



Center for Land Use Education

# THE LAND USE TRACKER

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## PLANNING FOR COMMUNITY FOOD SYSTEMS

*By Rebecca Roberts, Land Use Specialist, Center for Land Use Education*

*"There is a quiet revolution stirring in our food system. It is not happening so much on the distant farms that still provide us with the majority of our food; it is happening in cities, neighborhoods, and towns. It is a movement that has the potential to address a multitude of issues: economic, environmental, personal health, and cultural."*<sup>1</sup>

Food is one of the basic essentials of life. It plays a primary role in shaping human health, culture, traditions, local economies, the environment, and the communities in which we live. Yet, few stop to consider these interactions. How does food shape our lives, our neighborhoods, our communities, and the way in which we use our land? How do our decisions influence the types of food that are available, accessible and affordable to local populations? Are there changes that need to be made to these systems? This article will attempt to *define* a community food system; provide *reasons* why planners, local decision-makers and communities should start thinking more seriously about food systems; and offer a *process* to plan for community food systems. The accompanying articles will move beyond planning for food systems and introduce some specific land use tools and strategies for strengthening community food systems.

### What Is a Community Food System?

A *food system* refers to "the chain of activities connecting food production, processing, distribution and access, consumption, and waste management, as well as all the associated supporting and regulatory institutions and activities."<sup>2</sup> A *community food system* weds the concept of a food system to a particular place. Community food systems have been defined to encompass relatively small areas, such as neighborhoods, and progressively larger areas, such as towns, villages, cities, counties, regions, and bioregions.<sup>3</sup>

### Why Plan for Food Systems?

As consumer interest in local foods has risen, so too has the interest of planners and other professionals. Individuals in diverse fields such as public health, nutrition, education, agriculture and economic development bring unique interests, issues and resources to bear on this discussion and all have a role to play in advancing the issue. The American Planning Association<sup>2,4</sup> offers the following reasons to plan for community food systems:

- **Community Design.** The food system takes up significant urban and rural land in activities related to agriculture, industry, wholesale, retail, and waste management. These land uses and their spatial relationships are crucial to the quality of places and communities, as well as their economic vitality, ecological health, sense of place, and quality of community life.
- **Public Health.** Food is vital to the public health, safety, and welfare of residents. Hunger and obesity co-exist in communities, and are on the rise. Land use and transportation policies, including the promotion of neighborhood-level markets, public transit, and walkable communities can help ensure widespread access to affordable and nutritious food.
- **Farmland Loss.** Loss of farmland due to urban and suburban conversion, particularly mid-sized farms, threatens rural communities and traditional land stewardship practices. Retirements among farmers, high land costs, and limited profitability are speeding the conversion of farmland and discouraging



On The Web...

Wisconsin's Farm Fresh Atlases serve as a guide to local farms, farmers' markets, restaurants, stores and other businesses that sell local food and use sustainable practices.  
[www.farmfreshatlas.org](http://www.farmfreshatlas.org)

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**CALENDAR OF EVENTS****MIDWEST VALUE ADDED AGRICULTURE CONFERENCE & WISCONSIN LOCAL FOOD SUMMIT**

January 24-25, 2008 – The Plaza Hotel, Eau Claire, WI  
[www.rivercountryrca.org/valad.htm](http://www.rivercountryrca.org/valad.htm)

**INITIATING COMMUNITY-BASED REAL ESTATE DEVELOPMENT IN YOUR DOWNTOWN**

January 30, 2008 – WisLine Teleconference, 10:30-11:50 a.m.  
To register call: (608) 262-0810 or visit: [www.uwex.edu/lgc](http://www.uwex.edu/lgc)

**FOOD AND ENERGY FROM THE GROUND UP: EFFICIENCY'S ROLE IN SUSTAINABLE AGRICULTURE**

February 20-22, 2008 – Embassy Suites Hotel, Des Moines, Iowa  
[www.aceee.org/conf/08ag](http://www.aceee.org/conf/08ag)

**WISCONSIN ASSOCIATION OF LAND CONSERVATION EMPLOYEES ANNUAL CONFERENCE**

February 27-29, 2008 – The Waters of Minocqua, Minocqua, WI  
[www.walce.org/pages/Conference.htm](http://www.walce.org/pages/Conference.htm)

**WISCONSIN LAND INFORMATION ASSOCIATION ANNUAL CONFERENCE**

February 27-29, 2008 – Grand Geneva Resort & Spa Hotel, Lake Geneva, WI  
[www.wlia.org/](http://www.wlia.org/)

**URBAN AGRICULTURE CONFERENCE: POLLINATING OUR FUTURE**

February 28-March 1, 2008 - Hilton Hotel, City Center, Milwaukee, WI  
[www.growurban.org/schedule.shtml](http://www.growurban.org/schedule.shtml)

**WAPA SPRING WORKSHOP**

March 27, 2008 – Alliant Energy Center, Madison, WI  
[www.wisconsinplanners.org/](http://www.wisconsinplanners.org/)

**APA NATIONAL PLANNING CONFERENCE**

April 27-May 1, 2008 – Las Vegas, NV  
[www.planning.org/2008conference/index.htm](http://www.planning.org/2008conference/index.htm)

**CLUE WORKSHOPS****ZONING BOARD OF ADJUSTMENT AND APPEALS WORKSHOP**

January 30, 2007 – Manitowoc, WI  
[www.uwsp.edu/cnr/landcenter/workshopszb.html](http://www.uwsp.edu/cnr/landcenter/workshopszb.html)

For additional dates and information, visit the online calendar of events  
[www.uwsp.edu/cnr/landcenter/events.html](http://www.uwsp.edu/cnr/landcenter/events.html)

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younger generations from entering the industry.

■ **Local Economy.** Globalization of food industries means that food comes increasingly from more distant sources. Large food companies are able to out-compete local producers and processors with negative implications for the local tax base and employment. As people lose their connection with local food and agriculture, it becomes more difficult to preserve the land and infrastructure upon which local agriculture, and oftentimes the local economy, rests.

■ **Environmental Quality.** Some practices associated with conventional farming can negatively impact air, water, wildlife habitat and other aspects of environmental quality. Industrial livestock facilities, for example, may release odors, dust, pathogens, and toxic chemicals contributing to air pollution and public health concerns. Agricultural runoff in the form of fertilizers, pesticides, pharmaceuticals, animal wastes and sediments can degrade lakes, rivers and groundwater quality. Loss of native vegetation to farmland reduces wildlife habitat and other valuable ecosystem services such as flood control and groundwater recharge.

■ **Energy and Waste.** The food we eat consumes a considerable amount of energy to produce, process and transport. It can take as much as 10 fossil fuel calories to produce a single food calorie. In the United States, food travels an average of 1,400 miles before it reaches our dinner table. Food wastes and packaging comprise approximately 20-30 percent of all solid waste, much of which is transported over long distances to landfills. Local and regional food distribution systems, combined with composting programs and efforts to reduce food packaging, can help combat inefficient use of land and energy resources.

### How Do We Plan For Food Systems?

Local efforts to strengthen community food systems often share two common elements: a *structure* for involving local citizens, professionals and decision-makers, and a *process* for examining and moving forward with food system issues.

■ **Structure.** Communities have utilized

a variety of structures and organizations – both formal and informal – to channel local involvement and expertise to food planning efforts. Groups of interested citizens, farmers, business owners and others have been actively meeting in many communities to discuss food system issues, sharing concerns ranging from health and the environment to personal livelihoods. These groups often represent the pulse of a community and are responsible for bringing food system issues to the forefront of thought and discussion. Over time, some have gathered significant political momentum and have transformed into non-profit organizations or local government advisory bodies.

Most communities also contain non-profit and special interest groups that are addressing food-related issues through hunger prevention coalitions, healthy eating campaigns or community gardening associations, to name a few. Though narrowly focused in scope, these groups can help raise awareness regarding food system issues and channel important expertise and resources to the table. At the local government level, formal food policy councils, plan commissions and advisory committees are increasingly involved in advisory and policy-making capacities to guide food system development efforts.

■ **Planning Process.** A range of processes have been used to generate interest surrounding food system issues and elicit the vision, values and knowledge of local people. While some efforts could be characterized as informal, grass-roots, or narrowly-focused, others have sought the input of diverse groups, tackled a range of complex issues, and have been formally sponsored by local organizations or municipalities.

Wisconsin's comprehensive planning program provides an important opportunity for communities to think about local food systems. Figure 1 identifies potential food system planning issues within the context of the nine "elements" or topics which must be considered within a comprehensive plan. Figures 2 and 3, respectively, provide examples of goals, objectives, actions and policies contained in the City of Madison

### Milwaukee Community Garden



Photo: [www.growingpower.org](http://www.growingpower.org)

### Viroqua Farmers' Market



Photo: [www.viroqua-wisconsin.com](http://www.viroqua-wisconsin.com)

### Compost Demonstration Site



Photo: [www.growingpower.org](http://www.growingpower.org)



Figure 1: Opportunities to Plan for Food Systems by Plan Element

Plan Element	Related Food Systems Actions
Issues and Opportunities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Conduct a community food assessment</li> <li>• Identify populations or geographic regions that have difficulty accessing fresh, local foods</li> </ul>
Economic Development	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Promote “buy local” food programs that retain money in the local economy</li> <li>• Provide loans/tax incentives to businesses incorporating local foods or sustainable practices</li> <li>• Create marketing materials highlighting local food retailers, restaurants and businesses</li> <li>• Develop a commercial kitchen incubator for small or start-up food businesses</li> </ul>
Agriculture	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Assess the impact of development trends on prime farmland and food production</li> <li>• Support the development of agricultural support infrastructure including roads, cooperatives, processing/storage/distribution facilities, and shared equipment</li> <li>• Develop a rural living guide explaining the realities of living in an active agricultural area</li> <li>• Link retiring farmers with those looking to enter or expand local farming operations</li> <li>• Support networking opportunities to link local farmers, processors and consumers through direct sales, farmers markets, farm stands, CSAs, cooperatives, speed-dating, and other methods</li> <li>• Capture food and farm wastes for reuse as animal feed, compost or bio-energy</li> <li>• Promote farming practices such as managed intensive grazing, conservation tillage, crop rotation, soil and nutrient management, integrated pest management, and organic production</li> </ul>
Natural Resources	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Raise awareness of the energy and environmental impacts of inorganic fertilizers and pesticides, concentrated animal wastes, food miles traveled, and excessive packaging</li> <li>• Support farming and food production practices that enhance or support air/water/soil quality, wildlife habitat, natural resources, biodiversity and open space</li> <li>• Encourage community gardens, public green spaces and edible landscaping</li> </ul>
Cultural Resources	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Celebrate diverse cultural, agricultural and dietary traditions through festivals, displays, demonstrations, tours, and other techniques</li> <li>• Work with tribal governments to strengthen understanding of Native American land management and food systems including farming, hunting, fishing and gathering</li> </ul>
Housing, Health and Human Services	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Incorporate access to edible gardening space in public housing, schools &amp; government buildings</li> <li>• Work with low-income, rural, inner-city, elderly, youth, disabled, ethnic and other underserved groups to provide access to local, nutritious, affordable and culturally appropriate foods</li> <li>• Assist farmers, restaurants, institutions and food pantries to distribute excess food</li> <li>• Provide education related to food production, selection, nutrition, preparation and preservation</li> <li>• Enhance food security by localizing markets and building emergency food reserves</li> </ul>
Utilities and Community Facilities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Request local, sustainable and/or organic foods in school, jail, hospital, health care and government vending and food service contracts</li> <li>• Divert food wastes from landfills through residential/commercial composting or curbside pickup</li> </ul>
Transportation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Assess the location of housing, schools, work sites and food sources relative to transit options</li> <li>• Provide safe walking/biking routes or public transportation to groceries, farmer’s markets, foodstands, community gardens, and food pantries</li> <li>• Reduce fossil fuel use by localizing markets and using alternative rail/water shipping options</li> </ul>
Land Use	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Inventory underutilized land or buildings that could be safely re-purposed for food production</li> <li>• Promote mixed use development that includes neighborhood-level grocery stores, farm stands, community gardens, food pantries and other means of accessing food</li> </ul>
Implementation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Adopt incentives for low fertilizer input crops and organic production</li> <li>• Revise zoning, building, landscaping and other codes to allow urban agricultural practices such as community gardens, neighborhood markets, edible landscaping, and animal/bee keeping</li> <li>• Strengthen farmland preservation efforts through zoning, purchase of development rights, transfer of development rights, agricultural conservation easements, and other related programs</li> </ul>
Intergovernmental Cooperation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Develop a regional food policy council to address food production, processing, distribution, access, consumption and waste management issues</li> </ul>

Comprehensive Plan and the Sustainable Chequamegon Strategic Plan. These examples hint at the range of food system issues that can be considered through local planning processes.

**Conclusion**

A variety of individuals, acting together, are needed to plan for community food systems. Citizen members serving on local governments, plan commissions, community food policy councils, and non-profit boards and organizations are needed to help bring food system issues to the forefront of community dialogue and decision-making. Professionals in diverse fields such as public health,

nutrition, education, agriculture, economic development and planning will be needed to help provide data, resources and expertise related to their particular fields. Planners and other land use professionals, for example, have ready access to important community data and information, and also have significant influence over community plans and related policies and regulations. Extension educators, for their part, are poised to help make connections between various government, community groups and professions. All of these groups can play a key role in strengthening or hindering local food system development.



Figure 2: Sample Goal, Objectives and Policies from the City of Madison Comprehensive Plan<sup>5</sup>

<b>Goal:</b> Maintain existing agricultural operations in the City and encourage new, smaller farming operations such as Community Supported Agriculture Farms.	
<b>Objective:</b> Protect existing community gardens in the City and establish additional areas for new community gardens.	<p><b>Policy:</b> Strive to create one community garden site for every 2,000 households in the City.</p> <p><b>Policy:</b> Design aesthetically pleasing community gardens appropriate to the neighborhoods where they are located.</p>
<b>Objective:</b> Identify areas on the City’s periphery suitable for long-term preservation for diverse agricultural enterprises and community separation.	<p><b>Policy:</b> Cooperate with adjoining towns, villages and Dane County to protect identified long-term preservation areas for the benefit and use of current and future generations.</p> <p><b>Policy:</b> Encourage unique agricultural uses, such as apiaries, orchards, vineyards, and other agricultural uses that are compatible with urban land uses.</p>

Figure 3: Sample Goal, Objective and Actions from the Sustainable Chequamegon Strategic Plan<sup>6</sup>

<b>Goal:</b> Strong, sustainable, and local food systems that ensure access to affordable and nutritious food for people in the region have been established.	
<b>Objective:</b> Follow the lead of the Chequamegon Bay Sustainable Agriculture Coalition, FEAST (Food Security, Education, Access, Sustainability, and Tradition) in our agricultural outreach.	<p><b>Action:</b> Collaborate with FEAST to carry out baseline inventories of who our regional farmers are, what they produce, what they would like to produce, how far away their markets are, how they access transportation, and what barriers they face in selling to local markets.</p> <p><b>Action:</b> Collaborate with FEAST to secure funding to train local farmers in sustainable agriculture techniques and develop distribution networks.</p> <p><b>Action:</b> Collaborate with FEAST in grant-seeking for expansion of the Mobile Farmer’s Market, a pilot project to serve locally grown produce in local schools, and for expansion of agriculture production in the region.</p>

<sup>1</sup> Ableman, Michael. “The Quiet Revolution: Urban Agriculture — Feeding the Body, Feeding the Soul.” In Kimbrell, Andrew, Ed. (2002). Fatal Harvest: The Tragedy of Industrial Agriculture. Foundation for Deep Ecology.

<sup>2</sup> Born, Brandon, et al. (2005). Food Systems Planning White Paper. Prepared by the American Planning Association’s Food System Planning Committee for the Legislative & Policy Committee. [www.planning.org/divisions/pdf/foodwhitepaper.pdf](http://www.planning.org/divisions/pdf/foodwhitepaper.pdf)

<sup>3</sup> Wilkins, Jennifer and Marcia Eames-Sheavly. (No date). “A Primer on Community Food Systems: Linking Food, Nutrition and Agriculture.” Discovering the Food System. Cornell University. [foodsys.cce.cornell.edu/](http://foodsys.cce.cornell.edu/)

<sup>4</sup> American Planning Association. (2007). Policy Guide on Community and Regional Food Planning. [www.planning.org/policyguides/pdf/food.pdf](http://www.planning.org/policyguides/pdf/food.pdf)

<sup>5</sup> City of Madison Comprehensive Plan. (2006). [www.ci.madison.wi.us/planning/comp/plan.html](http://www.ci.madison.wi.us/planning/comp/plan.html).

<sup>6</sup> Sustainable Chequamegon Initiative Strategic Plan. (2006). [www.allianceforsustainability.org/strategicplan\\_20060813.pdf](http://www.allianceforsustainability.org/strategicplan_20060813.pdf)

## CAN EATING LOCAL “SAVE THE ENVIRONMENT?”

By Andrew Dane, Community Development Agent, Barron and Chippewa Counties

According to a recent survey by market research publisher Packaged Facts, the market for locally grown food is expected to jump from approximately \$4 billion in 2002 to \$5 billion in 2007. (Note: there is no agreed upon definition for what “local” food means – some say 100 or 250 miles, others define it as food grown within the State or the Midwest). With the recent passage of Wisconsin’s state budget, a new program - “Buy Local, Buy Wisconsin” - will provide grants to groups and organizations around the State working on promoting local food system development.

So what’s driving the demand for locally grown food? A number of factors are believed to be driving this trend, including concerns over food safety and the “greening” of American culture. Increasingly, what we put in our mouths is no longer thought of as strictly a health issue. As Michael Pollan points out in his popular book *The Omnivore’s Dilemma*, everyone is an eater, and how we choose to spend our food dollars is a decision we make everyday. Consumers are increasingly thinking about the type of food system they want to support with their food dollars. People are spending money on food for moral, political, and environmental reasons rather than simply for health reasons.

A popular claim surrounding “local” food is that by supporting farmers you are “protecting the environment” and “preserving open space.” The environment claim is often made when contrasting sustainable or organic practices with conventional practices. The open space claim is essentially the same type of argument that proponents of commodity agriculture make – if we support farms they are more likely to succeed and therefore less likely to be converted into other uses.

But can the growth in the demand for local food translate into more open space protection or more farmland preservation? If local food is to live up to this promise, both the number of farms and acreage

dedicated to growing for a local market will need to expand dramatically. What types of policies or programs are needed to grow the local food system so that it does in fact meaningfully contribute to farmland preservation, open space preservation, and the safeguarding of other environmental services that rural, working lands provide? I’ll attempt to answer these questions by taking a look at a few *land use* strategies and analyzing them with an eye toward the types of farms that are at the leading edge of the local food movement. Secondly, I’ll discuss a few *alternative* strategies that could strengthen the link between local food system development and “saving the environment.”

### Land Use Strategies

A land use strategy which has helped protect agricultural lands is **Purchase of Development Rights (PDR)**. A PDR program uses local government or grant dollars to purchase the “development rights” to targeted lands, usually those with high natural resources or agricultural values. The land is retained by the original owner and may later be bought or sold, but the right to develop the land is limited. Because PDR programs are costly the number of acres they can protect from development is quite limited. Nonetheless, farms marketing locally are typically small. Therefore, a well designed PDR program may actually be a good tool to protect these types of farms. In Marin County, CA, land trusts have protected over 25,000 acres of land, including Straus Farm – a 660 acre organic dairy. Where private commitments exist, donated **Conservation Easements** can provide the same level of protection as PDR programs but at a much lower cost to local governments.

Another type of land use strategy that could encourage local food system development is a **Planned Unit Development (PUD)**. PUDs offer a flexible alternative to traditional zoning. Developments are proposed and reviewed as an integrated package and often

The **Buy Local, Buy Wisconsin** program is funded at \$600,000 over the next two years.

It will:

- Develop, expand and enhance regional food markets for Wisconsin farmers and processors
- Meet the increasing consumer demand for high quality, locally produced foods
- Expand regional agricultural tourism in Wisconsin
- Shift 10 percent of Wisconsin’s \$20 billion annual food expenditures to regionally produced food.

For more information see: <http://aic.uwex.edu/documents/BuyLocalProposal.pdf>



incorporate a mix of land uses or common open spaces. Potentially, they provide an excellent tool to incorporate open space and working farm land into new residential or mixed use developments. This approach may also enable planners and developers to integrate space for local community gardens, school gardens, and farmers' markets into local communities.

While newer, innovative land use strategies may offer ways to promote local food system development, re-visiting existing **Zoning Codes** may be an even more effective way of expanding the local food system. Zoning codes should be examined to identify barriers that make farming difficult or impossible. Working to tear down or modify these barriers could likely do more for local food system development than anything else. Do zoning codes make agri-tourism and other on-farm ventures difficult to implement? Are educational activities allowed on farm? Do codes allow for on-farm selling? In order for farms that market locally to thrive and multiply, land use officials need to allow these types of farms to take advantage of their full economic potential. These types of farms need a regulatory environment where they can capture as much value-added dollar as possible to survive. Marketing, processing, on-farm educational programs, agri-tourism and direct sales are some of the activities that allow "local" farms to flourish.

### Alternative Strategies

Local communities, particularly counties, play a key role in shaping rural land use patterns and economic development strategies across the state. As more and more communities seek to sustain their working lands, opportunities to develop specific strategies that target smaller farms are growing. An Iowa county, for example, is supporting local food system development by investing in an **Incubator** that assists direct market farmers. That same county is also creating policies that require government to source a percentage of its food from local sources, thereby boosting local farm incomes. **Farm to School** programs may be an attractive strategy for communities that want to support local farms and provide healthier food choices for their

kids. Other strategies for creating a stronger local food system include investing in the supply chain required to move food grown locally to market. **Revolving Loan Funds** may consider setting aside or targeting loan programs to invest in cooperative business formation, food processing facilities, and distribution facilities. Land use officials working closely with economic development agencies could play a very strong role here.

### Conclusion

In order for local farms to live up to the promise of "protecting the environment" and "preserving open space" more farms representing a range of farm types, from small isolated one acre vegetable plots to thousands of acres of uninterrupted grazing lands, need to exist.

To get there means rebuilding an entire "ecosystem" of support structures for local farms to thrive in. For this rebuilding project to be successful, planners, community development professionals, elected officials and other practitioners will need to bring their multi-disciplinary expertise to bear on a range of inter-related issues including land use, economic development, and agriculture.

In some cases their role will be to use land use strategies that help communities create stronger local food systems. Some of the options presented in this article include PDR programs, conservation easements, PUDs, and revisions to existing zoning codes. Through comprehensive planning, they can assist communities to identify alternative policies that support local food system development and then craft appropriate regulatory and non-regulatory strategies to achieve those goals. They should also work closely with professionals outside of the traditional realm of planning, including economic development agencies, lending sources, local businesses, schools and other institutions to develop creative support systems that help the local food system continue to grow and thrive. When a greater number of farms and more diverse types of farms are engaged in marketing locally then the promise that local foods "save the environment" could finally ring true.

### Harmony Valley Farm Tour



Photo: [www.newfarm.org](http://www.newfarm.org)

### Lincoln Elementary School Garden



Photo: [www.madison.k12.wi.us](http://www.madison.k12.wi.us)

### Milwaukee Garden to Market Program



Photo: [www.walnutway.org](http://www.walnutway.org)



## FARMING SUBDIVISIONS: PROBLEMATIC OR PROMISING?

By Lynn Markham, Land Use Specialist, Center for Land Use Education

Hold it. Don't planners usually advise against combining agricultural and residential land uses? Tom Daniels, for instance, states:

*It is not widely understood that modern agriculture is an industrial process, using chemical fertilizers, herbicides, pesticides, and heavy machinery. Although farmland is pretty to look at, farmers and nonfarm residents generally do not make good neighbors. Farming generates noise, dust, odors, chemical sprays and slow-moving machinery. Manure runoff and fertilizers can raise nitrate levels in nearby groundwater and surface water above federal safety standards. In turn, farms are subject to trespassing, vandalism, and complaints from nonfarm neighbors.<sup>1</sup>*

This article will briefly discuss agricultural trends, examples of farming subdivisions, types of farms that are a good fit for farming subdivisions, and planning tools for guiding farming subdivisions.

### Agricultural trends

While the overall trend in U.S. agriculture in the last century has been toward a global, industrialized system of production, a counter trend toward local, small-scale, less chemically dependent agriculture and food production has emerged in recent years. An example of this trend in Wisconsin is the rapid growth of community supported agriculture (CSA). Since the first CSA farms began in Wisconsin in 1988, this local food approach has expanded to about 90 CSAs serving over 5,000 households in 2007.<sup>2</sup>

### Farming subdivision examples

So, can CSAs and other forms of small-scale agriculture designed to feed local people successfully combine with residential land uses? A few recent examples suggest that in some cases the answer is "yes."

One of the best known farming subdivisions, Prairie Crossing, is located forty miles north of Chicago. Designed from the start as a conservation development, it features clustered homes, ecologically restored wetlands and prairie grasslands, and 154 acres reserved for organic farming. Prairie Crossing houses Sandhill Organics, a small family farm on nearly forty acres. One-quarter of Prairie Crossing's residents have volunteered on the farm, and the farmers' market is an important meeting place for the entire community.<sup>3</sup> In Minnesota, The Fields of St. Croix conservation subdivision has preserved 90 acres of farmland and is home to Natural Harvest, an organic CSA.<sup>4</sup> The Windsor Park subdivision, also in Minnesota, has set aside open space for community gardens.<sup>5</sup>

Other conservation subdivisions have protected agricultural land largely to grow crops for livestock or to graze livestock. In Massachusetts, the Pardon Hill development includes a permanent dedication of 60 acres for active agricultural use – for crops such as corn, hay and grapes, and for grazing cattle, sheep and horses.<sup>6</sup> The 418-acre Farmview subdivision in Pennsylvania contains 145 acres of cropland that was donated by the developer to a local conservation organization. The cropland is leased to farmers in the community through multi-year agreements that encourage adoption of traditional farming practices to minimize impacts on the residents. Yards are separated from the farming operations by a 75-foot deep hedge-row area thickly planted with native trees and shrubs. Although other developers were skeptical of the proposal to build large homes (ranging from 2,600–3,700 sq. ft.) on lots generally less than one-half acre in size (in a marketplace consisting primarily of one acre lots), the high absorption rate helped convince them that this approach was sound. Reduced infrastructure costs for streets, water, and sewer lines provided financial benefits to both the developer and township. Premiums added to "view lots" abutting the protected fields or woods also contributed to the project's profitability.<sup>7</sup>



Map: [www.prairiecrossing.com](http://www.prairiecrossing.com)

### Community Supported Agriculture (CSA):

A unique social and economic arrangement between local households and farmers who work together to share the responsibility of producing and delivering fresh food. Households support a local farm by paying an annual fee that entitles them to a "share" of the season's harvest which usually comes as weekly boxes of fresh foods supplied by the farmers.





## What types of farms fit in farming subdivisions?

Based on a review of several farming subdivision examples, it's clear that some types of agriculture are a better fit near residential areas than others. Common characteristics of farms in farming subdivisions include:

- Production of vegetables, fruits, nuts, hay, corn, trees or grasses for biofuels
- Grazing animals
- Products or services sold to local residents
- Organic or low pesticide input

To maintain good farm-neighbor relations, both potential farmers and potential homebuyers should be aware of expectations regarding the farm operation including noise, dust, chemicals and odors.<sup>8</sup>

## Planning tools to guide farming subdivision development

Many of the farming subdivisions discussed in this article were developed as conservation subdivisions with the agricultural land protected through a conservation easement or land donation. These agricultural conservation easements are described in the box at the right. Notably, the easements limit subdivision and non-farm development, but do not ensure the land under easement will continue to be farmed.

Some of the developers of farming subdivisions used transfer of development rights programs to increase the density of homes. Farming subdivisions may also be developed using Planned Unit Developments or mixed use zoning districts. Effectively using these tools to guide farming subdivisions requires that the tools clearly delineate the types

of farms and farming practices that are accepted by both farmers and neighboring landowners.

## Conclusions

Subdivisions that include farms have sprouted across the country, countering conventional notions that farmers and homeowners don't mix. A variety of planning tools are available for guiding farming subdivisions. Farming subdivisions have many of the same potential benefits and limitations as other conservation subdivisions.<sup>9</sup> Limitations specific to farming subdivisions include relatively small land areas for farming, potential complaints from residential neighbors, and no guarantee that the land will continue to be farmed. If the right types of farms are thoughtfully incorporated into farming subdivisions, potential benefits include reduced reliance on food transported from distant sources, stronger community connections, increased understanding of food production and its challenges, a more localized economy, and improved public health if organic methods are used.



*Prairie Crossing conservation subdivision and Sandhill Organics farm.*



Photos: [www.newfarm.org](http://www.newfarm.org)

### Agricultural conservation easements generally

- Limit subdivision and non-farm development
- Permit commercial development related to the farm operation and the construction of farm buildings
- Do not restrict farming practices
- May ask landowners to implement soil and water conservation plans
- Do not ensure the land will continue to be farmed

Farmland Information Center, 2006. Agricultural Conservation Easements Fact Sheet.

[www.farmlandinfo.org/documents/27762/ACE\\_06-10.pdf](http://www.farmlandinfo.org/documents/27762/ACE_06-10.pdf)

<sup>1</sup> Daniels, Thomas L. et al. (1995). *The Small Town Planning Handbook*, 2nd edition, p. 131.

<sup>2</sup> Markham, Lynn. (2007). Community Supported Agriculture in Wisconsin: Supporting Local Farmers and Protecting Drinking Water, Center for Land Use Education, p. 2. <http://wi.water.usgs.gov/gwcomp/integrate/CSA.pdf>

<sup>3</sup> Cohen, Nevin. (2007). Civic Agriculture = Sane Housing, *The Nation*, <http://mobile.thenation.com/docmobile.mhtml?i=20071217&s=cohen>

<sup>4</sup> Minnesota Land Trust, (2005). Conservation Design Portfolio, Case Study 2, The Fields of St. Croix. [www.mnland.org/pdf%20files/cdp-fieldsstcroix.pdf](http://www.mnland.org/pdf%20files/cdp-fieldsstcroix.pdf)

<sup>5</sup> Minnesota Land Trust, (2005). Conservation Design Portfolio, Case Study 4, Windsor Park. [www.mnland.org/pdf%20files/cdp-windsorpark.pdf](http://www.mnland.org/pdf%20files/cdp-windsorpark.pdf)

<sup>6</sup> Qroe Farm Corporation, Pardon Hill, South Dartmouth, Pennsylvania. [www.qroefarm.com/downloads/completed\\_projects/Pardon.pdf](http://www.qroefarm.com/downloads/completed_projects/Pardon.pdf)

<sup>7</sup> Natural Lands Trust, Inc., Farmview. [www.natlands.org/categories/article.asp?fidArticleId=72](http://www.natlands.org/categories/article.asp?fidArticleId=72)

<sup>8</sup> Southwestern Illinois Resource Conservation & Development, Inc. (2006). Conservation Design Handbook: Moving toward a profitable balance between conservation and development in Southwestern Illinois. [www.swircd.org/pdf/conservation%20subdivision%20design%20handbook.pdf](http://www.swircd.org/pdf/conservation%20subdivision%20design%20handbook.pdf)

<sup>9</sup> Haines, Anna. (2002). "An Innovative Tool for Managing Rural Residential Development: A Look at Conservation Subdivisions," *The Land Use Tracker*, Vol. 2, Issue 1. [www.uwsp.edu/cnr/landcenter/tracker/Summer2002/cons subdiv.html](http://www.uwsp.edu/cnr/landcenter/tracker/Summer2002/cons subdiv.html)



# COMMUNITY GARDENS: FOR NOW OR FOREVER?

*By Alicia Acken Cosgrove, Land Use Specialist, UW-River Falls*

*Troy Gardens town home development and community gardens*



Photos: Alicia Acken Cosgrove

Years ago, I volunteered for a community garden. The corner lot had been vacant for years. It was decided that this lot was not the place for an edible garden, but rather, a great place for a community gathering place. Landscapers donated plant material, the locally owned coffee shop coordinated volunteers and provided coffee, and the nuns that lived across the street provided lemonade and gardening tools. A few months ago, I returned to visit some former neighbors and learned that my garden was gone. It's now a vacant lot with some improvements, waiting for the lower Great Lakes economy to improve.

It's a common story, many community gardens are grass-roots creations. Few comprehensive or neighborhood plans discuss community gardens. Regulations, while not specifically prohibiting community gardens, may not support their existence. So the tenure is often precarious and the locations of gardens not always ideal. This article will discuss a variety of tools to encourage and protect community gardens, including comprehensive plans, real estate policies, zoning, and land trusts.

## Seattle, Washington – Comprehensive Plan

A first step in creating or protecting community gardens is to make community gardens part of the comprehensive plan. Like any other community resource, an assessment of community gardens, including the age, locations, management, land ownership and zoning status could be a useful part of an Issues and Opportunities element. The comprehensive planning process is also an opportunity to identify goals, objectives and programs to encourage community gardens.

Seattle's comprehensive plan identifies areas to promote and expand community gardens. The plan provides the following measurable goal for including community gardens in areas designated as Urban Villages:

“One dedicated community garden for

each 2,500 households in the Village with at least one dedicated garden site.” ([www.seattle.gov/DPD/Planning/Seattle\\_s\\_Comprehensive\\_Plan/](http://www.seattle.gov/DPD/Planning/Seattle_s_Comprehensive_Plan/))

## Minneapolis, Minnesota – Real Estate Disposition Policy

The Minneapolis Real Estate Disposition Policy provides guidance for the sale of city-owned parcels. Section 2.2.14 outlines the process and limitations for selling and buying community gardens. Community garden lot sales require “favorable neighborhood recommendation and the approval of all adjoining property owners.” Purchasers must be financially viable, and be able to demonstrate experience in owning and operating inclusive community gardens. The lots are sold for market value and the purchaser must place a conservation easement on the community garden. ([www.ci.minneapolis.mn.us/policies/disposition%20policy.doc](http://www.ci.minneapolis.mn.us/policies/disposition%20policy.doc))

## Cleveland, Ohio – Urban Garden Zoning

Cleveland experienced a loss in the number of gardens in the 1990s; some original Victory Gardens were also being threatened. Community gardens were seen as potential sites for other needed municipal uses such as fire stations and school bus parking lots. According to Julia Barton with Ohio State University Extension, most community gardeners in Cleveland make less than \$19,999 a year. Community gardens provide a way for these gardeners to grow an average of \$500-\$1,000 worth of fruits and vegetables per year, supplementing both their diet and income. A team of extension professionals, non-profits, the planning office, and a city councilman worked to modify the city's zoning codes to better protect community gardens. According to Barton, “Zoning is the only tool we have to use in Cleveland. It might not be ideal, but it's all we have. So we worked with it, and decided the best thing we could do was create an Urban Garden District in the Zoning Code.” The following language specifies what can be included in the district:



**336.03 Permitted Main Uses**

Only the following main uses shall be permitted in an Urban Garden District:

(a) community gardens which may have occasional sales of items grown at the site;

(b) market gardens, including the sale of crops produced on the site.

**336.04 Permitted Accessory Uses**

Only the following accessory uses and structures shall be permitted in an Urban Garden District:

(a) greenhouses, hoophouses, cold-frames, and similar structures used to extend the growing season;

(b) open space associated with and intended for use as garden areas;

(c) signs limited to identification, information and directional signs, including sponsorship information where the sponsorship information is clearly secondary to other permitted information on any particular sign, in conformance with the regulations of Section 336.05;

(d) benches, bike racks, raised/accessible planting beds, compost bins, picnic tables, seasonal farm stands, fences, garden art, rain barrel systems, chicken coops, beehives, and children's play areas;

(e) buildings, limited to tool sheds, shade pavilions, barns, rest-room facilities with composting toilets, and planting preparation houses, in conformance with the regulations of Section 336.05;

(f) off-street parking and walkways, in conformance with the regulations of Section 336.05.

(City of Cleveland Zoning Code, Ord. No. 208-07, Chapt. 336, Urban Garden District, [http://caselaw.lp.findlaw.com/clevelandcodes/cco\\_part3\\_336.html](http://caselaw.lp.findlaw.com/clevelandcodes/cco_part3_336.html))

Other municipalities that contain zoning provisions for community gardens include:

- Austin, Texas ([www.amlegal.com/austin\\_tx](http://www.amlegal.com/austin_tx)),
- New York, New York ([www.nyc.gov](http://www.nyc.gov)),
- Portland, Oregon ([www.portlandonline.com](http://www.portlandonline.com)), and
- Boston, Massachusetts ([www.cityofboston.gov/bra/pdf/ZoningCode/Article33.pdf](http://www.cityofboston.gov/bra/pdf/ZoningCode/Article33.pdf)).

The City of Boston Department of

Neighborhood Development is notable for distributing grant funding, actively acquiring community gardens, and conveying gardens to over thirty different non-profit and land trust organizations

**Philadelphia, Pennsylvania – Land Trusts**

Not all land trusts are interested in protecting community gardens or other small parcels of land. Conservation Land Trusts have traditionally focused on protecting farmland and sensitive natural areas. Community Land Trusts, by contrast, tend to work in more urban settings and promote goals such as the promotion of affordable housing or community gardens. Neighborhood Gardens Association (NGA), which is based in Philadelphia, is an example of a land trust that was formed to purchase and protect community gardens. NGA was created through a partnership between the Pennsylvania Horticultural Society, Penn State Urban Gardening Program, local business representatives, and community gardeners. The Association holds title to twenty-nine gardens. Not all of their gardens are vegetable gardens though; the group also protects sitting parks and flower gardens. The NGA website provides an outline for creating land trusts for the purpose of protecting community gardens: [www.ngalandtrust.org/trust.html](http://www.ngalandtrust.org/trust.html)

**Madison, Wisconsin – Troy Gardens**

A discussion of community gardens would be incomplete without mentioning Troy Gardens in Madison ([www.troygardens.org/index.html](http://www.troygardens.org/index.html)). In 2001 the Madison Area Community Land Trust purchased the property. Troy Gardens is a 31 acre development that integrates a community garden, a native tall grass prairie, and maple woodlands. The Trust also built and integrated 30 town homes on the site. Photos of the development are included on page 10.

There are many more examples of community gardening programs. Each program is unique, and includes different combinations of private, non profit and government partnerships. For more information on community garden efforts located in Wisconsin and neighboring states, please refer to the resources listed at right.

**Community Gardening Resources in the Midwest**

Herbach, Geoff. 1998. "Harvesting the City: Community Gardening in Greater Madison, Wisconsin." Madison Food System Project Working Paper Series MFSP-1998-01. [www.cityfarmer.org/madison.html](http://www.cityfarmer.org/madison.html)

Mikolajewski, Matthew. 2002. Milwaukee Community Gardens: Current Trends and Recommendations. University of Wisconsin Milwaukee, School of Architecture and Urban Planning. [www.uwm.edu/SARUP/gallery/planning/planstudentpdf/milwaukeecommunitygardens.pdf](http://www.uwm.edu/SARUP/gallery/planning/planstudentpdf/milwaukeecommunitygardens.pdf)

Saylor, Kirsten. "Twin Cities Community Garden Sustainability Plan Final Report." September 2005. [www.gardenworksmn.org/AboutUs/Sust\\_Plan.pdf](http://www.gardenworksmn.org/AboutUs/Sust_Plan.pdf)



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Please submit an article to our newsletter.

It should be:

- 1,000 words or less,
- Informative,
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- And address a land use issue.

The managing editor will review your submission and get back to you if any changes are necessary.

Managing Editor  
Rebecca Roberts

The **2nd annual Wisconsin Local Food Summit** will be held in conjunction with the **10th annual Midwest Value Added Agriculture Conference** on January 24th and 25th, 2008. Making Connections is the theme for the upcoming Summit & Conference, which bring together value-added agricultural producers and advocates of local food. One registration allows you to participate in both events, which will take place at the Plaza Hotel and Suites in Eau Claire, Wisconsin. For more information and to register for the conference go to: [www.rivercountryred.org/valad.htm](http://www.rivercountryred.org/valad.htm)

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