

2012 Metropolitan Agricultural Preserves Program Status Report



March 2013

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Introduction to the Metropolitan Agricultural Preserves Program

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

The report summarizes program enrollment as of December 31, 2012. 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 covenanted as agricultural preserves.

In the past, the Metropolitan Council staff worked with local governments to identify and map important agricultural areas as part of the local comprehensive plan. 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 2008 comprehensive plan update process.

The legislation intends 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 legislation provides metropolitan area farmers 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, local food production, and the Twin Cities farming economy.

The Agricultural Preserves 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.

Eligibility and Implementation

The legislation directs the local authority, or the local government having planning and zoning authority, to implement the program and its requirements, the application process and the program restrictions. The legislation indicates that the local authority identifies long-term agricultural lands, and establishes zoning for these areas at a density of no more than one dwelling unit per forty acres. The local authority then certifies by resolution the areas eligible for enrollment, allowing landowners to apply.

Benefits

Landowners enrolled in the program receive a number of benefits, including 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.

The legislation 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, but will be a minimum tax savings of \$1.50 per acre.

The program prohibits special assessments for public improvement projects including sanitary sewer systems, storm water sewer systems, 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

The program is voluntary, and landowners typically work with the local authority to prepare enrollment applications, sign and notarize them and record the documents with the county. The legislation outlines a number of enrollment conditions, including a minimum property size. The program requires a minimum forty acres needed 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 unit.

The enrollment application is a restrictive covenant that includes the property's legal description, notarized signatures, and an affidavit of the local authority certifying that the land is eligible for enrollment. The covenant is recorded with the property title at the county and remains effective if ownership changes.

The covenant 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 covenant remains in effect until the landowner, or the local authority, initiates an expiration notice. The covenant and benefits end eight years from the date the expiration notice is signed and recorded at the county.

Enrollment forms must be recorded at the county before June 1 of each year to receive property tax benefits payable the following year. Therefore, participants enrolling by June 1, 2012 see the property tax benefits reflected in the property tax statements for 2013.

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 it peaked in 1997 at almost 202,000 acres. The enrollment decreased during the period from 1998 through 2009.

However, enrollment in the more recent years has continued to rebound, for example from 2009 to 2012, to just over 207,000 acres. At this time, the total acreage enrolled in the program represents an area about 325 square miles in size. From 2010 to 2012, the acres enrolled increased 12,782 acres from 195,115 acres in 2011, to 207,897 acres in 2012.

Table 1 shows the enrollment trend for the three year period from 2010 to 2012, and Table 2 shows the trend for annual enrollment from 2000 to 2012. The 2012 enrollment has surpassed the year 2000 enrollment high by almost 8,000 acres.

Table 1: 2010 to 2012 Enrollment Trends (acres) by County

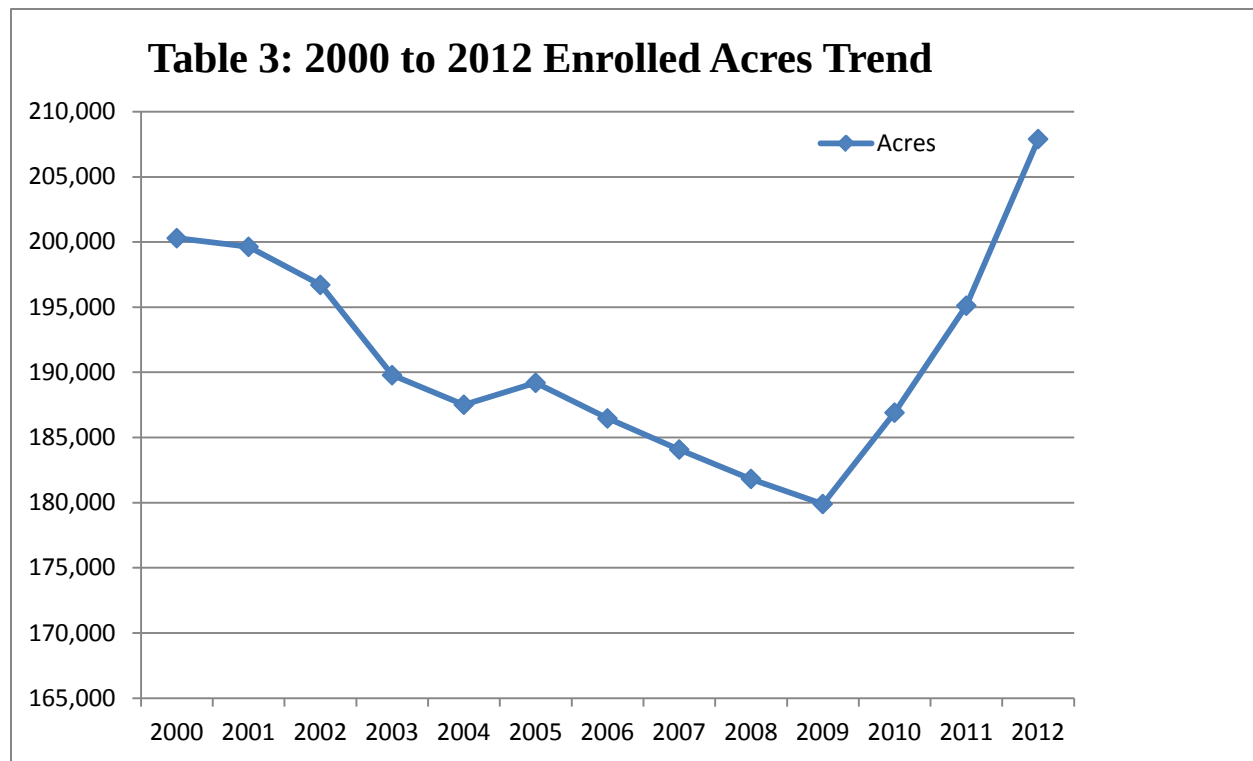
	2010 Enroll	2011 Enroll	2012 Enroll	2010-2012 Change	2012 % of Total
Anoka	1,591	1,313	1,196	(395)	1%
Carver	98,337	101,576	106,352	8,015	51%
Dakota	59,308	63,949	71,032	11,724	34%
Hennepin	12,113	12,054	12,679	566	6%
Ramsey	0	0	0	0	4%
Scott	7,332	8,300	8,729	1,397	4%
Washington	8,227	7,923	7,909	(318)	100%
Total	186,908	195,115	207,897	20,989	1%

Source: Minnesota Department of Revenue, Abstract of Tax Lists 2012, 2011, 2010

Table 2: 2000 to 2012 Enrollment (acres) by County

County	2012	2011	2010	2009	2008	2007	2000
Anoka	1,196	1,313	1,591	1,520	1,793	2,104	3,026
Carver	106,352	101,576	98,337	93,271	93,739	93,518	100,995
Dakota	71,032	63,949	59,308	57,841	58,763	59,535	64,823
Hennepin	12,679	12,054	12,113	11,141	11,406	12,326	13,552
Scott	8,729	8,300	7,332	7,193	7,077	7,393	8,443
Washington	7,909	7,923	8,227	8,932	9,045	9,204	9,456
Total	207,897	195,115	186,908	179,898	181,823	184,080	200,295

Source: Minnesota Department of Revenue



Funding

The Agricultural Preserves Program is funded by a \$5.00 fee collected by metro area counties on mortgage registrations and deed transfers (MRDT). Of the fee revenue, the counties retain half in a county conservation fund, and forward the remaining half to both the Minnesota Conservation Fund and to the State general fund, split equally. The county conservation fund revenue supplements 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 remaining conservation revenues for agricultural land preservation or conservation planning activities each year. However, counties must transfer any unencumbered revenue back to the state each year.

Table 4 showing the program funding and demonstrates that Carver County, which has 51 percent of the total acres enrolled, pays the highest amount of conservation credit to program participants, and draws from the state conservation fund to pay the outstanding tax credits balance. For taxes payable 2012, Carver, Dakota and Scott counties drew funds from the state conservation fund to reimburse the county conservation credit paid to program participants.

Table 4: 2012 Program Funding and Tax Credit Summary

Tax classification and valuation 2011 for taxes payable 2012

	Enrolled 2012 (acres)	Total Conservation Credit(\$) 2012	County Share MRDT Revenue(\$)	Reimbursed from State Conservation Fund(\$)	Remains in County Fund (\$)
Anoka	1,196	\$8,330	\$47,281	0	38,951
Carver	106,352	\$376,155	\$16,528	359,627	0
Dakota	71,032	\$215,355	\$60,323	155,032	0
Hennepin	12,679	\$109,028	\$175,888	0	66,860
Ramsey	0	\$0	\$60,771	0	60,771
Scott	8,729	\$27,448	\$24,668	2,780	0
Washington	7,909	\$18,460	\$40,769	0	22,309
	207,897	\$754,776	\$426,228	517,439	188,891

Source: Minnesota Department of Revenue

Metropolitan Agricultural Preserves Program

2012 Enrollment

March 2013

-  County Boundary
-  City & Township Boundary
-  Agricultural Preserves Parcels

