

# Wisconsin Farmland Protection Partnership Project

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**W**isconsin is among the leading states in the nation for the conversion of agricultural land to urban, highly developed, and low-density residential land use. Between 2001 and 2016, nearly 250,000 acres of land was converted out of agricultural use—lost land that could have generated \$190 million in annual revenue.

## **What's at stake when Wisconsin loses its agricultural land?**

Agriculture contributes nearly \$105 billion to Wisconsin's economy and over 11% of the state's employment. As agricultural land disappears, so do jobs and businesses that rely on that land. Farmland also provides a significant opportunity for improving the state's environmental resources and helping meet the increasing challenges of a changing climate. Regenerative agricultural practices on farmland are among the most cost-effective and immediate climate solutions. Such practices can help mitigate extreme

weather events, capture carbon, and improve water quality. With every farmland acre we lose, options for addressing environmental resource concerns become more limited.

## **Not all agricultural land is equal, and some of the best land is at risk.**

Wisconsin has some of the best agricultural land in the country, with 61% of the state's farmland considered nationally significant. Wisconsin is a critical contributor to national long-term crop production and food security.

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Agricultural land loss not only impacts the state’s economy, it also has grave implications for our country’s ability to produce our own food.

### Wisconsin needs an option for permanent protection.

Wisconsin has needed more tools to help ensure the continued availability of farmland for a long time. One of the key mechanisms for permanently protecting valuable agricultural land has been unavailable to serve the farmers it was created to help. In 2009, Wisconsin passed the Working Lands Initiative, creating the state’s

first ever Purchase of Agricultural Conservation Easements program. After funding one round of easements, however, no additional resources were allocated to the program, creating a significant hurdle for farmers seeking options to keep their land available for agriculture.

### The Wisconsin Farmland Protection Partnership Project

seeks to address the need for increased agricultural conservation easement funding in the state. The partnership plans to slow the loss of vital agricultural land by accelerating permanent land protection statewide.

## GOALS

The goals of the **Wisconsin Farmland Protection Partnership Project** are to:

- Dramatically increase the number of farms and acres permanently protected in the next five years
- Utilize easement dollars strategically, where they are most needed. In consultation with land trust and local government partners, the groups will use AFT’s Farms Under Threat analysis and tools to help protect land where that protection may have the greatest impact.
- Leverage partner contributions to access federal funding for conservation practices. The partnership will incentivize the increased adoption of regenerative practices on protected land, both to help invest in the state’s soil resources, water quality, and to ensure those lands where investments occur are not lost to future development.
- Demonstrate to state decisionmakers that agricultural conservation easements, when used purposefully and in conjunction with other land use tools, can effectively preserve the state’s agricultural land base.
- Increase farmland access and tenure opportunities for historically disadvantaged and underserved farmers.

## FOR MORE INFORMATION

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**PARTNERS INCLUDE** American Farmland Trust, Tall Pines Conservancy, Driftless Area Land Conservancy, Groundswell Conservancy, Ozaukee Washington Land Trust, Mississippi Valley Conservancy, North Central Conservancy Trust, Town of Dunn, Rock County, Jefferson County, The Savanna Institute, Gathering Waters, UW-Division of Extension, UW-Dept. of Agronomy, WI Land + Water, Michael Fields Agricultural Institute, and Dept. of Agriculture, Trade & Consumer Protection