Soil Surveys in Wisconsin Help Implement Farmland Preservation Legislation

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In 1977 the Wisconsin Legislature passed the Farmland Preservation Act. This act provides property tax relief for eligible farmers who participate in local programs designed to preserve farmlands.

Soils information is an important tool in delineating farmland to be preserved. The Agricultural Lands Preservation Board has adopted a standard mapping program that includes using the latest and best soil map available. Soil Survey maps show the different kinds of soils and their spatial distribution. Soils that behave similarly in response to management and treatment can be grouped to fit the needs of a particular user. For agricultural purposes, soils can be grouped into capability classes and subclasses according to their potentials and limitations for long-term production of common crops. These capability classes and subclasses can then be used to group soils into categories of important farmlands.

Four classifications of important farmlands for Wisconsin are being proposed: prime farmlands, statewide significance, unique, and local significance. Prime farmlands are the best agricultural soils in the state. Soils in capability classes I and II would be included. Some poorly drained soils that are potentially class IIw but have not been artificially drained would be omitted from prime farmlands.

Farmlands of statewide significance are productive soils but are more difficult to manage and maintain. Soils in capability class III would fall into this group. Some poorly drained soils that are potentially class IIIw without artificial drainage would be omitted.

Unique farmlands include land used for production of specific high-value food and fiber crops. Included in this group would be soils that are presently being irrigated in capability classes IV and VI on 0 to 12% slopes, and land presently used for growing crops such as cranberries, apples, cherries, and mint on class IV through VII land.

Farmlands of local importance include productive soils in capability classes V and VI on 12% to 19% slopes.

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