



More Than 190,000 Acres Added to Ag Enterprise Areas

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Editors note: Local contacts for new and expanded AEAs are listed at the end of this release.

MADISON – Wisconsin is approaching 1 million acres in agricultural enterprise areas with the latest round of petitions approved for the designation, Sec. Ben Brancel announced today at a meeting of the Board of Agriculture, Trade and Consumer Protection.

The new acreage will become official Jan. 1, after Sec. Brancel signs orders creating four new agricultural enterprise areas, or AEAs, and expanding an existing one. Wisconsin will then have 29 AEAs that total 940,000 acres in 22 counties, 85 towns and the Bad River Reservation.

The new AEA acreage totals about 191,300 acres in six counties and 13 towns, with 290 landowners petitioning for the designation.

This is the fifth round of AEA designations. The Department of Agriculture, Trade and Consumer Protection can designate up to 2 million acres as AEAs. Originally, the department had authority to designate up to 1 million acres, but the Legislature recently doubled that figure. Local landowners, in partnership with local governments, must seek the designation.

"Landowners in these areas have the opportunity to apply for farmland preservation agreements, which afford them tax credits. To date, we have enrolled more than 430 farmland preservation agreements, covering nearly 100,000 acres in the AEAs. Landowners outside these AEAs who want to participate will have a chance to submit a petition during the 2015 petition cycle, which begins this fall," Sec. Brancel said.

AEAs are part of Wisconsin's farmland preservation program. They are intended to encourage preservation of agricultural land use and to promote agricultural economic development appropriate to each area. In turn, the designation provides some certainty for farmers and agribusinesses that their area will remain in agriculture, so they can be confident about investing in their businesses. Landowners in AEAs are not subject to any new land use regulations. Farmers owning land within an AEA can receive tax credits in exchange for signing an agreement to keep their land in agricultural use for at least 15 years.

The new and expanded AEAs are:

Friends in Agriculture AEA, Clark County

This new AEA totals 17,158 acres the towns of Fremont and Lynn, where dairying and horticulture are among the primary agricultural sectors. The goals of the 36 petitioners include minimizing land use conflicts, assessing and protecting environmental resources for use by existing and new agricultural operations, respecting the agricultural heritage within the area, and developing joint marketing opportunities for local products. Petitioners hope to create the state's largest contiguous block of working lands by linking with other AEAs.

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AG ENTERPRISE AREAS – ADD ONE

Greenville Greenbelt AEA, *Outagamie County*

This new AEA covers 1,444 acres in the town of Greenville, where cash cropping accounts for the most agricultural activity. The nine petitioners' goals include maintaining the existing farmland for agriculture by supporting policies to increase development densities in the urban portion of their town, and to promote infill development that targets land adjacent to urban areas. They wish to provide support to ensure successful transitions of existing farm businesses between generations or to new ownership. The town offers many agritourism opportunities and enjoys support for agriculture through programs at the Fox Valley Technical College.

Heart of America's Dairyland AEA, *Clark and Marathon counties*

This designation expands an existing AEA by about 70,000 acres, bringing the covered area to about 234,500 acres. With 125 new petitioners, newly added towns are Weston and York in Clark County and Bern, McMillan and Eau Pleine in Marathon County. Towns previously included are Mayville, Colby, Unity, Beaver, Loyal in Clark County; and Brighton, Hull, Frankfort, Holton and Johnson in Marathon County. Dairying and cash crops dominate agriculture here. All told, 395 landowners have petitioned for the designation and expansion of the AEA to preserve the region's agricultural heritage, assure production capacity and provide food security, and provide tools to control population density and residential-agricultural conflicts. This AEA is the largest in Wisconsin, and received the 2013 Top Rural Development Initiative Award from Wisconsin Rural Partners.

The Headwaters of Southeast Monroe County AEA, *Monroe County*

This is a new AEA, encompassing 86,380 acres in the towns of Clifton, Glendale, Willington and Wilton. Cash grain and dairying dominate agriculture in this region, but forage, direct market vegetables and timber are also important to the local ag economy. Along with preserving the area's agricultural heritage, the 99 petitioners aim to foster a conservation movement to protect resources, build support for policies that protect productive ag land, and minimize land use conflicts.

West Point AEA, *Columbia County*

This new AEA covers 17,158 acres in the Town of West Point, which is strong in dairy, beef and row crop operations. The 21 petitioners include in their goals protecting soil and water quality and wildlife, slowing fragmentation of ag lands, preserving multi-generation farms, encouraging ag diversity, modernizing farm operations to remain competitive, and providing farm-related education. The nearby urban areas offer a market to local products, and existing operations have invested more than \$10 million in the past decade.

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Local contacts for 2014 agricultural enterprise areas

Friends in Agriculture AEA: Matt Zoschke, 715-743-5102, matt.zoschke@co.clark.wi.us

Greenville Greenbelt AEA: Dave Tebo, 920-757-5151; dtebo@townofgreenville.com

Heart of America's Dairyland AEA: Andy Johnson, 715-261-6000, Andrew.johnson@co.marathon.wi.us; Matt Zoschke, 715-743-5102, matt.zoschke@co.clark.wi.us

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