

THE WORKING LANDS INITIATIVE: WHAT IS IT AND WHY DO YOU CARE

Linda H. Bochert ^{1/}

- The Working Lands Initiative is about finding common ground on new strategies for preserving Wisconsin working lands (agriculture, forestry, tourism & recreation use). Wisconsin can be green and growing.
- The Working Lands Initiative is about boosting Wisconsin's economic development, especially in rural communities, in order to strategically protect the land for the bio-economy (biomass of forestry and agriculture materials) and protect all our natural resources for future generations. Wisconsin must be planning for prosperity.
- The Working Lands Initiative goals include creating a policy tool kit for state and local government to protect these critical lands. These policy tools will include a natural resource portfolio that recognizes the "other" values of working lands such as water recharge areas, critical habitat for wildlife and carbon sequestration.
- The Working Lands Initiative will seek innovative partnerships between public and private entities to maximize efforts in preserving our natural resources through Community Collaboration Networks and a shared vision.

Why Now?

DATCP is pursuing the Working Lands Initiative with a diverse group of stakeholders as our steering committee. The timing is critical because:

- We still have much to preserve and sustain in Wisconsin's working lands.
- We have many diverse and rapidly urbanizing areas of Wisconsin. Critical working lands are being lost or fragmented.
- Wisconsin is well positioned to be a leader in the bio-based economy.
- The next Federal Farm Bill presents opportunities for transitioning away from a commodity payment system to a conservation credit system. Wisconsin could be a pilot state for new models.

Benefits and Potential Outcomes of Working Lands Initiative

- Preparing Wisconsin for the bioeconomy of the future by determining the critical mass of lands needed for sustainable biomass crops.
- Creating broad business community and citizen support for shaping the Wisconsin landscape in ways that grow the economy, preserve its natural beauty and keep agriculture on the economic roadmap.
- Policy recommendations to the Governor and Legislature.
- Providing a policy tool kit for local government and private entities to determine what are the best ways to preserve working lands.
- Targeting private investments and state resources to areas where agriculture and rural growth can be sustained without being overcome by other development uses.

^{1/} Michael Best & Friedrich, Madison, WI.

- Identifying key lands and waters for long-term environmental stewardship protection. These lands can often best be surrounded by working agriculture lands.
- Formulating a natural resource portfolio available to farmers and financial investors looking to expand agriculture business in Wisconsin. This portfolio could include carbon sequestration credits, financial payments or credits for conservation easements and financial credits for water quality improvements. This portfolio can be a part of strategy to assist farmers in building equity besides the sole answer of selling the farm to fund their retirement.
- Coordinating state programs in tourism, transportation, commerce, and agriculture so that they work together, not against each other, in promoting economic vitality and environmental sustainability of working lands.
- Positioning Wisconsin for the next Farm Bill with innovative programs that complement the policy of these major federal appropriations.
- Leveraging more federal and private dollars to protect working lands.

Context for Policy Discussion:

The Department of Agriculture, Trade and Consumer Protection (DATCP) is focusing on three key strategies for Wisconsin in the coming months:

1. We want Wisconsin to continue to be Green and Growing. That means we can diversify the agriculture economy, seek more value-added opportunities for agriculture, expand operations and still protect the Wisconsin environment.
2. The Working Lands Initiative - This is about preserving a critical mass of land in Wisconsin for agriculture, forestry, recreation, tourism and achieve this with strategic planning for business and housing growth in an environmentally friendly way.
3. The Governor's BioConsortium - a catalyst for necessary actions to advance the emerging bioeconomy and potential energy conservation opportunities.

The premise of the Working Lands Initiative is that Wisconsin's land base, along with its natural resources of clean waters, rich forests and ample habitat areas, are critical to the state's economic sustainability and need to be maintained in an environmentally friendly way.

WORKING LANDS INITIATIVE

Steering Committee Members

Richard Barrows: Associate Dean and Director, College of Agricultural and Life Sciences, University of Wisconsin-Madison.

Sue Beitlich: President of the Wisconsin Farmers Union.

Linda H. Bochert: Partner in the Land and Resources practice area of the law firm Michael Best & Friedrich LLP.

Jerry Bradley: Past president of the Dane County Farm Bureau; past member of the Dane County Drainage Board. Mr. Bradley is a 5th generation farmer in the Town of Sun Prairie.

Ed Brooks: Dairy farmer since 1971. In 1979, he was elected as a director to the Wisconsin Dairies Cooperative, now Foremost Farms, and has served as Chairman of the Board for the past 15 years

Denny Caneff: Executive Director of the River Alliance of Wisconsin.

Richard Cates: Faculty member in the Department of Soil Science, UW-Madison; DATCP Board member.

Vicki Elkin: Executive Director of Gathering Waters Conservancy.

Rob Gottschalk: A principal at Vandewalle & Associates, an economic development, planning and design consulting firm in Madison.

Steve Guthrie: A professional forester who has lived and practiced forest management in Northern Wisconsin since 1977. Currently, he manages an 80,000-acre industrial forest property for Tomahawk Timberlands L.L.C., a private company which purchased the property from Packaging Corp. of America in 1999.

David Helbach: Director of Corporate Affairs for Alliant Energy Corporation in Madison.

Steve Hilger: Partner in Hilgers Farms, Inc. of Bloomer, Wisconsin.

Mark O'Connell: Executive Director of the Wisconsin Counties Association.

Jim Holperin: Secretary of the Wisconsin Department of Tourism.

Edward Huck: Executive Director of the Wisconsin Alliance of Cities.

Margaret Krome: Policy Program Director for the Michael Fields Agricultural Institute in East Troy, Wisconsin; DATCP Board member.

Thomas D. Larson: Director of Regulatory & Legislative Affairs for the Wisconsin Realtors Association.

Bill Oemichen: President and CEO of the Wisconsin Federation of Cooperatives and the Minnesota Association of Cooperatives.

Gary Rohde: Former Dean of the College of Agriculture, Food and Environmental Sciences, UW-River Falls, and Secretary of DATCP.

Sharon L. Schmeling: Chairman of the Jefferson County Board of Supervisors.

Rick Stadelman: Executive Director of the Wisconsin Towns Association.

John B. Torinus Jr.: Chairman and CEO of Serigraph Inc. since 1987; previously served as Business Editor and columnist for the Milwaukee Sentinel.

Curtis Witynski: Assistant Director of the League of Wisconsin Municipalities.

Dan Poulson: Co-Chair, DNR Board Member and former Director of the Wisconsin Farm Bureau.

Jerry Deschane: Wisconsin Builders Association.

Steve Hiniker: Executive Director of 1000 Friends of Wisconsin.

Pat Cornelius: Oneida Tribe.