



## Farmland Preservation

### Preserving Farmland & Natural Resources for the Future

According to the most recent USDA Census of Agriculture, the number of farms in Wisconsin decreased by over 7% between 2012 and 2017<sup>1</sup> (more than twice the national decrease of 3.2%)<sup>2</sup> Total farm acreage also fell by nearly 2%.<sup>3</sup>

Unfortunately, the lack of access to affordable farmland is one of the biggest barriers to new farms getting started. This problem will continue to grow as the amount of farmland in Wisconsin shrinks. A bipartisan bill in the Wisconsin legislature would give a significant boost to the state's Farmland Preservation Program.

**Assembly Bill 637, introduced by Representatives Oldenburg, Spreitzer, Novak, Kolste, Tranel, and Shankland, and its companion bill, Senate Bill 575, introduced by Senators Testin, Schachtner, Smith, and Taylor, would:**

1) *Shorten farmland preservation agreements* that farmers enter into with the Department of Agriculture, Trade, and Consumer Protection (DATCP) from 15 years to 10 years.

2) The bill would also *increase the per-acre tax credit amounts* for farmers as follows:

- from \$7.50 to \$10 for acres in a farmland preservation zoning district without a farmland preservation agreement
- from \$5 to \$10 for acres covered by a farmland preservation agreement but not in a farmland preservation zoning district
- from \$10 to \$12.50 for acres in a farmland preservation zoning district and covered by a farmland preservation agreement
- add a new \$10 per acre credit for farmland in a farmland preservation area, if the acres are covered by an agriculture conservation easement

Acreage and participation in the farmland preservation program has fallen over the last decade. <sup>4</sup> AB 637/SB 575 seeks to address the primary reasons that farmers are reluctant to enroll.

An additional side benefit to expanding the Farmland Preservation Program is improving soil and water quality in rural areas. Farmers who sign up for the farmland preservation tax credits agree to comply with soil and water conservation standards. Increasing the tax credit amounts will help farmers cover the cost of meeting the conservation standards set by the program.

#### Barriers to Participation in Farmland Preservation



**45%** of farmers agreed that farmland preservation program incentives are too low to make participation worthwhile

**44%** of farmers that previously claimed the credit but no longer do so cited that the tax credit was not high enough to offset the costs of meeting the required conservation standards. <sup>5</sup>

**31%** of farmers stated that the tax credit was not high enough to make signing the contract worthwhile



**57%** of farmers considering farmland preservation agreements were hesitant to limit what could be done with their land in the next 15 years

**30%** stated that the 15-year contract is too long<sup>6</sup>



Statistics source: DATCP

## FARMLAND PRESERVATION

### *What can the state do?*

#### **SUPPORT THE FARMLAND PRESERVATION TAX CREDIT BILL (Assembly Bill 637/Senate Bill 575)**

Groups that have already voiced support for this bill include:

- Wisconsin Farmers Union
- Wisconsin Corn Growers Association
- Wisconsin Pork Association
- Cooperative Network
- Dairy Business Association
- Wisconsin Farm Bureau Federation
- Wisconsin Counties Association
- Clean Wisconsin Inc
- River Alliance of Wisconsin
- The Nature Conservancy
- Wisconsin Conservation Voters
- Wisconsin Land and Water Conservation Association, Inc.
- Wisconsin Independent Businesses, Inc.
- Wisconsin Property Taxpayers Inc
- Wisconsin Towns Association

<sup>1</sup> 2012 Farms: 69,754. 2017 Farms: 64,793. Table 8, Total number of farms, 2017 and 2012, 2017 Census of Agriculture: Wisconsin. [https://www.nass.usda.gov/Publications/AgCensus/2017/Full\\_Report/Volume\\_1,\\_Chapter\\_1\\_State\\_Level/Wisconsin/st55\\_1\\_0007\\_0008.pdf](https://www.nass.usda.gov/Publications/AgCensus/2017/Full_Report/Volume_1,_Chapter_1_State_Level/Wisconsin/st55_1_0007_0008.pdf)

<sup>2</sup> 2012 Farms: 2,109,303. 2017 Farms: 2,042,220. Table 8, Total number of farms, 2017 and 2012, 2017 Census of Agriculture: United States. [https://www.nass.usda.gov/Publications/AgCensus/2017/Full\\_Report/Volume\\_1,\\_Chapter\\_1\\_US/st99\\_1\\_0007\\_0008.pdf](https://www.nass.usda.gov/Publications/AgCensus/2017/Full_Report/Volume_1,_Chapter_1_US/st99_1_0007_0008.pdf)

<sup>3</sup> 2012 Farm Acreage: 14,568,926. 2017 Farm Acreage: 14,318,630. Table 8, Total acreage of farms, 2017 and 2012, 2017 Census of Agriculture: Wisconsin. [https://www.nass.usda.gov/Publications/AgCensus/2017/Full\\_Report/Volume\\_1,\\_Chapter\\_1\\_State\\_Level/Wisconsin/st55\\_1\\_0007\\_0008.pdf](https://www.nass.usda.gov/Publications/AgCensus/2017/Full_Report/Volume_1,_Chapter_1_State_Level/Wisconsin/st55_1_0007_0008.pdf)

<sup>4</sup> Email dated October 24, 2019: "Co-sponsorship of LRB 3633 & LRB 4749, related to the farmland preservation program," Memo from Representatives Loren Oldenburg, Mark Spreitzer, Todd Novak, Deb Kolste, Travis Tranel, and Katrina Shankland to legislative colleagues.

*Wisconsin Farmers Union is member-driver organization that is committed to enhancing the quality of life for family farmers, rural communities and all people through education, cooperation, and legislation. Learn more at [www.wisconsinfarmersunion.com](http://www.wisconsinfarmersunion.com).*



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