



## Agricultural Enterprise Area

Preserve farmland. Protect the environment. Grow the economy.

# SNAPSHOT

## Montana Society for Responsible Use AEA

County: Buffalo

Municipalities in AEA: Montana

Acres: 29,751

Designation Year: 2022

### Background

The Montana Society of Responsible Land Use Agricultural Enterprise Area (AEA) was created in the spring of 2021 during a Town of Montana Board meeting. Joe Bragger, a farmer and innovator in the local agricultural community, introduced the AEA program to the board as a means to protect and preserve farmland in the area. This close-knit Buffalo County community had been home to family farms for generations, but as interest in premium hunting land and growth in nearby factories and agricultural processing plants increased, added pressure was placed on owners of prime farmland to sell for other land uses.

Goals of the AEA include:

- Preserve farmland and promote soil conservation and nutrient management so that farmland is being managed in an environmentally sustainable and regenerative manner.
- Share knowledge, opportunities, and successes about farmland conservation practices amongst farmers in the Town of Montana through education, demonstrations, and research. This includes encouraging participation in other DATCP programs, such as producer-led watershed groups and the Nitrogen Optimization Pilot Program.



**LOCAL  
GOVERNMENTS**



**AG CO-OPS &  
BUSINESSES**



**PRODUCERS &  
LANDOWNERS**

- Promote a farm business environment that encourages farmers to embrace new crops, livestock, and marketing ventures in order to increase farm revenue streams and market resiliency of an operation.
- Protect the surrounding natural lands and local water resources from runoff and sedimentation.

### Supporting the Agricultural Community

Bragger had previously participated the Farmland Preservation Program offered by the Wisconsin Department of Agriculture, Trade and Consumer Protection. However, his land had not been eligible for the farmland preservation tax credit because the Town of Montana did not have a certified farmland preservation zoning district or AEA. As soon as the new AEA designation went into effect, Bragger enrolled his lands into a new farmland preservation agreement, since landowners who own farmland in an AEA have the opportunity to sign a farmland preservation (FP) agreement. An FP agreement is a voluntary 10-year commitment to keep land in agricultural use and to implement soil and water conservation practices.



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



**Agroforestry**



**Ag Equipment**



**Farm Supply**



**Ag Consulting-  
Certified Crop  
Advisors**



**Food Processing  
Facilities, Food  
Warehouses**



**Meat Distributor**



**Cheesemakers**



**Aquaculture**



**Milk Producers**



**Organic Farms**



**Agritourism**



**Livestock Truckers**



**Agronomists**



**Grain Trucking**



**Plant Nurseries**



**Buffalo Trempealeau  
Farmer Network  
Producer-led  
Watershed Group**

In return, landowners with an effective agreement can claim a \$10 per acre tax credit in areas without a certified FP zoning district.

*"We have a lot of farmers in the township who are participating in nutrient management planning and conservation planning. Any credits they get back from the FP Program can be reinvested back into their operation to further improve it," said Bragger.*

One tool that is used to verify that a participating farm is meeting soil and water conservation practices is a nutrient management plan. When paired with soil testing, a nutrient management plan is something any producer can utilize to identify their soil nutrients, potentially reduce fertilizer costs or applications, and adjust inputs to meet nutrient needs on the farm and save money.

Like many farmers across the state, Bragger operates both owned and rented farmland. As an FP participant, he provides Buffalo County with a nutrient management plan that includes all the acres he operates. By including the rented farmland in his land stewardship activities and nutrient management plans, Bragger enables those landowners who are not producers themselves to participate in the FP Program and sign an FP agreement, thus widening the positive impact the FP program has on the local community.

## **Land Use Planning to Preserve Prime Farmland**

The Town of Montana is situated on the northern end of the Driftless region of Wisconsin. The area features a landscape known for rolling hills and dense forests nestled in plunging valleys. While much of the land in the township is productive, the flat fields that line the winding roadways are the easiest in which to maneuver equipment and are the most desirable for farming. These areas are also highly sought-after for conversion to residential land, or even recreational use by local hunting outfitters. The town effectively utilizes land use planning and the AEA as tools to balance historical agricultural land uses and the rising demand for other uses.

The AEA by itself does not have any land use restrictions or requirements for landowners. However, when an AEA landowner signs a FP agreement, they are voluntarily restricting the use of those lands to agricultural, agricultural accessory, and open natural spaces for the duration of the 10 years. This allows current landowners to limit land conversion and discourage potential buyers from purchasing land for uses outside of agriculture. Paired with a Comprehensive Land Use Plan, the AEA allows the community to identify the best locations for future development while still allowing for the preservation of agriculture in the community.

*"Good planning can sometimes, even by accident, all line up and work out," said Bragger.*

Since the establishment of the Montana Society of Responsible Land Use AEA four years ago, the community has protected over 1,200 acres through FP agreements. That number will continue to grow as more members of the community become eligible and choose to participate in the program, achieving the Town of Montana's goal to continue their agricultural legacy long into the future.

## **Community Driven Agriculture**



**Protect land and water  
resources from runoff and  
sedimentation**



**Farmer-to-farmer outreach**



**Promote sustainable and  
regenerative agricultural  
practices**



**Endorse farm business  
practices that embrace  
innovation to increase  
revenue and market  
resiliency**

**To find out if your land is located in the Montana Society for Responsible Use AEA  
or to sign a farmland preservation agreement, contact:**

**Briar Golden - Resource Management Specialist  
Buffalo County Land Conservation & Resource Management Dept.  
Phone: (608) 685-6702 - Email: [briar.golden@buffalocountywi.gov](mailto:briar.golden@buffalocountywi.gov)**

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