



Agriculture Enterprise Area

Preserve farmland. Protect the environment. Grow the economy.

SNAPSHOT

Apple Lake AEA

Counties: Polk, St. Croix

Municipalities: Farmington, Alden, Star Prairie

Focus on Polk County

Acres: 9,994

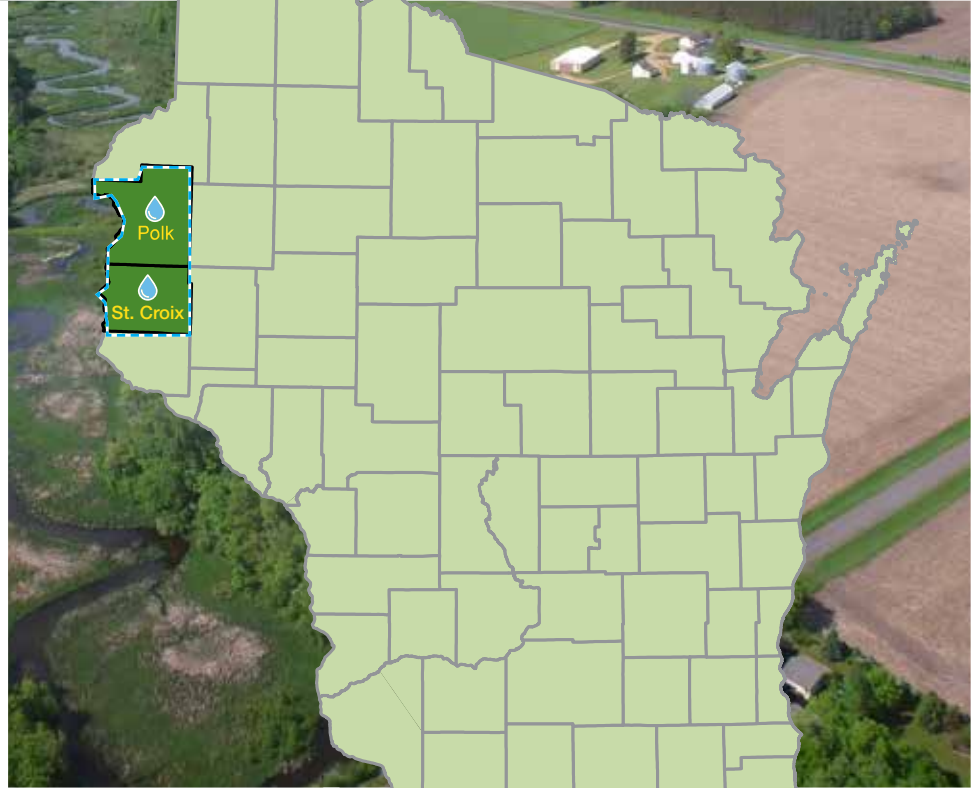
AEA Designation: 2011

Background

The Apple Lake Agricultural Enterprise Area (AEA) is situated in Wisconsin's Northwoods, just east of the Mississippi River, where it is surrounded by small lakes in the Lower Apple River Watershed. Originally established in 2011, this AEA covers nearly 10,000 acres in the towns of Farmington and Alden in Polk County and the town of Star Prairie in St. Croix County. This AEA is rooted in its commitment to improving and protecting the local surface waters of the Horse Creek Watershed.

Goals of the AEA include:

- Implement the state's soil and water conservation standards to protect and improve water quality of local impaired and threatened water resources.
- Encourage agribusiness development, such as implement dealers or local food co-ops, to support current and future agricultural operations.
- Promote enrollment in farmland preservation agreements to slow urban sprawl and protect productive farmland for future production.
- Create an opportunity for a more sustainable agricultural community where commodities are marketed locally.



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LOCAL GOVERNMENTS

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AG CO-OPS & BUSINESSES

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PRODUCERS & LANDOWNERS

Planning for the Future

According to the United States National Agricultural Statistics Service, Polk County lost 12.6%, over 36,000 acres, of farmland between 2002 and 2017. Once farmland is developed into other types of lands uses, such as residential or commercial, it is rarely returned back to productive farmland. This can have significant impacts for communities that depend on agriculture to support the local economy. Beyond petitioning for an AEA, developing a farmland preservation plan is another way that communities can support protections for their agricultural lands.



Farmland preservation plans are crafted every 10 years at the county level, with community input from landowners and local town officials to best represent where agricultural production will remain for the foreseeable future. The plan also identifies where a certified farmland preservation zoning district or AEA could be established. Polk County is currently working on updating their farmland preservation plan with the intention of more narrowly defining productive agricultural lands in the community.

“We are going to be more specific when identifying agricultural lands that are most valuable and that have the best chance at being in a farmland preservation zoning district or designated as an AEA,” said Eric Wojchik, Polk County Conservationist.

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

 Ag Consulting-Certified Crop Advisors

 Ag Equipment

 Agritourism

 Agronomists

 Aquaculture


 Dairy Plant

 Farm Supply and Dealers

 Farmer's Market

 Food Processing Facilities, Food Warehouses

 Grain Trucking

 Horse Creek Area Farmer-Led Watershed Council

 Livestock Truckers

 Meat Distributor and Processing

 Milk Producers

 Nursery and Tree Farms

 Organic Farms

 St. Croix Wetland Management District

 Standing Cedar State Natural Area

 Timber Production

The county is working with a group of local stakeholders, including farmers, business owners, and local governments, as well as the West Wisconsin Regional Planning Commission, to draft the plan. The county is looking forward to rebuilding the foundation of its farmland preservation program so that it can grow and expand into areas that have not yet had the opportunity to participate.

Working in the Watershed

The Horse Creek Watershed Council, whose area of focus contains the Apple Lake AEA, was founded by producers with a mission of helping others adopt best management practices related to water quality and soil health. Timm Johnson, a local farmer, is a member of this producer-led group and is a farmland preservation agreement holder. Johnson is passionate about protecting local water quality and preserving local farmland for future generations.

Since 2015, Johnson has hosted cover crop and tillage test plots on his land to support the Horse Creek Watershed Area Council's research project.

"Our models show that in one year, our implementation of no-till and cover crops have resulted in 6,800 fewer pounds of phosphorus entering Cedar Lake," said Johnson. "A one-pound reduction in phosphorus can result in a 500-pound reduction in algae growth. This means there was 3.4 million pounds less of algae in the lake."

These test plots continue to be used to test new methods to increase rain infiltration, decrease soil erosion, and reduce phosphorus loss on farm fields.

"I would like to see more farmers participate in the producer-led program and to continue to look at conservation practices," said Johnson. "I also want more farmers to be aware of the Farmland Preservation Program, and of the tax credits and benefits of the program."

Growing Farmland Preservation Opportunities

While Polk County is working on expanding opportunities to other areas of the county through their planning process, they also hope to work with landowners who are currently in the AEA to protect their farmland.

"The producers we have in the Apple Lake AEA are committed to the conservation and preservation of these valuable lands, not only in an agricultural preservation sense but also in how they farm," said Wojchik.

Landowners within the Apple Lake AEA are eligible to participate in the Farmland Preservation Program through farmland preservation agreements. These agreements are a 10-year voluntary contract between the landowner and the state. During the agreement period, the landowner must keep the land in agricultural use and maintain soil and water best management practices. In return, the landowner may claim the farmland preservation tax credit. The tax credit for farmland preservation agreement holders was increased beginning in tax year 2023 to \$10 per acre, or \$12.50 if lands are also located in a certified farmland preservation zoning district.

Local landowners or townships who are interested in starting a new AEA or who are interested in farmland preservation zoning should contact the Polk County Land and Water Resources Department to learn more.

Farm Economics and Growth



Transition farmland to the next generation
Encourage value-added crop production
Explore opportunities for farm diversification

Planning for Future Farmland



Community supported planning process
Ease urban development pressures in rural areas

To find out if your land is located in the Apple Lake AEA or to sign a farmland preservation agreement, contact

Eric Wojchik - County Conservationist
Polk County Land and Water Resources Dept.
Phone: (715) 485-8644 Email: eric.wojchik@polkcountywi.gov

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