



Five New Ag Enterprise Areas Recommended

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MADISON – Just over 140,000 acres in Wisconsin have been recommended to become part of the Agricultural Enterprise Area program, where connecting blocks of mainly agricultural land are targeted for agricultural preservation and agricultural development by local communities.

Seven petitions were submitted to the Wisconsin Department of Agriculture Trade and Consumer Protection. Following an evaluation, five areas were recommended to receive official designations as AEAs. The recommended areas had petitions jointly submitted by more than 250 landowners, 12 towns and 4 county governments--Calumet, Clark, Dodge and Sauk.

“The designation recognizes the local commitment to agricultural preservation and to growing the agricultural economy within the identified areas,” explained John Kappelman, a member of the AEA Evaluation team. “An AEA is a community effort as residents, farmers, businesses and local government work together and set priorities to determine how the area will develop and grow with a focus on agriculture, business and community character.”

Agricultural businesses within the proposed areas range from conventional dairy and beef operations, to cash-cropping, vegetable production and other specialized agriculture.

The five AEAs recommended for designation are:

- Burnett AEA, Dodge County: There are existing cooperative ventures between landowners in the area and a strong agricultural infrastructure. In recent years, many investments have been made to farms and related agricultural businesses.
- Fairfield AEA, Sauk County: This area with its highly productive muck soils supports a diverse production of vegetables, mint and corn. There is an existing strong public/private partnership that supports agriculture while protecting existing wildlife resources.
- Heart of America’s Dairyland AEA, Clark County: The petitioners did extensive outreach to involve communities. A leader in dairy production, this area also supports vegetables, fruit, nursery and bedding plants. Potential local partnerships include economic development corporations, an agribusiness park and the Central Wisconsin Agribusiness Innovation Center.
- Hilbert Ag Land on Track AEA, Calumet County: Many cooperative efforts in the area include joint marketing and purchasing plans for dairy feed and forage. A new mill pelletizes baled alfalfa. The petitioners want to preserve their rural character while guiding residential and non-ag uses to urban areas. Strong partnerships with the local technical college, dairy promotion board and forage council exist.
- Trenton AEA, Dodge County: This is a strong cash-cropping area with livestock operations and vegetables that go to seven processing facilities along with agribusinesses such as ethanol plants, corn milling and agricultural cooperatives. By leveraging existing strong land use protections to ensure continued agricultural land use, the petitioners hope to spur local, regional and statewide agricultural growth.

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“Ag Enterprise Areas are a unique way to preserve large tracts of agricultural land for the future,” said Secretary Ben Brancel. “The designation of the AEA offers some certainty to farms and agricultural businesses that rely on one another. This in turn promotes monetary investments for the farms and businesses alike,” Brancel said.

To become officially designated, the recommended areas must go through a public rule making process, which requires a public hearing and approval by the Agriculture, Trade and Consumer Protection Board. Designations are anticipated to take effect January 1, 2012.

Once designated, landowners within the area can choose to enter into a 15-year farmland preservation agreement with the state. Landowners with an agreement can claim an income tax credit worth \$5 per acre, or \$10 per acre if the land is also within a certified farmland preservation zoning district. In exchange for this tax credit, the landowner voluntarily commits to maintain their land in agricultural use for 15 years.

This year is the second year that AEAs will be designated in the state. Twelve areas, totaling nearly 200,000 acres, were designated as AEAs in 2010. Maps of the 2010 areas are available at http://datcp.wi.gov/Environment/Working_Lands_Initiative/AEA/AEA_Map/index.aspx. Maps of the five areas recommended for designation this year will be posted as the rule materials are developed.

Overall, the state has authority to designate one million acres as agricultural enterprise areas.

The next round of AEA petitions will be available this fall.

For more information on Agricultural Enterprise Areas, contact Coreen Fallat, coreen.fallat@wisconsin.gov or (608) 224-4625.

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