5.0 Purpose

While manufacturing and retail trade occupations represented the majority of employment activities in the Town of Excelsior in 2000, farming and agricultural activities continue to represent an important form of economic activity, and for some Excelsior residents, a primary way of life. Excelsior's farmland and farming operations have been traditionally passed down to succeeding generations. As in most of Wisconsin, the local agricultural community faces many challenges. Because of its proximity to the City of Reedsburg, the Town of Excelsior has begun to experience an increased rate of rural residential development, more so than in many other parts of Sauk County. Along with this residential development rate, increases in property value assessments, increasing health care costs, and stagnant farm prices have compounded recent challenges to the agriculture industry.

From being a viable employment opportunity and lifestyle for many, the future of Excelsior's agricultural economy is now in question. While rural residential development can provide an opportunity for landowners to realize some immediate economic value from their land, if done without careful thought, such land divisions may conflict with adjacent agricultural land uses and contribute to the loss of prime farmland in the Town of Excelsior.

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.

5.1 Regional and Local Trends in Agriculture

From 1987 to 1997, the estimated number of farms in Sauk County decreased from 1,502 to 1,452 (by 3.33%). The average size for farms in Sauk County also decreased from 246 acres in 1987 to 229 acres in 1997. During the same time period, the estimated number of farms in the State of Wisconsin decreased from 75,131 to 65, 602, (by 12.68%), while the average size of farms increased from 221 acres to 227 acres.

Table A1: Trends in Average Size of Farms

Sauk County Farms				Wisconsin Farms			
Year	Approximate Number of Farms	Average Size of Farm in Acres	Percent Change in Average Size	Year	Approximate Number of Farms	Average Size of Farm in Acres	Percent Change in Average Size
1987	1,502	246		1987	75,131	221	
1992	1,383	243	-1.22%	1992	67,959	228	3.17%
1997	1,452	229	-5.76%	1997	65,602	227	-0.44%

Source: Wisconsin County Agricultural trends in the 1990's, Prepared by PATS, UW Madison, August 2001

From 1990 to 1997, the estimated number of farms in Excelsior increased from 76 to 89, while the number of dairy farms decreased from 36 to 23. In Sauk County, both farms and dairy farms have decreased. The estimated number of farms per square mile in 1997 is similar for the Town and the County. For dairy farm density, the Town had 0.7 dairy farms per square mile and the County had 0.6 dairy farms per square mile.

Table A2: Trends in Farm Numbers

	Estimated Farm Numbers				Dairy Farm Numbers			
	1990	1997	% change	Estimated Farms per square mile	1989	1997	% change	Dairy Farms per Square Mile, 1997
Excelsior	76	89	17.1%	2.6	36	23	-36.1%	0.7
Sauk County	1597	1507	-5.6%	1.9	687	475	-30.9%	0.6

Source: Wisconsin Town Land Use Databook, Prepared by the Program on Agriculture Technology Studies (PATS), UW Madison, September 1999 – Wisconsin Agriculture Statistics Service in cooperation with the WI Department of Agriculture

The estimated number of farms for Sauk County illustrated in the ***Tables A1 Trends in Average Size of Farm and A2 Trends in Farm Numbers*** differs. This is due to different methodologies used for estimating the number of farms in Sauk County by the Program on Agricultural Technology Studies (PATS), UW Madison, and Census of Agriculture.

5.2 Land in Agriculture Use

Land sales in the Town of Excelsior, Sauk County, and State of Wisconsin, indicate that 3,709 acres of farmland were sold in the Town of Excelsior from 1990-1997. Of the acreage sold, 747 acres were diverted out of agricultural uses at an average price per acre of $1,007, between 1990 and 1997. As a point of reference, the Town of Ironton had the highest amount of land converted out of agriculture at 1,520 acres, while the Town of Sumpter had the lowest amount at only 88 acres.

Table A3: Agriculture Land Sales, Town of Excelsior, Sauk County, and State of Wisconsin

	Agriculture Land Continuing in Agriculture Use			Agricultural Land Being Diverted to Other Uses			Total of all Agriculture Land		
	Number of Trans.	Acres Sold	Dollars Per Acre	Number of Trans.	Acres Sold	Dollars per Acre	Number of Trans.	Acres Sold	Dollars Per Acre
Town of Excelsior 1990-1997	N/A	2,962	$963	N/A	747	$1,007	64	3,709	$976
Sauk County 1990-1997	N/A	50,947	$914	N/A	16,130	$1,124	1,103	67,077	$979
Sauk County 2001	33	2,017	$2,511	19	642	$2,712	52	2,670	$2,560
State of Wisconsin 2001	1,974	126,404	$2,060	993	49,337	$3,448	2,967	175,741	$2,450

Source: Wisconsin Town Land Use Databook, Prepared by the Program on Agriculture Technology Studies (PATS), UW Madison, September 1999 – Wisconsin Agriculture Statistics Service in cooperation with the WI Department of Agriculture

5.3 Production Trends

During 1999, the average yield for field corn for Sauk County differed by only 1 bushel per acre from that of the State. The average difference for corn silage is 1 ton per acre. Alfalfa yield in Sauk County was 0.3 tons per acre less than the State, 0.5 tons more for per acre forages harvested, and 2.0 tons per acre more for soybean yields.

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

Farm Production Trends, 1999	Forage/Feed							
	Alfalfa		Other Forages	All Forage Harvested		Soybeans		Small Grains (Oats, barley, wheat)
	Acres	Yield	Acres	Acres	Yield	Acres	Yield	Acres
Sauk County	715	4.1	8,100	79,600	4.6	24,500	48	7,300
State of Wisconsin	3,000,000	4.4	600,000	3,600,000	4.1	1,300,000	46	485,000

Farm Production Trends, 1999	Corn				
	Field Corn		Corn Silage		Total Corn
	Acres	Yield	Acres	Yield	acres
Sauk County	66,000	144	15,100	16	81,100
State of Wisconsin	2,850,000	143	730,000	17	3,580,000

Source: Wisconsin County Agricultural trends in the 1990's, Prepared by PATS, UW Madison, August 2001

The number of dairy cows, the total milk produced by them, and the number of dairy herds decreased for both the County and the State from 1991-1999, while the productivity of the herds increased from 1991 to 1999 for both the County and the State.

Table A6: Dairy Production Trends: Sauk County & State of Wisconsin

Dairy Trends, Sauk County and Wisconsin	Net Change, 1991 – 1999				Percent Change, 1991 – 1999			
	Number of Cows	Total Milk Produced	Herd Productivity	Number of Dairy Herds	Number of Cows	Total Milk Produced	Herd Productivity	Number of Dairy Herds
Sauk County 1991 – 1997	-6,300	-4,060	2,800	-233	-17.10%	-0.80%	19.70%	-35.00%
State of Wisconsin 1991 – 1997	-388,000	-1,329,000	2,983	-12,103	-22.10%	-5.40%	21.40%	-37.20%

Source: Wisconsin County Agricultural trends in the 1990's, Prepared by PATS, UW Madison, August 2001

These statistics are reflective of the agricultural industry throughout the State of Wisconsin. Despite these changes, agricultural productivity has increased. Sauk County remains one of the State's leaders in terms of production and revenue generated, according to a recent study completed in August, 2001, by the University of Wisconsin- Madison, entitled, "*Wisconsin County Agricultural Trends in the 1990s*".

5.4 Local Farm Numbers and Types

Even though farming and related agricultural activities are declining, they still are a significant economic activity in the Town. Farmers in the Town of Excelsior produce a variety of agricultural commodities including dairy, beef production, animal feed such as corn, alfalfa and soybeans as well as a number of cash crops. Historical data shows that the total number of dairy farms has declined significantly. In 1997 there were 23 dairy farms, down from 32 dairy farms in 1989.

5.5 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 Excelsior 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 individual contracts include approximately 548 acres, with most contracts extending beyond 2010 through 2020.

5.6 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 Excelsior. 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. ***Map5-1 Land Capability Classification*** depicts the soils by classifications for the Town of Excelsior.

Approximately 46% of the soils in the Town of Excelsior are Class I, II, or III soils. Class I 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.

Table A7: Soil Class and Acreage of in the Town of Excelsior

Town of Excelsior Land Capability Classification		
Soil Class	Acres	Percent of Total Land Area
Class I	571	2.62%
Class II	3,970	18.22%
Class III	5,530	25.38%
Class IV	4,825	22.14%
Class V	0	0.00%
Class VI	4,296	19.72%
Class VII	958	4.40%
Class VIII	1,639	7.52%
Total	21,789	100.00%

Source: Sauk County Planning & Zoning

Approximately 42 % of the soils in the Town of Excelsior 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.

Approximately 12% of the soils in the Town of Excelsior 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 21% 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.

5.7 Agriculture Infrastructure

The agricultural industry in the Town of Excelsior 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.

5.8 Alternative Agricultural Opportunities

Despite the change 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 improved agricultural industry efficiency. 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 commodities such as specialty meats, artisan 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 expands opportunities for the industry.

Other examples of agricultural alternatives include agri-tourism/bed and breakfast establishments, recreational activities and agriculture-related cottage industries. The Town of Excelsior has adopted policies that support alternative agriculture and related opportunities.

5.9 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.

☐ Purchase of Development Rights Program

The Purchase of Development Rights (PDR) is a concept employed in communities across the country in which a public agency (such as the local or county government) or a private non-profit conservation organization compensates private landowners who voluntarily agree to permanently extinguish their rights to develop their property for residential or commercial use.

A legal agreement called a Conservation Easement is executed by the parties and recorded with the Register of Deeds as part of the permanent land record for that property. Agriculture, forestry, recreation and other traditional uses of the land are typically permitted, within the parameters of approved soil and water conservation plans and/or forestry stewardship plans.

Sauk County has already implemented the Baraboo Range Protection Program (BRPP) to purchase development rights from willing sellers whose land lies within the boundaries of the Baraboo Range National Natural Landmark (BRNNL), as it existed in March of 1999. Other local organizations work with willing landowners to protect properties outside the BRNNL as well, including some properties in the Town of Excelsior.

☐ 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 Excelsior. 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.

- **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 percent of the fair market easement value.

- **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.

- **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.

- **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, including a permanent easement, a 30-Year Easement or a Restoration Cost Share Agreement.

- **Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP)** provides a voluntary conservation program for farmers and ranchers that promote agriculture production 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.

- **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 the Wisconsin Department of Commerce, Department of Agriculture, Trade and Consumer Protection (DATCP), the University of Wisconsin Extension (UWEX), and local organizations such as the Sauk County Development Corporation and the Sauk County Land Conservation Department. A few examples of these programs and resources include:

- **Farmland Preservation Program** which provides tax credits to farms of 35 acres or more under Farmland Preservation contracts, having a farm income of not less than $6000 for each of the last three years, and which operations are in compliance with county soil and water conservation programs. ***Map 5-3 Town of Excelsior Farmland Preservation Plan Map*** describes lands generally

identified by the Town for long-term agricultural protection under the Farmland Preservation Program.

- **Wisconsin's Use Value Tax System** provides tax relief to agricultural landowners by assessing property value in terms of crop production and agricultural market prices, not current real estate market trends or non-farm development potential.

- **Agriculture Development Zone (South-Central)** is a new 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 Commerce administers this program.

- **Wildlife Abatement and Claim Program** is a county-administered program to assist landowners with excessive levels of agricultural crop damage from deer, bears, geese, or turkeys.

- **SavorWisconsin.com** is a program offshoot of Governor Doyle's "Grow Wisconsin" initiative, designed to enhance the state's economy. To help accomplish this, several steps have been taken to emphasize the purchase of locally grown, produced, and manufactured products to support Wisconsin's local producers and businesses. With this, SavorWisconsin.com started in late 2002 and is guided by DATCP, UWEX and the Wisconsin Apple Growers Association. The website highlights and promotes many of Wisconsin's smaller and independent agricultural producers as well as agriculture-related events Statewide.

5.10 Agriculture Goal, Objectives and Policies

Agriculture Resources Goal:
Maintain an economically and environmentally sustainable agriculture industry, both animal and crop based, and preserve farmland.

Agriculture Resources Objectives and Policies

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

ARP-1a Provide educational materials to persons seeking development permits to assure the agriculture ways of life are made available before the proposed permits are approved.

ARO-2 Maintain an environment for economically viable agriculture.

ARO-3 Maintain an environment for environmentally sustainable agriculture.

ARO-4 Preserve Farmland

ARP-4a The Town recommends that the county appeal to the state Land and Water Conservation Board to amend the Town's Agriculture Preservation Plan map ***(Map 5-3)*** to be consistent with this Comprehensive Plan.