

5.0 Purpose

While tourism and lake recreational activities represent a major form of economic activity in the Town of Woodland, manufacturing and agricultural activities represent a second form of economic activity, and for many Woodland residents, a primary way of life. Throughout the Town of Woodland's history, farmland and farming operations have been passed down to succeeding generations, a tradition that continues today. However, in the last 25 – 30 years, the agricultural community has faced many challenges.

Because of its proximity to the City of Mauston and Hillsboro, the Town of Woodland has begun to experience an increased rate of rural residential development, more so than in 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 the challenges to the agriculture industry recently. For years, farming has remained a viable employment opportunity and lifestyle for many in Woodland, but the future of a viable agricultural economy is in question. Development of rural residential lands is not inherently negative as it provides an opportunity for landowners to divide land as they see fit. However, done improperly, such land divisions may conflict with adjacent agricultural land uses and may contribute to the loss of prime farmland in the Town of Woodland. 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 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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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

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 **Charts 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).

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

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

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

5.3 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

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

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: Production Trends: Sauk County & State of Wisconsin

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

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.

5.4 Local Farm Numbers and Types

Even though farming and related agricultural activities are declining, they still are the primary economic activity in the Town. Farmers in the Town of Woodland 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. In 2007, Woodland had approximately 20 active dairy farms, a few beef farms, and 1 sheep farm. Historical data shows that the total number of dairy farms has declined significantly. In 1997 there were 43 dairy farms, down from 51 dairy farms in 1989. Currently, there are only 3 active dairy farms producing in the Town, but approximately 13,984 acres of land are still in agricultural production.

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 Woodland did not adopt Exclusive Agriculture Zoning to qualify the Town's farmers to take part in this program, stand-alone contracts were still permitted until 2009. After that, the program changed to where all new contracts had to be located with an Exclusive Agricultural Zoning district or within an Agricultural Enterprise Area (AEA) as designated by the state. There are still original contracts active in the Town and some have been modified to be current standards and receive increased tax refunds. These contracts include approximately 4,608 acres, with most contracts extending beyond 2010 through 2020. In 2024, landowners within the Town petitioned the state to create an AEA which would landowners within that area to sign new contracts with increased refund rates.

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 Woodland. The USDA-NRCS rates 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 Classification** depicts the soils by classifications for the Town of Woodland.

Approximately 36.55% of the soils in the Town of Woodland 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.

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

Town of Woodland Land Capability Classification		
Soil Class	Acres	Percent of Total Land Area
Class I	61	0.26%
Class II	3,041	13.14%
Class III	5,361	23.15%
Class IV	7,061	30.50%
Class V	0	0.00%
Class VI	4,635	20.02%
Class VII	0	0.00%
Class VIII	2,993	12.93%
Total Acreage in Woodland	23,152	100.00%

Source: Sauk County Land Resources and Environment Department

Approximately 50.52% of the soils in the Town of Woodland 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 12.93% of the soils in the Town of Woodland 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 13.40% 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 Alternative Agricultural Opportunities

Despite the observed changes in the number of farmers, farm size and the price of farmland, agricultural productivity has increased. Agriculture has also been diversifying to expand upon tourism and niche markets including vacation rentals, grass-raised cattle, alpaca fiber products, produce stands, Farm Art Detour, bakeries, and pizza stands.

Overall, changes to technology, machinery and agricultural practices have resulted in agricultural industry efficiency gains. 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 Woodland has adopted policies that support alternative agriculture and related opportunities.

5.8 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

There are numerous programs and resources available through federal, state and local agencies that can provide assistance to farmers to help ensure the agricultural sustainability. These programs should not be looked at individually, as a possible solution to ensure the viability of agriculture, but rather viewed as small components of the collective system aimed at preserving the production of food and fiber and our resources in the United States.

- **Federal Programs and Resources**

Below are some examples of federal programs and resources, administered by the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA), which can provide assistance to farm operators in the Town of Excelsior. The Farm Service Agency (FSA) and the 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% 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 inclusive of a permanent easement, 30-Year Easement or a Restoration Cost Share Agreement.
- **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.

- **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:
 - **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.
 - **Wisconsin's Use Value Tax System** provides tax relief to agricultural landowners by assessing property on its 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 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.

5.9 Agriculture Goal, Objectives and Policies

Agriculture Resources Goal: Maintain agriculture opportunities for family type farms and promote various commodities and organic products to enhance farming income.

Agriculture Resources Objectives/Policies:

ARO-1 Promote opportunities for farmers to obtain additional income from activities and the sale of items related to agriculture and farming as an occupation.

ARP-1A Actively work with Sauk County to develop conditional use permits and other options that will allow for innovative 'value-added' farming income opportunities that are consistent with the rural character.

ARP-1B Encourage individuals to seek expertise from agencies such as USDA, Sauk County Land Resources and Environment Department, UW-Extension, representatives from various buying cooperatives and others to both explore the feasibility of and provide resources to farmers who may be considering the production of alternative agricultural products, markets and growing methods.

ARO-2 Inform new and existing residents about farm life, farm noises, odors, and operational requirements prior to granting permits for construction of new residential lots.

ARP-2A As part of the creation of any new lot by Certified Survey Map, a statement shall be included on the first page of the CSM, by the Town Board, indicating that said lot is located in an agricultural area and that agricultural activities are taking place and are planned to continue. The statement shall include provisions to protect farming operations and limit actions against agricultural uses

The following includes suggested language that can be applied to ARP-2A and at the Town's election may be expanded upon as appropriate: Through Wis. Stat. § 823.08, the Wisconsin Legislature has adopted a right to farm law. This statute limits the remedies of owners of later established residential property to seek changes to near-by pre-existing agricultural practices. Active agricultural operations are now taking place and are planned to continue in the vicinity of this Certified Survey Map/Subdivision Plat (choose one). These active agricultural operations may produce noises, odors, dust, machinery traffic or other conditions during daytime and evening hours.

ARO-3 Preserve productive farmlands and encourage the maintenance and growth of family farm operations for continued and future agriculture uses.

For the purposes 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 small-scale animal husbandry, organic production, fruit orchards, cash cropping, large-scale animal operations etc.

ARP-3A Prime agriculture land as defined on **Map 5-1 Land Capability Classification** is land that has the best combination of physical and chemical characteristics for producing crops. It has the soil quality, growing season and naturally occurring moisture supply needed to economically produce sustained high yield crops when treated and managed according to acceptable farming methods. Note that grazing (pasture) is a crop. These lands are identified as class I, II or III by the Sauk County Soil Survey. Property owners with lands identified as class I, II and III are encouraged not to use these lands for residential or commercial development. This policy will not prevent an individual from making agricultural use of land that is not otherwise mapped or identified as such.