

**Recommendations of the Dane County Board's Sustainable Agriculture Subcommittee  
to the Environment, Agriculture and Natural Resources Committee**

**Approved by the Sustainable Agriculture Subcommittee, January 25, 2010**

**Education and Technical Assistance**

- **Need** - Stakeholders across all of our work group topic areas shared the need for more specific information and assistance in implementing new initiatives supporting sustainable agriculture. Needs range from assistance with business planning and value-added agriculture, to education about new markets, to assistance with optimally using the state and county's farmland protection programs, to help for beginning farmers in finding, land, and other resources needed to get started.
- **Recommendation** - Create a one-stop shop dedicated to improving capacity for education and assistance on many aspects of sustainable agriculture.
  - This initiative would **expand on existing county capacity** in institutional marketing, farmland protection, and other areas and build sufficient capacity to assist farmers and others undertake initiatives to meet the goals of
    - supporting beginning farmers;
    - protecting farmland and natural resources;
    - supporting initiatives that help farmers expand marketing and value-added opportunities; and
    - helping all consumers, regardless of income, access high quality food, building on community gardens and other local food production strategies in the area.
  - The one-stop shop will thus **target** producers, other agricultural entrepreneurs, landowners, community groups, and others interested in sustainable agriculture in its many dimensions.
  - Example 1: The County will help farmers and local jurisdictions establish agricultural enterprise areas, as designated in the state's new Working Lands Initiative. Its staff will educate about the potential of the use of Transfer of Development Rights, and assist towns in updating comprehensive plans to reflect use of TDRs and to use the new WLI provisions for charging additional conversion fees (above the state rate) to landowners who take land currently under farmland protection out of such protection
  - Example 2: The County will help farmers conduct market feasibility studies, business plans, and navigate the regulatory considerations of value-added ventures. It will support the development of new markets for agricultural products produced in Dane County using environmentally sound, socially responsible, profitable practices. These will include support for developing farmers' markets in areas of the County with consumer interest but not currently served by local markets.

- Example 3: The County will help beginning farmers and agricultural entrepreneurs find mentors, private landowners from whom they can lease land, and information needed for their startup operations.
- **Staff: Increased staffing** (FTEs, etc.) will be needed over time for expanded Extension agricultural support, potentially 3 to 4 new FTEs over a 3-4 year period, even if in next year's budget, the program can only afford 1-2 new FTEs.
- **Internet** - A specific form of the County's increased capacity on sustainable agriculture issues pertains to better access to and use of the Internet to help communicate information and offer technical assistance to stakeholders.
  - The County will seek federal and state dollars to support **increased community access to broadband Internet services**.
  - County staff will create a **web-based interface** for educating about all aspects of sustainable agriculture. For example, such a portal would contain all necessary information to facilitate agricultural land preservation, economic viability, best management practices implementation, and intergenerational transfer throughout the region.

### Cultivating A New Agricultural Workforce

- **Need** - Because nationally and in Wisconsin, the average age of farmers is getting dramatically older than it has ever been, it is important to cultivate new farmers. Impediments to entering farming include difficulties in accessing land, operating capital, equipment and reliable information.

We also recognize that across the nation, many models have shown how farming can help people who have struggled with social or legal problems to stabilize their lives and contribute to their communities. Therefore, we support establishing farming and gardening programs targeting this population.

- **Recommendations:**
  - Establish an **agricultural incubation and demonstration farm** in County
  - Target a portion of the County's existing **Revolving Loan Fund** to beginning farmers
  - Encourage **private landowners** to lease property to beginning farmers
  - Help beginning farmers gain better access to **needed equipment**
  - Establish an urban agriculture/horticulture program for the **Dane County Jail and Huber Center**. This could be modeled after similar programs in other states and after the horticulture program at Oakhill Correctional Institution in Oregon, WI, which uses agriculture/horticulture training as both therapy and career development strategies. The County should include the Food Council and Dane County Extension Office in the planning process.
  - Clearly define "urban agriculture" and "community food security" and include the Dane County Food Council in the process of doing so.

### Use of County-owned Lands

- **Need** - Two of this Subcommittee's work groups identified the lack of available land as a limitation to the adoption of sustainable agriculture in the County. Because the County itself owns considerable land, we have several recommendations pertinent to those lands.
- **Recommendations:**
  - Ensure that all County-owned lands have a **conservation plan** created and implemented for all uses of that land
  - Develop a complete **inventory** of County-owned land that would be strong candidates for longer-term uses that support community agriculture and food security
  - **Set aside County-owned land for longer-term uses** that support community agriculture and food security. Integrate this concept into the County Parks & Open Space Plan, as well as planning for current properties such as the Anderson Farm, the Silverwood Farm, and Badger Prairie property
  - Give lease preferences to 1. beginning farmers and 2. community gardens and other community-based agriculture ventures on County land parcels of 10 or less tillable acres