



# FARMLAND PRESERVATION PLAN

Sauk County

DRAFT: February 2025



Dear Sauk County Residents

I am excited to introduce the Sauk County Farmland Preservation Plan for 2025-2035. After several years of gathering information, incorporating public feedback, and collaborating with local municipalities, this plan has emerged as a comprehensive and valuable tool for future planning initiatives and for implementing department programs and policies.

The updated Sauk County Farmland Preservation Plan effectively highlights agricultural trends and resources, which aids in identifying the most impactful programs for the rural landscape. It encompasses policies and objectives aimed at farmland protection, supported by various programs available through the department. The plan features detailed maps that identify areas designated for continued agricultural use in the foreseeable future, laying the groundwork for certified zoning, agricultural enterprise areas (AEAs), and farmland preservation agreements. Additionally, the plan outlines the department's efforts to enhance conservation and support sustainable agricultural practices.

Protecting and enhancing agricultural lands remains a top priority for both the county and local governments. Utilizing the Sauk County Farmland Preservation Plan will greatly facilitate these efforts over the next decade.

*Melissa Schlupp*

Interim Director



# ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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# INTRODUCTION

## **Farmland Preservation Plan Overview**

A productive, secure agricultural land base in Sauk County is vital to our ability to maintain agriculture as a dominant part of our culture and preserve agriculture as a viable industry which helps society to secure necessary food, fiber, and fuel supplies. Agriculture, a significant economic driver in Sauk County, includes over 1,400 working farms with nearly 300,000 acres either under production or reserved for future production.[1] The future success of agriculture requires maintaining land areas for future production while assuring favorable and expanded markets for agricultural commodities. A well-crafted and implemented farmland preservation plan cannot necessarily preserve all our agricultural lands, nor can it provide stable and growing markets for agricultural commodities, but it can provide policy guidance when choosing what initiatives to implement as a county, when and where to implement them, and in what capacity.

## **Wisconsin's Working Lands Initiative**

In 2009 the Wisconsin Legislature enacted Wisconsin Act 28 (2009-2011 Budget Bill) to create what is commonly referred to as the Working Lands Initiative. This law changes Chapter 91 of the Wisconsin State Statutes and sets forth technical specifications for programs that further the physical preservation of farmland, provides a means of economic support and opportunities to the state's agricultural producers, and connects production to markets. The new law continues Sauk County's tradition of maintaining the farmland preservation plan and zoning certification, conservation compliance, and leading policy implementation efforts that result in measurable outcomes which support a vibrant agricultural economy.

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[1] USDA CENSUS OF AGRICULTURE 2022



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Under the new law, Sauk County must update the Farmland Preservation Plan by December 31, 2025. The law also specifies that Sauk County must maintain a certified zoning ordinance in order for landowners to qualify for farmland preservation income tax credits, Agricultural Enterprise Areas, or Purchase of Agriculture Conservation Easement.[2] The updated plan is an integral continuation of Sauk County’s previous planning efforts to support the agricultural industry, which began with the adoption of the first farmland preservation plan in 1979.

### **History of Farmland Preservation Planning in Sauk County**

Sauk County has a history of preserving farmland through the implementation of state programs, influencing the development of new state programs, as well as the establishment of programs uniquely tailored to Sauk County. The following is a historical timeline of agriculture-related plans and programs which were proposed or adopted in Sauk County.

1979: Sauk County adopted the “Sauk County Agricultural Preservation Plan.” This plan promoted the preservation of agricultural lands through the use of techniques such as density-based zoning, the transfer of development rights, and identifying lands within each town to be preserved for agricultural land uses.

1981: The Sauk County Board of Supervisors considered the adoption of the Exclusive Agriculture Zoning District (EAZ) as part of the Sauk County Zoning Ordinance.

1986: The Sauk County Board of Supervisors approved the addition of the Exclusive Agriculture Zoning District (EAZ) to the Sauk County Zoning Ordinance.

1986-1990: Following the adoption of the EAZ by the Sauk County Board of Supervisors, the following towns adopted EAZ.

- Town of Troy, October 1986
- Town of Prairie du Sac, October 1986
- Town of Ironton, November 1986
- Town of Sumpter, April 1987
- Town of Westfield, June 1987
- Town of Franklin, July 1987
- Town of Honey Creek, July 1987
- Town of Reedsburg, November 1990

1999: Sauk County Board of Supervisors approved Sauk County 20/20 Development Plan.

2004: Sauk County Board of Supervisors considered the adoption of an agricultural land purchase of development rights program.

2006: The Sauk County Board of Supervisors approved an addendum to the 1979 Farmland Preservation Plan to implement a density-based zoning program for towns zoned Exclusive Agriculture and Resource Conservancy.

2006: The Sauk County Board of Supervisors unanimously approved the addition of the Planned Unit Development Program (subsequently renamed Planned Rural Development

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[2] WI STATE STATUTE CHAPTER 91, FARMLAND PRESERVATION



Program) to the Sauk County Zoning Ordinance, which implemented the density-based zoning program.

2009: The Wisconsin Working Lands Initiative was passed as a part of the state's 2009-2011 biennial budget and coincided with an update to Chapter 91 of Wisconsin State Statutes.

2009: The Sauk County Board of Supervisors approved the Sauk County Comprehensive Plan entitled, 'Positioning Sauk County For The Future'.

2011: The Sauk County Land Conservation and Planning and Zoning Departments combined to form the Conservation, Planning, and Zoning Department.

2011: Fairfield AEA is established, encompassing 9,501 acres.

2013: DATCP certified the farmland preservation plan.

2013: County board approved the farmland preservation plan.

2014: Town of Excelsior Adopted Exclusive Agriculture Zoning

2019: Conservation, Planning and Zoning Department became the Land Resources and Environment Department.

2020: Bear Creek AEA is established, encompassing 30,691 acres.

2023: Planning work on the farmland preservation plan update began.

2023: Farmland Preservation Program received legislative updates, increasing tax credits for those enrolled in the program.

2024: Dellona AEA is established, encompassing 8,285 acres.

2025: Woodland AEA is established, encompassing 20,410 acres.





### **Overview of the 1979 Farmland Preservation Plan and the 1979 and 2006 Addendums**

The first Sauk County Farmland Preservation Plan was adopted in 1979 and provided policy guidance related to:

- Developing and adopting an Exclusive Agriculture Zoning District;
- Implementing conservation practices;
- Establishing farmland preservation plan maps for each town.

The 1979 addendum provided additional policy guidance to:

- Recommend the development of a Purchase of Development Rights program, with an emphasis on purchasing agricultural conservation easements.

The 2006 addendum provided additional policy guidance to:

- Detail the planned unit development, cluster development and density-based zoning program including residential siting and land preservation standards;
- Update Farmland Preservation Plan maps for consistency with future land uses identified in those towns with adopted comprehensive plans.

The 2013 plan rewrite focused on:

- Working with each town to review and where necessary update the Farmland Preservation Plan maps and where applicable assuring consistency with future land use maps in the town comprehensive plans;
- Developed plan goals, objectives and policies around key topic areas utilizing input from farmer-led facilitated focus groups.

The Sauk County Land Resources and Environment Department led the development of the original plan and addendums along with securing certification from the Wisconsin Department of Agriculture, Trade, and Consumer Protection (DATCP). As a result of this overall and ongoing farmland preservation planning effort, the Sauk County Farmland Preservation Plan, addendums, and implementation ordinances have received certification from DATCP, and continue to be the primary tools to preserve agricultural land in towns that have adopted Exclusive Agriculture Zoning.





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## The Planning Process

The Land Resources and Environment Department provided oversight to the planning process and to the development of implementation strategies adopted as part of this Farmland Preservation Plan. Public engagement for the plan consisted of listening sessions, which were hosted across the county in February 2024. The Sauk County Land Resources and Environment Department staff gathered data, conducted the listening sessions, and worked with the towns to update the Farmland Preservation Plan Map.

## Community Participation

Community participation during the planning process occurred in several different ways. The following is a summary of efforts to solicit public input:

- The LRE Department developed a farmland preservation survey that was sent to producers in multiple newsletters and listservs.
- An ESRI StoryMap was developed to share the planning process, along with other resources. This was promoted on the department's social media and web-page.
  - Updates, information, listening session meeting times and contact information were posted to the StoryMap.
- The LRE Department decided on three listening sessions that would be hosted around the county.
  - The listening sessions were promoted via FSA eNewsletter, WRPQ (radio), Magnum Media (radio), Facebook, MailChimp, a flyer created by the department, and a press release.
  - These listening sessions were hosted in February 2024 in Rock Springs, La Valle, and Plain.
  - Attendance was low, but the agricultural producers who attended were able to engage in long-form conversations with LRE staff.
  - These conversations provided an opportunity for the department to understand concerns and goals that producers have for themselves and their livelihoods.
  - Discussions at the listening sessions included succession planning for farmers, understanding what conservation resources are needed and what is working, discussions around creating a new agricultural enterprise area (AEA) in Woodland, and developing a better understanding of residents' opinions on nonfarm residential development.
- An online forum was provided where a draft plan was shared. The draft plan and maps were also sent to townships.
- The Land Resources and Extension Committee held a public hearing on [February 2025](#).

## Plan Implementation, Maintenance and Review

The Land Resources and Environment Department may review and monitor this plan with the LRE Committee periodically to seek policy directives regarding implementation efforts and potential plan amendments. Without periodic review, this plan has the potential to lose its relevance as conditions change, specific projects are implemented, or as new priorities emerge.



# CONDITIONS & TRENDS

This chapter provides an overview of Sauk County and the general context and trends with which this Farmland Preservation Plan is based. While much information was obtained from the county and local plans, additional background information and assessments are presented in:

- [Positioning Sauk County for the Future, A Comprehensive Plan for Organizations, Businesses, and Governments in Sauk County](#), adopted in 2009;
- The [Land and Water Resource Management Plan](#), adopted in 2018;
- Various local comprehensive plans, which were originally developed as part of the state's Smart Growth Law and have recently been updated. These plans can be found on [Sauk County's website](#).

## **Environmental Resources**

To sustain agriculture production of food, fiber, and fuel for the world population of over eight billion people, the agriculture community requires access to affordable resources and markets, available land, healthy soil and water.

## **Geology and Soils**

There are three major geological regions of Sauk County which influence the major soil types found. These are often categorized as The Driftless Area, the Glaciated Area and the Baraboo Hills.

The Driftless Area comprises the western four-fifths of Sauk County. There is no evidence of this area having been glaciated for at least 750,000 years. Because the western portions of



Sauk County are unglaciated, the topography has been sculpted by flowing water for thousands of years, resulting in relatively narrow ridges and steep-sided valleys carved into Cambrian dolomite and sandstone formations. The uplands are typically underlain by dolomite. Soils in the Driftless Area are characterized as moderately well drained to excessively well drained soils that have a sandy loam to silt loam, loamy to sandy surface and a sandy loam to silt loam, loamy, sandy, or clayey subsoil, underlain by sandstone and dolostone bedrock.[3]

The Glaciated Area in the eastern one-fifth of Sauk County includes rolling terrain with intricate slopes composed of glacial till (clay, silt, sand, boulders, and other debris transported and deposited by glacial ice), and sediment deposited in glacial lakes and on the floodplains of glacial melt water rivers. The majority of the soils found in the glaciated eastern portion of Sauk County are characterized as being moderately well drained to excessively drained; having a loamy or sandy surface and subsurface layer, underlain by outwash and glacial till.[4]

The Baraboo Hills (also known as the Baraboo Range or the Baraboo Bluffs) are centered across the middle section of the county, forming one of the more significant topographic features. The bluffs are composed of Precambrian red quartzite, which is one of the hardest known rock types. Soils on the Baraboo Bluffs are characterized as well drained, medium textured soils over shallow quartzite rock outcroppings. Portions of the Baraboo Bluffs occur in both the Driftless Area and the Glaciated Area.[5]

### **Soil Erosion**

Soil erosion varies depending on soil type, slope, time of year, the amount and intensity of rainfall events as well as activities occurring on the soil at a given time. Many of the soils in Sauk County are susceptible to erosion. Whenever soil erosion processes equal those of soil building, we refer to the maintenance of this balance as tolerable soil loss, or “T.” When soil building processes exceed soil erosion levels, the field has a soil loss less than “T”. When soil erosion exceeds soil building, the field has a soil loss greater than “T”.

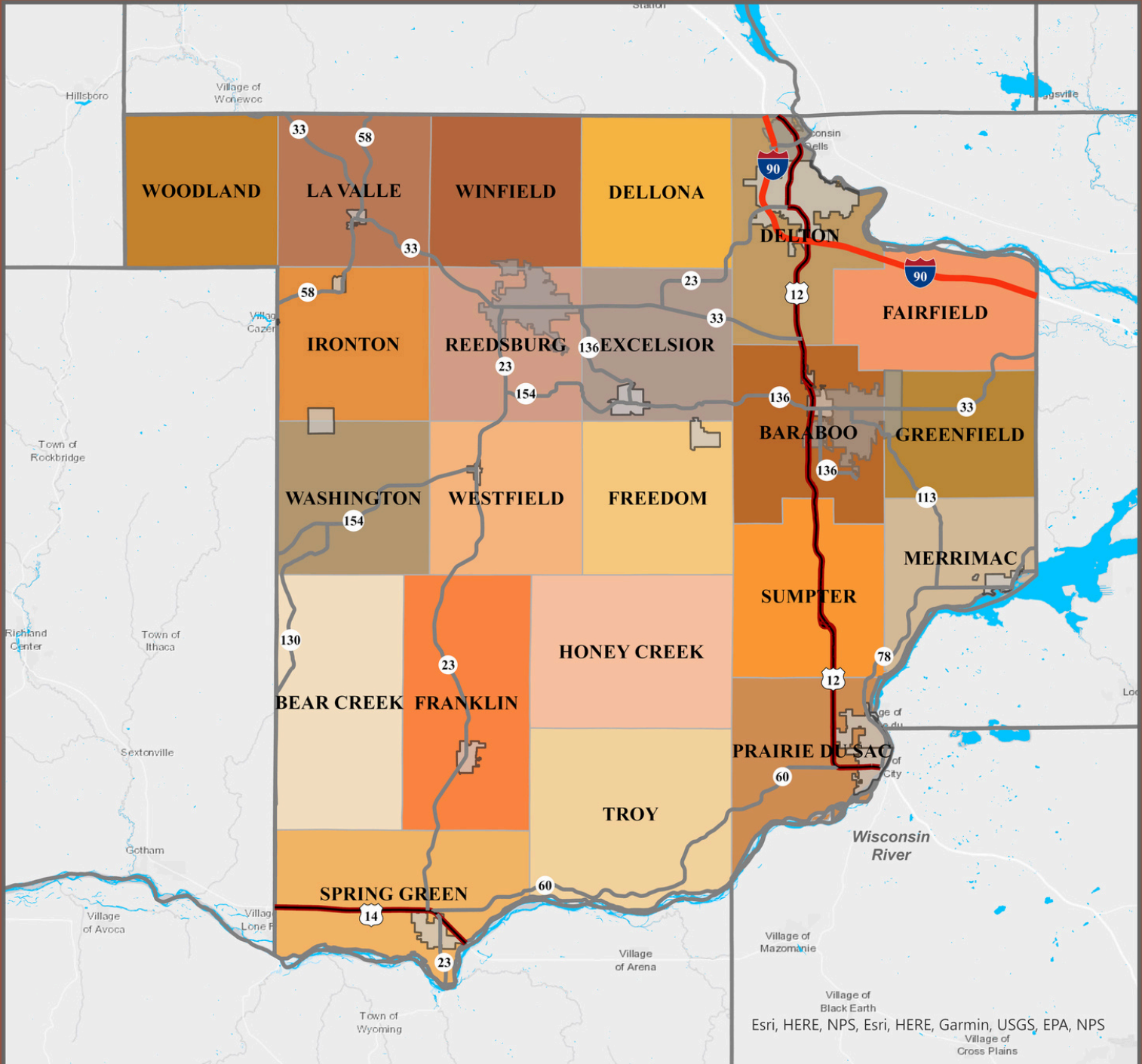
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[3] SAUK COUNTY LAND AND WATER RESOURCE MANAGEMENT PLAN, JANUARY 2018.

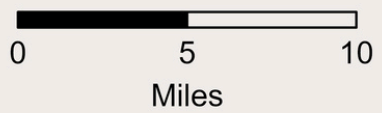
[4] IBID

[5] IBID

# Sauk County Farmland Preservation Plan: Towns



Esri, HERE, NPS, Esri, HERE, Garmin, USGS, EPA, NPS  
 Village of Cross Plains



## Legend

### Transportation

- U.S. Highway
- Interstate
- State Highway

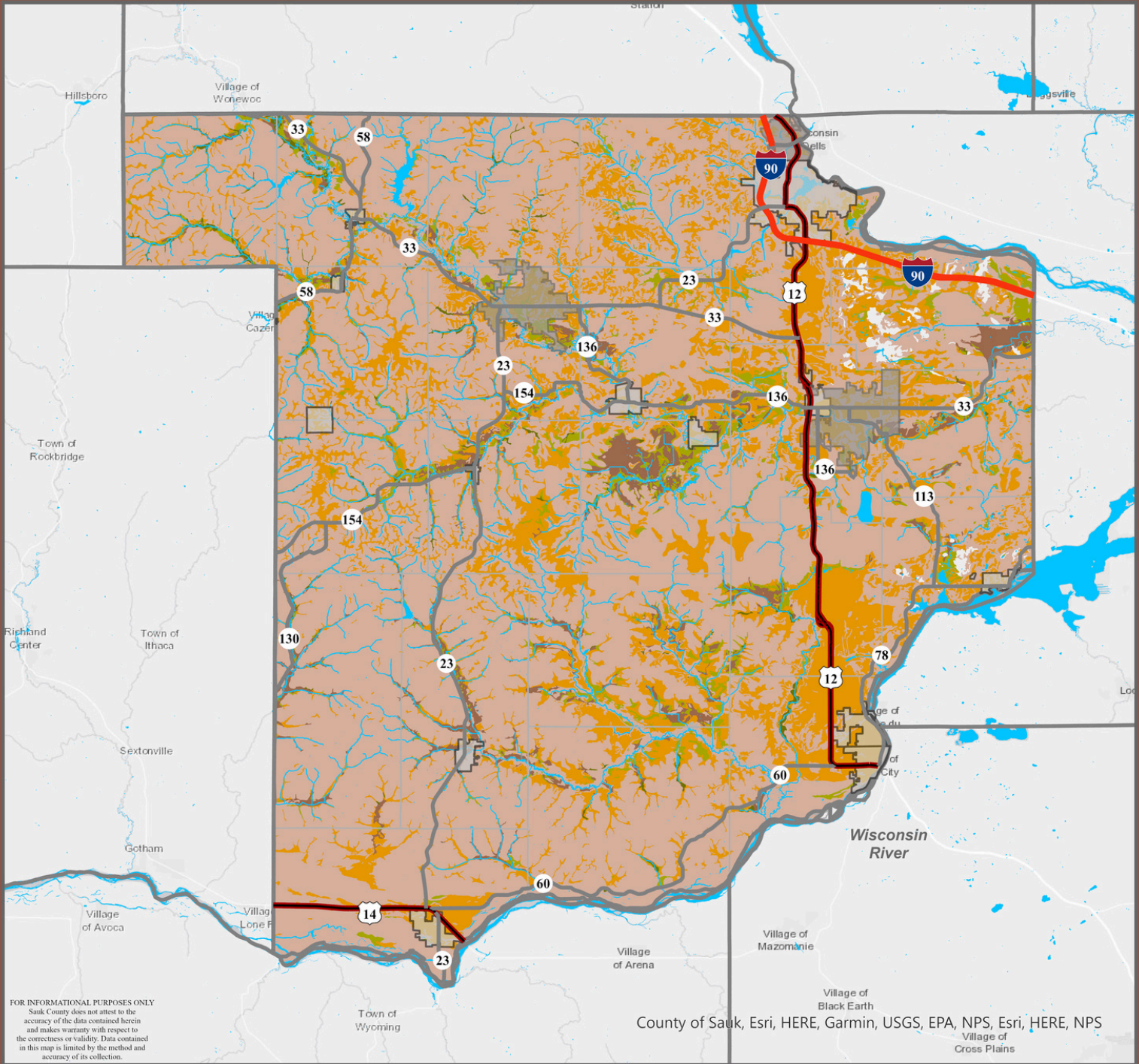
### Municipal Boundaries

- Village
- City
- Municipal Boundaries
- County Boundaries



FOR INFORMATIONAL PURPOSES ONLY  
 Sauk County does not attest to the accuracy of the data contained herein and makes warranty with respect to the correctness or validity. Data contained in this map is limited by the method and accuracy of its collection.

# Sauk County Farmland Preservation Plan: Farmland Classification



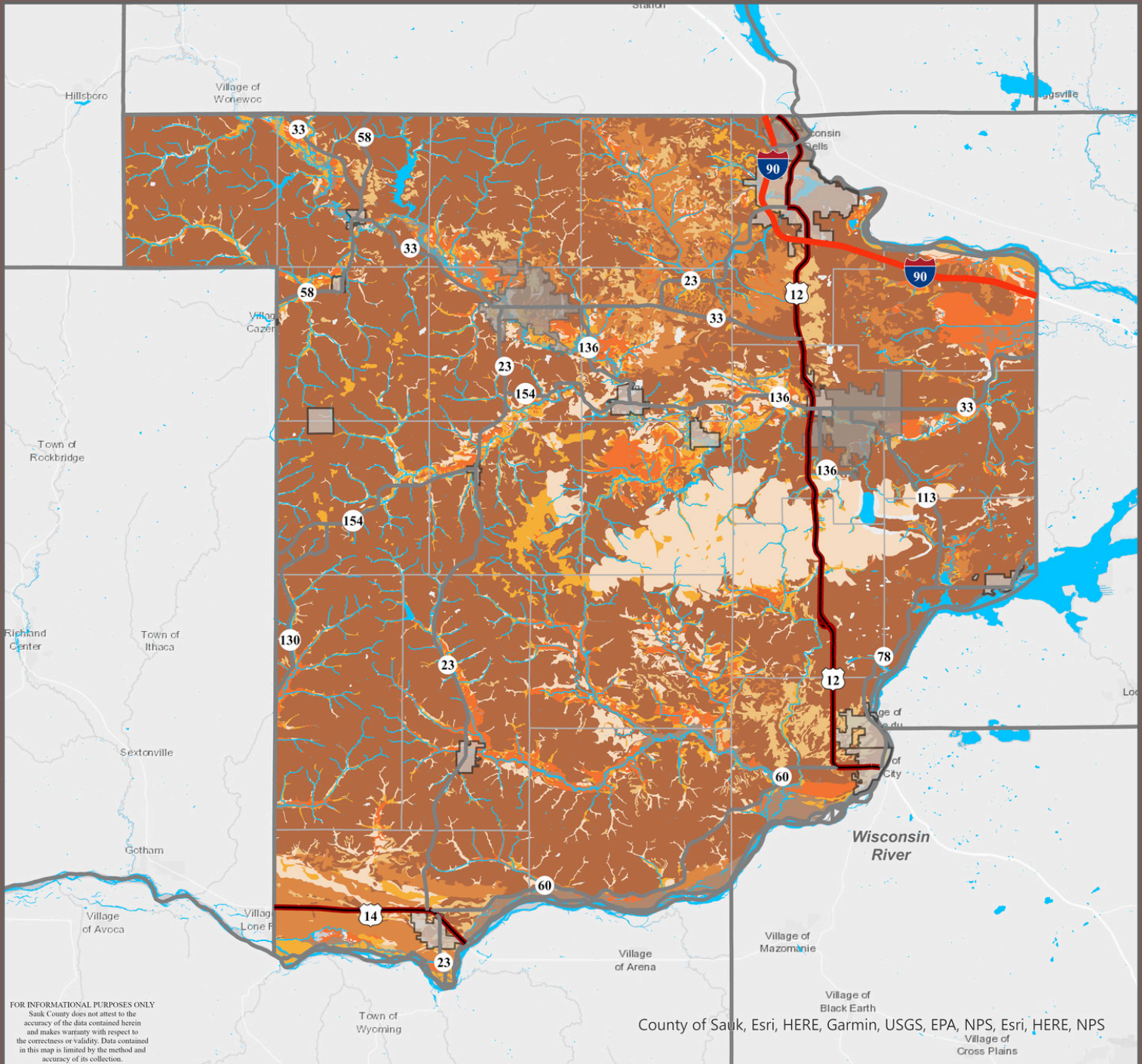
0 5 10  
Miles

**Legend**

|                                  |                             |                       |
|----------------------------------|-----------------------------|-----------------------|
| <b>Farmland Classification</b>   | <b>Municipal Boundaries</b> | <b>Transportation</b> |
| Not prime farmland               | Village                     | U.S. Highway          |
| Prime farmland                   | City                        | Interstate            |
| Prime if drained                 | Town                        | State Highway         |
| Prime if drained and not flooded | County Boundaries           |                       |
| Prime if not flooded             |                             |                       |



# Sauk County Farmland Preservation Plan: Soil Drainage Class



## Legend

### Soils Drainage Class

- Excessively drained
- Moderately well drained
- Poorly drained
- Somewhat excessively drained
- Somewhat poorly drained
- Very poorly drained
- Well drained

### Municipal Boundaries

- Village
- City
- Town
- County Boundaries

### Transportation

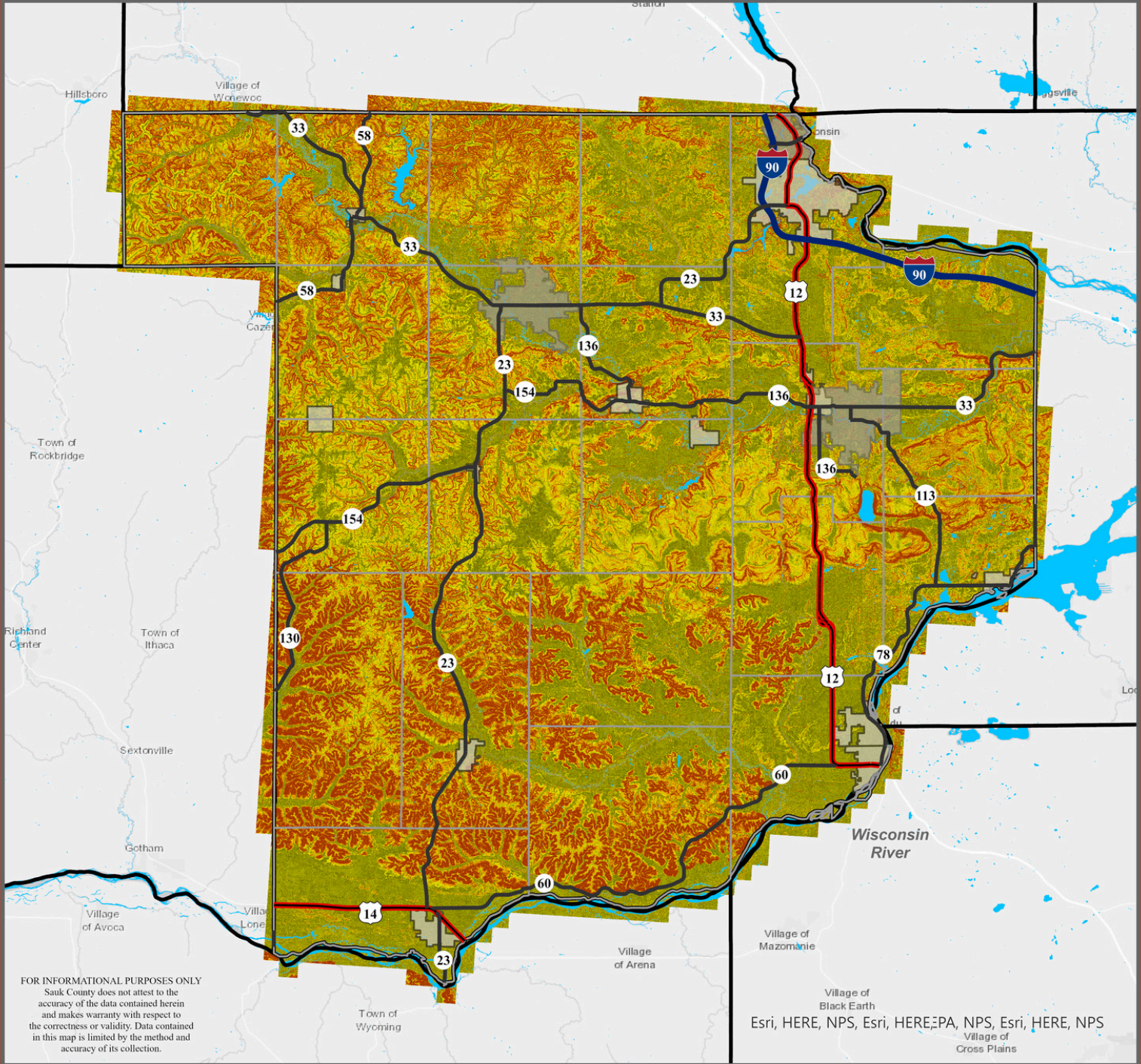
- U.S. Highway
- Interstate
- State Highway



### Sauk County, WI

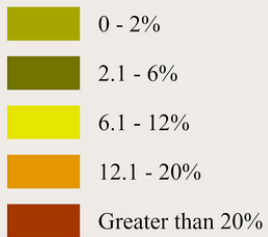


# Sauk County Farmland Preservation Plan: Slope



## Legend

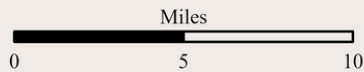
### Slope



### Municipal Boundaries



### Transportation



## Sauk County, WI





## Water

All of the watersheds within Sauk County fall within the Lower Wisconsin River Basin. Many of Sauk County’s streams are fed by permanent springs. Local differences in the quality of surface water and groundwater in these watersheds reflect current land use practices, the composition of soil and rock through which the water moves, and the length of time the water is in contact with these materials.[6]

Land uses affect the quality and quantity of surface water. Agriculture is the predominant land use in the county and has an influence on the surface water resource. Increased development in urban regions has also impacted water bodies through the potential increase in delivery of nutrients and other pollutants through storm water discharges as well as impacting the flow rates of rivers and streams with potentially increased peak flows and reduced average flow rates.

## Water Supply and Use

In Sauk County, water use for agriculture has remained relatively consistent since 1990. Notable increases occur in the years 2000 and 2005 when the county experienced a moderate to extreme drought. [7] Sauk County is fortunate to currently have a large enough supply of groundwater to meet its needs.

**Sauk County water use by year, In millions of gallons per day**

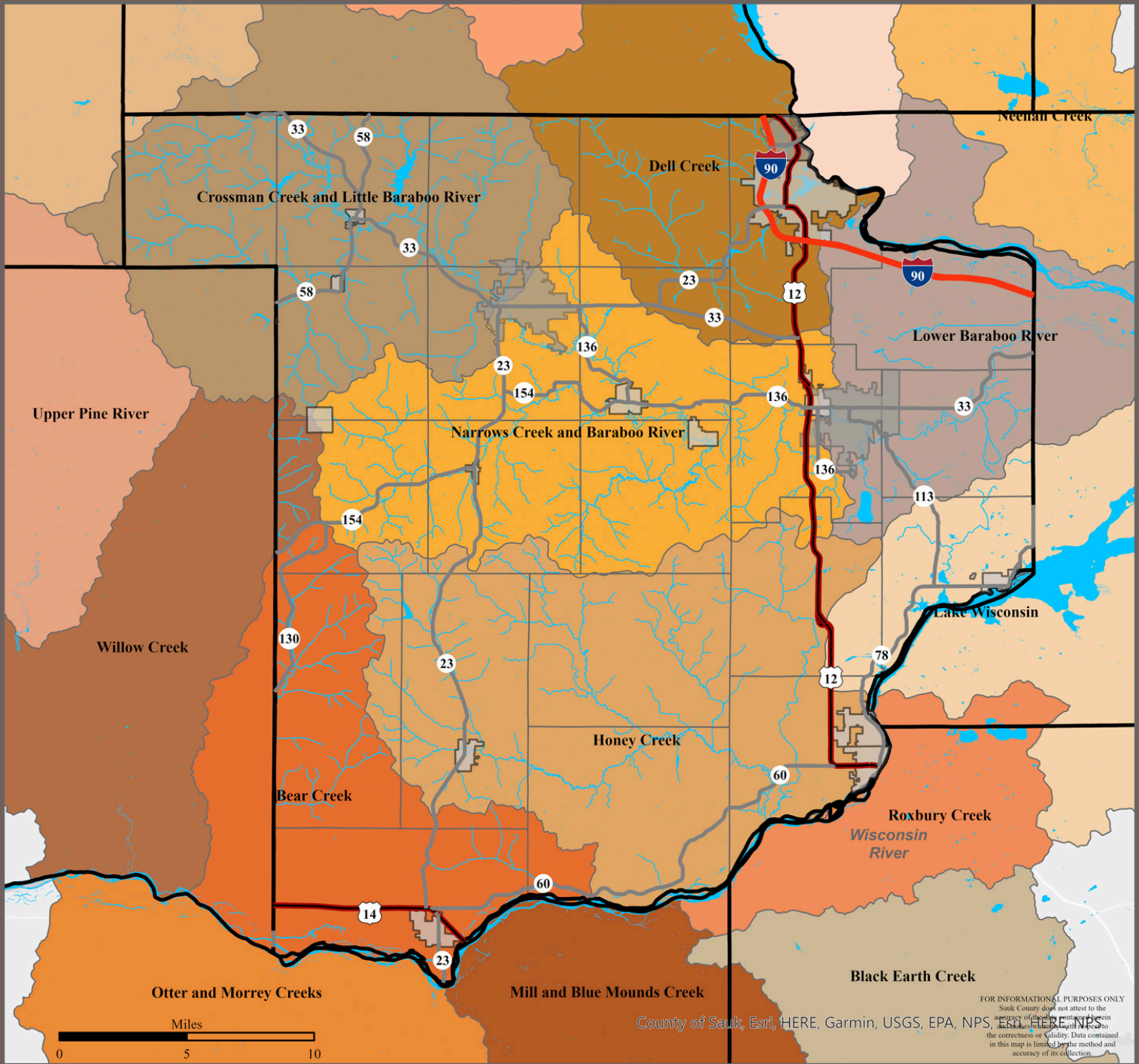
|                 | 1990 | 1995 | 2000  | 2005  | 2010 | 2015 |
|-----------------|------|------|-------|-------|------|------|
| Livestock       | NA   | NA   | 1.44  | 1.86  | 1.84 | 1.76 |
| Crop Irrigation | 6.65 | 6.43 | 10.53 | 12.57 | 4.87 | 6.44 |
| Total Water Use | 6.65 | 6.43 | 11.97 | 14.43 | 6.71 | 8.20 |

[6] SAUK COUNTY LAND AND WATER RESOURCE MANAGEMENT PLAN, 2018.

[7] USGS NATIONAL WATER INFORMATION SYSTEM WEB INTERFACE.



# Sauk County Farmland Preservation Plan: Watersheds



## Legend

### WDNR Watersheds

- Honey Creek
- Lower Baraboo River
- Bear Creek
- Narrows Creek and Baraboo River
- Lake Wisconsin
- Willow Creek
- Crossman Creek and Little Baraboo River
- Dell Creek
- Roxbury Creek
- Mill and Blue Mounds Creek
- Otter and Morrey Creeks
- Upper Pine River
- Black Earth Creek
- Duck and Plainville Creeks
- Neenah Creek
- Seymour Creek and Upper Baraboo River
- Lower Lemonweir River
- Yahara River and Lake Mendota

### Municipal Boundaries

- Village
- City
- Town
- County Boundaries

### Transportation

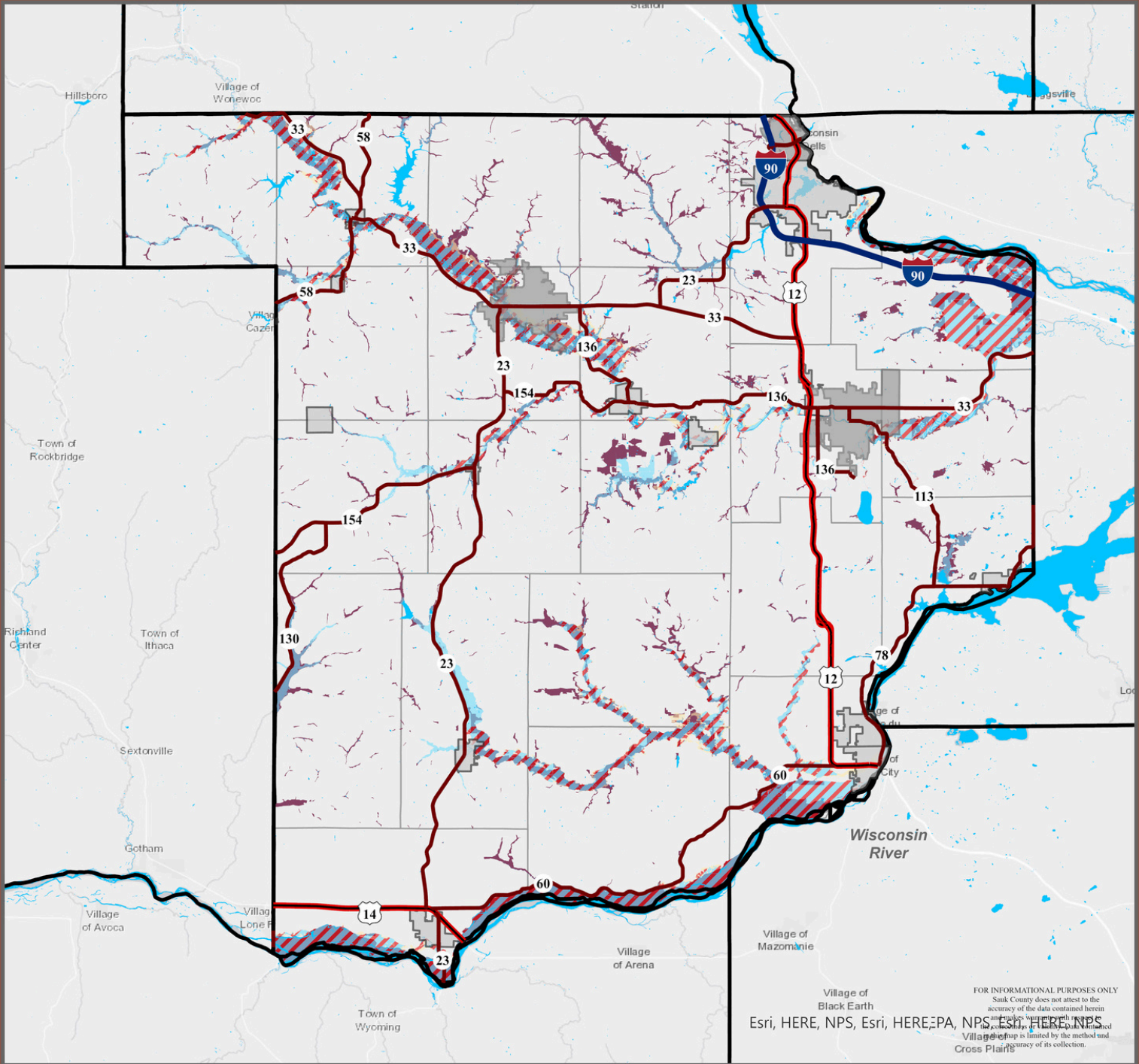
- U.S. Highway
- Interstate
- State Highway



## Sauk County, WI



# Sauk County Farmland Preservation Plan: Water Resources



## Legend

### FEMA Flood Zones

- 500 year
- 100 year
- Floodway
- DNR Wetlands

### Surface Water

- Stream or River
- Lake or Pond

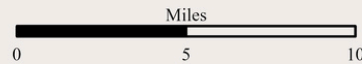
### Municipal Boundaries

- Village
- City

- Town
- County Boundaries

### Transportation

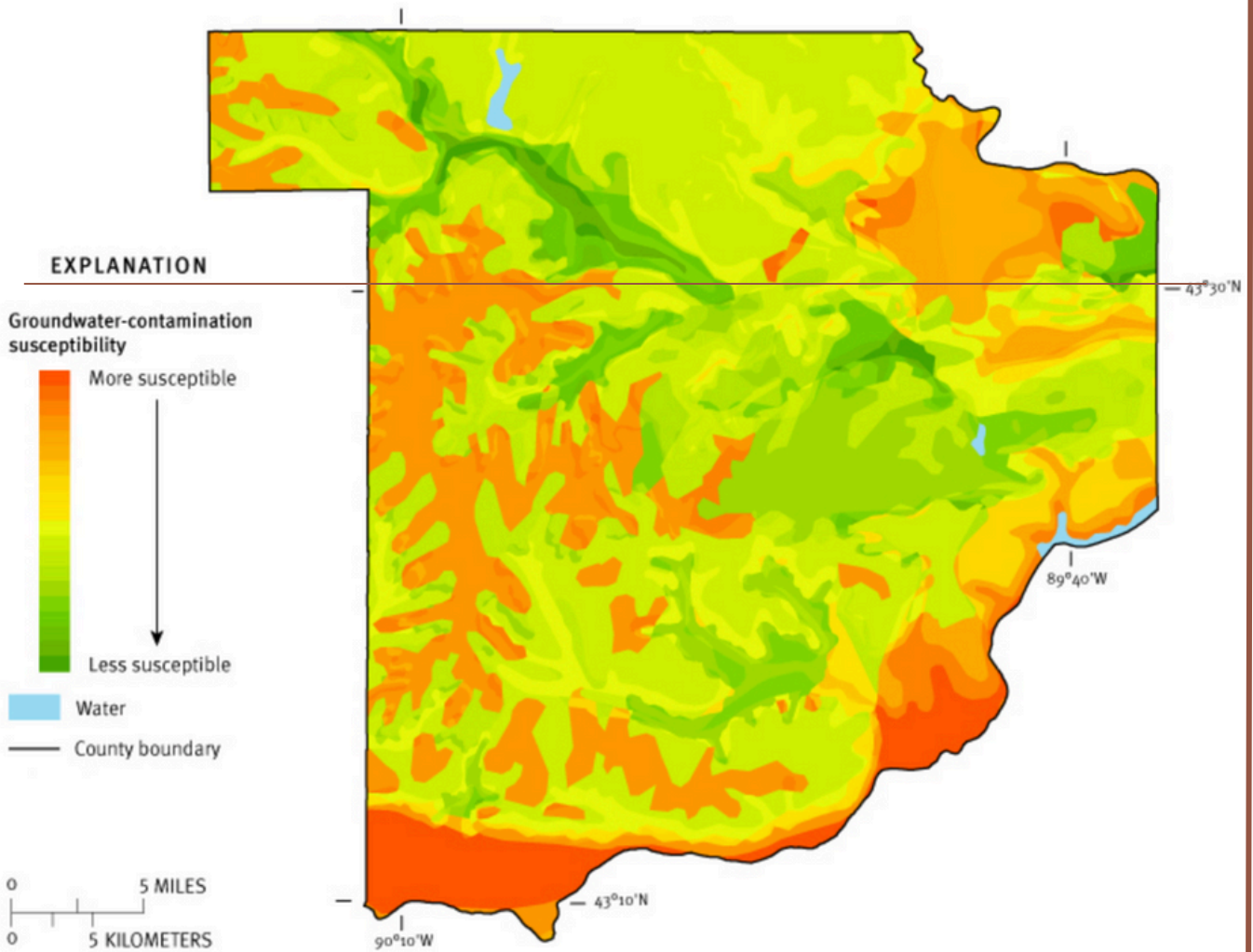
- U.S. Highway
- Interstate
- State Highway



## Sauk County, WI



## Sauk County – Groundwater-Contamination Susceptibility Analysis



This groundwater-contamination susceptibility map is a composite of five resource characteristic maps, each of which was derived from generalized statewide information at small scales, and cannot be used for any site-specific purposes.

Groundwater-Contamination Susceptibility Analysis figure created by United States Geological Survey, available at <https://wi.water.usgs.gov/gwcomp/find/sauk/susceptibility.html>

As illustrated in the previous water use table, groundwater is the major source of water supply in Sauk County. Both quantity and quality of ground water can vary. Groundwater is found in varying depths throughout the county. General topography, the distance above the permanent stream level, and the geological character of the underlying rock formations are factors that influence the water's depth, location, and quantity.

The difference in land uses along with the composition, solubility, and surface area of particles of soil and rock through which the water moves, as well as in the length of time the water is in contact with these materials, results in local differences in the quality of groundwater in Sauk County.

The most common type of aquifer in the western portion of Sauk County is the sandstone and dolomite aquifer. It consists of layers of sandstone and dolomite bedrock units that vary greatly in their water yielding properties. Overall, this aquifer provides reliable supplies of water suitable for virtually all uses.



The east-central portion of Sauk County is underlain by quartzite bedrock. Drilling wells in these hard rock areas is expensive and yields are generally low, often barely sufficient for domestic purposes.[8]

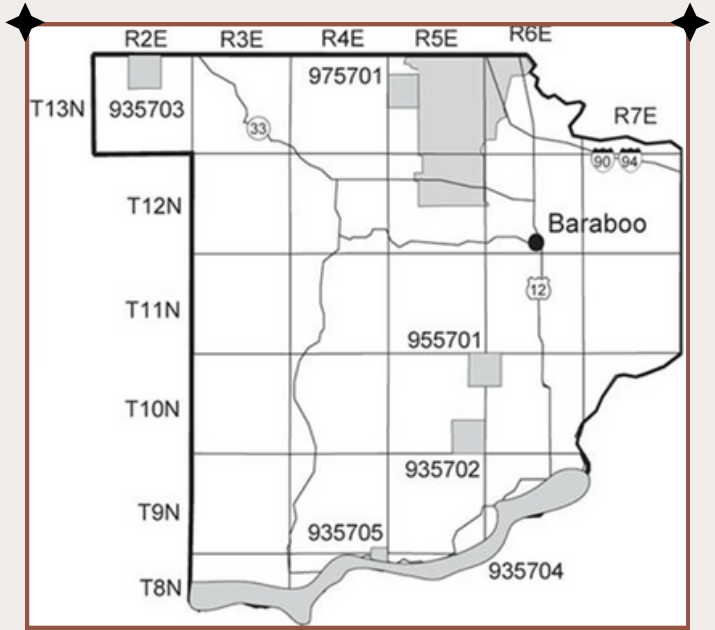
Another important source of groundwater is in the subsurface sand and gravel deposits along the Wisconsin River and the lower reaches of the Baraboo River. These deposits yield large quantities of water and are often susceptible to human-induced pollutants.

Atrazine, coliform bacteria, and nitrates are common contaminants found in Sauk County's groundwater resource. Nitrates appear to be the biggest threat to the county's groundwater. Fertilizer, septic system effluent, animal waste, and landfills can all contribute to elevated nitrate levels. State and federal laws set the maximum allowable level of

nitrate-nitrogen in public drinking water at ten parts per million (ppm). Based on groundwater samples analyzed by Sauk County Health Department, Central Wisconsin Groundwater Center, Wisconsin Department of Agriculture Trade and Consumer Protection (DATCP), and Wisconsin Department of Natural Resource (DNR), the highest nitrate levels came from the northeastern and southwestern portion of the county where the permeable soils facilitate the movement of nitrates into the groundwater.

The map below depicts the county's atrazine prohibition areas.[9] These are determined by a number of factors including soil type and places in which atrazine has been detected. These areas cover approximately 38,700 acres. The proper use of atrazine is not strictly enforced, although it is monitored by DATCP.

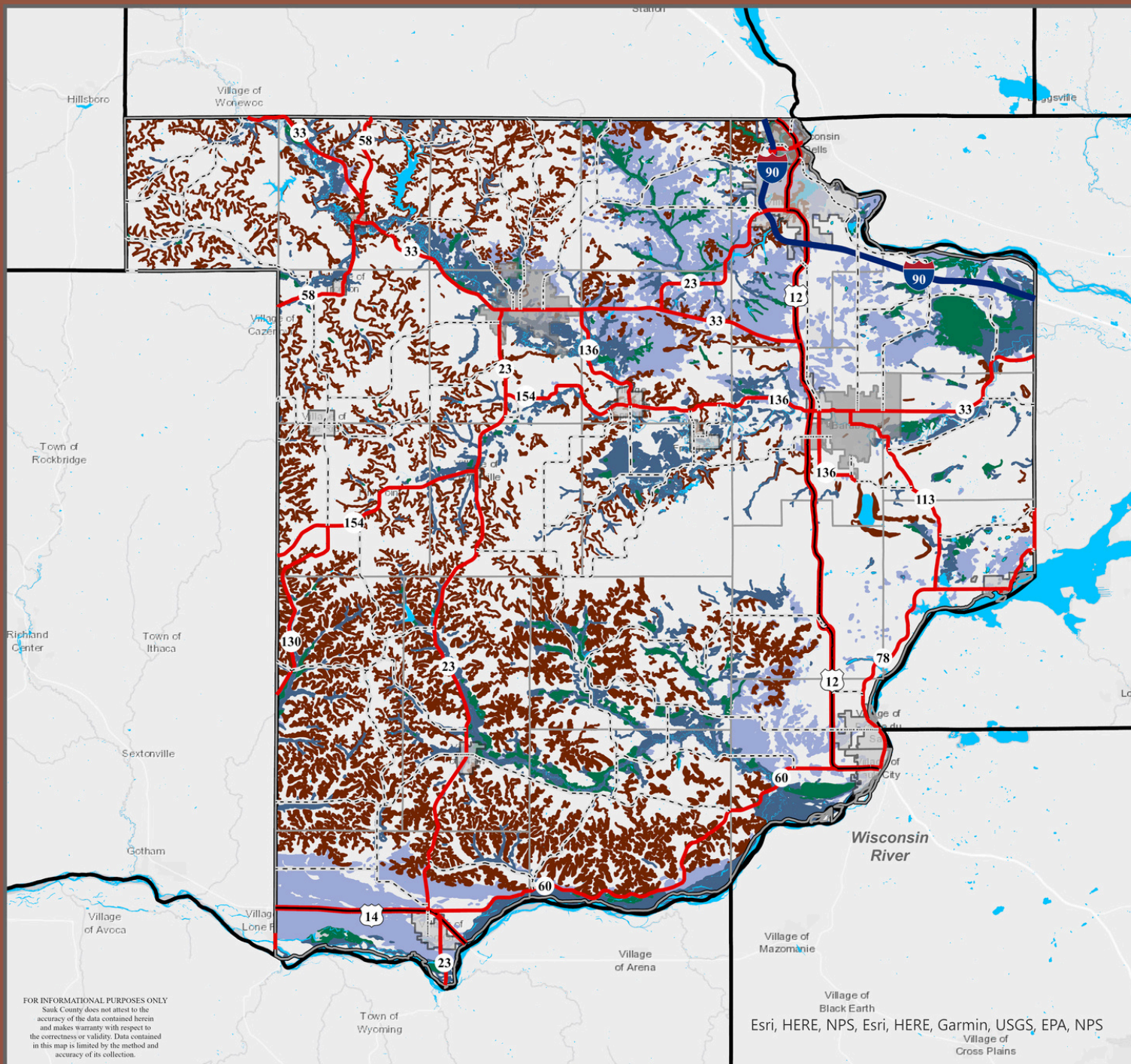
Another emerging contaminant is Perfluoroalkyl and Polyfluoroalkyl (PFAS) Substances. While these contaminants have been phased out of their use in commercial products, they are still found in the environment from these historical uses. Current federal drinking water standards are 70 parts per trillion (ppt) for PFAS chemicals, a regulation in which the State of Wisconsin has adopted. There are no current Federal standards for groundwater.



ATRAZINE FIGURE CREATED BY WISCONSIN DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE, TRADE AND CONSUMER PROTECTION, AVAILABLE AT [HTTP://WWW.DATCP.STATE.WI.US/ARM/AGRICULTURE/PEST-FERT/PESTICIDES/ATRAZINE/CNTY\\_LIST.JSP](http://www.datcp.state.wi.us/arm/agriculture/pest-fert/pesticides/atrazine/cnty_list.jsp)

[10] SAUK COUNTY LAND AND WATER RESOURCE MANAGEMENT PLAN, 2018. SAUK COUNTY LAND CONSERVATION DEPARTMENT, [HTTP://WI.WATER.USGS.GOV/GWCOMP/FIND/SAUK/INDEX.HTML](http://WI.WATER.USGS.GOV/GWCOMP/FIND/SAUK/INDEX.HTML) , WISCONSIN DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE, TRADE, AND CONSUMER PROTECTION

# Sauk County Farmland Preservation Plan: Fall 590 Soil Restrictions



## Legend

### Fall 590 Soil Restrictions

- P: Excessively drained
- R: 20" or less to bedrock
- W: 12" or less to apparent water table
- W: 12" or less to apparent water table; P: Excessively drained

### Municipal Boundaries

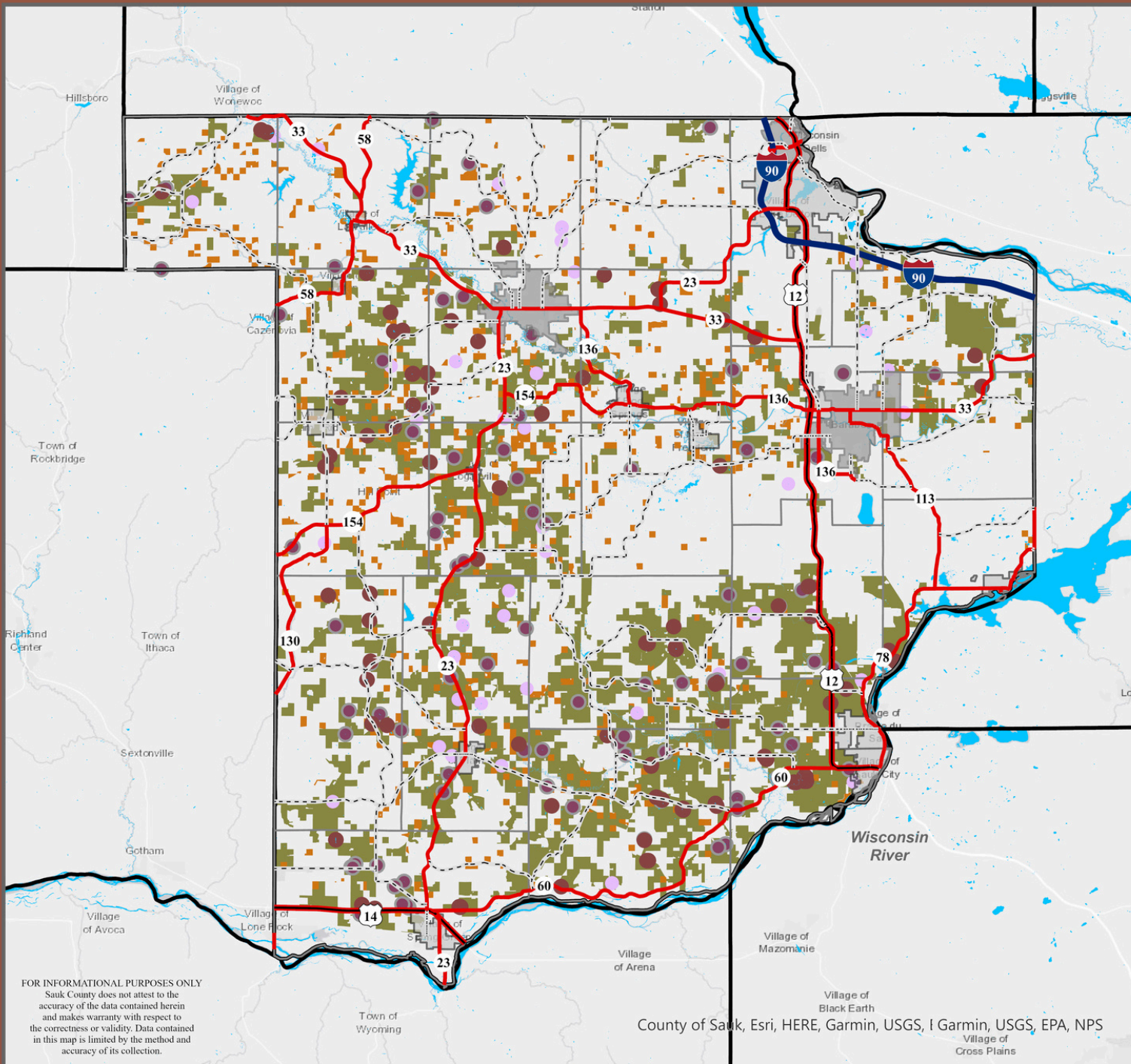
- Village
- City
- Town
- County Boundaries

### Transportation

- U.S. Highway
- Interstate
- State Highway
- County



# Sauk County Farmland Preservation Plan: Manure Management\*



## Legend

- |                            |                             |                       |
|----------------------------|-----------------------------|-----------------------|
| Permitted Manure Storage   | <b>Municipal Boundaries</b> | <b>Transportation</b> |
| Unpermitted Manure Storage | Village                     | U.S. Highway          |
| Closed Manure Storage      | City                        | Interstate            |
| Livestock Structures       | Town                        | State Highway         |
| Acres Covered in NMPs      | County Boundaries           | County                |



\*DATA UPDATED IN 2018



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### **Soil and Water Resource Management Programs Assistance**

There are several programs available at the county level to assist agriculture producers and other landowners with managing soil and water resources. The Farmland Preservation Program provides participating farmers the ability to claim tax credits if they comply with soil and water conservation standards as set forth in the cropland standards, manure storage and management as well as livestock standards. The Land and Water Resource Management (LWRM) Program administered by the LRE department assists landowners by providing cost-share and technical assistance for the implementation of best management practices. LRE also assists farmers with managing animal waste and conducts farm inspections to ensure that appropriate practices are in place.

The United States Department of Agriculture Farm Service Agency (USDA-FSA) and the Natural Resources Conservation Service (USDA-NRCS) both have offices in the West Square Building. The Sauk County FSA office provides disaster and drought information, assists farm producers with the Highly Erodible Land and Wetland Conservation compliance, and administers programs such as the Conservation Reserve Program (CRP). CRP is a voluntary program which provides financial incentive to landowners who wish to set aside marginal producing lands, provide habitat, reduce soil erosion and protect surface waters from sediments.[10] A change in market demands, including increased ethanol production and organic farming, has contributed to the recent trend of declining CRP enrollment. Sauk County FSA also reports that Sauk County is seeing a trend of declining CRP enrollment. If market demands continue, it is anticipated that these trends will continue.

The NRCS assists landowners and farm operators with conservation plans which are designed to benefit the soil, water, air, plants, and animals in ways that result in healthy ecosystems and productive lands, as well as administering programs such as the Environmental Quality Incentive Program (EQIP) and the Conservation Stewardship Program (CSP).[11]

### **Natural Features and Resources**

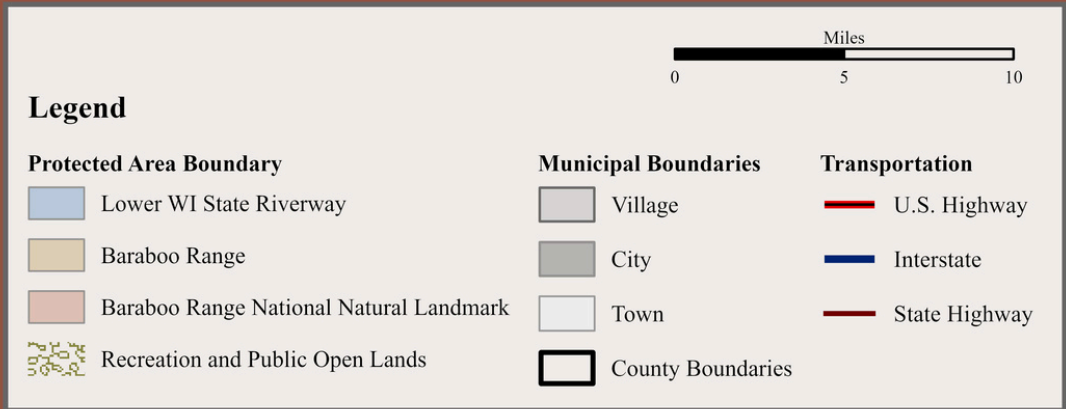
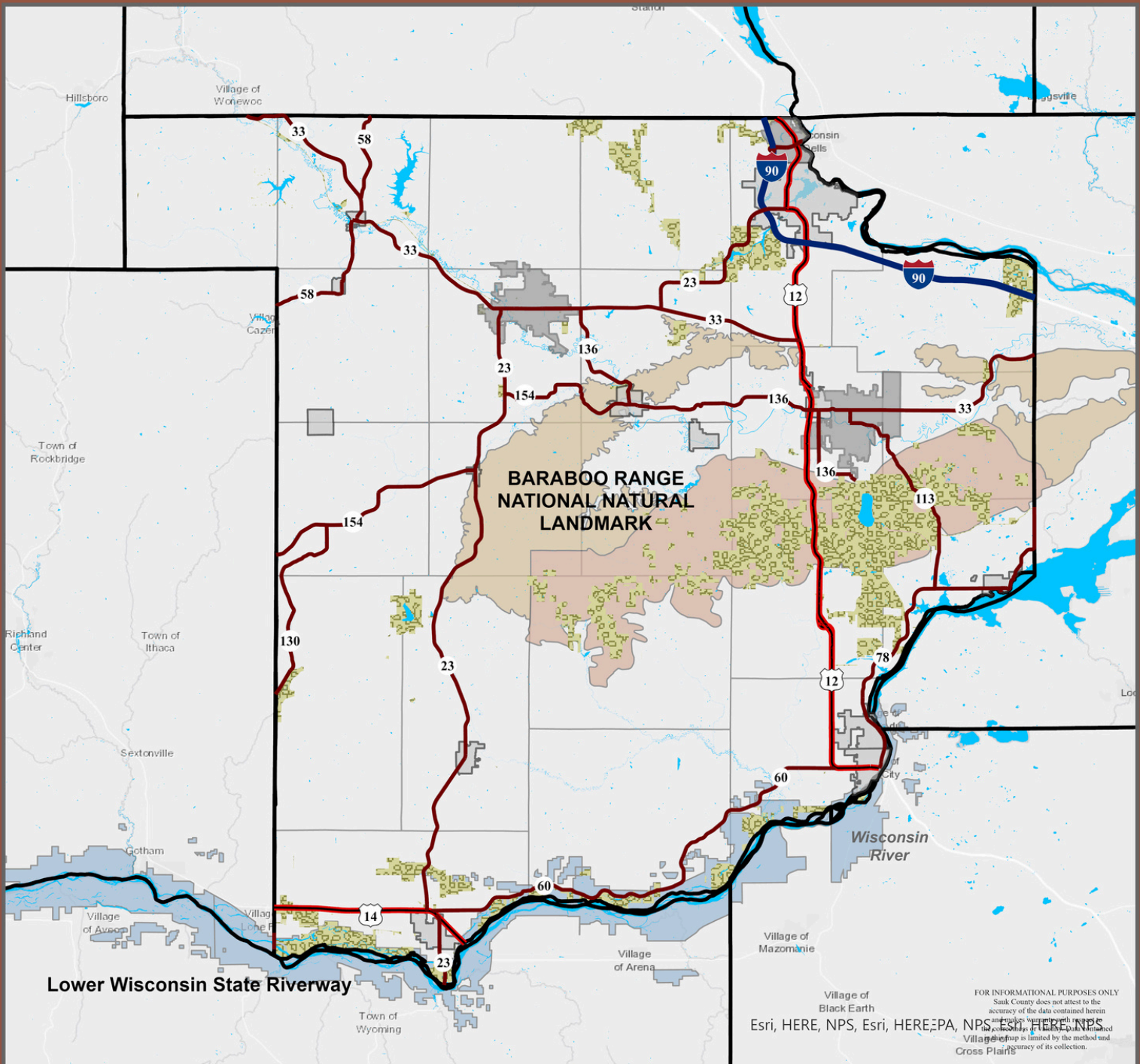
Approximately fifty-one percent of the land cover in Sauk County consists of crops, pasture and hay. Forests, including deciduous, evergreen or mixed forests comprise thirty-four and one-half percent of the land cover in Sauk County. A portion of these forests are considered agricultural forests. Within Sauk County, there are several natural areas with open waters, wetlands, non-agricultural forested lands, unique geological features, grasslands, varied plant habitats and outstanding scenic features. These areas comprise almost twenty-four percent of the land cover. Locations such as Wisconsin Dells and Devils Lake have been a draw for visitors for over 150 years. There are a variety of natural features and resources in the county being conserved and preserved; from private lands to local and county parks, from state, federal and tribal parks and lands to lands owned or managed by non-profit organizations and partnerships. As the Resource Conservation Area map depicts, these lands are scattered throughout the county with two areas of concentration creating environmental corridors: The Baraboo Range National Natural Landmark within the Baraboo Range, and the Lower Wisconsin State Riverway.

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[10] USDA, FSA [11] [HTTP://W1.WATER.USGS.GOV/GWCOMP/FIND/SAUK/INDEX.HTML](http://w1.water.usgs.gov/gwcomp/find/sauk/index.html) WISCONSIN DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE, TRADE, AND CONSUMER PROTECTION, MARCH, 2013

[11] IBID

# Sauk County Farmland Preservation Plan: Resource Conservation







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## Conservation Organizations and Programs at Work Throughout Sauk County

As depicted on the Conservation Preservation Area map, many conservation groups and organizations own property in the county, much of which lies within or adjacent to the Baraboo Range Natural National Landmark (BRNNL) and the Lower Wisconsin State Riverway (LWR). Non-profit organizations including The Nature Conservancy (TNC), the Wisconsin Society of Ornithology (WSO), the University of Wisconsin Board of Regents, and the Riverland Conservancy (RLC) own and manage lands for conservation of unique ecosystem needs. The WI DNR manages Devils Lake, Natural Bridge, Rocky Arbor, and Mirror Lake State Park. Sauk County owns numerous parks and forests around the county. A complete list of all county parks can be found [here](#). Sauk County also administers the [Planned Rural Development \(PRD\) program](#) which is aimed at preserving both agriculture and natural lands.

### The Nature Conservancy

The Nature Conservancy (TNC) is a private, non-profit conservation organization. Its mission is to preserve the plants, animals, and natural communities that represent the diversity of life on earth by protecting the lands and waters they need to survive. It does so through land acquisition from willing sellers or donors, entering into voluntary conservation easements agreements and by participating in land and forest management activities. TNC opens preserves to the public for hiking and bird watching, with some being open to deer hunters. TNC owns 9,844 acres at ten preserves across the Baraboo Hills, including: Baxter's Hollow, Hemlock Draw, Morgan Hone Preserve and Pine Hollow[12].

### Wisconsin Society of Ornithology

The Wisconsin Society of Ornithology (WSO) was organized in 1939 to encourage the study of Wisconsin birds. The work of WSO has grown in scope and now includes supporting the research and habitat protection necessary to preserve Wisconsin birdlife, as well as participating in community education and outreach efforts. WSO owns, manages and preserves the Honey Creek Natural Area in the Baraboo Hills. This area comprises 263 acres of bog and woodland habitat and includes trails, picnic areas, rustic camping facilities, and the Cox Nature Center for local geology and habitat exhibits. [13] In total, WSO owns 372 acres in the Baraboo Hills.

### The Riverland Conservancy

The mission of the Riverland Conservancy (RLC) is to promote the conservation, protection, and restoration of the lands, waters, and natural communities that comprise our environmental heritage. It works to achieve its mission through education, stewardship, and partnerships. RLC has restored and continues to manage the Merrimac Preserve, more than 1,600 acres of forest, prairie, savanna, wetlands, and streams which provide an integral wildlife corridor between the Baraboo Bluffs and the Wisconsin River.[14]

### Sauk County Planned Rural Development Easements

Sauk County administers the Planned Rural Development (PRD) program as one means to ensure the preservation of agriculture lands while allowing for development at a density ratio of 1 home per 35 acres. Through the County PRD program, which was adopted in 2014,

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[12] [HTTPS://WWW.NATURE.ORG/EN-US/GET-INVOLVED/HOW-TO-HELP/PLACES-WE-PROTECT/PRIORITY-AREA-THE-BARABOO-HILLS/](https://www.nature.org/en-us/get-involved/how-to-help/places-we-protect/priority-area-the-baraboo-hills/)

[13] [HTTPS://WSOBIRDS.ORG/ABOUT-WSO/HONEY-CREEK-PRESERVE](https://wsobirds.org/about-wso/honey-creek-preserve)

[14] [HTTPS://RIVERLANDCONSERVANCY.ORG/MERRIMAC/](https://riverlandconservancy.org/merrimac/)



an agriculture landowner may develop parcels of land between one to five acres in size. In return, the landowner puts a preservation easement on agriculture or natural area lands which are equal in size to 35 acres less the developed parcel. The developed parcel must have minimal impact to the existing agricultural production and/or natural features of the land. As of December 2023, there are 154 PRDs throughout the County, several of which lie within or adjacent to the Baraboo Range and Lower Wisconsin State Riverway. This has resulted in 9,413 acres being preserved in exchange for 229 acres of development.

### **Baraboo Range**

Located in central Sauk County, the Baraboo Range is a remnant of the deposited sediment in an ancient sea. The Baraboo Range exhibits scenic beauty and contains vast diversity of topology, geological features, microclimates, soils, plants and animal species.[15] Within the Baraboo Range environmental corridor, 28 different types of forest, wetland and prairie have been identified in the Bluffs, providing habitat over 1,800 kinds of plants and animals, some of which are on the federal or state listed threatened or endangered species. As one of the largest tracts of hardwood upland forests in the Midwest, the Baraboo Range is crucial to many migrating and forest bird species[16]. The full extent of the Baraboo Range is outlined on two previous maps: the Land Cover map and the Resource Conservation Area map.

### **Baraboo Range National Natural Landmark**

There are 18 National Natural Landmark sites in the state of Wisconsin, one of which is within the Baraboo Range. The National Natural Landmark status recognizes this site as having geological and biological diversity, rarity and value. In recognition of the outstanding geological and ecological significance, 50,700 acres of the “South Range” were designated as the Baraboo Range National Natural Landmark (BRNNL) in 1974, and included on the Nature Conservancy’s list of “Last Great Places”. The National Natural Landmark status helps to raise awareness and encourage the conservation of this area[17].

The BRNNL is outlined on both the previous Land Cover map as well as the Resource Conservation Area map. Portions of the BRNNL are owned by individuals or corporations, non-profit organizations, or State agencies. The land in the BRNNL is conserved by these individuals as well as through the efforts of partnerships and programs such as the Baraboo Range Protection Program and land trusts such as the Baraboo Range Preservation Association.

[15] [DNR.WI.GOV/TOPIIC/](http://DNR.WI.GOV/TOPIIC/)

[16] THE NATURE CONSERVANCY AT [WWW.NATURE.ORG](http://WWW.NATURE.ORG)

[17]THE NATIONAL PARK SERVICE AT [WWW.NATURE.NPS.GOV/NNL](http://WWW.NATURE.NPS.GOV/NNL)



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### **Baraboo Range Protection Program**

Sauk County adopted The Baraboo Range Protection Program (BRPP) Plan in 1999. The Baraboo Range Protection Program protected natural resources in the Baraboo Range through the purchase of conservation easements. The program was part of the U.S. Highway 12 Memorandum of Agreement. The program completed the acquisition of 43 conservation easements, protecting 3,100 acres of Baraboo Range forest and farmland.

### **Baraboo Range Preservation Association**

The Baraboo Range Preservation Association (BRPA) is a land trust that ‘works to preserve and protect the qualities and culture of the Baraboo Range through promotion of ecologically responsible land use’. [18] They do so through collaborative efforts with other organizations, education outreach and the purchase of easements tailored to the needs of the land and landowner.

### **Lower Wisconsin State Riverway**

The Wisconsin River flows unimpeded from the dam in Prairie du Sac to the mouth of the Mississippi River in Prairie du Chien. This environmental corridor contains many habitats for wildlife and fisheries, sites of historical and archaeological significances as well as fantastic vistas. Two-thirds of the users of the LWR can be found on the portion which borders Sauk County; the area between Prairie du Sac and Spring Green. The LWR was established in 1989. There are six management units and four state natural areas within the Sauk County section of the LWR.[19]

The LWR Board aims to protect the nearly 80,000 acres of land on both sides of the river which make up the LWR. The goal of the Board is ‘to provide a quality public area for unique river corridor activities and compatible recreational pursuits; maintain the generally natural and scenic landscape of the Lower Wisconsin Riverway; and manage the corridor’s natural resources for the long-term benefit of the citizens of the area and state.’ [20] The board administers a system of performance standards and issues permits for structures and a variety of activities occurring within the Riverway. Agriculture activities are exempt from permitting.

### **Sauk County Farm**

The Sauk County farm, formerly known as the Sauk County Health Care Center, is located three miles south of Reedsburg, Wisconsin, at the intersection of State Roads 23 and 154. The County Farm is a roughly 566-acre property, originally called the County Poor Farm and Asylum, the site was initially purchased in 1871 by Sauk County to provide care and housing for impoverished, mentally ill, and disabled people. The County Farm’s healthcare institutions evolved significantly over the course of the 20th century and was renamed the Sauk County Healthcare Center in the 1970’s. It remained in use until 2009 when the decision was made to relocate to the Healthcare Center to the City of Reedsburg.



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[18] [HTTP://WWW.BARABOORANGE.ORG/](http://www.baraboorange.org/)

[19] [HTTP://LWR.STATE.WI.US/](http://lwr.state.wi.us/)

[20] [HTTP://DNR.WI.GOV/FILES/PDF/PUBS/LF/LF0055.PDF](http://dnr.wi.gov/files/pdf/pubs/lf/lf0055.pdf)



Today, the County Farm is under the oversight of the Sauk County Land Resources and Environment (LRE) Department and Board of Supervisors, with the Land Conservation Division overseeing most of the property's management and the Parks and Recreation Division providing maintenance for the historic fire house and the Sauk county Cemetery – the final remnants of the site's former public health institutions. The Sauk County farm is diverse, consisting of flat bottom fields along the stream that bisects the property as well as gently rolling to steeper hills. Most of the property is comprised of commodity cropland and pasture, which has been rented out to local farmers since the 1980's. In fact, the land at the County Farm has produced food consistently throughout its 150-year history. The remainder of the property is comprised of the land where the former healthcare center stood, wooded forest, and Narrows Creek, which runs through a significant portion of the property.

The Sauk County LRE Department has developed a property master plan for the County Farm to ensure the continued management of the site's agricultural and natural resources, the preservation of its historic features, and the transformation of the space into an educational amenity for the Sauk County community. The plan is centered on the following goals: to create educational opportunities for Sauk County's current and future farmers, and to utilize the space for agricultural demonstration and experimentation. Over the next 20 years, the LRE Department envisions the County Farm becoming a place for Sauk County residents to converge, learn, and experiment with regenerative and conservation-friendly farming best practices. As part of this vision for the property, the County is working with community partners to demonstrate agricultural and conservation practices on-site such as: working with the farmer led watershed group on cover crops; hosting a stream restoration training with USDA; and, prairie burns with Pheasants Forever.

### **Land Use**

Sauk County's major land uses consist of agriculture and natural areas. The county also contains numerous incorporated cities and villages and Ho Chunk Nation lands. Each municipality has, over time, established plans and policies that guide future land uses, many of which help preserve farmland and promote agriculture development. The towns have established policies to maintain agriculture as the dominant land use. These policies may be reflected in their comprehensive plan, ordinances, extra territorial zoning, boundary agreements, memorandum of understanding or other related plans and agreements.

[18] [HTTP://WWW.BARABOORANGE.ORG/](http://www.baraboorange.org/)

[19] [HTTP://LWR.STATE.WI.US/](http://lwr.state.wi.us/)

[20] [HTTP://DNR.WI.GOV/FILES/PDF/PUBS/LF/LF0055.PDF](http://dnr.wi.gov/files/pdf/pubs/lf/lf0055.pdf)

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## Farmland

The table below, unless otherwise noted reflects data for Sauk County as found in the Census of Agriculture. The 2007 level represents approximately 44% of the county’s land, including cropland, pasture and agricultural forests[23]. In 2022, Sauk County had 1,408 farms, losing 265 farms since 2002. The average size of the farms in the county has remained the same over the past 20 years. Sauk County lost 15.6% of its agricultural acreage from 2002-2022.

| Agriculture Land                 |         |         |         |         |         |
|----------------------------------|---------|---------|---------|---------|---------|
|                                  | 2002    | 2007    | 2012    | 2017    | 2022    |
| Acres of Farmland                | 353,104 | 358,919 | 330,000 | 299,344 | 298,103 |
| Number of Farms                  | 1,673   | 1,923   | 1,665   | 1,412   | 1,408   |
| Average Size of Farms (in acres) | 211     | 187     | 200     | 212     | 212     |

## Farmland Preservation Areas

Farmland preservation areas are primarily devoted to preserving agricultural and/or agricultural related uses, natural resource or open space areas and are identified on maps for each of the towns. These areas are eligible for Exclusive Agriculture Zoning, entering into an Agriculture Enterprise Area agreement and the benefits of other programs which may be implemented as a result of this plan.

## Agriculture Enterprise Areas (AEA)

An Agriculture Enterprise Area (AEA) is an area of contiguous land which is primarily in agriculture use and is designated by the Department of Agriculture, Trade and Consumer Protection (DATCP) in response to a locally developed petition. An AEA is only designated if it is identified by the local community as an area that should be preserved for current and future agricultural use. This local input into the process is important to achieve identified goals.

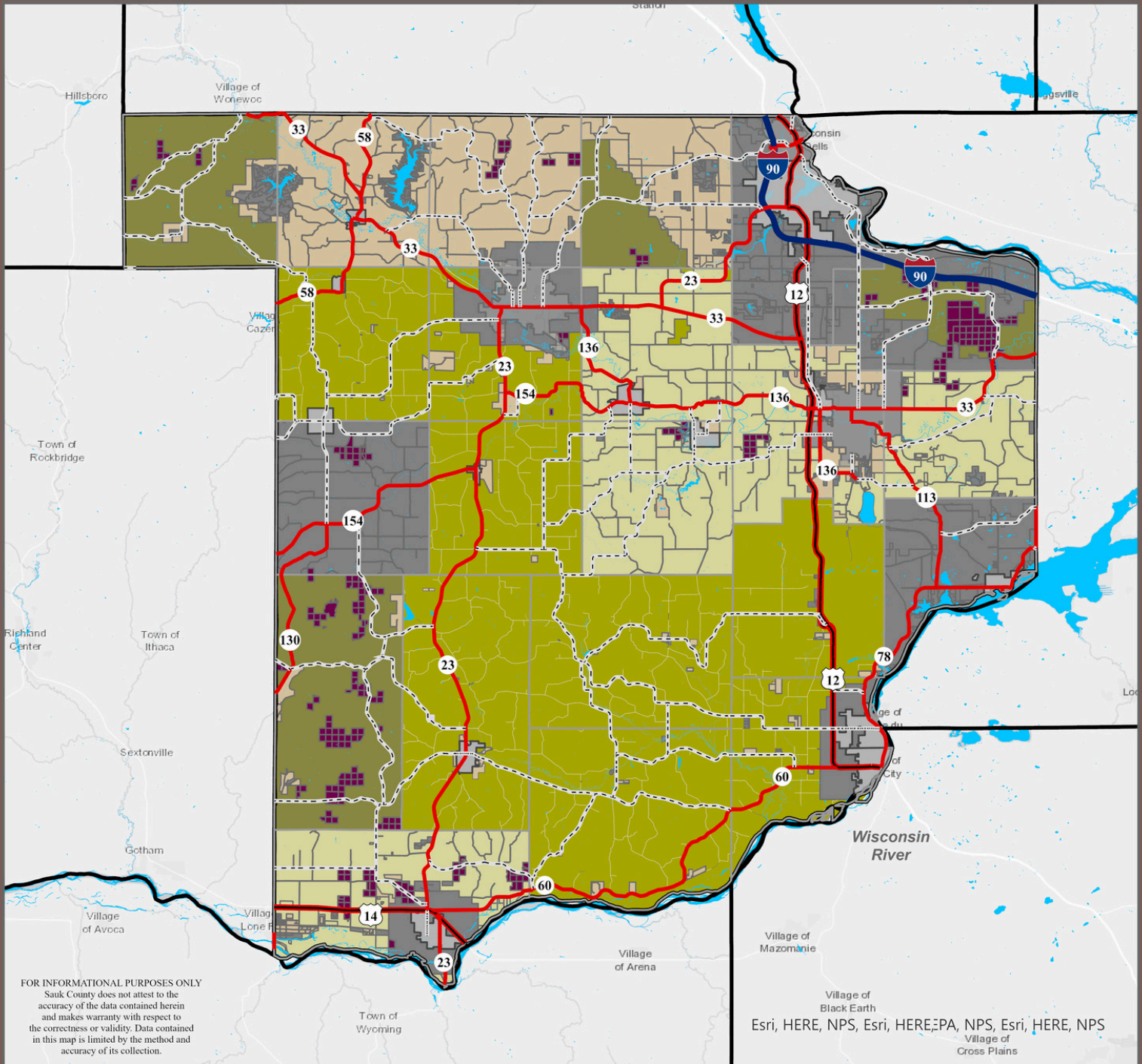
Eligible farmers in a designated area can enter into voluntary farmland preservation agreements with DATCP. Farmers with an agreement receive income tax credits in return for keeping their land in agricultural use for a minimum of 10 years. Tax credits available to farmers in an AEA are:

- \$10.00 per acre for farmers with a farmland preservation agreement signed after July 1, 2009 and located in an agricultural enterprise area.
- \$ 12.50 acre for farmers in an area zoned and certified for farmland preservation and in an agricultural enterprise area, with a farmland preservation agreement signed after July 1, 2009.















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[21] USDA AGRICULTURAL CENSUS 2022

# Sauk County Farmland Preservation Plan: Active Areas

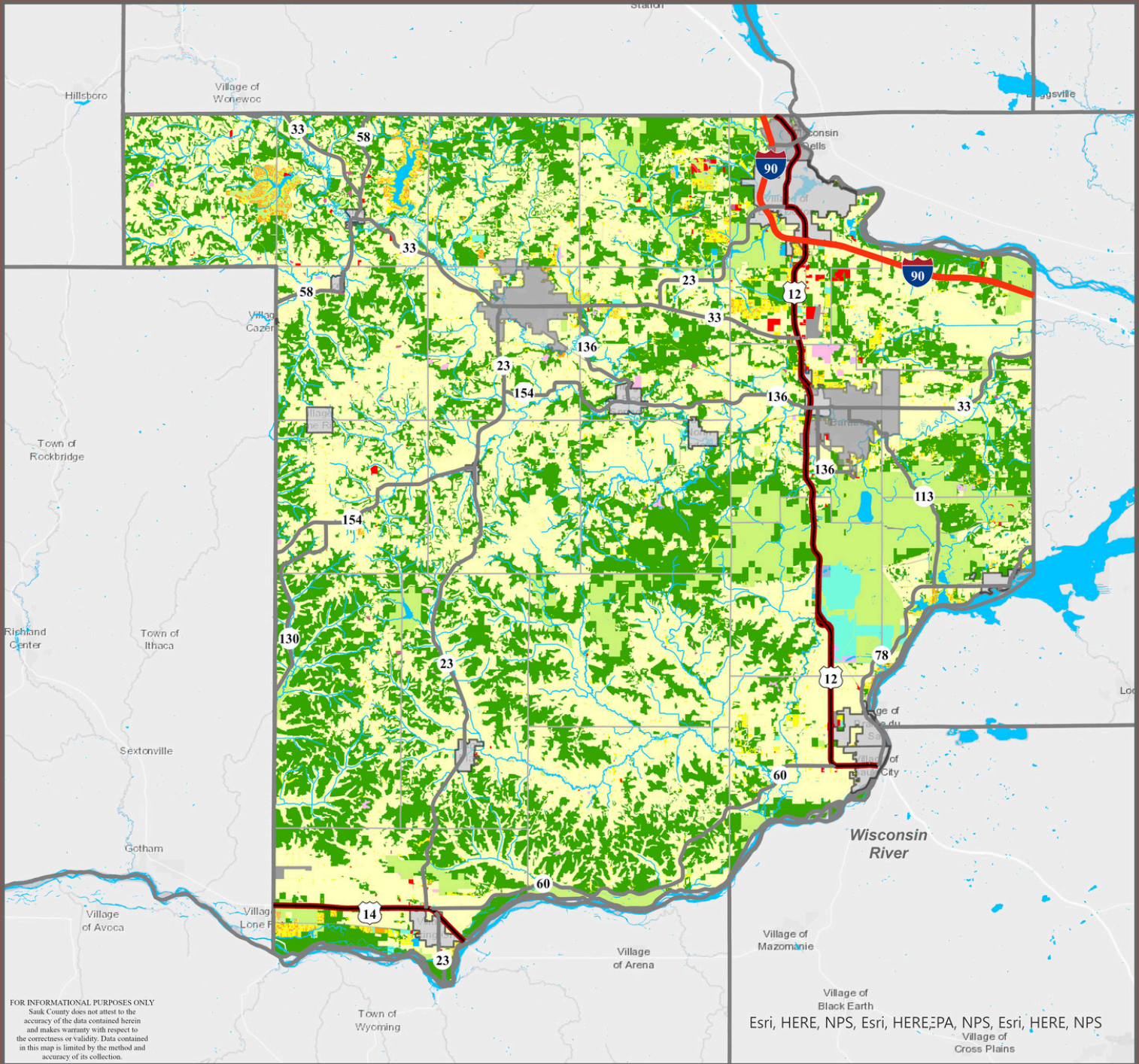


## Legend

- |   |   |   |
|---|---|---|
|  Current FP Agreements        | <b>Municipal Boundaries</b>   | <b>Transportation</b>   |
|  Agricultural Enterprise Area |  Village           |  U.S. Highway  |
| <b>Zoning Description</b>   |  City              |  Interstate    |
|  Exclusive Agriculture Zoning |  Town              |  State Highway |
|  Agricultural Zoning          |  County Boundaries |  County        |
|  Resource Conservancy         |   |   |
|  All Other Districts          |   |   |



# Sauk County Farmland Preservation Plan: Land Use



## Legend

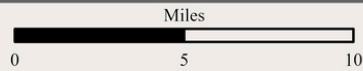
### Current Land Use

- Agriculture
- Commercial
- Industrial
- Institutional/ Government
- Landfill/ Extraction
- Mixed Use
- Multi-family Residential

- Recreation
- Single Family Residential
- Transportation
- Utility
- Vacant
- Woodland

### Municipal Boundaries

- Village



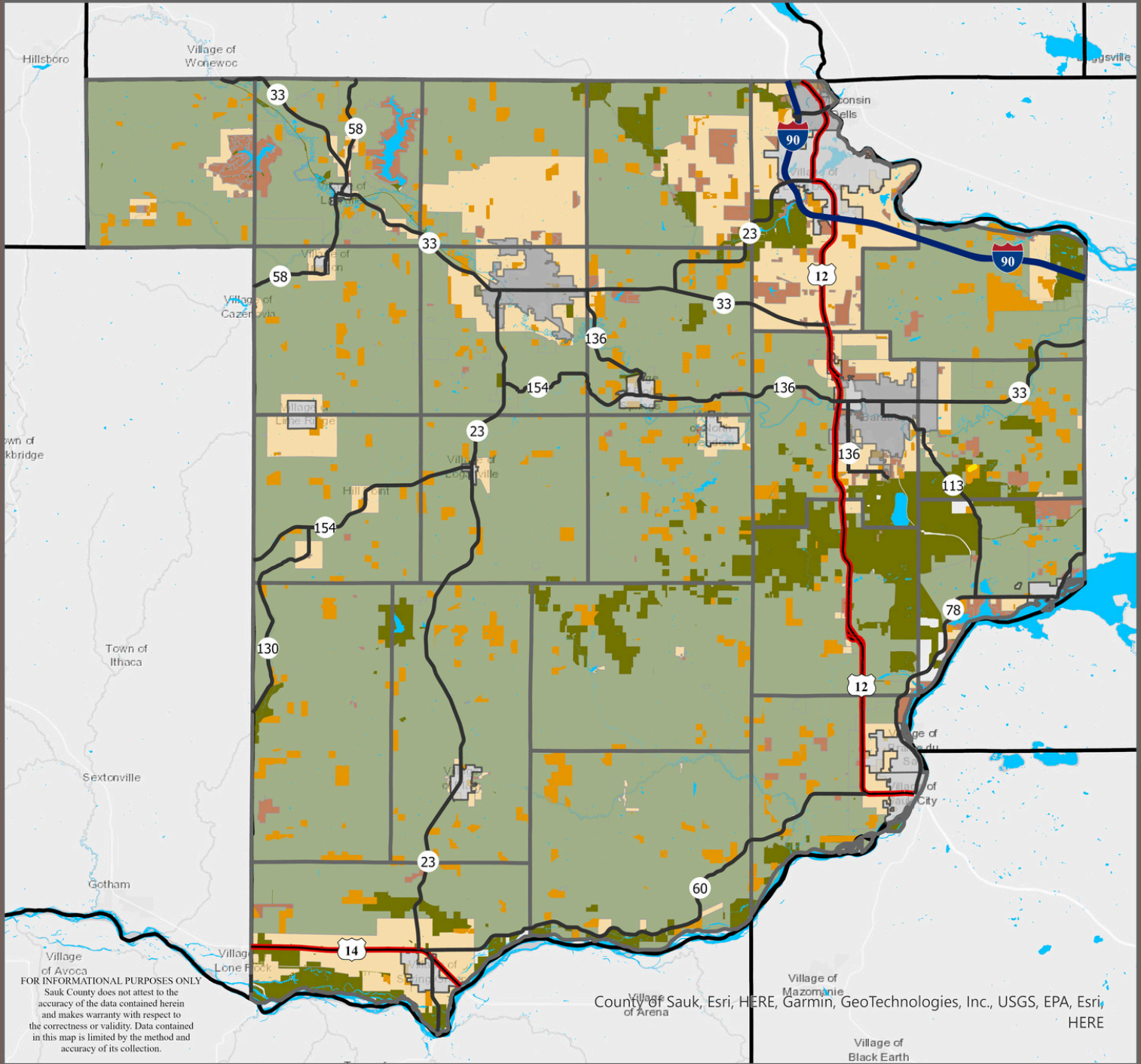
- City
  - Town
  - County Boundaries
- ### Transportation
- U.S. Highway
  - Interstate
  - State Highway



## Sauk County, WI



# Sauk County Farmland Preservation Plan: Non-operating Landowners



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 Sauk County does not attest to the accuracy of the data contained herein and makes warranty with respect to the correctness or validity. Data contained in this map is limited by the method and accuracy of its collection.

County of Sauk, Esri, HERE, Garmin, GeoTechnologies, Inc., USGS, EPA, Esri, HERE

**Legend**

|                                 |                             |                       |
|---------------------------------|-----------------------------|-----------------------|
| Non Operating Landowners        | <b>Municipal Boundaries</b> | <b>Transportation</b> |
| <b>Farmland Preservation</b>    | Village                     | U.S. Highway          |
| Farmland Preservation Area      | City                        | Interstate            |
| Transition Area                 | Town                        | State Highway         |
| Unincorporated Development Area | County Boundaries           |                       |
| Public Open Spaces              |                             |                       |

Miles  
 0 4.75 9.5





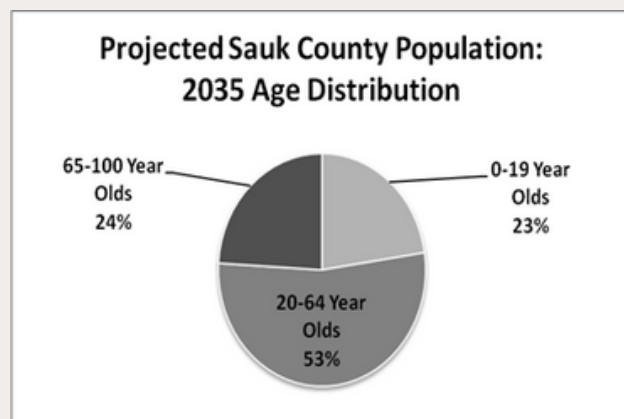
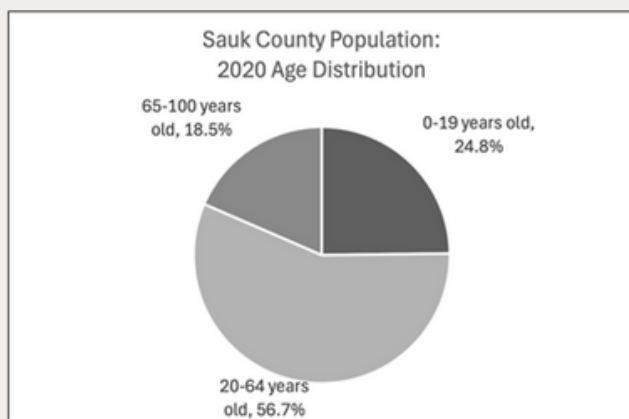
An AEA is one tool that can help individuals and communities meet locally identified goals for preserving agricultural land for continued production. In addition, AEA designations can help promote investment in agriculture, agricultural infrastructure, and agricultural-related businesses. An AEA designation may be used in conjunction with other local land use and development strategies including farmland preservation planning and zoning, voluntary farmland preservation agreements, agricultural and conservation easements, private land use covenants, economic development grants, cooperative agreements, or financial incentives.

The designated AEAs vary in size and type of agricultural land use, and in their overall goals for agricultural preservation and agricultural economic development. There are 5 AEAs currently in Sauk County. The Fairfield AEA was designated in 2011 and encompasses 9,501 acres in the Town of Fairfield. The Bear Creek AEA was designated in 2020 and encompasses 30,691 acres in the Town of Bear Creek. The Dellona AEA was designated in 2024 and encompasses 8,285 acres in the Town of Dellona. The Woodland AEA was designated in 2025 and encompasses 20,410 acres in the Town of Woodland.

### County Population, Demographics and Housing

Sauk County’s population stayed relatively steady from 1900 to 1940, spiked in 1950, and has been increasing since 1960. The US Census reported Sauk County population in 2020 as 65,763. Population data projects a change in county demographics during the coming decades. Sauk County’s population, along with the state and national populations, is aging. Between 2010 and 2035 the percentage of the county’s population between the ages of 65 and 100, comprising 18.5% of the population in 2020, is projected to increase by 5.5% to 24% of the population by 2035. [22]

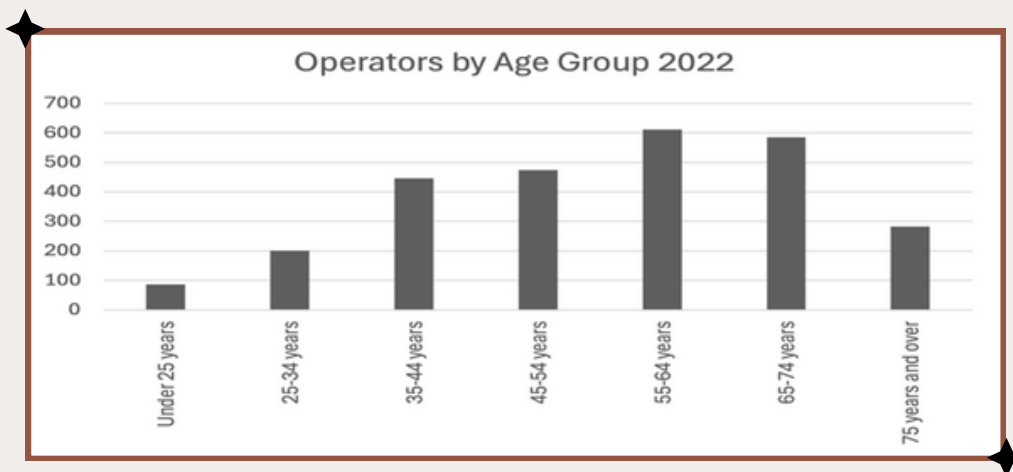
| Sauk County Population Changes 1900 to 2020 |        |        |        |        |        |        |        |        |        |        |        |        |        |
|---|--------|--------|--------|--------|--------|--------|--------|--------|--------|--------|--------|--------|--------|
| Year  | 1900   | 1910   | 1920   | 1930   | 1940   | 1950   | 1960   | 1970   | 1980   | 1990   | 2000   | 2010   | 2020   |
| Population                                  | 33,006 | 32,869 | 32,548 | 32,030 | 33,700 | 38,120 | 36,179 | 39,057 | 43,469 | 46,975 | 55,225 | 61,976 | 65,763 |
| % Change                                    |        | -0.4%  | -1.0%  | -1.6%  | 5.2%   | 13.1%  | -5.1%  | 8.0%   | 11.3%  | 8.1%   | 17.6%  | 12.2%  | 6.1%   |



[22] US CENSUS BUREAU



The aging population trend is also reflected in the farming population. In 2022, the average age of farm operators was 55.4, up from 55.2 in 2007, 53.8 in 2002 and 52.8 in 1997.[23] Along with older farmers, many in the farm family are often employed off the farm. This is due to declining profitability, a search for stable wages, health insurance, and an increase in the number of smaller and hobby farms. [24] Sauk County ranks eighth in Wisconsin for the number of female farm operators, with 983 in 2022.[25]



### Housing and Municipal Growth

One way to examine municipal growth's impact on farmland is to consider lands annexed into a municipality. As previously noted, the primary land uses in Sauk County are agriculture and natural areas. As municipalities grow, land from these areas is annexed. Since the year 2005, 2,005.5 acres of land has been annexed into incorporated municipalities.

There is an increasing demand for housing due to rising population numbers and changing household patterns. According to the US census, the average household size was 2.37 in 2020, up from 2.19 people in 2010 and 2.32 people in 2000. Since 1990 there has been an overall increase in population as well as an increase in seasonal housing throughout the county.

These increases have led to an increase in the number of households and housing units. Sauk County's Zoning Ordinance, along with various local ordinances, addresses appropriate housing types for each zoning district.

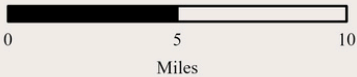
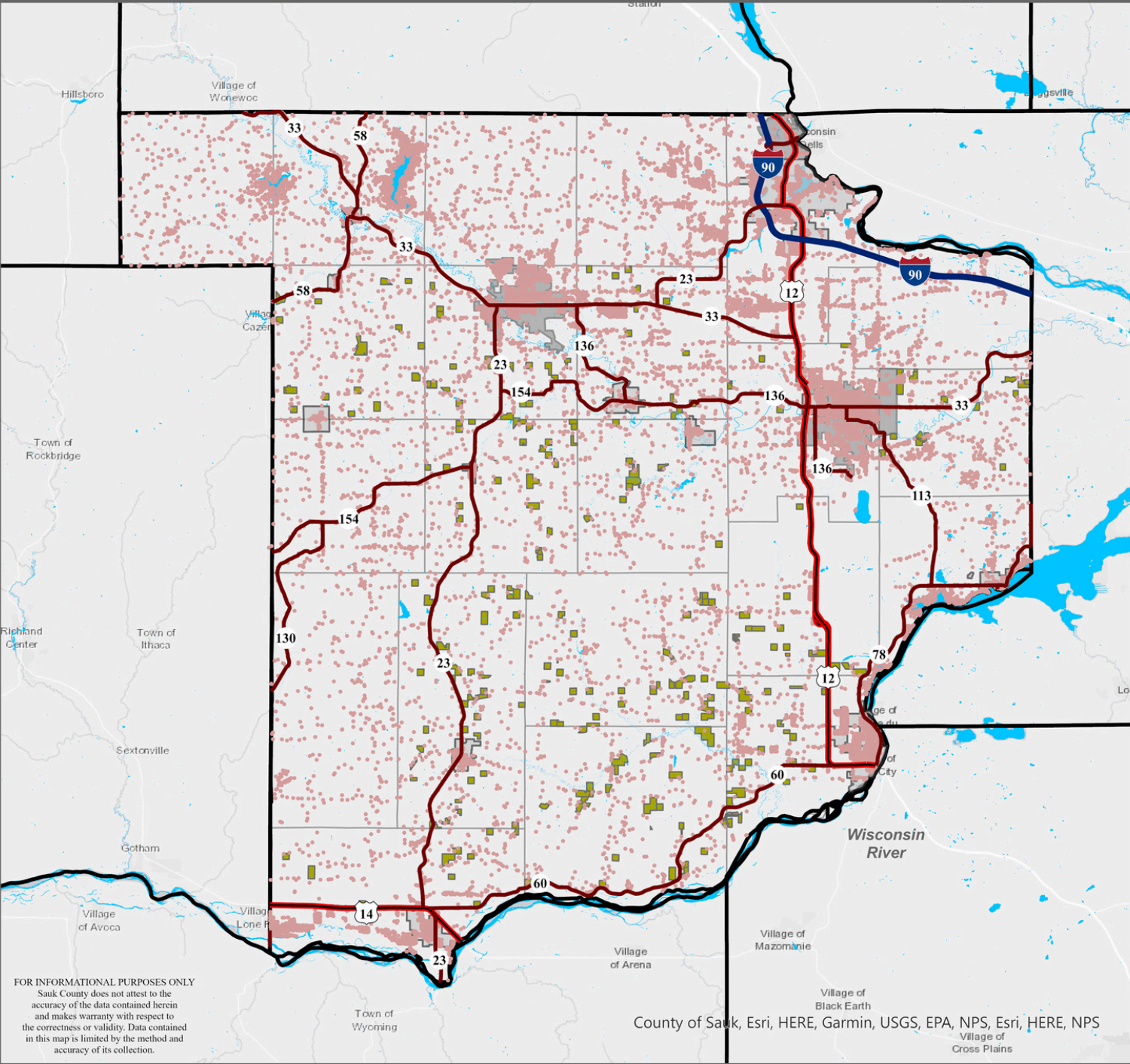
| Sauk County Household and Housing Unit Trends |            |                     |
|---|------------|---------------------|
| Year  | Households | Total Housing Units |
| 1990  | 17,801     | 20,439              |
| 2000  | 21,644     | 24,297              |
| 2010  | 25,192     | 29,708              |
| 2020  | 26,751     | 30,784              |

[23] USDA AGRICULTURAL CENSUS 2022

[24] WISCONSIN LAND USE , MEGATRENDS' UW EXTENSION & THE CENTER OF LAND USE EDUCATION, SUMMER 2010

[25] UW EXTENSION AND USDA AGRICULTURAL CENSUS 2022

# Sauk County Farmland Preservation Plan: Development



### Legend

- |  |   |  |
|--|---|--|
| <span style="color: red;">•</span> Residential Development   | <b>Municipal Boundaries</b>   | <b>Transportation</b>  |
| <b>Planned Rural Development</b>   | <span style="display: inline-block; width: 15px; height: 10px; background-color: lightgray; border: 1px solid black;"></span> Village | <span style="display: inline-block; width: 15px; height: 2px; background-color: red; border: 1px solid black;"></span> U.S. Highway    |
| <span style="display: inline-block; width: 15px; height: 10px; background-color: orange; border: 1px solid black;"></span> Development Lots      | <span style="display: inline-block; width: 15px; height: 10px; background-color: gray; border: 1px solid black;"></span> City         | <span style="display: inline-block; width: 15px; height: 2px; background-color: blue; border: 1px solid black;"></span> Interstate     |
| <span style="display: inline-block; width: 15px; height: 10px; background-color: green; border: 1px solid black;"></span> Preservation Easements | <span style="display: inline-block; width: 15px; height: 10px; background-color: white; border: 1px solid black;"></span> Town        | <span style="display: inline-block; width: 15px; height: 2px; background-color: black; border: 1px solid black;"></span> State Highway |
|  | <span style="display: inline-block; width: 15px; height: 10px; border: 2px solid black;"></span> County Boundaries                    |  |





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The Sauk County Comprehensive Plan and each local comprehensive plan address growth issues. Comprehensive plans are accessible on the Sauk County website. While most plans provide for residential or mixed-use land use areas and encourage concepts such as infill and compatible land uses, there currently are no overarching plans dealing specifically with housing and municipal growth.

### **Sauk County Density Credit Exchange/Transfer of Development Rights**

In addition to the PRD program, the Sauk County zoning ordinance offers an option for towns to work with incorporated municipalities to develop and implement a Transfer of Development Rights Program (TDR). The TDR is a regulatory strategy that incorporates private market forces to accomplish, in this instance, the protection of agricultural lands or other purposes such as the protection of environmentally sensitive areas. A TDR program can only be implemented following the designation of sending and receiving areas and application of a conservation easement. The TDR program acts as an extension of the PRD program, first implemented in 2006, and utilizes the same minimum siting criteria to locate the easements, except that rather than creating PRD lots in rural areas, the development rights are 'sent' to the incorporated area.

### **Transportation, Utilities, Communications and Community Facilities and Services**

For any business, including our farms and agriculture-related businesses, access to needed resources, supplies and markets is essential for success and growth. The following is an overview of the transportation, utilities, communications and community facilities and services in Sauk County.

#### **Transportation**

Transportation networks influence the ability to transport both people and goods. It is estimated that agriculture makes up 30% of freight transportation in the United States.[26] In Sauk County, the major agriculture transportation methods are truck and rail.

In Sauk County, the roads are managed by the state, county and/or local municipalities. This network provides access to both local lands as well as to markets within and outside of the county. Most roads have weight limits and/or truck size postings. The postings denote the weight, and thus the amount of goods that can be transported on any given load. The Sauk County Highway Department's main facilities are located in West Baraboo with satellite facilities in other locations including Reedsburg.

The rail lines in Sauk County include the Wisconsin Southern Railroad- managing 22 miles of freight transport line from Merrimac to Reedsburg- and Amtrak, which serves the Wisconsin Dells with passenger rail service.

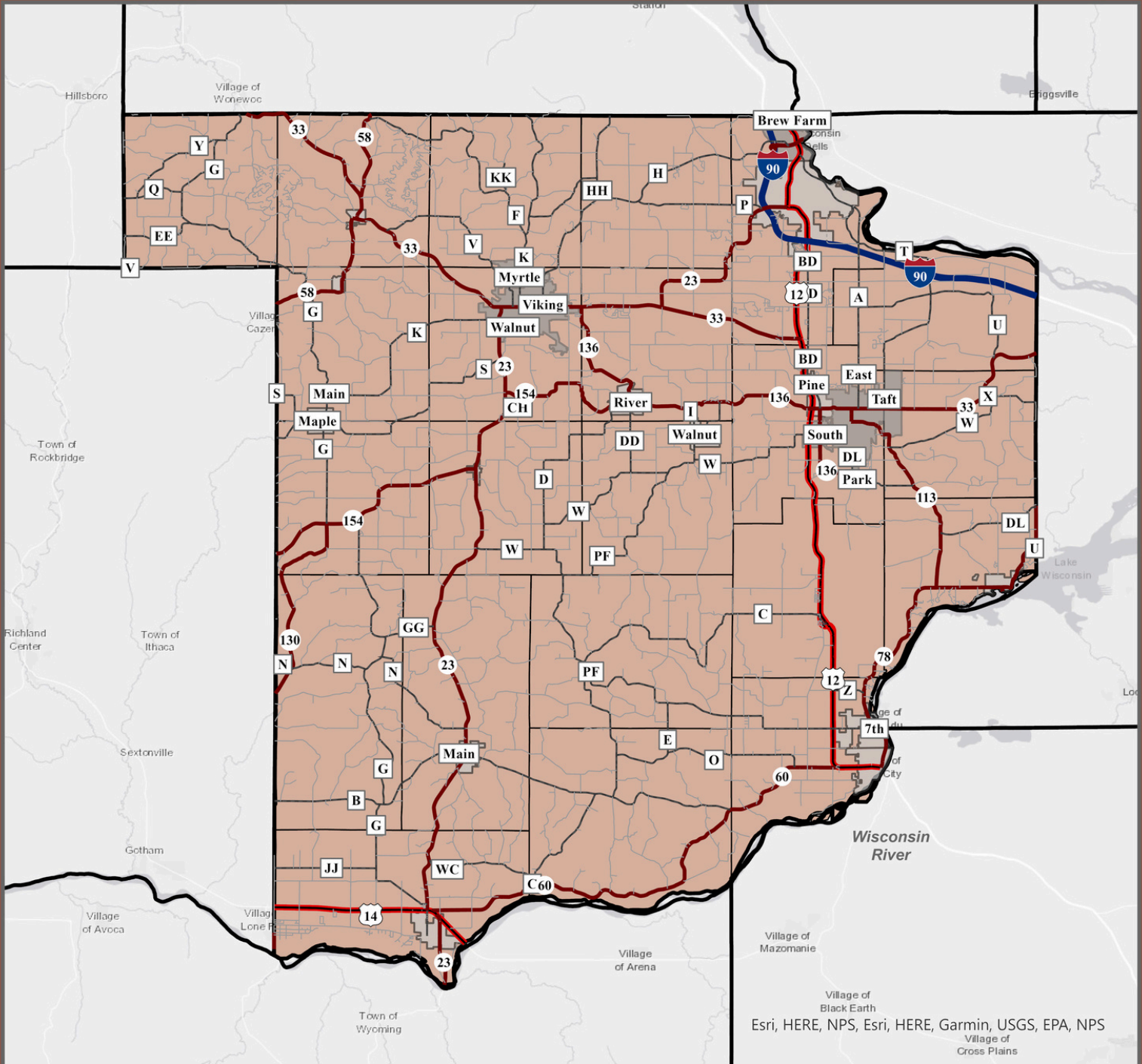
Air transport includes Tri-County Airport (Spring Green), Baraboo/Dells Municipal Airport, Reedsburg Municipal Airport and the Sauk Prairie Airport. All of these provide small recreational, small passenger, business and freight services.

Plans for transportation include the Connect 2050, the Wisconsin State Airport System Plan 2030, Wisconsin Rail Plan 2050 and the Wisconsin State Freight Plan.

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[26] USDA AGRICULTURAL MARKETING SERVICE- [AGRICULTURAL TRANSPORTATION RESEARCH AND INFORMATION CENTER](#)

# Sauk County Farmland Preservation Plan: Transportation







Esri, HERE, NPS, Esri, HERE, Garmin, USGS, EPA, NPS  
 Village of Cross Plains

## Legend

### Transportation

-  U.S. Highway
-  Interstate
-  State Highway
-  County
-  Town

### Municipal Boundaries

-  Village
-  City
-  Town
-  County Boundaries



### Sauk County, WI



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### **Utilities and Energy**

Agriculture communities consume and create energy. In Sauk County, utility services, equipment and supplies are provided by Alliant Energy, Madison Gas and Electric, Premier Utility Services, and various local municipal utility districts and public works. A variety of companies provide alternative energy options including Amerigas, providing propane and Midwest Engineering Consultants providing solar energy products. There has been an increase in the capacity of transmission lines throughout Sauk County. Several new substations have been constructed or upgraded.

### **Ethanol**

According to the U.S. Energy Information Administration, Wisconsin ranked 9th in ethanol production. Wisconsin is ranked ninth in the nation in fuel ethanol production. The state's nine ethanol plants can produce almost 587 million gallons of ethanol per year, about twice the amount consumed in the state. Wisconsin ranks 9th nationwide in overall annual ethanol production. [27]. For reference, 1 bushel of corn yields, on average, 2.9 gallons of fuel, 15.1 pounds of distillers grains (10% moisture), and 0.9 pounds of corn distillers oil. (28). The State has nine large scale commercial ethanol plants, two of which are in nearby Columbia County and one in Juneau County.

### **Anaerobic Digesters**

Technology advancements are benefiting the agriculture community in many ways. One such advancement is the anaerobic digester. These convert waste from animal herds into energy. Anaerobic digester systems are increasing around the state, providing farmers the opportunity to mitigate odors, reuse manure, create some heat and electricity for themselves and possibly selling excess resources. [29] In 2023, Wisconsin was one of the leading states in the nation for on-farm anaerobic digesters, having 36 of the 436 in existence [30]. Because of the cost, the typical system is designed for approximately 1000 cows. Some of the digesters serve individual farms with large dairy herds. Some digesters are used by several smaller farms as a community facility. There are currently no such digesters in Sauk County. In 2007 there were 27 farms in Sauk County with 500 or more cows.[31]

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[27] U.S. ENERGY INFORMATION ADMINISTRATION, WISCONSIN STATE ENERGY PROFILE, UPDATE SEPTEMBER 19, 2024

[28] RENEWABLE FUELS ASSOCIATION 2023 POCKET GUIDE TO ETHANOL

[29] WISCONSIN LAND USE , MEGATRENDS' UW EXTENSION & THE CENTER OF LAND USE EDUCATION, SUMMER 2010

[30] US EPA LIVESTOCK ANAEROBIC DIGESTER DATABASE

[31] USDA 2022 AGRICULTURE CENSUS

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## Waste Management

Local governments manage the majority of solid waste and recycling services through contracts with private waste removal businesses. The old Sauk County landfill was managed by the County and is no longer operating, although methane from the landfill is converted into energy and sold for profit to Alliant Energy. Waste is now transported by private contractors to various landfills in the state. Sauk County sponsors opportunities for households and agricultural businesses to safely dispose of hazardous waste materials during the annual Clean-Sweep event and recycling of agriculture plastics such as silage bags and bale wrap. Animal waste is regulated by DATCP, the DNR, and by Sauk County.

## Communications

As the agriculture industry adapts to changing times, communicating information, and sharing knowledge is essential. Sauk County’s communication infrastructure is served in part by various cell phone and internet providers, including US Cellular, Verizon, Charter Communications, TDS, Bug Tussell and others. Sauk County owns and maintains a number of communication towers with fiber optics throughout the County, which are also connected to the Sauk County Health Care Center and Sheriff’s Department. In Sauk County, 80% farms had internet access in 2022.[32] The available data does not indicate whether this access is considered high-speed internet. The increasing number of farms using computers for business purposes will make communication more effective and efficient.

| Farm Internet Access in Wisconsin[33] |                            |                                   |                             |
|---------------------------------------|----------------------------|-----------------------------------|-----------------------------|
| Year                                  | Farms with Internet Access | Farms marketing over the internet | Farms with broadband access |
| 2021                                  | 82%                        | 22%                               | 54%                         |
| 2023                                  | 83%                        | 17%                               | 56%                         |

## Agriculture Community Facilities and Services

Many of the public sector service agencies are located in the Sauk County Government offices located in the West Square Building in Baraboo. Offices at this location which provide services to the agriculture community include the Land Resources and Environment Department, Veterans office, Job Service Center, Aging and Disability Resource Center, Public Health, Human Services, Extension Sauk County offices, Emergency Management, and the USDA Service Center housing the FSA and NRCS offices. The Sauk County DNR Forester’s office is located at the Baraboo Civic Center. Some of the collaboratively developed agriculture related programs and services include Clean Sweep, Wisconsin Women in Conservation, The Sauk County Fair, Drinking Water Program, Youth Conservation Days, Conservation Chronicle Newsletter, Rural Safety Days, Sauk County Farm Connect Guide, as well as several association conferences and workshops designed to highlight and promote conservation, business development, health, research, technology, and innovation in agriculture.

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[32] USDA 2022 AGRICULTURE CENSUS

[33] WISCONSIN 2023 AGRICULTURAL STATISTICS, USDA NASS IN COOPERATION WITH WI DATCP



### **Education and Technical Assistance Networks**

Growth, development and success in agriculture and related businesses depends on higher levels of agriculture education and research. Sauk County has many strong educational systems which range from public and private K-12 systems to college and continuing education opportunities. Future Farmers of America (FFA), 4-H clubs and other organizations help support agriculture education and experiences for youth. The public libraries throughout the County and the proximity to high-quality, two- and four-year University of Wisconsin (UW) system college campuses further strengthen the overall education opportunities.

There are a variety of sources for information-sharing and continuing education opportunities designed specifically for the agriculture industry in Sauk County. The Madison College Reedsburg campus, UW Platteville- Baraboo Sauk County campus, and the Sauk County Extension programs disseminate research, knowledge and information. Sauk County's Extension office also has a regional crops and soils educator and a horticultural educator serving the county's communities. DATCP, NRCS, FSA, DNR, and the Sauk County LRE department provide planning and technical assistance as well as educational outreach resources.

### **Health Care**

General and specialized health care needs are met through several hospitals, clinics, urgent care and alternative care facilities located throughout the county.

The Aging & Disability Resource Center (ADRC) of Sauk County has offices in the West Square Building, downtown Baraboo. The ADRC provides transportation services, family caregiver support, home service coordination, prevention programs, a variety of information and assistance services and county wide senior dining centers.

The Sauk County Public Health Department aims to protect and promote healthy lifestyles, as well as prevent and reduce disease and injury. The department is made up of three divisions: environmental health, public health programming, and Women, Infants, and Children (WIC). They provide maternity services, immunizations, voucher programs for uninsured and underinsured, radon test kits, among several other services. The Sauk County Department of Human Services provides service for all county residents. Priorities include enhancing self-reliance, protecting the vulnerable, and promoting healthy families, relationships, and lifestyles.





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## Cultural Resources

Sauk County contains a variety of churches, cemeteries, historical and other cultural sites. Local comprehensive plans outline resources specific to each town, and the goals and objectives which are aimed at preserving these cultural resources. Comprehensive plans are accessible on the [Sauk County website](#). The variety of cultural resources found in Sauk County adds to the rural character and assist with preserving the historic and culture aspects of our agriculture community.

The Sauk County Land Resources and Extension committee provides grants to community organizations and local governments seeking supplementary funds for local arts, history and humanities projects. Projects may include activities directed at research, documentation, and preservation of the unique cultural (including agricultural) history of Sauk County.[34] Events such as Farm Art DTour help celebrate both the arts and agriculture with temporary art installations and artist-built mobile [roadside culture stands](#) selling fresh, locally grown produce. Field notes (rural culture education sites), farm forms (creations made by farmers, area businesses and community groups), pasture performances and more are found on the DTour.

The Sauk County Fairgrounds is managed by the Sauk County Agricultural Society. Several events take place every year including auctions, tractor pulls and the Sauk County Fair. All of these efforts help celebrate, promote and preserve the legacy of our agriculture community.

## Emergency Responders

Emergency Responders provide services to the agriculture community in Sauk County. Several fire districts and emergency medical districts cover Sauk County. Each town contracts with a fire district and emergency medical ambulance service to cover their individual needs.

The Sauk County Sheriff's Department provides prisoner conveyance, court bailiff and security, as well as lake and snowmobile patrol services throughout the county. The department also provides patrol, investigative, warrant and civil processes to townships and municipalities without local services. Specialty teams include the Emergency Response Team, Critical incident Negotiations Team, Drug Enforcement, K-9 unit, Scuba Dive and Rescue Team, and Honor Guard.[35] The Sauk County Law Enforcement Center includes the Huber Center and County Jail.

## Farmer Angel Network

In the fall of 2018, the Sauk County community pulled together after a farmer died by suicide. During this challenging time, community members reached out to the family to comfort, support, and listen as they worked through the emotions that followed. As some community members chatted about the extreme sadness and feeling of helplessness surrounding the family and community, a farmer shared they had also suffered from severe depression and battled many thoughts of suicide in the past.

At this point, they realized there was a need to support the community and families in similar situations. During the winter months, they created a safe space to come together and talk about farm stress and suicide over the lunch hour. They brought in speakers and resources to listen to and utilize during these difficult times. The farmer's family and other community members decided to share their stories to help others learn about farm stress and mental health concerns in rural communities, and Farmer Angel Network (FAN) was formed.

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[34] Sauk County Arts and Culture, <https://www.co.sauk.wi.us/artsandculture>

[35] Sauk County Sheriff's Department

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The Farmer Angel Network builds strong rural communities that support agriculture by providing education, resources, and fellowship with a focus on mental wellness and suicide prevention in and around Sauk County, Wisconsin. This group includes farmers, agriculture professionals, local public health, land conservation, Extension educators and others.

### **Agriculture Infrastructure, Facilities and Technical Services**

Agencies such as the University of Wisconsin, the Department of Agriculture Trade and Consumer Protection (DATCP), Wisconsin Department of Administration (DOA), and many private firms offer information and technical assistance to the agriculture community in areas such as business planning and development, production management consultation, soil and water conservation methods, insurance and financial services. A successful agriculture industry also depends on access to a variety of supplies, inputs, technical assistance and services. Commodities need to be harvested, transported, refined, packaged, stored, marketed, sold and distributed. As production and markets diversify, the need for food processors, collectors, storage and distribution sites for specialty or organic products may grow as well. Market needs and local ordinances will determine the best location for facilities. The following two tables highlight the variety of facilities and services which are a part of the Sauk County agriculture facilities and technical services infrastructure.

### **Economic Growth and Business Development**

Sauk County has many features which contribute to its ability to develop and maintain economic diversity and a viable agriculture business community including quality education, research and development services, transportation networks, natural resources, rich soils, an able workforce, as well as access to a variety of health facilities, business and industry support systems and markets.

### **Overview of Sauk County's Economy**

The Sauk County Development Corporation works to promote and retain economic vitality in Sauk County and its individual communities. The following table shows that in 2020, educational, health, and social services was the major employer, followed by the manufacturing and recreation industries. The largest increase from 2000-2020 in the county came from professional, scientific, management, administrative, and waste management services. Meanwhile, the employment sector with the largest decrease over the past two decades has been agriculture.



| Sauk County Employment Sectors [36]   | % of Residents Employed in 2000 | % of Residents Employed in 2010 | % of Residents Employed in 2020 |
|---|---------------------------------|---------------------------------|---------------------------------|
| <b>All Industries</b>   | 29,108                          | 32,845                          | 34,197                          |
| Agriculture, Forestry, Fishing, Hunting, & Mining                                   | 5.3%                            | 4.2%                            | 3.6%                            |
| Construction  | 7.8%                            | 8.0%                            | 7.3%                            |
| Manufacturing   | 19.1%                           | 17.3%                           | 15.8%                           |
| Wholesale Trade   | 3.2%                            | 3.3%                            | 2.6%                            |
| Retail Trade  | 13.2%                           | 12.5%                           | 12.2%                           |
| Transportation, Warehousing, and Utilities  | 4.0%                            | 3.7%                            | 4.3%                            |
| Information   | 1.5%                            | 1.6%                            | 1.4%                            |
| Finance, Insurance, Real Estate, Rental, and Leasing                                | 4.3%                            | 4.6%                            | 4.4%                            |
| Professional, Scientific, Management, Administrative, and Waste Management Services | 5.2%                            | 5.7%                            | 6.6%                            |
| Educational, Health and Social Services   | 17.6%                           | 17.4%                           | 20.4%                           |
| Arts, Entertainment, Recreation, Accommodation and Food Services                    | 12.1%                           | 15.4%                           | 15.0%                           |

### Agriculture and the Economy

Agriculture plays an essential role in Wisconsin and Sauk County economies. Approximately one out of every ten Wisconsin residents works in an agriculture-related job, with “every job in agriculture support[ing] an additional .89 jobs in Wisconsin”.[37] Since 2006 there has been relative stability in Wisconsin’s agriculture employment, with some experts saying that agriculture helped “cushion” employment problems in Wisconsin’s economy during the 2007 recession.[38]

[36] U.S. Census, 2000, 2010 and 2020

[37] Organic Agriculture in Wisconsin: 2012 Status Report, Silva et al, February 2012

[38] Ibid.

### Characteristics of Hired Farm Labor by Wisconsin Counties 2017 [39]

|             | Percent of farms with any hired labor | Number of hired farm workers | Change in hired farm workers net change 2012-2017 | Change in hired farm workers, percent change 2012-2017 | Hired farm worker payroll (\$1,000 payroll) |
|-------------|---------------------------------------|------------------------------|---|--|---|
| Sauk County | 19.9%                                 | 1,226                        | -59   | -15.1%   | \$17,806                                    |
| Wisconsin   | 26.1%                                 | 72,425                       | -2,015  | -10.6%   | \$1,052,738                                 |

### Characteristics of Hired Farm Labor by Wisconsin Counties 2022 [40]

|             | Percent of farms with any hired labor | Number of hired farm workers | Change in hired farm workers net change 2012-2017 | Change in hired farm workers, percent change 2012-2017 | Hired farm worker payroll (\$1,000 payroll) |
|-------------|---------------------------------------|------------------------------|---|--|---|
| Sauk County | 21.00%                                | 1,138                        | -88   | -7.20%   | \$17,806                                    |
| Wisconsin   | 22.80%                                | 66,659                       | -5,766  | -8.00%   | \$1,052,738                                 |

### Average Value of Farmland, 2017 [41]

|             | Average Value of all agricultural products sold | Estimated market value of land and buildings |          | Average value of machinery and equipment per farm | Average net farm income per farm |
|-------------|---|--|----------|---|----------------------------------|
|             |   | Per Farm                                     | Per Acre |   |                                  |
| Sauk County | \$107,354                                       | \$674,903                                    | \$2,485  | \$130,623   | \$24,157                         |
| Wisconsin   | \$176,368                                       | \$1,083,640                                  | \$4,904  | \$156,689   | \$36,842                         |

### Average Value of Farmland, 2022 [42]

|             | Average Value of all agricultural products sold | Estimated market value of land and buildings |          | Average value of machinery and equipment per farm | Average net farm income per farm |
|-------------|---|--|----------|---|----------------------------------|
|             |   | Per Farm                                     | Per Acre |   |                                  |
| Sauk County | \$191,083                                       | \$1,329,231                                  | \$6,278  | \$160,529   | \$42,934                         |
| Wisconsin   | \$285,347                                       | \$1,440,749                                  | \$6,117  | \$191,104   | \$77,839                         |

### Average Value of Farmland by Value of Sales, 2017 [43]

|             | Percent of farms with positive net income | Value of total government payments (in thousand) | Percent of farms receiving government payments | Percent Farms market value of agricultural products sold |                      |                        |                        |                        |                     |
|-------------|---|--|--|--|----------------------|------------------------|------------------------|------------------------|---------------------|
|             |   |  |  | \$1,000 to \$19,999                                      | \$20,000 to \$99,999 | \$100,000 to \$249,000 | \$250,000 to \$499,999 | \$500,000 to \$999,999 | \$1,000,000 or more |
| Sauk County | 46.7%                                     | \$2,048  | 45.5%  | 55.8%  | 21.1%                | 10.6%                  | 6.4%                   | 6.1%                   | 0.0%                |
| Wisconsin   | 50.8%                                     | \$126,583  | 42.4%  | 6.6%   | 18.9%                | 10.6%                  | 6.6%                   | 3.9%                   | 3.3%                |

[41] [40] [41] [42] [43] USDA Census of Agriculture, 2017 or 2022

**Average Value of Farmland by Value of Sales, 2022 [44]**

|             | Percent of farms with positive net income | Value of total government payments (in thousand) | Percent of farms receiving government payments | Percent Farms market value of agricultural products sold |                      |                        |                        |                        |
|-------------|---|--|--|--|----------------------|------------------------|------------------------|------------------------|
|             |   |  |  | \$1,000 to \$19,999                                      | \$20,000 to \$99,999 | \$100,000 to \$249,000 | \$250,000 to \$499,999 | \$500,000 to \$999,999 |
| Sauk County | 48.7%                                     | \$3,074  | 31.4%  | 33.5%  | 16.8%                | 10.5%                  | 8.0%                   | 7.5%                   |
| Wisconsin   | 53.4%                                     | \$147,121  | 26.2%  | 32.0%  | 19.6%                | 10.2%                  | 7.1%                   | 9.7%                   |

The Sauk County agriculture related industries include:

|                                      |  |                                   |
|--------------------------------------|--|-----------------------------------|
| • research and production            | • landscape businesses                           | • economic support services       |
| • aquaculture                        | • cooperatives                                   | • transport                       |
| • beef                               | • custom farm services                           | • farmers markets                 |
| • pork                               | • farm equipment                                 | • organic goods                   |
| • poultry                            | • feed dealers and suppliers                     | • community supported agriculture |
| • slaughterhouses                    | • Community supported agriculture (CSA) programs | • greenhouses                     |
| • dairies                            | • consultation services                          | • pumpkin patches                 |
| • cheese makers                      | • custom application service                     | • corn mazes                      |
| • sawmills                           | • transport services                             | • Christmas tree farms            |
| • pick-your-own fruits or vegetables | • food processing                                | • maple syrup production          |
| • orchards                           | • packing facilities                             | • honey producers                 |
| • seasonal garden centers            | • Agritourism                                    | • sports clubs                    |
| • floriculture                       | • agronomy services                              | • game farms                      |
| • horticulture                       |  |                                   |

[42] USDA Census of Agriculture, 2022



The following table illustrates the overall economic effects agriculture had in Sauk County:

| <b>Economic Effects of Agriculture in Sauk County During 2021<sup>[43]</sup></b>                              |                 |
|---|-----------------|
| <b>Economic Activity</b>  | <b>Amount</b>   |
| Economic Impact   | \$743 million   |
| Tax dollars in sales tax, property tax, and income tax  | \$19 million    |
| Products sold locally directly to consumers   | \$1 million     |
| Amount produced by agricultural products (milk, grain, cattle and calves, hogs and pigs, hay and other crops) | \$181.8 million |
| Employment in the agricultural sector   | 4,312 jobs      |

### **Agriculture Production**

In 2022, the vast majority of the farms in Sauk County were owned by individuals or through some type of family arrangement. Nearly 92% of all farms in the County fell into this category. The majority of farms in the County (68%) were less than 180 acres in size. The majority of farmland in Sauk County is utilized for cropland at 196,000 acres followed by pasture at 24,688 acres.

In 2022, Sauk County ranked 30th in the state in number of chickens for egg production, compared to 2007 when the county ranked first in the metric. The County has the fourth highest sales of hogs and pigs in Wisconsin, and is sixth in the state for sheep and goat sales.



<sup>[43]</sup> UW Extension, Sauk County Agriculture Value and Economic Impact, 2021



### Economically Significant Commodities [43]

| Product Sold                                     | Sauk County 2022 Sales |
|--|------------------------|
| Dairy Products                                   | \$98,214,000           |
| Cattle and Calves                                | \$31,693,000           |
| Corn   | \$80,340,000           |
| Hogs and Pigs                                    | \$9,225,000            |
| Soybeans   | \$30,664,000           |
| Poultry and Eggs                                 | \$886,000              |
| Vegetables, Melons, Potatoes, and Sweet Potatoes | \$893,000              |
| Wheat  | \$2,532,000            |
| Fruits, Tree Nuts, and Berries                   | \$1,227,000            |
| Sheep, Goats, and their Products                 | \$1,515,000            |

### Organic Agriculture

Organic agriculture is a rapidly growing sector. The fastest growing areas in Wisconsin organic production include vegetable production and dairy. During 2021, Wisconsin was ranked second in the Nation states in certified organic acreage with 245,333 acres.. [44] During 2021, Wisconsin was leading the nation in terms of the number of organic farms, with 1,455 organic farms, second only to California. [45]

Research shows that from every dollar generated for the sale of raw agricultural products, \$1.24 in economic activity is generated through the purchasing of inputs, job creation and the resulting spending in local communities. Studies show that while organic production tends to result in smaller amounts of purchased inputs, it involves more labor and more job creation than conventional production, and overall it results in a larger amount of economic activity on a per-acre basis for labor and local spending than conventional farming. [46]

### Direct Sales and Agritourism

There is a growing interest in developing local, regional food markets. A number of programs at the state level, such as 'Buy Local, Buy Wisconsin' and 'Something Special from Wisconsin' are geared towards supporting direct sales, agritourism, as well as locally grown and processed products.

According to the 2017 Agriculture Census, Wisconsin had 5,579 farms offering Direct Sales or Agritourism. The subsets and numbers of farms involved in direct sales and agritourism include: 4,949 farms with only direct sales, 491 farms with only agritourism, and 139 farms with both direct sales and agritourism. [47]

[44] The Economic Impact of the Organic Sector in Wisconsin and Beyond, Laura Paine, Organic Agriculture Specialist WI DATCP, June 2011

[45] 2007 USDA Agriculture Census and the 2008 USDA Organic Production Survey

[46] Organic Agriculture in Wisconsin: 2012 Status Report Silva et al

[47] 2012 Wisconsin Agritourism Survey Report, Laura Brown and Colette Hershey. UW Extension Center for Community & Economic Development



Value-added operations are those that include any activity an agricultural producer performs outside of traditional commodity production to receive a higher return per unit of commodity sold. This includes activities such as agritourism and entertainment agriculture. On average, successful agritourism operations bring in greater total sales and have less debt than many other value-added operations.

A survey conducted in 2012 by the Wisconsin Agricultural Tourism Association Inc. in conjunction with the UW- Extension, was published. Fifty percent or more of respondents, primarily females in households earning \$50,000.00 or more per year indicated that supporting local farmers, spending time with family and friends, participating in outdoor or rural and affordable activities, and having a fun adventure were important reasons for participating in an agritourism activity. Having on-site restrooms, adequate parking and a convenient location made the list of the top three amenities looked for. [48] Examples of agritourism in and near Sauk County include, but are not limited to:



|                             |                              |
|-----------------------------|------------------------------|
| Corn mazes                  | Farm markets                 |
| Cheese factory tours        | Bed and breakfast/farm stays |
| Christmas tree farms        | Petting farms                |
| Food festivals              | Farm tours                   |
| Pick-your-own produce farms | Roadside produce stands      |
| Nurseries                   | Greenhouses                  |
| Wineries                    | Haunted barns                |
| Sleigh or Horse rides       | Pumpkin patches              |





# FARMLAND PRESERVATION GOALS AND OBJECTIVES

As part of the Farmland Preservation Plan development process, members of the Sauk County agriculture community contributed their expertise and ideas regarding trends, and key issues relating to agriculture businesses and farmland preservation.

The preservation of agriculture is vital to maintaining and increasing the quality of life for all. Within those expressions, the agriculture community also communicated a sense of pride; pride in the diversity of goods produced and their availability in Sauk County; excitement regarding the utilization of new technologies from GPS systems to higher yielding seeds; pride in land stewardship practices and resource conservation efforts; pride in knowledge and expertise; pride in the professionalism of the industry; and pride in meeting local and global market needs and demands.

This chapter outlines key issue statements expressed during the planning process, which highlight the assets, opportunities or challenges. After each key issue statement, a goal and one or more objectives/policies are listed. Goals are broad, advisory statements which convey what ultimately is to be achieved relating to a theme and/or key issue statement. Goals answer “What can, or should, Sauk County work towards?” An objective or policy states how Sauk County can and should work towards a goal. Objectives and policies are measurable, either qualitatively, quantitatively, or both.



**Key Issue:**

Access to food is paramount to Sauk County residents. The preservation of agriculture is key to maintaining and increasing the quality of life in Sauk County.

**Goal:**

Agricultural development, recognition and success needs to be a permanent part of our policies.

**Objectives and Policies:**

- Recognizing that agricultural lands are a nonrenewable resource, Sauk County should work toward maximizing agriculture production capabilities while managing for growth, by developing a comprehensive approach to grade and protect our agriculture lands.
- Develop programs to attract and encourage new agricultural development and markets to improve agriculture economic viability.
- Encourage and support a variety of opportunities for positive interactive connections with the agriculture community.
- Continue to consider both the long- and short-term goals when making decisions and to be aware of the long-term implications of those decisions that affect the agriculture industry.
- Support local farms and locally produced food.

**Key Issue:**

Farming operations are becoming more efficient and producing higher yields in part due to utilization of advances in technology, however, the higher costs of land, volatile production expenses and commodity prices, and securing capital for startup and transition of farming operations is limiting growth potential.

**Goal:**

Create a framework that will allow for the success of various types of agricultural operations and support industries.

**Objectives and Policies:**

- Encourage entrepreneurship and economic development with a focus on utilizing existing and emerging technology and products.
- Encourage adaptability, innovation and for-organization-association as a means of improving the economics in farming.
- Collaborate with regional partners to enhance opportunities for producers and food processors to take advantage of market demands and emerging markets.
- Support agriculture producers, operators and businesses in business plan development as one means to ensure operations are viable.
- Develop and support strategies that help recognize that there is a difference between the production value and perceived sale value of agriculture lands.
- Develop programs and provide assistance to viable innovative, modernizing, start-up and transition farming operations.
- Continue to develop programs and infrastructure which allow for different operations to thrive and meet local and regional market demands.
- Support the agricultural land use property tax.



**Key Issue:**

Sauk County is committed to helping preserve agriculture resources through a variety of programs and policies.

**Goal:**

Balance the development of non-agricultural land use with agricultural land preservation and the right to farm.

**Objectives and Policies:**

- Facilitate the creation of boundary and extra territorial agreements that support orderly development and preserve agriculture businesses and lands.
- Work with interested towns to expand farmland preservation options through the application of Exclusive Agriculture zoning.
- Continue to improve methods to help agriculture related businesses, producers and landowners understand the policy and permit processes with an emphasis on facilitating movement through county, state, and federal processes.
- Continue to provide Agriculture Enterprise Petition education and support for groups of interested landowners and/or towns.
- Continue to evaluate farmland preservation programs to ensure their effectiveness.
- Continue to listen to the concerns and comments of the agricultural community and be a liaison to state policy makers regarding maintaining a successful farmland preservation program.
- Advocate to state policy makers and DATCP to maintain programs that preserve farmland in Sauk County including the Planned Rural Development program.
- Support policies and programs which create catastrophic insurance programs for risk management to replace price supports and thus support a natural process of supply and demand.



**Key Issue:**

Research and technological advances play a significant role in the agriculture community by contributing to increased production, access to relevant information, as well as more efficient operations.

Agriculture experience, education and business training are essential components for production agriculture to function as a professional, efficient, and competitive operation.

**Goal:**

Cultivate agriculture as a career objective and foster continuing educational development.

**Objectives and Policies:**

- Support incentives to apply new technologies in existing and future agricultural operations and create educational settings to understand their applications.
- Identify and utilize methods and programs to effectively and efficiently inform farmers of trends, advances in technology, and potential resources.
- Partner with agriculture organizations to provide and promote employer/employment standards.
- Sponsor and support programs which expose young people and those making a career change to the expanding possibilities in agriculture and agriculture related businesses.
- Support programs which provide training opportunities for agricultural employees.



**Key Issue:**

Agriculture success is dependent on information being exchanged. That exchange of information plays a significant role in education, awareness, consumer demand, public perception, land stewardship and resource conservation needs, as well as interagency cooperative efforts.

**Goal:**

Develop and maintain centralized access to information.

**Objectives and Policies:**

- Implement methods to increase rural access to current communication technologies.
- Create and support programs that inform the public of new agricultural products and those that promote awareness of conservation, farm development success stories, good farming practices, right to farm and rural living responsibilities.
- Support training for agriculture producers, operators and businesses regarding effective public relations and marketing methods.
- Explore opportunities to support community, regional, and global agriculture information and education exchanges.
- Pursue programs to educate the public on why preserving agricultural land is important, including food production, wildlife habitat, and economic importance to community.
- Implement the Sauk County Farm Master Plan to develop the property into an agricultural and conservation educational asset and demonstration area.
- Utilize the Sauk County Farm as a community building tool to further build working relationships with our community partners.



**Key Issue:**

Technology advancements, effective waste management, conservation and sustainable practices are essential to maintaining healthy soil, water and other natural resources while producing quality foods.

**Goal:**

Proactively address changing natural resource management needs.

**Objectives and Policies:**

- Partner with other agencies to develop, support and evaluate agriculture best management practices and programs that balance practicality with effectiveness.
- Continue to develop and support policies which allow for diversified production methods which promote adaptability to climate variations and resource conservation needs.
- Work with producers to identify the most profitable and sustainable production system for them.
- Partner with landowners and provide technical assistance to help landowners meet soil and water conservation standards and protect groundwater resources.

**Key Issue:**

Sauk County’s agricultural businesses must remain diverse to take advantage of market needs.

**Goal:**

Support and encourage all types of agriculture.

**Objectives and Policies:**

- Promote policies and programs which take advantage of the potential diversity of local food systems and agricultural products of Sauk County.





# FARMLAND PRESERVATION MAPS

In 2024, each town in Sauk County reviewed, and where appropriate, updated their Farmland Preservation Map. The towns also reviewed their farmland preservation map, current zoning map and future land use maps for consistency. When designating farmland preservation, development and transition areas on the farmland preservation map, the following criteria was utilized:

## **Farmland Preservation Area Mapping Criteria**

Parcels which fit within any of the criteria listed below, and which are not a part of a City, Village or unincorporated development area or fifteen year planned development area, are designated as a preservation area:

- Primarily devoted to agriculture or agricultural related uses
- Open space
- Grassland
- Forest
- Natural resource area
- Open waters
- Wetlands
- Land within the Baraboo Range Protection area as identified in January 2024
- Land designated as an Agriculture Enterprise Area as of January 2025





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### **Unincorporated Development Area Mapping Criteria**

The following criteria were utilized for the designation of the unincorporated development areas:

- Unincorporated villages
- Areas of rural, non-agriculture related development such as rural business development and rural neighborhoods

### **Transition Area Mapping Criteria**

Transition Areas are those areas designated as non-agricultural development within the next fifteen years. These areas are:

- Parcels identified through either a boundary agreement, extraterritorial zoning district or a memorandum of understanding as an area which may be annexed and/or developed within the next fifteen years
- Parcels identified by town zoning or future land use maps as a development area

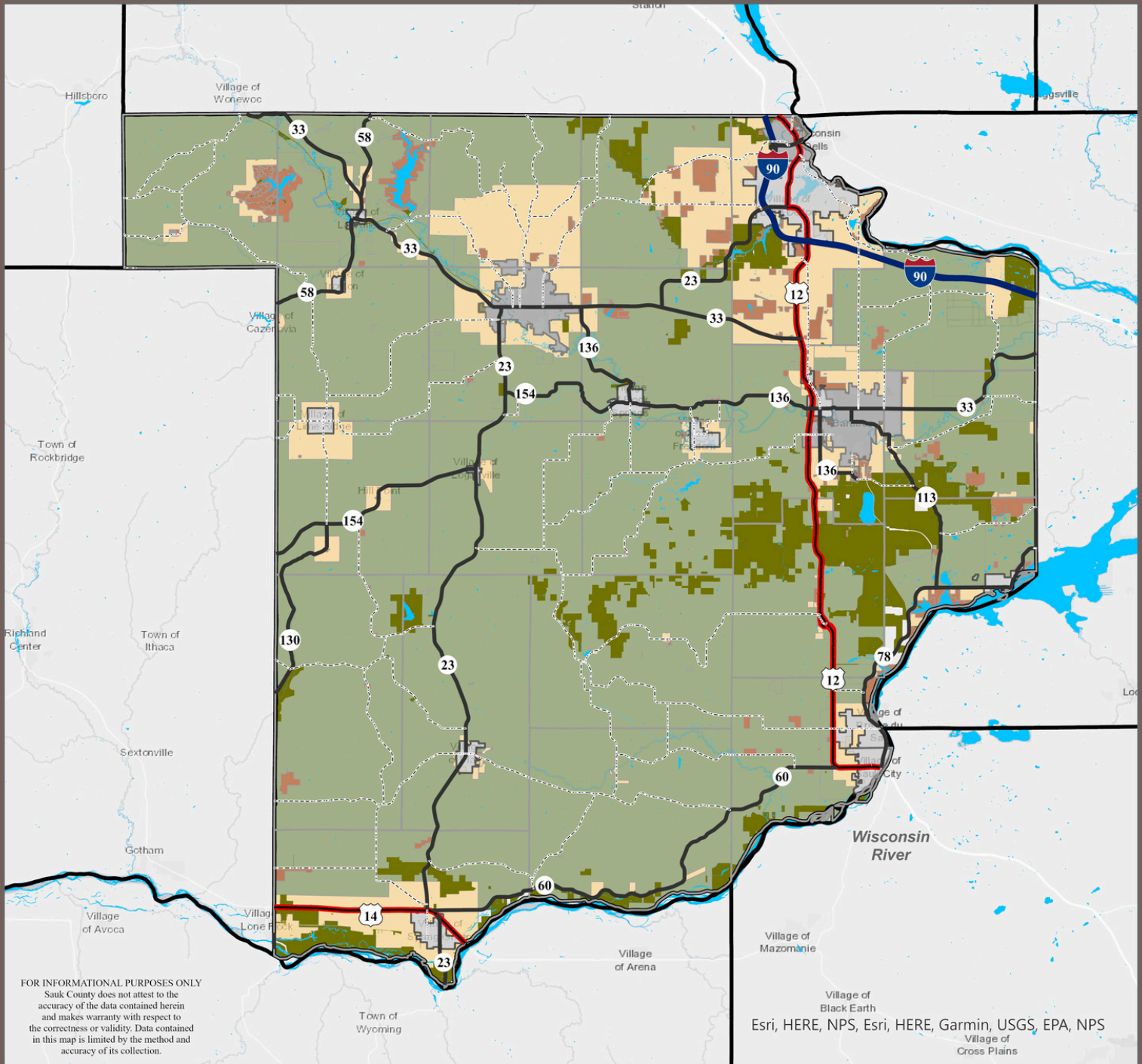
### **Federal, State and County Owned Mapping Criteria**

All lands owned by a federal, state or county entity are considered unclassified and are not farmland preservation, unincorporated development, or transition areas.

The following pages contain the Farmland Preservation Plan Maps for each Town in alphabetical order.



# Sauk County Farmland Preservation



## Legend

### Farmland Preservation

- Farmland Preservation Area
- Transition Area
- Unincorporated Development Area
- Public Open Spaces

### Municipal Boundaries

- Village
- City
- Town
- County Boundaries

### Transportation

- U.S. Highway
- Interstate
- State Highway
- County



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# Sauk County Farmland Preservation Plan