



AEA Snapshot: Castle Rock AEA Protects Soil and Water Quality through Conservation Practices

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MADISON – With more than 23,000 acres in the Driftless Area in Grant County, the Castle Rock agricultural enterprise area (AEA) was designated in 2020 and is the county’s first AEA. Through the AEA designation, the community will work to protect the [Snow Bottom State Natural Area](#), [Blue River](#) watershed, as well as several class one and class two trout streams by implementing conservation practices that protect soil and water quality.

Wisconsin’s Driftless Area is characterized by a distinctive terrain of steep slopes intertwined with rivers and forested areas that were bypassed by the last continental glacier. Due to the geographic characteristics of Castle Rock AEA, upland best management practices like grassed waterways, contour strip cropping, no-till, and cover crops are a priority in preventing run-off and preserving local water resources.

Being the first AEA in Grant County presents a unique opportunity for Castle Rock landowners who choose to sign farmland preservation agreements to participate in the Farmland Preservation Program in a town without general farmland preservation zoning. Farmland preservation agreements differ from farmland preservation zoning in that they do not apply land use restrictions until a landowner chooses to enroll some or all of their farm. Of Castle Rock AEA’s 23,000 acres, seven landowners have 1,200 of those acres enrolled in farmland preservation agreements. The county hopes that this opportunity will spark further participation in the Farmland Preservation Program and help contribute to the preservation of Grant County’s outstanding natural resources as well as its rural farm culture.

To find out if your farmland is located in the Castle Rock AEA, to sign a farmland preservation agreement, or to learn more about conservation initiatives and resources in Grant County, contact Mike Adams, Grant County soil conservationist at (608) 723-6377 or by email at madams@co.grant.wi.gov.

About Agricultural Enterprise Areas (AEAs)

AEAs are community-led efforts to establish designated areas important to Wisconsin's agricultural future. As a part of the state's Farmland Preservation Program, AEAs strive to support local farmland protection goals. Through this designation, communities can encourage continued agricultural production and investment in the local agricultural economy.

Eligible landowners within an AEA can sign a 15-year farmland preservation agreement committing all or a portion of their farm to agricultural use and maintaining state soil and water conservation standards. In return, they may be eligible to claim the farmland preservation tax credit.

To learn more about AEAs and the Farmland Preservation Program, visit 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.

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