

2024 AGRICULTURAL PRESERVES PROGRAM



September 2025

The Council’s mission is to foster efficient and economic growth for a prosperous metropolitan region.

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The Metropolitan Council is the regional planning organization for the seven-county Twin Cities area. The Council operates the regional bus and rail system, collects and treats wastewater, coordinates regional water resources, plans and helps fund regional parks, and administers federal funds that provide housing opportunities for low- and moderate-income individuals and families. The 17-member Council board is appointed by and serves at the pleasure of the governor.

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Introduction to the Metropolitan Agricultural Preserves Program

[Minnesota Statutes § 473H](#) established the Metropolitan Agricultural Preserves Program (Program) in 1980 to encourage and preserve areas planned and zoned for long-term agricultural use within the seven-county metropolitan area.

The purpose of the statute is to encourage the use and improvement of the metropolitan area's agricultural lands for producing food and other agricultural commodities. It establishes a local planning process to designate agricultural areas as a long-term land use and provides benefits to maintain viable productive farm operations.

The statute provides metropolitan area farmers with the assurance that they can make long-term agricultural investments and continue to produce crops on agricultural lands. In turn, the program's incentives support farming as a long-term land use, for local food production, and the Twin Cities farming economy.

The Program acknowledges the regional and local planning processes and identifies a certification process to designate long-term agricultural lands as eligible for program enrollment. It links planning for agriculture to the local comprehensive plan and zoning ordinance and requires local governments to certify these actions by resolution as a part of the application for enrollment. From a regional planning perspective, the certification process demonstrates the value of the locally certified lands as an indicator of agricultural areas that warrant the highest level of regional support.

Early in the Program, Metropolitan Council staff worked with local governments to identify and map important agricultural areas as part of their local comprehensive plans. Local governments then certified by resolution these areas as eligible for enrollment in the Program. Today, local governments have mapped areas eligible for agricultural preserves enrollment as part of the 2040 comprehensive planning process. To be eligible for enrollment in the Program, the local comprehensive plan must guide parcels as agricultural land with a maximum density of 1 unit per 40 acres.

This report summarizes Program enrollment as of December 31, 2024. The Metropolitan Council has monitored the Program's participation since 1982 and has prepared annual reports to the Minnesota Legislature summarizing participation in the Program and providing maps illustrating lands enrolled in the Program, as required by statute.



Enrollment Acreage and Overall Trends

The Legislature established the Program in 1980, and by 1983, over 88,000 acres were enrolled. The enrollment increased steadily in the years following 1983 until 1997 when nearly 202,000 acres were enrolled. From 1997 through 2009, enrollment decreased to a low point of just under 180,000 acres.

Subsequently, Program enrollment significantly increased between 2009 and 2012, likely in response to the Great Recession (2007 – 2009). Since 2012, there have been more gradual changes in the number of acres enrolled. Enrollment continued to exhibit an upward trend from 2012 to 2015, when it reached an all-time high of just over 209,000 acres, after which enrollment began to experience a gradual but steady decline. Since its high in 2015, the program has experienced an 8.7% decrease in the number of acres enrolled. In 2024, 191,033 acres were enrolled in the Program, a decrease of about 0.6% from 2023’s 192,271 acres.

Figure 1 – 2000 to 2024 Enrollment Trends (acres) by County

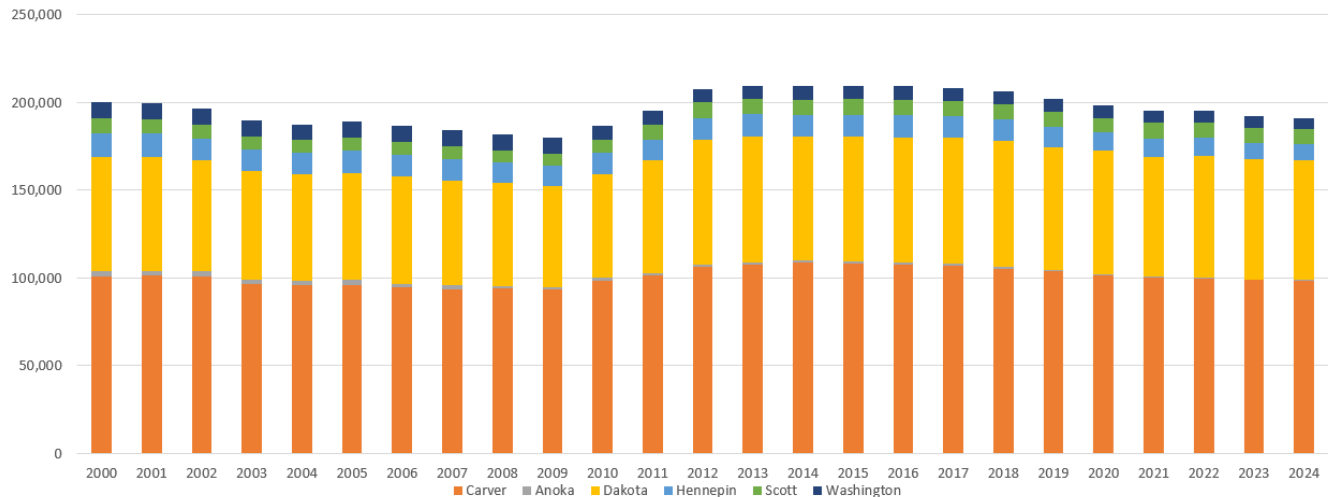


Table 1 (below) details the enrollment trends between 2000 and 2009. During this period, all counties experienced a decline in acres enrolled in the Program. Cumulatively, over 20,000 acres were withdrawn from the Program during this period resulting in a 10% decrease in enrollment. This decrease was likely the result of development pressure experienced by agricultural landowners at the start of the new millennium.

Table 2 (below) shows the trends since 2009. During this period, enrollment in the Program increased from its 2009 low of 179,898 acres to a high of 209,395 in 2015. After 2015, overall Program enrollment began to decline, though Carver, Dakota, and Scott still have more acres enrolled than they did in 2009. Anoka, Hennepin, and Washington Counties currently have dropped below their 2009 numbers in terms of acres enrolled.

Since 2000, Dakota County has had the most significant increase in acres enrolled, with an increase of 5% or 3,346 acres. Anoka, Hennepin, and Washington Counties have continued to experience the most significant decline since 2000, with overall decreases of 81%, 31%, and 34%, respectively. Anoka County has the fewest enrolled acres overall and has declined from 3,026 to 468 acres. Hennepin County has experienced the largest decline in terms of acres lost with a decrease of 4,171 acres since 2000. Enrollments in Carver and Scott counties have shown little net change with a decrease of 3% and an increase of 1%, respectively. Ramsey County does not have any parcels enrolled in the program due to not having large areas of agricultural lands.

Table 1 – Enrollment Trends (acres) by County prior to the Economic Downturn

County	2000	2001	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009	2000-2009 Change	2000-2009 Change %
Carver	100,995	101,266	101,065	96,371	95,835	96,115	94,621	93,518	93,739	93,271	-7,724	-8%
Anoka	3,026	2,855	2,706	2,636	2,480	2,549	2,139	2,104	1,793	1,520	-1,506	-50%
Dakota	64,823	64,872	63,523	61,877	61,089	61,166	60,838	59,535	58,763	57,841	-6,982	-11%
Hennepin	13,552	13,364	11,797	12,081	11,852	12,732	12,413	12,326	11,406	11,141	-2,411	-18%
Scott	8,443	8,094	8,382	7,774	7,388	7,389	7,353	7,393	7,077	7,193	-1,250	-15%
Washington	9,456	9,179	9,235	9,042	8,871	9,249	9,101	9,204	9,045	8,932	-524	-6%
Total	200,295	199,630	196,708	189,781	187,515	189,200	186,456	184,080	181,823	179,898	-20,397	-10%

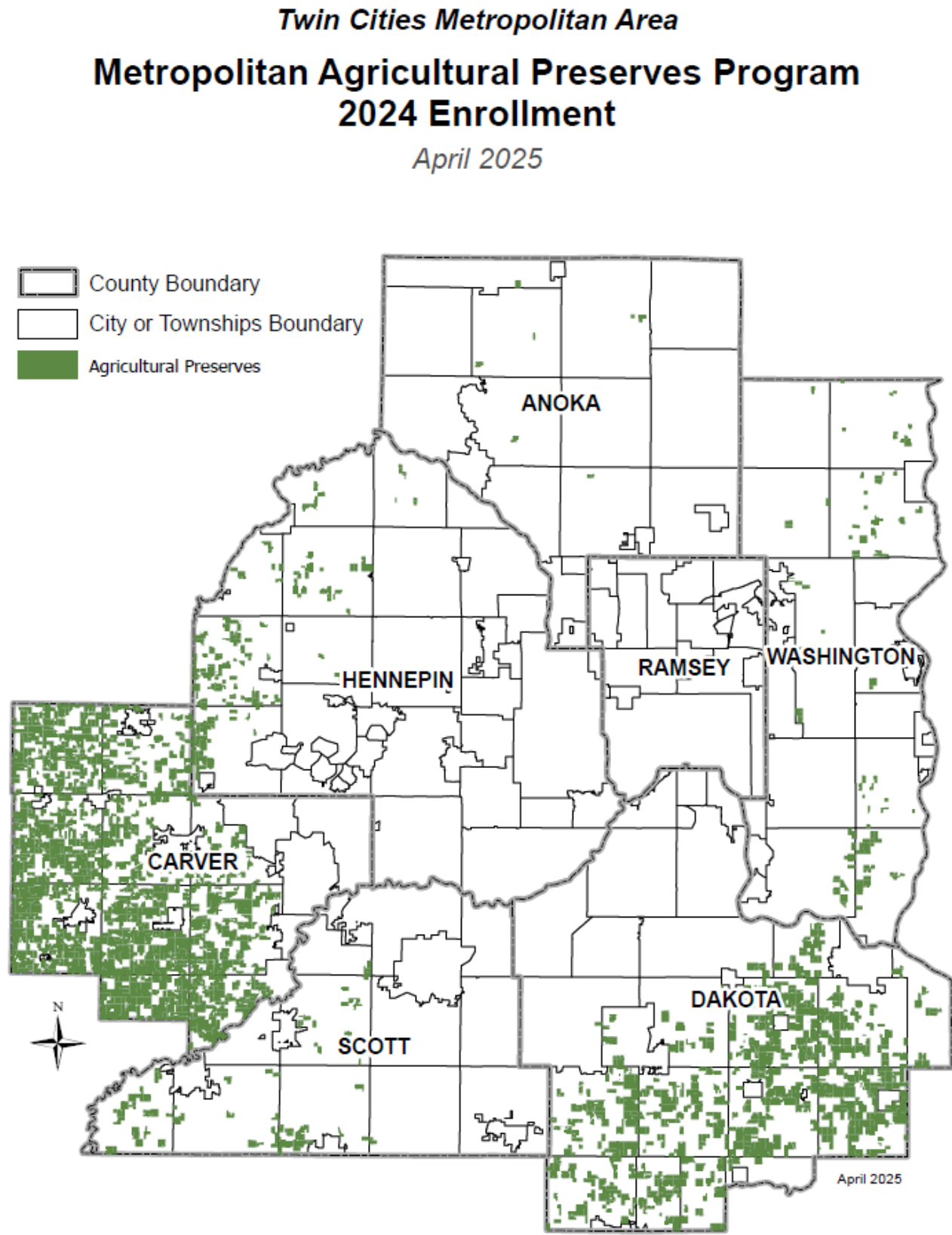
Source: Minnesota Department of Revenue

Table 2 - Enrollment Trends (acres) by County after Economic Downturn

County	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023	2024	2009-2024 Change	2009-2024 Change %
Carver	93,271	98,337	101,576	106,352	107,376	108,558	108,221	107,297	106,961	105,349	103,767	101,118	99,927	99,372	98,757	98,132	4,861	5%
Anoka	1,520	1,591	1,313	1,196	1,205	1,210	1,210	1,210	1,210	1,210	617	616	632	593	468	569	-951	-63%
Dakota	57,841	59,308	63,949	71,032	72,097	70,864	71,375	71,620	71,628	71,798	70,122	70,875	68,577	69,401	68,277	68,169	10,328	18%
Hennepin	11,141	12,113	12,054	12,679	12,634	12,431	12,260	12,704	12,170	12,060	11,581	10,591	10,463	10,347	9,525	9,361	-1,780	-16%
Scott	7,193	7,332	8,300	8,729	8,584	8,674	8,862	8,897	8,897	8,352	8,720	7,918	8,716	8,717	8,610	8,523	1,330	18%
Washington	8,932	8,227	7,923	7,909	7,441	7,453	7,467	7,449	7,449	7,442	7,440	7,345	7,254	6,945	6,633	6,259	-2,673	-30%
Total	179,898	186,908	195,115	207,897	209,337	209,190	209,395	209,177	208,315	206,211	202,247	198,463	195,569	195,375	192,271	191,013	11,115	6%

Source: Minnesota Department of Revenue

Figure 2 – 2024 Enrollment in Agricultural Preserves Program



About the Program

Eligibility and Implementation

Minnesota Statutes § 473H directs the local authority, defined as the government having planning and zoning authority, to implement the Program and establishes its requirements, the application process, and the Program restrictions. The legislation indicates that the local authority should identify long-term agricultural lands in their comprehensive plan and establish zoning for these areas at a density of no more than one dwelling unit per 40 acres. The local authority is then to certify by resolution the areas eligible for enrollment and allow landowners to apply to the Program.

Benefits

Landowners enrolled in the Program receive a special tax classification that results in reduced property taxes. The legislation requires that County assessors determine market value for property tax purposes on agricultural preserves properties based solely on the agricultural use and classification, without considering additional value from non-agricultural factors, such as potential development for other uses.

The statute directs County assessors to calculate taxes using the lower of two assessment rates, the local tax rate, or a rate calculated as 105 percent of the previous year's statewide average tax rate for townships. The market value is multiplied by the net tax capacity to determine property taxes, and the net tax capacity is determined using the lower of these two rates. This generates a property tax savings, a Program benefit known as a "conservation credit." The conservation credit amounts range in value based upon local tax rates, and generally amounts to a tax savings of at least \$1.50 per acre.

The Program prohibits special assessments for public improvement projects including sanitary sewer systems, storm water infrastructure, water systems, roads, and other improvements. It prohibits local governments from enacting or enforcing ordinances or regulations that restrict normal farm practices. Finally, it requires local governments to follow specific procedures if an entity initiates annexation or eminent domain actions that affect agricultural preserve land over ten acres in size.

Enrollment Process

The Program is voluntary, and landowners typically work with the local authority to prepare enrollment applications and record the documents with the County. The legislation outlines the conditions of enrollment, including a minimum property size. The Program usually requires a minimum of 40 acres for Program enrollment, but includes exceptions that recognize smaller parcels as eligible, for example, to accommodate smaller, non-contiguous parcels that are farmed as a single unit.

The enrollment includes filing a restrictive agreement that includes the property's legal description, notarized signatures, and an affidavit from the local authority certifying that the land is eligible for enrollment. The agreement is recorded with the property title at the County and remains effective even if ownership changes.

The agreement requires that the agricultural preserve property be in an agricultural use as defined by statute, which includes the production for sale of livestock, dairy animals or products, poultry and products, horticulture, and fruit. The document states that the restrictive agreement remains in effect until the landowner, or the local authority, initiates an expiration notice. The agreement and benefits end eight years from the date the expiration notice is signed and recorded with the County.

New enrollment forms must be recorded at the County before the annual deadline of June 1 to receive property tax benefits payable the following year. For example, participants enrolling by June 1, 2024, see the property tax benefits reflected in the property tax statements for 2025.

Expiration

As mentioned above, the statute identifies an official eight-year process for properties to exit the Program, which starts when the landowner or local authority initiates the expiration of the Agricultural

Preserve. This eight-year delay was established to ensure the insulation of agricultural land from development pressure. Historically, the statute identified exceptions to this expiration, which included a declaration of public emergency by the governor (e.g. for a state highway project) or death of an owner, in which case the property could expire out of the Program earlier than scheduled. In 2019, the legislature added a new provision to the statute which provided a new early termination mechanism for landowners. Under the new provision, a landowner can apply for early termination of the Agricultural Preserves status with the local authority any time after the subject property has been enrolled in the program for eight years. The local authority must approve this request with a majority vote of its Council/Board and must then file the approved expiration request document with the County. This change provides a potential reason for the recent accelerated decline in enrolled acreage; however, data from previous years of the Program indicates that several counties were already in a slight but steady decline prior to the new provision. The Council will monitor how this provision impacts the program going forward.

Funding

The Agricultural Preserves Program is funded by a \$5.00 fee collected by metropolitan area counties on mortgage registrations and deed transfers (MRDT). The counties retain half of the fee revenue in a county conservation fund, and the remaining half is split equally between the Minnesota Conservation Fund and the State general fund. The county conservation fund revenue offsets the property tax credit that the Program provides to participating landowners.

If the county conservation fund is not sufficient to reimburse the tax loss, counties may then draw from the state conservation fund. If the state conservation fund revenue is not sufficient, the state will appropriate the funding from the state's general fund.

The Program legislation allows counties to use any surplus in their conservation fund for agricultural land preservation or conservation planning activities. Counties must transfer any unutilized conservation funds back to the state.

Table 3 shows the Program funding in 2024 and demonstrates that Carver County, with approximately 51% of the total acres enrolled, pays the highest amount of conservation credit to Program participants and draws the most amount from the state conservation fund to pay the outstanding tax credits balance. For payable taxes in 2024, Carver and Dakota counties drew funds from the state conservation fund to reimburse the county conservation credit paid to Program participants.

Table 3 – 2023 Program Funding and Tax Credit Summary (source: MN Department of Revenue)



Table 1. County and State Conservation Accounts

County	2024 Acres Enrolled	2023 County Conservation Account Revenue	Credits Reimbursed From County Account	Tax Credits Amount Left in County Conservation Account	Reimbursed From State Conservation Fund and State General Fund
Metropolitan Counties					
Anoka	569.41	\$ 42,563.00	\$ 1,008.66	\$ 41,554.34	\$ -
Carver	98,132.24	\$ 15,960.00	\$ 15,960.00	\$ -	\$ 181,731.16
Dakota	68,169.05	\$ 49,600.00	\$ 49,600.00	\$ -	\$ 69,378.43
Hennepin	9,380.71	\$ 134,495.50	\$ 105,721.96	\$ 28,773.54	\$ -
Ramsey	0.00	\$ 49,282.50	\$ -	\$ 49,282.50	\$ -
Scott	8,522.57	\$ 18,635.00	\$ 14,671.06	\$ 3,963.94	\$ -
Washington	6,259.25	\$ 34,615.00	\$ 13,613.58	\$ 21,001.42	\$ -
Total	191,033.23	\$ 345,151.00	\$ 200,575.26	\$ 144,575.74	\$ 251,109.59
Note: The full amount was paid from the state conservation fund, with nothing paid from the state general fund.					



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