

Dept. of Agriculture: AEA Snapshot: St. Marie AEA helps protect agricultural lands, promotes conservation efforts

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MADISON, Wis. – Designated in 2021, the St. Marie Agricultural Enterprise Area (AEA) covers portions of the towns of St. Marie and Princeton in Green Lake County. Bounded by the Fox, Black Creek, and Puchyan rivers, this area is home to lush farmland that is worked by a community committed to preserving its rural character and agricultural resources. This AEA is primarily comprised of family farms ranging from 10 to 180 acres in size and producing various agricultural crops such as corn, beans, fruits, vegetables, and more.

The Farmland Preservation program (FP) is a partnership between local governments, landowners, farmers, and the Wisconsin Department of Agriculture, Trade and Consumer Protection (DATCP). The program offers two avenues for participation: farmland preservation zoning and AEAs. For the agricultural producers and landowners in the towns of St. Marie and Princeton, the St. Marie AEA has been the best way to achieve their conservation and land preservation goals while incentivizing land use protections with the farmland preservation tax credit.

Roger Naparalla is a farmer in the St. Marie AEA who inherited his land from his father. Naparalla said he wants to honor the legacy of his family farm.

“My father had a vision: to preserve the land and keep it working. I want to keep what we have and never have it developed,” said Naparalla. The 15-year farmland preservation agreement offered by the program provides a sense of security that his farm will remain in production agriculture for years after he is no longer the

operator.

Farmland preservation agreements also ensure that farms will be managed to the state's soil and water conservation standards. These standards include creating and implementing a nutrient management plan, managing non-point source pollution control, preventing soil erosion, and executing tillage setback near surface water. Ultimately, these efforts will lead to a more resilient and sustainable agricultural landscape for future generations to enjoy.

The Green Lake County Land and Water Conservation Department has seen an increased interest in the FP program in recent years, leading to the creation of the Town of Princeton AEA in 2023. Now with two AEAs within its borders, the county hopes to work with local landowners and producers to continue expanding the program.

"We really want to make sure that agriculture stays strong in our county," said Todd Morris, a Green Lake County conservationist.

Through the AEA petition process, Green Lake County has seen communities come together to promote soil health and conservation. They want to continue to grow the farmland preservation community in the county to make access to conservation tools more accessible, Morris said.

Local landowners or townships interested in starting a new AEA or learning more about farmland preservation zoning should contact their local county conservation department.

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
. To start or join a current AEA, contact the county land conservation department in
the county where your land is located.