

CHAPTER 7

Agricultural Resources

Introduction

Agriculture is a prominent feature of Erin Prairie, creating a backdrop that people find aesthetically pleasing while providing significant economic value to the local, state, national, and global economy.

The preservation of prime farmland is at the forefront of many discussions in the State. It is considered one of Wisconsin's most valuable resources that, once developed, would be difficult and expensive, or impossible to reclaim. At the same time, the equity value of farmland represents a major asset, and liquidation of that value can be a significant part of a landowner's retirement plan.

Within the last five years, the demand for farmland has come full circle. In the late 1990's, residential development was occurring at a rapid pace throughout St. Croix County and farmland was in high demand for housing and commercial development. With the recent collapse of the housing market and the high cost of fuel, farmland is now in high demand for growing crops, specifically corn, for food and fuel, and commuting to the deep suburbs has become less attractive. The future will reveal which of these opposing trends has greater long-term importance.

The Agricultural Resources chapter will address the conservation and effective management of prime farmland while realizing the vision and overall planning goals of the Town's comprehensive plan.

Farms

The significance of agriculture in St. Croix County and its neighbors is shown in Table 7-1. The United States Department of Agriculture provides agricultural statistics by County. The number of farms in 2002 was somewhat higher than in neighboring counties. A farm is defined for this comparison as any business that has sales of at least \$1,000 of agricultural products. The economic impact of farming in St. Croix County will be addressed in the Economic Development chapter.

Table 7-1 – Number of Farms

County	1987	1992	1997	2002
Dunn	1,515	1,383	1,701	1,683
Pierce	1,240	1,214	1,265	1,510
Polk	1,467	1,324	1,301	1,659
St. Croix	1,576	1,391	1,520	1,864

Source: USDA, National Agricultural Statistics Service

Land Cover

Map 7-1 shows agricultural land cover in the Town of Erin Prairie in 1999. The Wisconsin Initiative for Statewide Cooperation on Landscape Analysis and Data (WISCLAND) was formed in 1993 to develop digital geographic data for the state. These data were created by using satellite imagery to identify vegetative cover.

Map 7-1 divides agricultural land cover in Erin Prairie into three main categories.

- Corn
- Forage Crops: includes Alfalfa, Hay and Hay Mix.
- Other Row Crops: includes Peas, Potatoes, Snap Beans, Soybeans, and Others.

Though the current land cover may be different due to crop rotation or lands taken out of the Conservation Reserve Program to grow crops, the map shows the impact agriculture has on the Town's land-use practices. Recent economic trends have likely increase the amount of land farmed.

Prime Farmland

Map 7-2 shows prime farmland in the Town of Erin Prairie. The U.S. Department of Agriculture describes prime farmland as land that has the best combination of physical and chemical characteristics for producing food, feed, forage, and fiber and is available for these uses. A majority of the Town of Erin Prairie consists of soils classified as prime.

There are large areas in the northwest and southeast of the Town that are classified as prime farmland that are not farmed. Currently, these areas are not economical to farm because of limitations such as slopes, wet soils, and land belonging to State or Federal agencies..

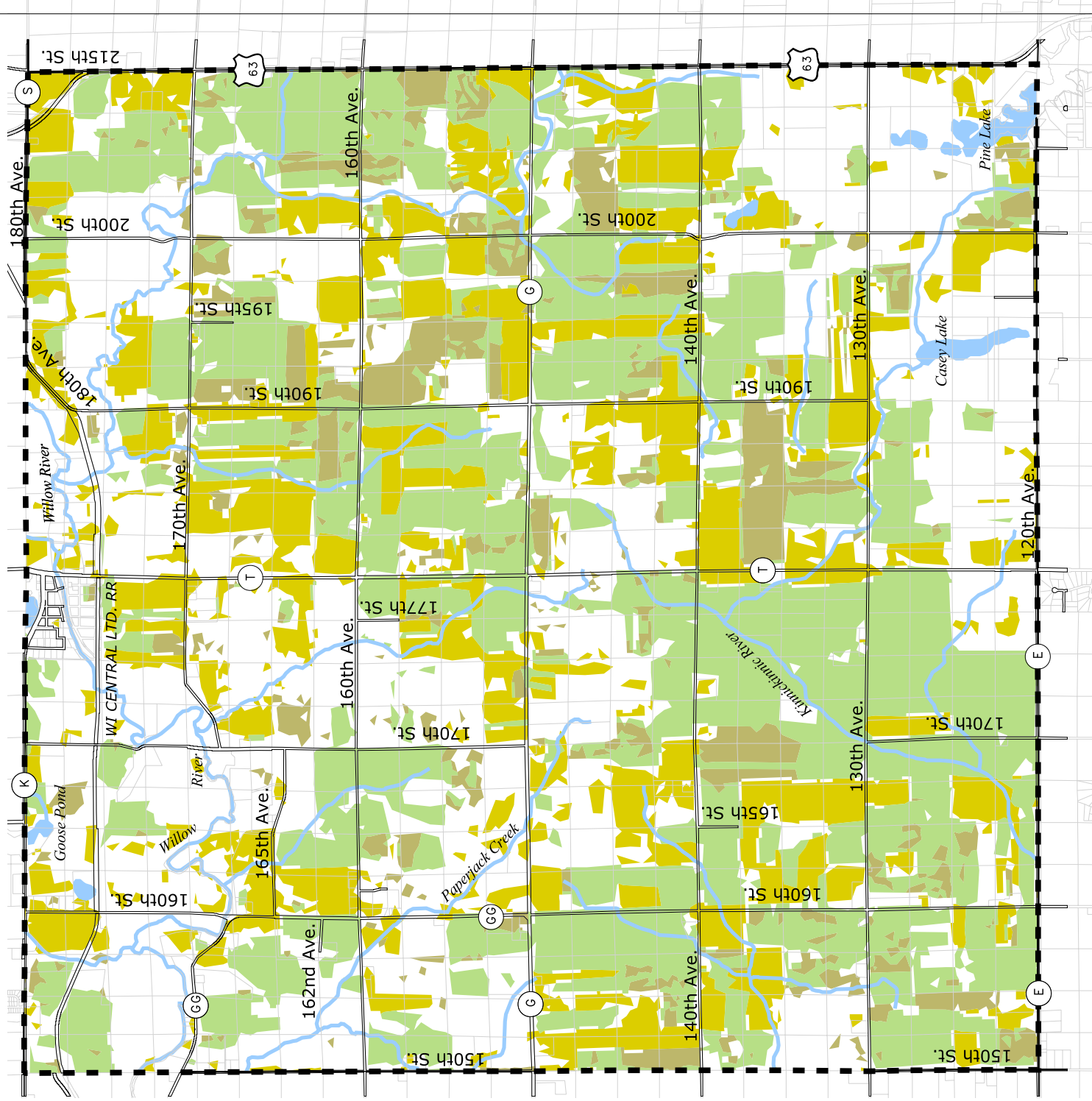
Land Evaluation and Site Assessment for Agriculture (LESA)

Land Evaluation and Site Assessment for Agriculture (LESA) is a tool that can be used to evaluate the agricultural value of land. The LESA system has two parts. The Land Evaluation (LE) component is based on soil characteristics while the Site Assessment (SA) is based on other factors such as size of parcel, surrounding land uses, and distance to public sewer. The LESA system was developed for St. Croix County in 2002 by a diverse group of St. Croix County departments as well as Town officials and residents.

Map 7-3 shows the combined LESA score for parcels in the Town of Erin Prairie. A majority of parcels fall in the 131-159 point range out of a total of 180 possible points. LESA point totals of 116 and above signify lands most suitable for long-term agricultural use.

LAND COVER

Town of Erin Prairie
St. Croix County, Wisconsin



Land Cover
Corn
Forage Crops
Other Row Crops

Town Boundary
Road Rights-of-Way
Lot Lines
Rivers, Streams, and Creeks
Lakes and Flowages



Source: WISLAND 1999



Farmland Preservation and Exclusive Ag Zoning

The State of Wisconsin enacted the Farmland Preservation Program in 1977- St. Croix County adopted a Farmland Preservation Plan in 1980. As part of the implementation of that plan, exclusive ag zoning was created. The purpose of exclusive ag zoning is to protect areas within which agricultural uses may exist. Approximately 87% of land in the Town of Erin Prairie is zoned exclusive ag.

Agricultural Goals, Objectives, Programs, Policies, and Actions

Goal 1: Preserve the productive farmlands in the Town for long-term farm use, and to maintain agriculture as a major economic activity and way of life..

Objectives

1. Preserve productive farmland.
2. Protect farm operations from incompatible adjacent land uses or activities that will adversely affect the long-term agricultural investment in land and improvements
3. Support local farms.

Programs, Policies, and Actions:

1. Support sustainable farming management practices that protect the Town's soils and reduce erosion. Encourage conservation tillage, and responsible irrigation that does not mine the ground water and lower the water table. Monitor ground-water levels to ensure that this resource is not degraded.
2. Support the development of agriculturally based businesses.
3. If economic pressure for increased housing development continues, guide slow residential growth that is compatible with the agricultural heritage of the Town, and conforms to the St. Croix County conservation subdivision ordinance, resulting in clustered housing and open space protected in conservation easements so that farmland is not fragmented or destroyed.
4. Develop a Town subdivision ordinance that supports concepts such as purchase or transfer of development rights, or purchase of agricultural conservation easements, allowing partial liquidation of farmland equity, while ensuring that the land itself remains undeveloped.