



# Agriculture Enterprise Area **SNAPSHOT**

Preserve farmland. Protect the environment. Grow the economy.

## West Point AEA

County: Columbia County

Municipalities: Town of West Point

AEA Designation: 2014

Acres: 15,887.62



### Columbia County Agriculture Economics\*

- #6 for grain in state
- 1,357 farms
- 96% of farms are family farms
- 5,262 agriculture jobs
- \$1.5B contributed in economic activity

*\*University of Wisconsin-Madison Division of Extension Columbia County agriculture impact report*

### Background

The West Point Agricultural Enterprise Area (AEA) was designated in 2014 by local landowners wanting to further participate in the Farmland Preservation Program. The West Point AEA is located in southwest Columbia County, south of Lake Wisconsin. Agriculture in the county mainly consists of beef, canning crops, corn grain, soybeans, winter wheat and accounts for 5,262 jobs and contributes \$1.5 billion in economic activity. In West Point, dairy farms are fixtures in the scenic rural landscape with residential development close to the shores of Lake Wisconsin.

**2**  
LOCAL GOVERNMENTS

**16**  
AG CO-OPS & BUSINESSES

**19**  
PRODUCERS & LANDOWNERS

### Local Participation

Gordon Carncross is a retired dairy farmer in the West Point AEA and grew up on the farm which has been owned by his family since 1946. Having served on the town board for many years, he has seen the push and pull between farming and residential communities. The pressure of devolvement inspired Gordon and others to get involved in farmland preservation and resulted in the nomination of the Town of West Point for an AEA designation.

Gordon believes the West Point community has common goals in protecting the areas' water resources. "We are all interested in water quality, because as humans, we're all dependent on water," said Gordon. *"Water that we drink or use, whether you're a farmer or non-farmer.* It's good to have the farming community working alongside the urban folks rather than competing. The farmers and the lake folk want the same thing - to protect the environment."



The West Point AEA serves as a platform to bring the agricultural community together, encourages farmers to mobilize conservation practices, and helps guide decisions about development. One tool an AEA has to achieve these goals is through voluntary farmland preservation agreements. These agreements are 15-year contracts in which landowners commit all or some of their land to agricultural use and to implement soil and water best management practices. Currently, landowners in the West Point AEA can claim \$7.50/acre/year in tax credits in areas zoned for farmland preservation. Landowners in the AEA who enroll in a farmland preservation agreement in an area which is also zoned for farmland preservation are eligible to claim a higher tax credit rate of \$10/acre/year.

This AEA is supported and surrounded by the following agriculture enterprises, businesses, non-profits, and institutions:

-  Milk Producers
-  Milk Distribution
-  Beef Production
-  Cattle Breeding
-  Veterinarian Services
-  Aquaculture
-  Feed crops
-  Grain Warehouse/ Grain Dealer
-  Organic Farming
-  Vineyards
-  Food warehouse/ food processing
-  CREP Participation
-  Farm Equipment Retailers
-  Agri-tourism
  - Gibraltar Rock County Park
  - Ice Age National Scenic trail
-  Columbia County UW Extension
-  U.S. Department of Agriculture Natural Resources Conservation Service
-  Columbia County Co-operative Dairy Herd Improvement Association
-  Lake Wisconsin Farmer Watershed Council
-  Groundswell Conservancy

## County Support

Columbia County is working to increase farmland preservation participation and adoption of innovative conservation practices on farms. Chris Arnold, Columbia County water resource specialist, hopes that the county's foundation of conservation education will lead to voluntary adoption of conservation practices like nutrient management plans and cover crops. They want to bridge the perceived gap between farmers and the lake community through mutual understanding of agricultural practices. "We want to try to help the lake owners and the other people realize what's going on when [the farmers] are doing these nutrient management practices, to prevent conflict between the two groups," said Chris. "We want to educate both groups together as to how nutrient management works on the farms and how it relates to the lake owners."

Another opportunity to achieve conservation goals within the AEA is through Columbia County's 2021 AEA development grant program. This program includes monetary incentives for current and new farmland preservation participants. Landowners with a current farmland preservation agreement will receive a \$250 incentive to work with the Columbia County Land and Water Conservation Department staff to review their nutrient management plan for possible phosphorus reductions in excess of standards. Those who agree to implement phosphorus reductions will receive an additional \$250, for a total of \$500. Farmland owners looking to sign a new farmland preservation agreement have the opportunity to receive a one-time sign up incentive based on acreage. The first six currently enrolled farmland preservation zoning participants who sign up for an agreement in the AEA, have the opportunity for an additional \$250.

## Future Growth

Through the county's incentive program, Columbia County's goal is to increase voluntary and innovative conservation practices such as no-till, cover crops, and low disturbance manure injection. Growing participation will further protect West Point's natural resources and agricultural heritage for future generations.

Since retiring, Gordon's son Craig has taken over the dairy farm and is working to promote conservation practices as a member of the Lake Wisconsin Farmer Watershed Council, a producer-led group working to help farmers adopt improved practices that protect and improve surface and groundwater quality. Their goal is to work with and encourage farmers in the Lake Wisconsin area to learn and adopt new methods of reducing soil erosion and increasing water infiltration on the land they manage, while maintaining or improving farm profitability. People who live, work, and play in the Lake Wisconsin area will benefit from having improved surface and groundwater quality. Through practices such as cover crops to prevent runoff, Craig is working to preserve the land, soil, and water resources much like his father was able to do before him.

## Promoting Innovation and Education



Adoption of cover crops and soil health in partnership with Lake Wisconsin farmer watershed council



AEA Development Grant Program— incentive payments and nutrient management consultations



Bridging lake and agricultural communities

To find out if your land is located in the West Point AEA and to sign a farmland preservation agreement, contact

**Christopher Arnold, Water Resource Specialist**  
**Columbia County Land and Water Conservation Department**  
 Phone: (608) 742-9674  
 email: [christopher.arnold@co.columbia.wi.us](mailto:christopher.arnold@co.columbia.wi.us)

To start or join a current AEA, contact your county land conservation department where you land is located.