as by redistributing water collected in regional stormwater detention basins.

### **Encourage the Development of the Local Bioeconomy**

Advances in technology are opening up new markets for traditional agricultural products. The “new bioeconomy” is focused on finding new ways to use and process corn, soybeans, and other organic matter into new marketable plastics, fuels such as biodiesel and ethanol, and even pharmaceuticals. As production costs to process these materials decline, environmental regulations are becoming more stringent, petroleum costs are rising, and “green” economic incentives are becoming more widespread.

Wisconsin is in a favorable position to be able to supply raw materials for the rising bioeconomy. To compete with the efforts of other states and regions, Wisconsin has launched a state-wide initiative to position itself to take advantage of this emerging economy.



The City of Whitewater is ideally located near agricultural producers; major research and development centers at the University of Wisconsin-Whitewater, University of Wisconsin-Madison, and Northern Illinois University; and the manufacturing centers of southeastern Wisconsin. This location places the City in an excellent position to be a processor for biobased products through new and expanded industrial development. In addition to economic benefits generated through the use of biomass, the

#### **WHAT IS THE BIOECONOMY?**

Bioeconomy refers to the production of products, chemicals, and energy from renewable biomass (crops, crop waste, wood) instead of non-renewable fossil fuels such as petroleum. Ethanol from corn and biodiesel from crop waste are well known examples of fuels created from biomass. Research is underway to unlock the potential for higher energy yields from other organic sources such as grasses, legumes, and timber, all of which are readily grown in Wisconsin. The potential for biomass is certainly not limited to fuels. Many products that can be made from petroleum, such as plastics and lubricants, can also be made from biomass. By virtue of its natural resources, strong agricultural economy, and research facilities, Wisconsin is in a strong position to develop and expand its bioeconomy and biobased industries.

City could benefit from on-site bioenergy production through the use of agricultural products or natural amenities such as wind and geothermal. At the time this *Plan* was written, the City was in the process of exploring opportunities to utilize agricultural waste to produce methane, which would then be used for energy. The treated agricultural waste would then be redistributed to farmers for use as fertilizer. The City will also explore the feasibility and efficiency of other waste to energy alternatives such as garbage incineration

**Map 2: Soil Suitability for Agriculture**

# SOIL SUITABILITY FOR AGRICULTURE

WHITTEWATER, 2017

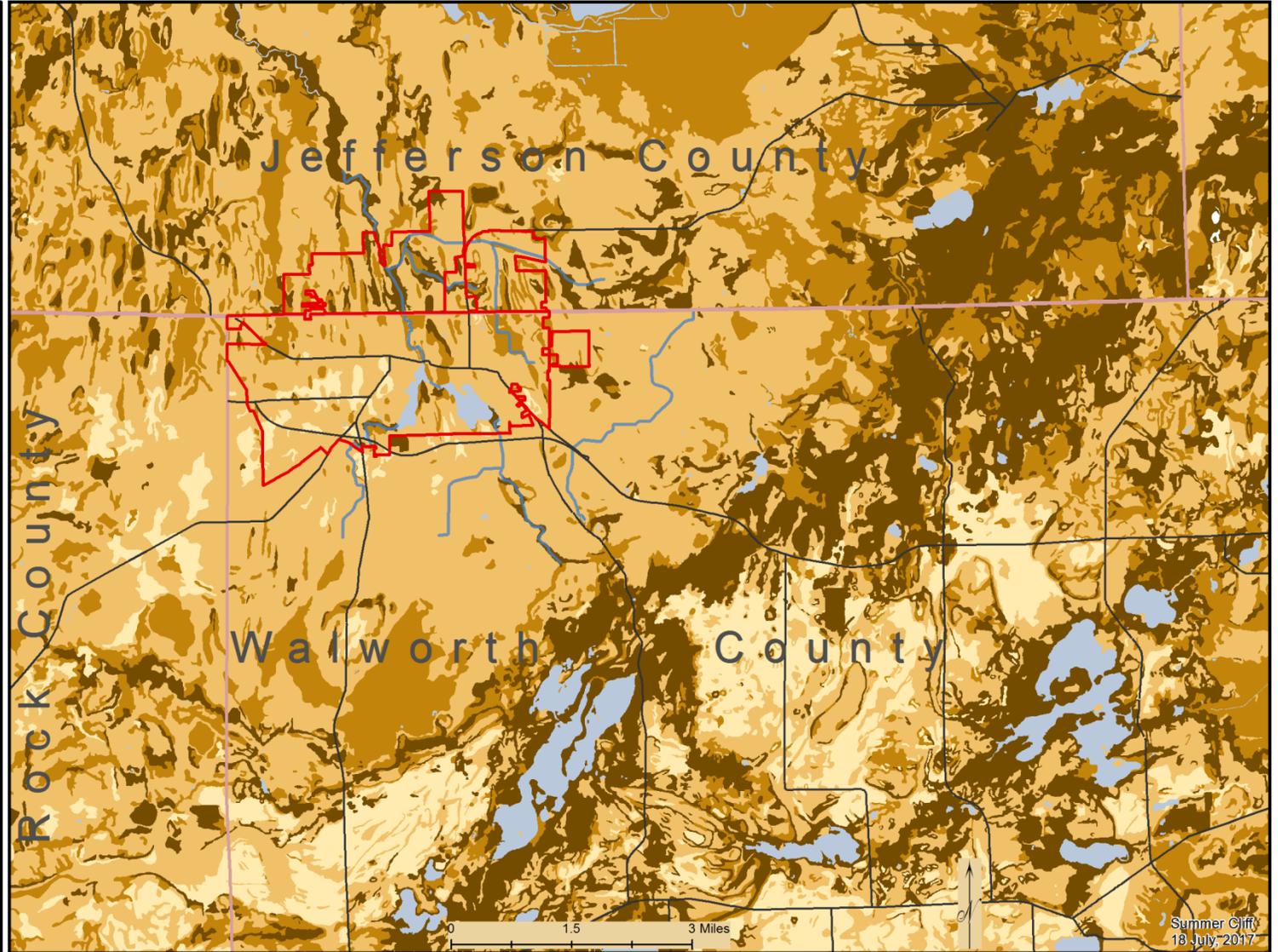


## Features

- Roads
- Rivers
- City Limits
- Counties

## Soil Suitability

- Most Suitable
- Moderately Suitable
- Semi Suitable
- Minimally Suitable
- Lakes/Null



Source: USDA NRCS, 2002