# Purpose

Farming and agricultural activities remain an important form of economic activity in the Town of Dellona, and for many residents, a primary way of life. Traditionally, Dellona families have passed farmland and farming operations to succeeding generations. These traditions are increasingly being challenged by competing economic forces. Largely because of its proximity to the City of Wisconsin Dells, the Town of Dellona has begun to experience increasing rural residential development, more so than in other parts of Sauk County in the period between 1990 and 2000. Increases in property value assessments and health care costs, coupled with stagnant farm prices, create pressure on landowners to sell family farms and forestland to developers. While development of rural residential land provides an opportunity for landowners to realize significant non-farm economic benefit from their land, such land

divisions may encourage new land uses that conflict with adjacent agricultural practices, further contributing to the loss of family farms in the Town of Dellona.

This section highlights some of the trends in agriculture from a local, county and state perspective. More importantly, it provides guidance to the Town to allow for a specified amount of rural residential development that is compatible with continued agriculture land uses.

* 1. **Regional and Local Trends in Agriculture**

From 1987 to 2022, the estimated number of farms in Sauk County decreased from 1,502 to 1,408 (6.3%). The average size for farms in Sauk County also decreased from 246 acres in 1987 to 212 acres in 2022. During the same time period, the estimated number of farms in the State of Wisconsin decreased from 75,131 to 58,521, (22.1%), while the average size for farms increased from 221 acres to 236 acres. Notably, from 2017 to 2022, the number of farms in Wisconsin decreased by 9.3%, while the number of farms in Sauk County nearly stayed the same.

**Table A1: Trends in Average Size of Farms**

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| **Table A1: Trends in Average Size of Farms** |
| **Year** | **Sauk County Farms** | **Wisconsin Farms** |
| **Approximate Number of Farms** | **Average Size of Farm in Acres** | **Percent Change** | **Approximate Number of Farms** | **Average Size of Farm in Acres** | **Percent Change** |
| **1987** | 1,502 | 246 |   | 75,131 | 221 |   |
| **1992** | 1,383 | 243 | -1.2% | 67,959 | 228 | 3.2% |
| **1997** | 1,452 | 229 | -5.8% | 65,602 | 227 | -0.4% |
| **2002** | 1,673 | 211 | -7.9% | 77,131 | 204 | -10.1% |
| **2007** | 1,923 | 187 | -11.4% | 78,463 | 194 | -4.9% |
| **2012** | 1,665 | 200 | 7.0% | 69,754 | 209 | 7.7% |
| **2017** | 1,412 | 212 | 6.0% | 64,793 | 221 | 5.7% |
| **2022** | 1,408 | 212 | 0.0% | 58,521 | 236 | 6.8% |

*Source: USDA Census of Agriculture, 1987-2022*

From 1990 to 2022, the estimated number of farms in Sauk County decreased by 11.8%, while the number of dairy farms decreased by 82.1%. In Sauk County, there were estimated 1.7 farms per square mile during 2022, and an estimated 0.15 dairy farms per square mile.

**Table A2: Trends in Farm Numbers**

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| **Table A2: Trends in Farm Numbers in Sauk County from 1990-2022** |
| **Estimated Farm Numbers** | **Dairy Farm Numbers** |
| **1990** | **1997** | **2007** | **2017** | **2022** | **% Change, 1990-2022** | **Estimated Farms per square mile, 2022** | **1989** | **1997** | **2007** | **2017** | **2022** | **% Change, 1989-2022** | **Dairy Farms per Square Mile, 2022** |
| 1597 | 1507 | 1,923 | 1,412 | 1,408 | -11.8% | 1.7 | 687 | 475 | 295 | 188 | 123 | -82.1% | 0.15 |

*Source: USDA Census of Agriculture, 1990-2022*

The estimated number of farms for Sauk County illustrated in the **C*harts A1 Trends in Average Size of Farm and A2 Trends in Farm Numbers****,* differs. This is due to different methodologies used between the methodology for estimating the number of farms in Sauk County prepared by the Program on Agricultural Technology Studies (PATS), UW Madison, and Census of Agriculture. The individual Town data is no longer available through the PATS program, but data trends were continued through 2022 with the most recent data available during the time of this plan for the County agricultural statistics.

**5.2 Land in Agriculture Use**

Land sales in the Sauk County, and State of Wisconsin, indicate that 1,090 acres of farmland were sold in Sauk County in 2022 through 17 transactions. All sales saw the land continuing in agricultural use. The average dollars per acre for agricultural land continuing in agricultural use was slightly higher in Sauk County ($7,440) than Wisconsin ($7,157).

**Tables A3: Agriculture Land Sales, Sauk County, and State of Wisconsin**

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| **Table A3a: Agriculture Land Sales Without Buildings 2022** |
|  | **Agricultural Land Continuing in Agricultural Use** | **Agricultural Land Being Diverted to Other Uses** | **Total of all Agricultural Land** |
| **Number of Transactions** | **Acres Sold** | **Dollars Per Acre** | **Number of Transactions** | **Acres Sold** | **Dollars Per Acre** | **Number of Transactions** | **Acres Sold** | **Dollars Per Acre** |
| **Sauk County** | 17 | 1,090 | 7,440 | - | - | - | 17 | 1,090 | 7,440 |
| **Wisconsin** | 888 | 52,747 | 7,157 | 56 | 2,267 | 24,485 | 944 | 114,311 | -\* |

*Source: USDA’s National Agricultural Statistics Service, 2022*

*\*Dollars per acre not listed for Total of All Agricultural Land*

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| **Table A3b: Agriculture Land Sales With Buildings 2020** |
|  | **Agricultural Land Continuing in Agricultural Use** | **Agricultural Land Being Diverted to Other Uses** | **Total of all Agricultural Land** |
| **Number of Transactions** | **Acres Sold** | **Dollars Per Acre** | **Number of Transactions** | **Acres Sold** | **Dollars Per Acre** | **Number of Transactions** | **Acres Sold** | **Dollars Per Acre** |
| **Sauk County** |  20 |  1,339  | 7,058 | 2 |  92 |  12,815 |  22 |  1,431  |  7,428  |
| **Wisconsin** |  596  |  42,308  |  6,559  |  45  |  1,517  |  11,466  |  641  |  43,825  |  6,729  |

*Source: USDA’s National Agricultural Statistics Service, 2020*

*\* Data for land sales with buildings not provided after 2020*

* 1. **Production Trends**

The County averaged 177 bushels of corn for grain per acre in 2022, compared to 168 bushels per acre in 2017. The County averaged 20 tons of corn for silage per acre according to the 2022 USDA Census on Agriculture, the same average as in 2017. In comparison, the State averaged 174 bushels of corn for grain and 20.5 tons of corn for silage per acre in 2022. Sauk County yielded on average 53.5 bushels of soybeans per acre and the State averaged 51 bushels per acre in 2022, up from 47 bushels for Sauk County and 46 bushels for Wisconsin in 2017.

**Tables A4 & A5: Production trends: Sauk County & State of Wisconsin**

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| **Table A4: Farm Production Trends Forage/Feed, 2017** |
|  | **Forage/Feed** |
| **Corn for Grain** | **Corn for Silage** | **Soybeans** | **Sorghum for Grain** | **Sorghum for Silage** | **Wheat for grain, all** | **Oats & Barley** |
| **Acres** | **Yield (bushels)** | **Acres** | **Yield (tons)** | **Acres** | **Yield (bushels)** | **Acres** | **Yield (bushels)** | **Acres** | **Yield (tons)** | **Acres** | **Yield (bushels)** | **Acres** | **Yield (bushels)** |
| **Sauk County** | 69,217 | 11,623,669 | 15,100 | 295,291 | 38,470 | 1,809,438 | - | - | 50 | 396 | 4,459 | 322,951 | 1,436 | 82,858 |
| **Wisconsin** | 3,074,502 | 519,334,406 | 921,602 | 17,474,959 | 2,214,985 | 101,917,737 | 3,171 | 292,849 | 2,646 | 34,866 | 200,613 | 13,285,868 | 105,024 | 6,191,952 |

*Source: USDA Census of Agriculture, 2017*

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| **Table A5: Farm Production Trends Forage/Feed, 2022** |
|  | **Forage/Feed** |
| **Corn for Grain** | **Corn for Silage** | **Soybeans** | **Sorghum for Grain** | **Sorghum for Silage** | **Wheat for grain, all** | **Oats & Barley** |
| **Acres** | **Yield (bushels)** | **Acres** | **Yield (tons)** | **Acres** | **Yield (bushels)** | **Acres** | **Yield (bushels)** | **Acres** | **Yield (tons)** | **Acres** | **Yield (bushels)** | **Acres** | **Yield (bushels)** |
| **Sauk County** | 76,306 | 13,556,719 | 9,401 | 187,423 | 42,696 | 2,282,623 | - | - | - | - | 5,089 | 363,035 | 393 | 20,870 |
| **Wisconsin** | 3,065,380 | 533,043,125 | 787,423 | 16,167,200 | 2,144,830 | 109,209,073 | 921 | 76,338 | 3,166 | 32,986 | 240,287 | 18,082,100 | 68,537 | 4,740,685 |

*Source: USDA Census of Agriculture, 2022*

The percentage of farms with beef cows in Sauk County was higher than Wisconsin in 2022, however Sauk County had a lower percentage of farms with milk cows. The County and the State had similar percentages of farmers with sheep and lambs, as well as layer chickens. While beef cows were accounted for on 25.9% of farms in Sauk County, their numbers (7,034) were significantly lower than those of milk cows (16,971) and hogs and pigs (32,301). From 2017 to 2022, the County saw a 15% decrease in the number of milk cows, and a 4.6% decrease in the percentage of farms that had milk cows.

**Tables A6 & A7: Dairy Production Trends: Sauk County & State of Wisconsin**

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| **Table A6: Farm Production Trends Livestock and Poultry in Percentage of Farms Inventory, 2017** |
|   | **Beef Cows** | **Milk Cows** | **Hogs & Pigs** | **Sheep & Lambs** | **Layer Chickens** | **Broilers & Other Meat Chickens** |
| **#** | **% of farms** | **#** | **% of farms** | **#** | **% of farms** | **#** | **% of farms** | **#** | **% of farms** | **#** | **% of farms** |
| **Sauk County** | 8,297 | 25.8% | 19,965 | 13.3% | 34,350 | 3.3% | 2,691 | 3.8% | 95,757 | 12.5% | 1,736 | 1.3% |
| **Wisconsin** | 287,100 | 21.5% | 1,280,395 | 13.9% | 298,879 | 3.4% | 80,688 | 4.4% | 7,639,627 | 12.3% | 53,438,462 | 1.9% |

*Source: USDA Census of Agriculture, 2017*

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| **Table A7: Farm Production Trends Livestock and Poultry in Percentage of Farms Inventory, 2022** |
|   | **Beef Cows** | **Milk Cows** | **Hogs & Pigs** | **Sheep & Lambs** | **Layer Chickens** | **Broilers & Other Meat Chickens** |
| **#** | **% of farms** | **#** | **% of farms** | **#** | **% of farms** | **#** | **% of farms** | **#** | **% of farms** | **#** | **% of farms** |
| **Sauk County** | 7,034 | 25.9% | 16,971 | 8.7% | 32,301 | 4.4% | 2,516 | 4.5% | 19,101 | 15.2% | 2,600 | 3.1% |
| **Wisconsin** | 284,400 | 22.2% | 1,264,272 | 10.6% | 335,975 | 3.5% | 71,801 | 4.3% | 6,490,101 | 14.9% | 8,493,377 | 2.9% |

*Source: USDA Census of Agriculture, 2022*

**Summary of Agricultural Statistics**

Overall, the number of the farms across Sauk County is trending down, despite there being a net decrease of only 4 farms from 2017 to 2022. The State of Wisconsin has been experiencing a decline of the number of farms, while the average size of farms has been slightly increasing. The number of dairy farms in Sauk County, however, has rapidly declined over the last 3 decades. From 1989 to 2022, there has been a 82.1% decrease in dairy farms in the County. From 2002-2022 the number of dairy farms decreased by 65% while in the same period the number of livestock only decreased by 37%. This is indicative of the loss of smaller and perhaps medium sized dairy producers. This decrease is a common trend throughout Wisconsin. Across the State, the amount of land in agriculture is decreasing at an alarming rate. According to the USDA Census of Agriculture, Wisconsin saw 533,952 acres of agriculture land from 2017 to 2022, 3.7% of the total in 2017. Surprisingly, Sauk County only lost 803 acres of agriculture land, only 0.27% of the total in 2017.

# Local Farm Numbers and Types

Even though farming and related agricultural activities are declining, and the number of Dellona’s working adults that list agriculture as their occupation has dropped significantly since 1990 and only 6.5% of the workforce reports working in agriculture. Farmers in the Town of Dellona produce a variety of agricultural commodities including beef production, animal feed such as corn, alfalfa and soybeans as well as a number of cash crops. The Town in 2022 had approximately 10,050 acres of agricultural land or 44.6% of land use was in agriculture.


# Farmland Preservation Program

The Farmland Preservation Program was established by the State of Wisconsin and was designed to help local governments that wish to preserve farmland through local planning and zoning by providing tax relief to farmers who participate. In the late 1970’s, Sauk County produced a Farmland Preservation Plan as a requirement to enter the program. Although the Town of Dellona did not adopt Exclusive Agriculture Zoning to qualify the Town’s farmers to take part in this program, stand-alone contracts are still permitted. These fourteen individual contracts include approximately 1,162 acres, with most contracts extending beyond 2010 and some through to 2033.

# Land Capability Classification

Soil suitability is a key factor in determining the best and most cost-effective locations and means for agricultural practices in the Town of Dellona. The USDA-NRCS groups soils suitable for agriculture based on the most suitable land for producing food, feed, fiber, forage and oilseed crops. When classifying soils, consideration is given to the limitations of the soil, its risk of damage, and its response to treatment. In general, the fewer the limitations, the more suitable the soil is for agricultural use. ***Map 5-1 Land Capability*** depicts the soils by classifications for the Town of Dellona.

Approximately 41.04% of the soils in the Town of Dellona are Class I, II, or III soils. Class one soils have few limitations that restrict their use. Class II soils have some limitations such as wetness, erosion, or droughtiness that require conservation practices. They are cultivated with a few simple precautions. Class III soils have many limitations with special management practices required. Approximately 47.93% of the soils in the Town of Dellona are Class IV, V, and VI soils. Class IV soils have severe limitations that require careful management. Class V soils are suited mainly to pasture due to permanent limitations such as wetness or stoniness. Class VI soils have limitations that make them generally unsuited for cultivation and limit use to pasture, woodland or wildlife.

**Table A7: Soil Class and Acreage of in the Town of Dellona**

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| Town of Dellona Land Capability Classification |
| Soil Class | Acres | Percent of Total Land Area |
| Class I | 0 | 0.00% |
| Class II | 2,396 | 10.64% |
| Class III | 6,845 | 30.40% |
| Class IV | 5,734 | 25.47% |
| Class V | 0 | 0.00% |
| Class VI | 5,054 | 22.45% |
| Class VII | 1,566 | 6.96% |
| Class VIII | 910 | 4.04% |
| Total | 22,505 | 99.95% |

*Source: Sauk County Land Resources and Environment Department*

Approximately 11.00% of the soils in the Town of Dellona are Class VII and VIII soils. Class VII soils have very severe limitations that restrict their use to pasture, woodland and wildlife. Class VIII soils (includes open water), with very severe limitations, have use restricted to recreation and wildlife.

As a general reference, ***Map 5-2 Prime Farmland/Slope Delineation*** defines prime farmland as having Class I and Class II soils. Approximately 10.64% of the soils on this map are indicated as prime farmland. Soils that require other management practices to be considered prime farmland are also indicated as such on the map.

# Agriculture Infrastructure

The agricultural industry in the Town of Dellona is supported by a diverse agricultural infrastructure within the area. Although most agriculture-supporting enterprises are not located within the Town, they can be easily accessed in the nearby trade centers.

# Alternative Agricultural Opportunities

Despite the changes in the number of farmers, farm size and the price of farmland, agricultural productivity has increased. According to a recent study completed in August, 2001, by the University of Wisconsin-Madison, entitled, “Wisconsin County Agricultural Trends in the 1990’s”, Sauk County remains one of the State’s leaders in terms of agricultural production and revenue generated.

Overall, changes to technology, machinery and agricultural practices have resulted in the industry becoming more efficient. In addition, it is more common for farms to concentrate their efforts on certain niche markets such as the production of organic, and non-

traditional products such as unique meats and cheeses and varied forest products. The promotion of locally produced products; Community Supported Agriculture; and direct marketing to the public, local restaurants, school districts, cooperatives and retail grocery cooperatives continues to produce positive results for the industry. Other examples of opportunities in the agricultural industry include agri- tourism/bed and breakfast establishments, recreational opportunities and agriculture-related cottage industries.

The Town of Dellona has adopted policies that support alternative agriculture and related opportunities.

# Federal, State and Local Programs and Resources

There are numerous programs and resources available through federal, state and local agencies that provide assistance to farmers to help ensure agricultural sustainability. These programs should not be looked at individually, as a possible solution to ensure the viability of agriculture, but rather as small components of the collective system aimed at preserving all scales of farming operations.

# Federal Programs and Resources

Below are some examples of federal programs and resources, administered by the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) that can provide assistance to farm operators in the Town of Dellona. The Farm Service Agency (FSA) and Natural Resource Conservation Service (NRCS) are agencies within the USDA that provide consultation and local administration of these programs and resources within Sauk County. In addition, these agencies also provide technical assistance and staffing to develop farm conservation plans and other management tools.

1. **Farmland and Ranch Land Protection Program (FRPP)** provides matching funds to help purchase development rights to keep productive farm and ranchland in agricultural uses. Working through existing programs, USDA partners with State, tribal or local governments and non-governmental organizations to acquire conservation easements or other interests in land from landowners. USDA provides up to 50% of the fair market easement value.
2. **Conservation Reserve Program (CRP)** is a voluntary program available to agricultural producers to help them safeguard environmentally sensitive land. Producers in CRP plant long-term, resource conserving covers to improve the quality of water, control soil erosion, and enhance wildlife habitat. In return, FSA provides participants with rental payments and cost-share assistance. Contract duration is between 10 and 15 years.

1. **Conservation Reserve Enhancement Program (CREP)** is a voluntary land retirement program that helps agricultural producers protect environmentally sensitive land, decrease erosion, restore wildlife habitat, and safeguard ground and surface water. Like CRP, CREP is administered by the USDA’s FSA.
2. **Wetlands Reserve Program (WRP)** is a voluntary program that provides technical and financial assistance to eligible landowners to address wetland, wildlife habitat, soil, water, and related natural resource concerns on private lands in an environmentally beneficial and cost-effective manner. The program provides an opportunity for landowners to receive financial incentives to enhance wetlands in exchange for retiring marginal land from agriculture. The program offers three options inclusive of a permanent easement, 30-Year Easement or a Restoration Cost Share Agreement.
3. **Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP)** provides a voluntary conservation program for farmers and ranchers. The program promotes agriculture productions and environmental quality as compatible national goals. EQIP offers financial and technical help to assist eligible participants install or implement structural and management practices on eligible agricultural land. EQIP offers contracts with a minimum term that ends one year after the implementation of the last scheduled practices and a maximum term of 10 years.
4. **Wildlife Habitat Incentives Program (WHIP)** is a voluntary program that encourages creation of high-quality wildlife habitats that support wildlife populations of National, State, Tribal, and local significance. Through WHIP, the NRCS provides technical assistance to landowners and others to develop upland, wetland, riparian, and aquatic habitat in areas on their property.
* **State and Local Programs and Resources**

In addition to the federal programs, several state and local programs and resources are available to aid in the sustainability of agricultural operations in the Town of Excelsior. These programs are supported by agencies like the Wisconsin Department of Safety and Professional Services (DSPS), Department of Agriculture, Trade and Consumer Protection (DATCP) and local organizations like the Sauk County Development Corporation and the Sauk County Department of Land Conservation. A few examples of these programs and resources include:

1. **Farmland Preservation Program** which provides tax credits to farms of 35 acres or more under Exclusive Agriculture Zoning, having produced at least $6,000 of gross farm revenues in the taxable year preceding the petition or those that produced at least $18,000 in gross farm revenues during the three taxable years preceding the petition, and which operations are in compliance with county soil and water conservation programs.
2. **Wisconsin’s Use Value Tax System** provides tax relief to agricultural landowners by assessing property on it value in terms of crop production and agricultural market prices, not current real estate market trends or non-farm development potential.
3. **Agriculture Development Zone (South-Central)** is an agricultural economic development program in the State of Wisconsin that provides tax credits to farm operators and business owners who make new investments in agricultural operations. These tax incentives are offered for three basic categories of investment including job creation, environmental remediation, or capital investments in technology/new equipment. The Wisconsin Department of Safety and Professional Services administers this program.
* **Wildlife Abatement and Claim Program** is a county-administered program to assist landowners that have excessive levels of agriculture crop damage from deer, bear, geese, or turkey.

# Agriculture Goal, Objectives and Policies

**Agriculture Resources Goal:** Manage existing agricultural land with emphasis on practices which enhance land value for agricultural purposes.

# Agriculture Resources Objectives/Policies:

ARO-1 Provide information to new and existing residents on farm life, farm noises, odors, and operational requirements prior to granting permits for the construction of new rural residences.

ARO-2 Encourage timber harvesting according to sustainable forestry practices that meet the needs of current generations while providing adequate resources to meet the needs of future generations.

*Note: There is currently a wide range of certification systems, including Forest Stewardship Council, Sustainable Forestry Initiative, American Tree Farm, and International Standards Organization (ISO) 1400.*

ARO-3 Identify and pursue opportunities for landowners to obtain additional income from activities which support local farm product marketing initiatives.

ARO-4 Promote the conservation of soil and water resources for agriculture uses. ARP-4a Encourage the use of *Best Management Practices* by landowners.

**Note:** “Best management practices” are defined by the U.S. EPA as “agricultural practices that

are suitable for reducing or minimizing water quality impacts, as part of an overall watershed approach.” The EPA mentions eight practices as part of its CORE 4 and Non-Point Pollution Management programs: 1) Conservation Tillage; 2) Crop Nutrient Management; 3) Pest management; 4) Conservation Buffers; 5) Irrigation Water Management; 6) Grazing Management; 7) Animal Feeding Operations Management; and 8) Erosion and Sediment Control. (Source: [www.epa.gov](http://www.epa.gov/) Agricultural Management Practices for Water Quality Protection.)

ARP-4b Encourage soil conservation practices to reduce soil erosion, improve water quality, and increase farmland productivity.

ARP-4c Avoid disturbance to wetlands, shorelands, and other environmentally sensitive areas.

ARO-5 Preserve productive farmlands and encourage the maintenance and growth of family farm operations for continued and future agriculture uses. For the purpose of this plan, family farm operations are broadly defined as any activity that utilizes the land to produce a product or commodity for sale and which provides for family income. These operations may include maple syrup production, small-scale animal husbandry, organic production, fruit orchards, cash cropping, large-scale animals operations etc.

ARP-5a Encourage residential and commercial development in areas least suited for agricultural purposes (perhaps land where there is no history of farming or that is inaccessible)

ARP-5b Discourage land divisions or subdivisions on prime farmland. ARP-5c Protect farming operations from incompatible adjacent land uses. ARP-5d Encourage / support agricultural land uses.