

Wisconsin Department of Agriculture, Trade, and Consumer Protection: Three new ag enterprise areas to be designated Jan. 1

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MADISON – Wisconsin will add another 185,000 acres in Agricultural Enterprise Areas with the designation of three new ones, including what will be the second largest AEA in the state. The new acreage will become official Jan. 1. Wisconsin will then have 37 agricultural enterprise areas, or AEAs, in 26 counties, 108 towns and the Bad River Reservation.

The new AEAs will be in Trempeleau County's Town of Arcadia; St. Croix County's Town of Troy; and six townships in northwest Outagamie and northeast Waupaca counties.

AEAs are part of the farmland preservation program administered by the Department of Agriculture, Trade and Consumer Protection. They are intended to keep land in agricultural use and promote agricultural economic development appropriate to each area, by preserving established agricultural infrastructure – land, public services and businesses that serve farms, as well as farms themselves. Landowners in AEAs are not subject to any new land use regulations.

Designation can provide some certainty for farmers and agribusinesses that agricultural infrastructure will remain into the future, so they can invest with confidence. It also makes landowners eligible to claim the farmland preservation tax credit if they agree to keep their land in agricultural use for at least 15 years and meet conservation standards.

For an AEA to be designated, at least five landowners, in partnership with their local government, petition DATCP for the designation.

The new AEAs are:

Three Rivers AEA, including almost 111,200 acres in Waupaca and Outagamie counties, takes in lands in the towns of Bear Creek, Deer Creek, Maple Creek, Union, Little Wolf, Lebanon and Matteson.

It becomes the state's second largest AEA, after Heart of America's Dairyland AEA in Marathon and Clark counties. Petitioners want to encourage long-term farm succession planning, allow for responsible residential development that lets farmers raise capital or have their families build homes on the farm, and explore opportunities for farmers to take advantage of their proximity to Fox Valley markets.

Farming for the Future AEA in Trempeleau County, encompassing almost 63,000 acres in the town of Arcadia. Dairy, beef and poultry are the primary agricultural commodities produced here. Petitioners aim to preserve prime agricultural lands in an area near several sand mining operations, promote local food processing and local food sales, and improve public roads for agricultural transportation.

Town of Troy AEA in St. Croix County, covering 10,800 acres where agriculture is focused on row crops, pasture and dairy. This is an area of high density residential development between Hudson and River Falls. Petitioners want to protect farmland while creating guidelines to allow compatible land uses to exist alongside working farms, and increase use of the town's transfer of development rights program.

Landowners outside designated AEAs who want to participate should work with their neighbors and local governments to petition for AEA status. For more information, go to farmlandpreservation.wi.gov. This is the ninth round of AEA designations. The Department of Agriculture, Trade and Consumer Protection has authority to designate up to 2 million acres as AEAs. Find more information about AEAs at datcp.wi.gov, search for "AEA".