



# Agriculture Enterprise Area

Preserve farmland. Protect the environment. Grow the economy.

# SNAPSHOT

## Golden Triangle

County: Eau Claire

Acres: 21,394

AEA Designation: 2016

Municipalities: City of Augusta; towns of Bridge Creek, Lincoln, Otter Creek, Washington; village of Fall Creek

## Background

The Golden Triangle agriculture enterprise area (AEA) is in the Chippewa Valley - an area between Eau Claire, Menomonie, and Chippewa Falls devoted to commercial and farmland activity. In 2015, a group of Eau Claire County farmers petitioned for the designation of the Golden Triangle AEA with the goals of promoting the agricultural economy and small-scale agriculture, using access to local city markets for local agricultural producers, and supporting farmland preservation. The Golden Triangle AEA was designated on January 1, 2016, and falls in portions of the towns of Lincoln, Washington, Otter Creek, Bridge Creek, the village of Fall Creek, and city of Augusta. It weaves across more than 20,000 acres with more than half as prime agricultural land. In Eau Claire County, agriculture provides 4,641 jobs to residents and contributes \$19.1 million in taxes, not including property taxes to local schools.



## Local Support

One of the farmer petitioners was Joe Smith, a dairy farmer in Eau Claire County, who remembered in the 1960's when many farmers tilled up and down hills instead of following the curves of the land. Smith noticed that this style of tillage and planting was resulting in soil and nutrient loss that was traveling into a nearby trout stream. Stream pollution can result in poor fish health due to a loss of cover, food sources, or sites to nest on in stream beds. The potential loss of trout in the stream drove Smith's passion to start implementing conservation practices on the farm. "I wanted my grandsons to be able to go fishing in that stream," said Smith.

As a result, Smith began implementing sustainable practices, like conservation tillage and cover crops, into his rotation to help reduce the amount of soil and nutrient loss. In 2014, Smith received the Wisconsin Land and Water Conservation Association state conservation farmer of the year award in recognition for outstanding work, community involvement, and education in conservation.



Smith stated the reason for forming the Golden Triangle AEA was to preserve farmland, noting the significant blocks of high quality agricultural soils within the Golden Triangle. Smith was among the first farmers in the area to sign a farmland preservation agreement. Getting farmers together and establishing commitments to the future of agriculture, through things like farmland preservation agreements and implementation of conservation practices, supports the growth of the farming community. The AEA is a group of individuals sharing the same interests in the future of agriculture.

*"Farming and agriculture are an important part of our community, and we want to try to preserve farmland and support the next generation of farmers. The (AEA) gives us an opportunity to do this,"*

-Golden Triangle AEA petitioner

This AEA is supported by the following agriculture enterprises and businesses:



Milk: haulers, producers & contractors



Licensed egg producers



Food processor & warehouse



Refrigeration services



Veterinary medicine



Feed & farm supply



Holstein Association  
(and breeders)



Community supported agriculture  
(CSA)



Beef producers



Dairy & livestock (nutrition) advisor



Livestock truckers



Grain dealer



Agricultural cooperative  
(grain elevator, store,  
bulk propane storage)



Organic certified  
businesses, farms



Apple orchards



Berry patches



Plant/tree nurseries



Ag consulting  
and accounting services



Demonstration farm



Historic Dells Mill and Museum



Eau Claire  
downtown farmers market

## County Support

The Eau Claire County Land Conservation Division helped landowners pull together materials for the AEA petition with the goal that the AEA serve as a bridge to keep landowners connected in the community. With this goal in mind, in the spring of 2020 the land conservation division purchased a no-till drill available to farmers to rent. No-till drills can drill different types and sizes of seed into a variety of planting conditions ranging from high residue, no-till fields to conventionally tilled fields. The purchase was possible through grants and fundraising at the local level, with the program's goal to be self-sustaining. Amanda Peters, Eau Claire County conservation technician-agronomist, reported that the new drill was well used in the first season and rented within the first week of purchase. The drill has also provided opportunities for farm-to-farm networking to discuss tillage, planting, and conservation goals.

*"These landowners really wanted this (AEA). We let the farmers make the decision as to where they want to go."*  
-Greg Leonard  
Eau Claire County  
Land Conservation Manager

The Eau Claire County Land Conservation Division acknowledged the opportunity for the Golden Triangle AEA to bring in new landowners and expand. Greg Leonard, Eau Claire County Land Conservation Manager emphasized any expansion is led by the landowners and their original passion behind this AEA is still present and visible today. In 2020, the land conservation division is working with a demonstration farm to show the benefits of cover crops and to increase farm-to-farm networking. A demonstration farm is a farm used primarily to research or demonstrate different agricultural techniques.

## Future Growth

As the Golden Triangle AEA develops, it will continue to keep land in agricultural use and promote long term stability across the area. The efforts of the AEA petitioners have produced tangible and positive impacts to the landscape that will help to raise more awareness about the Golden Triangle AEA. The implementation of conservation practices has improved the water quality of the trout stream and the trout have returned. With Joe Smith's grandsons now in college, they visit him on the farm almost every year to go fishing.

## Ag in Your Community

- Incentives to cover conservation costs
- Tax credits
- Protect soil and water
- Preserve farmland
- Install conservation practices
- Ag innovation
- Farm-to-farm networking
- Eau Claire River Watershed Coalition

Learn more at

<https://farmlandpreservation.wi.gov>

If you are a landowner in Eau Claire county and want to find out if your farmland is located in the Golden Triangle AEA, or to sign a farmland preservation agreement, or to learn more about conservation initiatives or resources in the county, **contact the Eau Claire County Land Conservation Division by phone at (715) 839-6226 or email [lcd@co.eau-claire.wi.us](mailto:lcd@co.eau-claire.wi.us).**

To learn more about AEA's and the Farmland Preservation Program, visit [https://datcp.wi.gov/Pages/Programs\\_Services/AgriculturalEnterpriseAreas.aspx](https://datcp.wi.gov/Pages/Programs_Services/AgriculturalEnterpriseAreas.aspx). To start or join a current AEA, contact the county land conservation department in the county where your land is located.