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## Chapter Two: Agricultural Resources



The Agricultural Resources element provides background on these resources in the Village of Cottage Grove and the surrounding areas. The information will be used to guide future land use decisions so that agricultural resources may be protected to the greatest extent desirable. The protection of agricultural resources is a regional priority that requires regional solutions.

### **A. Character of Farming**

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Throughout Dane County, the declining number of farms (both dairy and non-dairy), the amount of land converted out of agricultural uses, and the rising premiums on land value for non-agricultural uses are indicative of escalating pressure on agricultural lands that can result in the transformation of a rural to a developed landscape. These trends hold in the unincorporated areas surrounding

the Village of Cottage Grove. Despite the push for development of agricultural land, farming and agriculture remain an important component of the livelihood and economy in Dane County, and the Village of Cottage Grove and surrounding communities have expressed that continuation of agriculture is a high priority.

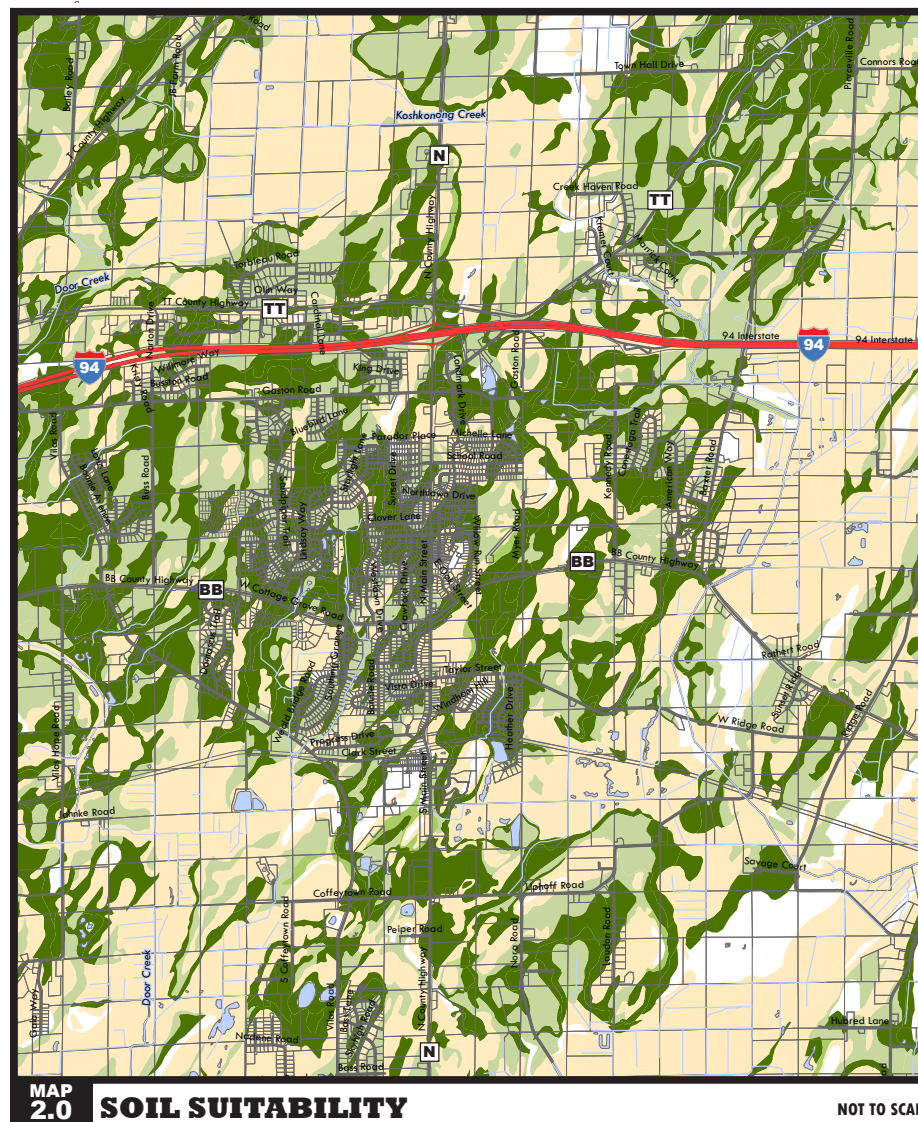
## B. Assessment of Farmland Viability

Map 2.0 illustrates the abundance of high-quality agricultural soils in and around the Village of Cottage Grove—some of the highest quality agricultural soils in the country. These lands include cultivated land, woodlands, and land used for resource extraction. Parcel sizes range from large lots—a minimum of 40 acres or more, to isolated rural lots that have been divided from farmlands for family residence construction, to concentrations of rural housing. Large areas of productive agricultural soils are present in the planning area. These high quality agricultural soils should be one key factor for determining areas planned for long-term agricultural and rural preservation.

The predominant soil capability classes in the area are II and III. Because of the drumlin field topography, soil patterns are very dispersed and irregular. The importance of this resource to the community and the region is widely recognized. An important goal of this chapter is to help preserve the extent and integrity of this resource as long as possible, while accommodating well planned, high-quality, compact urban development. This will mean gradual urbanization of some areas of good soils surrounding the current urban area—particularly in areas where sanitary sewer and public water can be provided at a reasonable cost. In other areas, where the cost-effective provision of full urban services is not possible, long-term agricultural preservation is called for.

## C. Farmland Preservation Efforts

Within the Village limits, farming activities are considered an in-



**Surface Water**  
 — Lakes and Ponds  
 — Stream or Drainage

**Soil Capability Class**  
 (Most to Least Productive)

- I
- II
- III
- IV to VIII



terim use. However, farmers in the Cottage Grove area and Dane County can participate in several federal, state, and county-wide programs and initiatives that are intended to preserve long-term farming activities. The 2008 Farm Bill reauthorized several federal programs, including the following:

- The Conservation Reserve Program (CRP) provides technical and financial assistance to eligible farmers and ranchers to address soil, water, and related natural resource concerns on their lands in an environmentally beneficial and cost-effective manner.
- The Wetland Reserve Program provides technical and financial support to help landowners with their wetland restoration efforts.
- The Wildlife Habitat Incentives Program provides both technical assistance and up to 75 percent cost-share assistance to landowners to establish and improve fish and wildlife habitat on their property.
- The Grazing Lands Conservation Initiative focuses on providing technical assistance to help new grazers begin using rotational grazing methods. Trained grazing specialists work one-on-one with farmers to develop grazing plans, fence and water plans, and provide seed recommendations.
- The Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP) is a voluntary conservation program for farmers and ranchers that promote agricultural production and environmental quality as compatible national goals. EQIP offers financial and technical help to assist eligible participants install or implement structural and management practices on eligible agricultural land.

In addition, the Wisconsin Department of Revenue offers two important farmland preservation programs, the Farmland Preservation Credit Program and the Farmland Tax Relief Credit Program. The Farmland Preservation Credit Program strives to preserve Wisconsin farmland by means of local land use planning and soil conservation practices and provides property tax relief to farmland owners. To qualify for the credit, farmland must be 35 acres

## SOIL CAPABILITY CLASSES

*Class I soils have few limitations that restrict their use. These soils can sustain a wide variety of plants and are well suited for cultivated crops, pasture plants, range lands, and woodlands. Class II soils have moderate limitations that restrict the types of plants that can be grown or that require simple conservation practices or soil management techniques to prevent deterioration over time. However, these practices are generally easy to apply, and, therefore, these soils are still able to sustain cultivated crops, pasture plants, range lands, and woodlands.*

*Soils in Class III have limitations that, under natural circumstances, restrict the types of plants that can be grown, and/or that alter the timing of planting, tillage, and harvesting. However, with the application and careful management of special conservation practices, these soils may still be used for cultivated crops, pasture plants, woodlands, and range lands. Soils in capability Classes IV through VIII present increasingly severe limitations to the cultivation of crops. Soils in Class VIII have limitations that entirely preclude their use for commercial plant production.*

or more and zoned for exclusive agricultural use or be subject to a preservation agreement between the farmland owner and the State. All program participants must comply with soil and water conservation standards set by the State Land Conservation Board. It should be noted that claims for both of the Farmland Preservation Credit and the Farmland Tax Relief Credit are documented for the municipality in which the claimant lives, which may not be where the farm is actually located. The Farmland Tax Relief Credit Program provides direct benefits to all farmland owners with 35 or more acres. The credit is computed as a percentage of up to \$10,000 of property taxes, with the maximum credit of \$1,500.

#### **D. Agricultural Resources Goals, Objectives, and Policies**

##### **Goal:**

1. Protect agricultural resources in the Cottage Grove area.

##### **Objectives:**

1. Protect productive agricultural lands from premature development.
2. Preserve productive agricultural lands from quasi-rural residential, commercial, and industrial development.
3. Discourage the proliferation of low-density unsewered development in the unincorporated areas around the Village.

##### **Policies:**

1. Encourage compact urban development with full public facilities and services, and work with nearby towns to strictly limit the amount of unsewered development within the Village's ETJ in an effort to preserve agricultural land.
2. Use a long-term urban service area boundary to provide general guidance over long-term intent for development and preser-

vation in the area.

3. Utilize the Village extraterritorial land division approval authority to review subdivision plats and certified survey maps in areas planned for agricultural preservation or future urban expansion, ensuring that development occurs in the appropriate location, at the appropriate time, and is consistent with Village plans and ordinances.
4. Assist surrounding communities in the exploration of programs to promote the long-term viability of agricultural uses. Opportunities to consider might include purchase or transfer of development rights programs (PDR and TDR) where such programs coincide with Village interests, community supported agriculture (CSA) programs, local farm markets, promotion of local products at area stores and restaurants, and general educational type opportunities.
5. Encourage new economic development based on bio-based products and industries in Cottage Grove.

#### **E. Agricultural Resource Programs and Recommendations**

Cottage Grove is a village and, like most communities that provide municipal services and utilities, it has grown in a fairly compact configuration. From time to time, development proposals for areas in towns adjacent to the Village's municipal limits have advocated large-lot residential development. This type of large-lot development impedes the Village's ability to provide municipal facilities in an efficient, cost-effective manner. This type of development also uses up agricultural land at rate 5 to 25 times faster than compact, sewerred development. This Plan intends to implement agricultural preservation objectives by guiding future development into areas planned for municipal service extension. In general, this Plan advises that the Village strongly advocate for limits to residential development served by on-site septic systems in areas surrounding the Village or within the long-term growth areas.