State of Wisconsin
Governor Tony Evers

Department of Agriculture, Trade and Consumer Protection
Secretary Randy Romanski

DATE: November 12, 2026

TO: Board of Agriculture, Trade and Consumer Protection

FROM: Randy Romanski, Secretary
Farmland Preservation Program

SUBJECT: 2026 Agricultural Enterprise Area (AEA) Update

REQUESTED ACTION: For information only.

Agricultural enterprise areas are community-led efforts establishing designated areas important to Wisconsin's agricultural future. More specifically, an AEA is an area of productive agriculture that has received designation from the state at the request of landowners and local governments. As a part of the state's Farmland Preservation Program, AEAs strive to support local farmland protection goals. Local communities can voluntarily pursue designation of an AEA by submitting a petition to the Department of Agriculture, Trade and Consumer Protection (DATCP). Through this designation, the community can encourage continued agricultural production and investment in the agricultural economy. Landowners within designated AEAs are eligible to enter into voluntary farmland preservation agreements 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 annually.

On August 12, 2026, the petition evaluation committee (committee), a team of individuals with technical expertise in agriculture, conservation and local governance, met to review two new AEA petitions received during this petition cycle. The committee recommended to the Secretary the designation of the Copper River AEA in Lincoln County and the Decatur Initiative for Rural Preservation AEA in Green County. See attachment A for a summary of the Copper River AEA and the Decatur Initiative for Rural Preservation AEA.

Table 1: *Recommended for AEA designation 2026*

AEA Name	Approximate acres	Number of petitioners	AEA Location County and Town
NEW – Copper River	76,083	14	Lincoln County, Corning and Harding Townships
NEW – Decatur Initiative for Rural Preservation	23,035	18	Green County, Albany, Decatur, Jefferson, Spring Grove, and Sylvester Townships

DATCP is authorized to designate up to two million acres as AEAs. Designation of the two successful petitions would result in 56 AEAs statewide totaling 1,844,473 acres covering portions of 34 counties, 154 towns (villages and cities), and the Bad River Reservation (Attachment B). This would result in over 92% of the available acreage being designated.

Attachment A: Summary of the 2026 AEAs recommended for designation
Attachment B: Maps of Recommended and Statewide Designated AEAs

Attachment A: Summary of the areas recommended for AEA designation 2026

Copper River AEA

Overview

- New AEA Petition
- Lincoln County, Town of Corning and Harding
- 76,111 acres
- 14 petitioners
- 12 non-petitioning cooperators: Including – North Central Wisconsin Regional Planning Commission; Lincoln County Economic Development Corporation; Timber Farm Operators; and Farm Families.
- This area supports a large number and high concentration of timber operations and Managed Forest Law. The area also supports agricultural productions ranging from dairy, row crops, cranberry production, Christmas Tree production and Federal Conservation Programs including Conservation Stewardship Program

Goals

- Create a sense of place and pride within the ag community.
- Support conventional agricultural uses that have been in area for generations.
- Expand non-traditional agricultural uses and specialty crop production to allow for increased market diversity and sustainability.
- Increase awareness and compliance with NR 151 through FP Participation.
- Provide support and a "path to success" for other Lincoln County producers that may be interest in establishing their own AEA.

Items of Note

- The Copper River AEA is a microcosm of agricultural production in northern Wisconsin which is not typically seen in the southern two thirds of the state
- AEA would allow landowners the opportunity to participate in the farmland preservation program after a long-term lapse in eligibility
- Establishment of the AEA aligns with overarching farmland preservation goals of the county's draft 2027-2037 Farmland Preservation Plan
- Producers hope to utilize program tax credits to relieve some financial pressure from rising input costs and pricing volatility in the current agricultural market

Decatur Initiative for Rural Preservation AEA

Overview

- New AEA Petition
- Green County, Town of Lessor
- 23,035 acres
- 18 petitioners
- 7 non-petitioning cooperators: 1) Bank of Broadhead; 2) Decatur Dairy, INC (Cheese Manufacturer); 3) Chris Speich, Farm Fuel Delivery; 4) Applied Ecological Institute; 5) Farmers of the Sugar River Producer-led Group; 6) Broadhead Veterinary Medical Center; and 7) Schwartzow Fertilizer
- This area supports a wide array of agricultural production from wheat, corn, soybeans, oats, greenhouse annuals, poultry, Community Supported Agriculture farms, and Federal Conservation Programs including Conservation Stewardship Program.

Goals

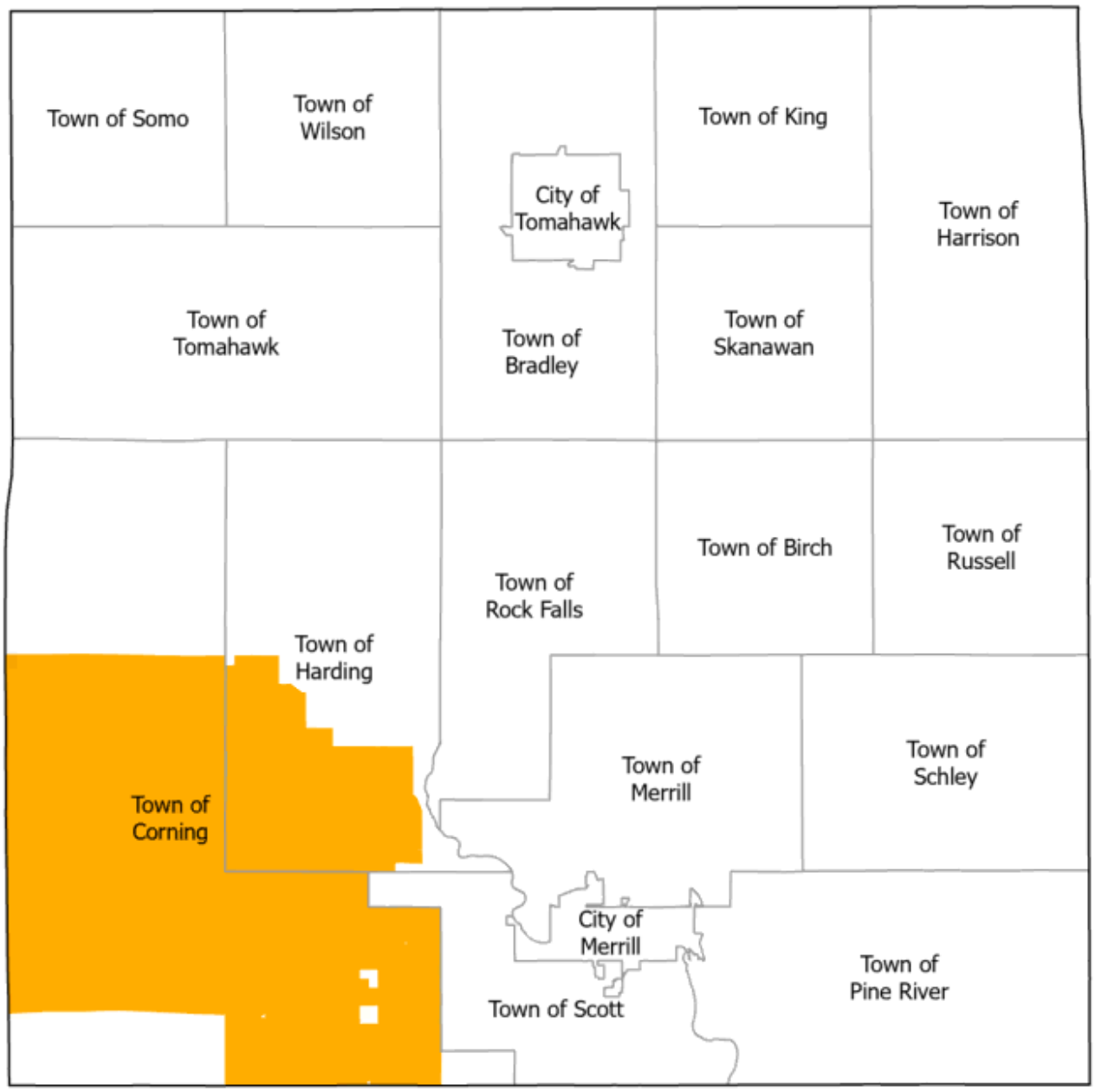
- Preserve farmland in an environmentally friendly way, including enrolling lands into FP agreements and nutrient management.
- Promote soil conservation and nutrient management planning through farmer-led education.
- Promote a farm business environment that encourages new crops, livestock and marketing ventures.
- Protect agricultural land from runoff and sedimentation into streams by added conservation practices to protect water quality.
- Promote land use practices that maintain or improve natural resources while promoting a viable and diverse economic base.

Items of Note

- Petition is a result of a multi-year process that began when the county amended their farmland preservation plan in 2024 to add the Town of Lessor to the Farmland Preservation Plan Area. Landowners, later petitioners, expressed interest in the agricultural enterprise area program, worked with conservation and planning staff early in the planning process to ensure that the goals of the future petition would align with the county's overall farmland preservation program.
- Many petitioners are already participating in the farmland preservation program through the neighboring townships with certified farmland preservation zoning districts or the Maple Grove AEA and are able to enroll into a farmland preservation agreement as soon as the AEA is designated.

Attachment B: Maps of Recommended and Designated AEAs

Copper River AEA – Lincoln County

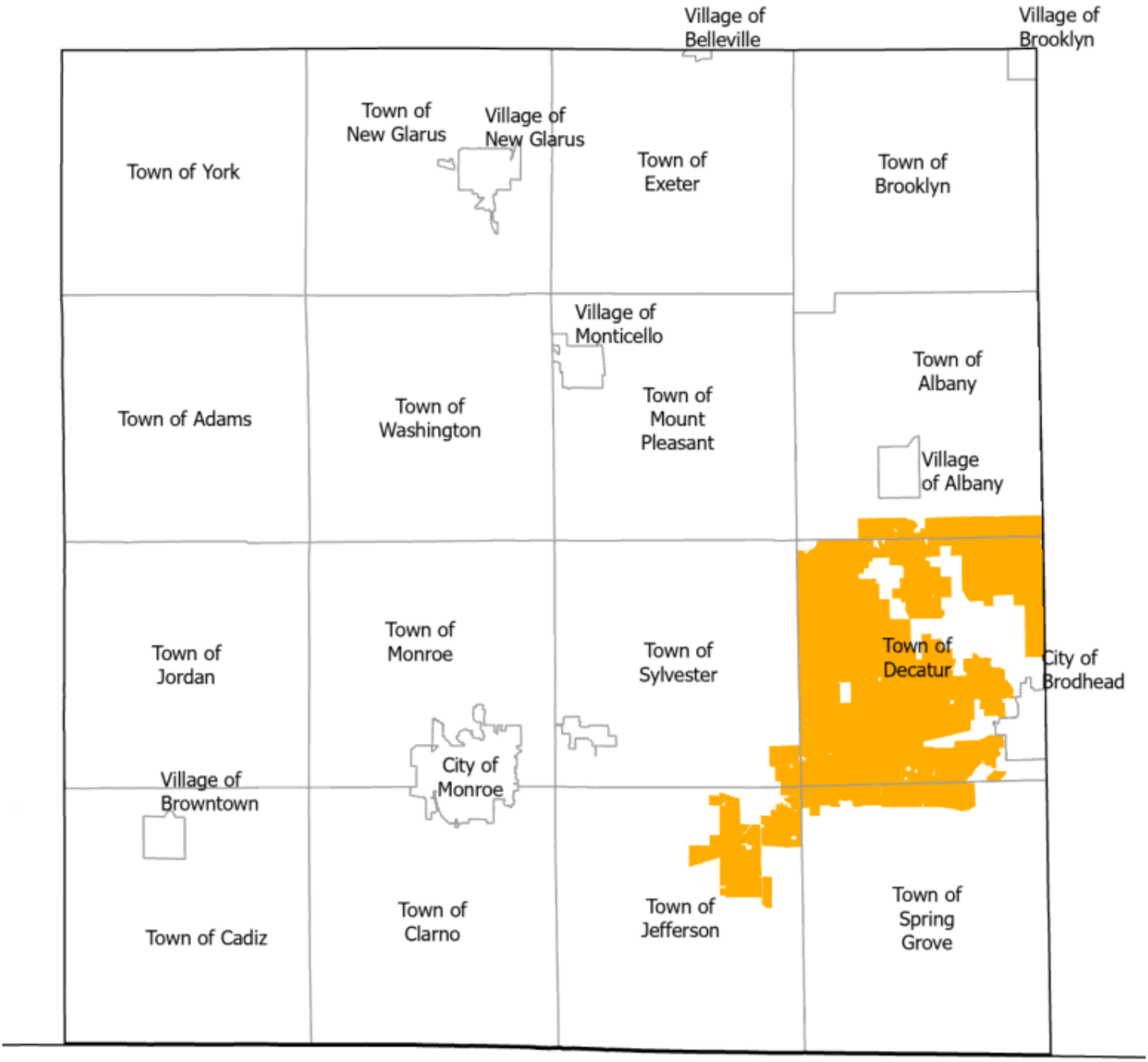


Map Legend

2026 Recommended Agricultural Enterprise Areas

Existing Agricultural Enterprise Areas

Decatur Initiative for Rural Preservation AEA – Green County



Map Legend

2026 Recommended Agricultural Enterprise Areas

Existing Agricultural Enterprise Areas

2026 Statewide Map of designated and recommended AEAs

