

DEFINING FARMLAND PRESERVATION

for Task Force discussion on 4/12/23

Goals:

1. To educate the community and decision makers about the need to preserve land for food production and market gardening within the City of Madison.
2. To create policy guidelines to help decision makers balance development interests with the strong community values that support local food production, local food businesses and the importance of preservation of farmland as expressed by the community and in adopted plans.

Questions to consider:

1. What is the need we are trying to address?
2. What does the Task Force mean by Farmland Preservation?

Standard definition from Wikipedia:

Farmland preservation is a joint effort by [non-governmental organizations](#) and [local governments](#) to set aside and protect examples of a region's [farmland](#) for the use, education, and enjoyment of future generations. They are operated mostly at state and local levels by government agencies or private entities such as [land trusts](#) and are designed to limit conversion of [agricultural land](#) to other uses that otherwise might have been more financially attractive to the land owner. Every [state](#) provides tax relief through differential (preferential) assessment. Less common approaches include establishing agricultural districts, using [zoning](#) to protect agricultural land,^[1] purchasing development rights, and [transferable development rights](#).^[1] It is often a part of [regional planning](#) and national [historic preservation](#).

This standard definition of farmland preservation is less relevant to the need to preserve land for food production and market gardening within the City of Madison, and tax credits for landowners is also not appropriate for our purposes. It focuses on specific programs rather than on policy guidelines for decision makers. In the context of a city, farmland should be thought of as growing space that ranges from a community garden plot to a multi-acre field, and should not be focused on commodity agriculture but rather on food production to increase resilience in the local food system.

The common “highest and best use” criteria for land use decisions is a barrier to incorporating values other than the market value of land. The property tax base is not the only way the City can provide for collective community needs. Removing land from the speculative market can provide health, well-being, security, economic development and ecological benefits for the community at large, and for economically and socially marginalized residents in particular. The opportunity to provide these land-based benefits diminishes with each acre of farmland that is used for development, so it behooves the City to optimize the use of potential growing space within its boundaries.

The ideas below are taken from your online report responses to the question, **“How does your research on this issue help to address the definition of Farmland Preservation for Task Force purposes?”**

1. Historically, farmland preservation benefits the white community and excludes communities of color. There is a need to make farmland available on a more equitable basis to growers in the community. Transparent and secure access to city-owned land provides opportunities for growers who seek to generate an income from the production of local foods.
2. Farmland Preservation is intended to protect working farmland, and preserve the farm economy. It is the thoughtful consideration that land zoned for agriculture must be seen as a resilient resource for residents in the city; for food growing, for habitat, for resilience in the face of climate change.
3. Urban agriculture is commonly understood as lands farmed by small farmers using human scale technology (hand tools, small tractors) growing high value, highly nutritious, fresh fruits and vegetables for local resident consumption made available through sale at local markets and restaurants. It highlights the importance of local food and creating jobs in the local community. A definition notes the range of practices "including market farms, community gardens, school gardens, full-year vegetable production in greenhouses, orchards, rooftop gardens, and the raising of chickens, fish, and bees."
4. Growing spaces protect the environment and public health while providing green infrastructure, stormwater management (infiltration), ecosystem services (carbon capture, pollinators), and green jobs.