

# Dept. of Agriculture, Trade and Consumer Protection: West Point AEA connects farmers and Lake Wisconsin community in Columbia County

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MADISON – Since the designation of the West Point agricultural enterprise area (AEA) in 2014, the Columbia County Land and Water Conservation Department has been connecting farmers and the Lake Wisconsin community on how conservation practices are working to protect soil health and water quality. This relationship helps both farmers and the lake community build a mutual understanding of agricultural practices, like nutrient management. The West Point AEA is located on over 15,800 acres in the southwest corner of the county, south of Lake Wisconsin.

The Lake Wisconsin Watershed Council, a producer-led group, is also working with farmers in this area to help adopt conservation practices that protect and improve surface and groundwater quality. The council received a producer-led watershed protection grant of \$15,000 in January 2021, which will be used to help educate farmers about how to reduce soil erosion and increase water infiltration while maintaining or improving farm profitability.

Columbia County is working with landowners and producers to implement conservation practices through incentive payments. The county's AEA development grant program is working with landowners to enroll farms into new farmland preservation agreements and review existing nutrient management plans for opportunities to reduce phosphorus. To be eligible, landowners need to meet with county staff to determine potential phosphorus reductions, implement the

reductions, and/or sign-up for a farmland preservation agreement.

To find out if your land is located in the West Point AEA, to sign a farmland preservation agreement, or to learn more about conservation initiatives and resources in Columbia County, contact Christopher Arnold, Columbia County water resource specialist, by phone at (608) 742-9674, or email at [christopher.arnold@co.-columbia.wi.us](mailto:christopher.arnold@co.-columbia.wi.us).

### **About Agricultural Enterprise Areas (AEAs)**

AEAs are community-led efforts to establish designated areas important to Wisconsin's agricultural future. As a part of the state's Farmland Preservation Program, AEAs strive to support local farmland protection goals. Through this designation, communities can encourage continued agricultural production and investment in the local agricultural economy.

Eligible landowners within an AEA can sign a 15-year farmland preservation agreement committing all or a portion of their farm to agricultural use and maintaining state soil and water conservation standards. In return, they may be eligible to claim the farmland preservation tax credit.

To learn more about AEAs and the Farmland Preservation Program, visit [https://datcp.wi.gov/Pages/Programs\\_Services/AgriculturalEnterpriseAreas.aspx](https://datcp.wi.gov/Pages/Programs_Services/AgriculturalEnterpriseAreas.aspx). To start or join a current AEA, contact the county land conservation department in the county where your land is located.