

Program Summary

Wisconsin Working Lands Initiative

July 2009

The Wisconsin Working Lands Initiative was passed as a part of the state's 2009—2011 biennial budget process. The Wisconsin Working Lands Initiative can be found primarily in Chapter 91 of Wisconsin State Statutes. Main components include:

- Expand and modernize the state's existing farmland preservation program
- Establish agricultural enterprise areas (AEAs)
- Develop a purchase of agricultural conservation easement matching grant program (PACE)

The goal of the Working Lands Initiative is to achieve preservation of areas significant for current and future agricultural uses through successful implementation of these components

EXPAND AND MODERNIZE THE STATE'S EXISTING FARMLAND PRESERVATION PROGRAM

- Modernize county farmland preservation plans to meet current challenges
- Provide planning grants to reimburse counties for farmland preservation planning
- Establish new minimum zoning standards to increase local flexibility and reduce land use conflicts; local governments may apply more stringent standards
- Increase income tax credits for program participants
- Improve consistency between local plans and ordinances
- Simplify the certification process and streamline state oversight
- Ensure compliance with state soil and water conservation standards
- Collect a flat per acre conversion fee when land under farmland preservation zoning is re-zoned for other uses

ESTABLISH AGRICULTURAL ENTERPRISE AREAS

- Maintain large areas of contiguous land primarily in agricultural use and reduce land use conflicts
- Encourage farmers and local governments to invest in agriculture
- Provide an opportunity to enter into farmland preservation agreements to claim income tax credits
- Encourage compliance with state soil and water conservation standards

Wisconsin Department of Agriculture, Trade and Consumer Protection

<http://workinglands.wi.gov>

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DEVELOP A PURCHASE OF AGRICULTURAL CONSERVATION EASEMENT (PACE) GRANT PROGRAM

- Protect farmland through voluntary programs to purchase agricultural conservation easements
- Provide up to \$12 million in state grant funds in the form of matching grants to local governments and non-profit conservation organizations to purchase agricultural conservation easements from willing sellers
- Stretch state dollars by requiring grants to be matched by other funds such as federal grants, local contributions and/or private donations
- Establish a council to advise the state on pending grants and proposed easement purchases
- Consider the value of the proposed easement for preservation of agricultural productivity, conservation of agricultural resources, ability to protect or enhance waters of the state, and proximity to other protected land
- Ensure consistency of state-funded easement purchases with local plans and ordinances

Educational Opportunities

The department will be organizing workshops to help local governments and citizens to better understand the Working Lands Initiative. These workshops will be designed to answer questions about participation in the Working Lands program.

To be notified of upcoming opportunities:

- Email DATCPWorkingLands@wisconsin.gov. In the email subject line, indicate which topic you are interested in learning more about:
 - General program information
 - Farmland preservation plan updates
 - Zoning ordinance updates
 - Establishing an AEA
 - Participating in the PACE program
- Call (608) 224-4500

To receive our Working Lands Newsletter:

- Email DATCPWorkingLands@wisconsin.gov. In the email subject line, write "Subscribe to newsletter."

For further information, visit <http://workinglands.wi.gov>.