



# Agriculture Enterprise Area

Preserve farmland. Protect the environment. Grow the economy.

# SNAPSHOT

## Castle Rock Township

County: Grant

Municipalities: Castle Rock

AEA Designation: 2020

Acres: 23,040

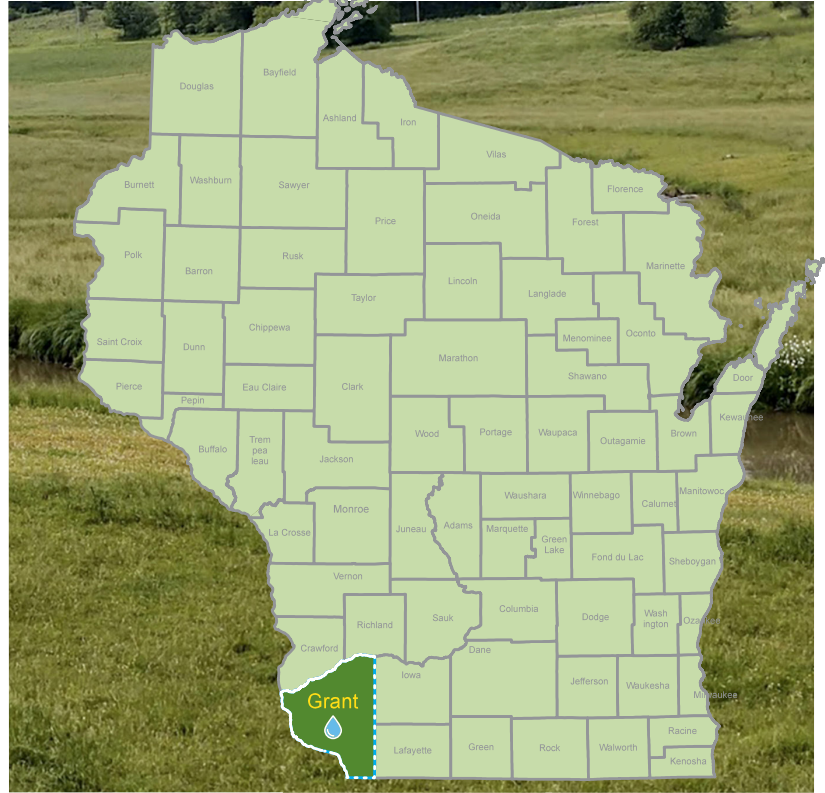
### Background

The Castle Rock Township agricultural enterprise area (AEA) was designated in 2020, due to local motivation to protect natural resources and preserve farmland. The AEA contains 23,040 acres, is near the northeast corner of Grant County, and contains farmlands within the town of Castle Rock. The primary agricultural commodities are row crops on small to mid-sized farms, with some small grain and hay production for the few large dairy facilities.

Through the AEA designation, petitioners in the community have a goal to protect the Snow Bottom Natural Area, Blue River watershed, as well as the six prized class one and class two trout streams. Landowners are also working with the county to develop a way for farmers to participate in the Farmland Preservation Program in an unzoned town.

AEA designations allow landowners to participate in the Farmland Preservation Program in areas outside of certified farmland preservation zoning district, like Castle Rock. Through tax credit incentives, the program promotes keeping land in agricultural use and implementing soil and water conservation practices. This area of Grant County is nestled in Wisconsin's Driftless Area – a region characterized by distinctive terrain of steep slopes intertwined with rivers and forested areas having been bypassed by the last continental glacier. Due to the geographic characteristics of this AEA, upland best management practices like grassed waterways, contour strip cropping, no-till, and cover crops are a priority in preventing runoff and preserving local water resources including the cold-water trout streams and the Blue River watershed.

Landowners who own farmland in the AEA have the opportunity to sign a farmland preservation agreement. An agreement is a voluntary 15-year commitment to keeping land in agricultural use and to implement soil and water conservation practices. In return, landowners with a signed agreement have an opportunity to claim the \$5 per acre tax credit and to contribute to preserving their own farm as well as the community's natural resources.



**2**  
LOCAL  
GOVERNMENTS

**4**  
AG CO-OPS &  
BUSINESSES

**7**  
PRODUCERS &  
LANDOWNERS

### Local Participation



















Landowners interested in signing an agreement and receiving the farmland preservation tax credit must have a nutrient management plan on their property. Nutrient management planning is the foundation for producers to improve crop yields and reduce costs by promoting efficient use of all nutrients applied (like fertilizer and manure). These plans also work to protect local water quality by keeping nutrients on fields and preventing them from running off to streams or into the groundwater.

In partnership with the Grant County Conservation, Sanitation and Zoning Department, the University of Wisconsin-Madison Division of Extension offers training workshops for landowners to learn how to create a new or update an existing nutrient management plan. In a small group or one-on-one training, landowners learn how to use nutrient management software, called SnapPlus, to write their plans. "The process to create a plan can be hard to do at first with the software, but the workshops are designed to help operators work through the process," explained Christopher Baxter, UW-Madison Division of Extension nutrient management specialist.

In addition to learning SnapPlus, landowners can take part in a fall soil sampling workshop and field day. Soil testing is the cornerstone of nutrient management planning because it is the



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

-  Milk producers
-  Beef producers
-  UW-Platteville
-  UW-Madison Nutrient and Pest Management Program
-  UW Division of Extension agriculture educators
-  Southwestern Wisconsin Regional Planning Commission
-  Snow Bottom State Natural Area
-  Blue River Watershed, Class I and II trout streams
-  CREP participation
-  Conventional crop rotations/row crops
-  Livestock feed production
-  Vineyards and winery
-  Aquaculture
-  Dairy cattle dealer
-  Blackhawk Lake Recreation Area
-  Lumber yard
-  Local farmer's market
-  Southwest Wisconsin Technical College

only practical way to determine field-specific lime and fertilizer needs. The workshop walks landowners through the proper way to take soil samples, where to sample in a field, how often to sample, and where to send samples for testing.

“Farmers who go through the program find that they end up saving quite a bit of money on fertilizer bills and come out with a better understanding of where manure goes on the field and how much can be spread,” said Baxter. Landowners can work with an agronomist to write a plan or write their own once they complete one of the training workshops. Landowners who are interested in participating in a future workshop should contact the Grant County Conservation, Sanitation and Zoning Department at (608) 723-6377 ext. 4.

### County Support

The Castle Rock Township AEA is the first AEA in Grant County. It represents a unique opportunity in the county for landowners to participate in the Farmland Preservation Program in a town without general zoning, through farmland preservation agreements. Agreements differ from farmland preservation zoning in that they do not apply land use restrictions until a landowner chooses to enroll all or a portion of their farm. 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.




Mike Adams is a Grant County soil conservationist who grew up just south of Lancaster on a 50-cow dairy farm and sees a lot of potential for Farmland Preservation Program participation.

“There are quite a few people in the community who would be good participants,” said Adams. He added that many of the farmers in the AEA are already meeting most of the soil and water conservation standards, which would streamline the writing and implementing of their nutrient management plan. Farmland preservation agreement holders must control non-point source pollution and soil erosion, and implement tillage setbacks near surface water. These best management practices promote soil conservation on farms and higher water quality in surrounding areas; with tax incentives helping to offset implementation costs.




### Future Growth

Since the AEA designation in 2020, seven landowners in the area have signed farmland preservation agreements for over 1,200 acres and more continue to express interest in the program. Reductions in runoff through program participation, preservation of Castle Rock natural areas, and the opportunities for tax credits will allow this area to preserve its agricultural character and resources for years to come. Looking forward, Adams and others in the county hope to expand on Castle Rock’s example and petition for further AEAs in Grant County’s agricultural areas

### Preserving Local Agriculture

-  Encourage new farmland preservation participation
-  Promote conservation practices
-  Encourage sustainable agricultural growth

### Protecting Natural Resources

-  Protect the Snow Bottom State Natural Area
-  Preserve trout streams
-  Promote upland best management practices

If you are a landowner in Grant County and want 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 or resources in Grant County contact:

**Grant County Conservation, Sanitation and Zoning Department**  
(608) 723-6377 ext. 4, or email [madams@co.grant.wi.gov](mailto:madams@co.grant.wi.gov).

To learn more about AEAs and the Farmland Preservation Program, visit:  
[https://datcp.wi.gov/Pages/Programs\\_Services/AgriculturalEnterpriseAreas.aspx](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.