

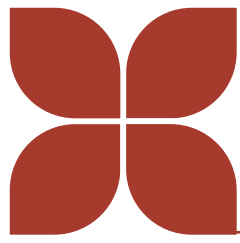
# Chapter 3: Agricultural Resources

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## INTRODUCTION

Agriculture has played a defining role in shaping Stoughton’s identity, economy, and landscape. Productive farmland, active agricultural enterprises, and the rural landscape surrounding Stoughton provide not only economic value, but also environmental benefits, scenic character, and a sense of place that residents deeply appreciate. As Stoughton continues to grow, the city faces the dual challenge of accommodating new development while preserving the agricultural resources and open spaces that make the community unique. This chapter outlines Stoughton’s agricultural resources and the goals, strategies, and actions that ensure farmland, agricultural businesses, and local food systems remain integral to the community’s future—balancing thoughtful development with the long-term stewardship of the area’s agricultural heritage.

## KEY TAKEAWAYS

- ◊ Agriculture has long been, and continues to be, a prominent part of Stoughton’s economy and culture, as seen through local employers such as Emmi Roth and Stoughton Trailers, longstanding events like the Stoughton Fair, community groups such as Future Farmers of America and 4-H, urban agricultural activities including two local farmers’ markets, CSAs, and a city-led community garden, and the large amount of farmland preservation area surrounding the city.
- ◊ Although agriculture is still a key part of the area in many ways, Stoughton, like much of Dane County and the state as a whole, is experiencing a loss of farmland due to development and growth pressures. A key consideration of this plan is how to balance the preservation of agricultural land and natural resources with the development needed to thoughtfully sustain community growth.



Photo: Stoughton Fair

## GOALS, STRATEGIES, AND ACTIONS

**Goal 1: Support the long-term viability of agricultural uses while guiding new development to planned, serviced growth areas in a compact and efficient pattern.**

### Strategies:

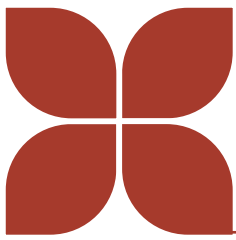
1. Work with neighboring jurisdictions (the Towns of Dunn, Dunkirk, Rutland, and Pleasant Springs) to identify, prioritize, and protect farmland that is best suited for long-term agricultural use, while recognizing areas appropriate for future urban expansion.
2. Direct new development to areas within the City’s existing or planned municipal service areas, and discourage scattered, low-density development in agricultural transition areas within Stoughton’s extraterritorial jurisdiction.

### Actions:

◊ Develop and implement clear criteria under which development on agricultural land may occur, prioritizing locations within planned growth areas, contiguous, compact development patterns, and avoidance of unnecessary fragmentation of remaining farmland.

◊ Restrict or discourage subdivisions relying on private wells and septic systems in agricultural and extraterritorial areas to prevent scattered development and preserve agricultural viability.

◊ Work towards establishing cooperative boundary agreements with adjacent towns that define city growth zones and agricultural transition areas, as well as areas for long-term agricultural preservation.



## Agricultural Resources

### Goal 2: Maintain agriculture as a significant economic activity within Stoughton and its ETJ area.

#### Strategies:

1. Encourage local use of area farm products, promoting connections between producers, businesses, and residents (for example, farmers' markets, CSAs, local restaurants and institutions using local products, local companies within the agricultural supply/value chain).
2. Allow and encourage continued farming, community gardening, and small-scale agricultural activities in areas planned for future growth until urban development is appropriate.
3. Increase urban agriculture activities in the planning area.
4. Support the attraction and development of agricultural-related businesses in the planning area, specifically in the City's business parks and industrial areas.

#### Actions:

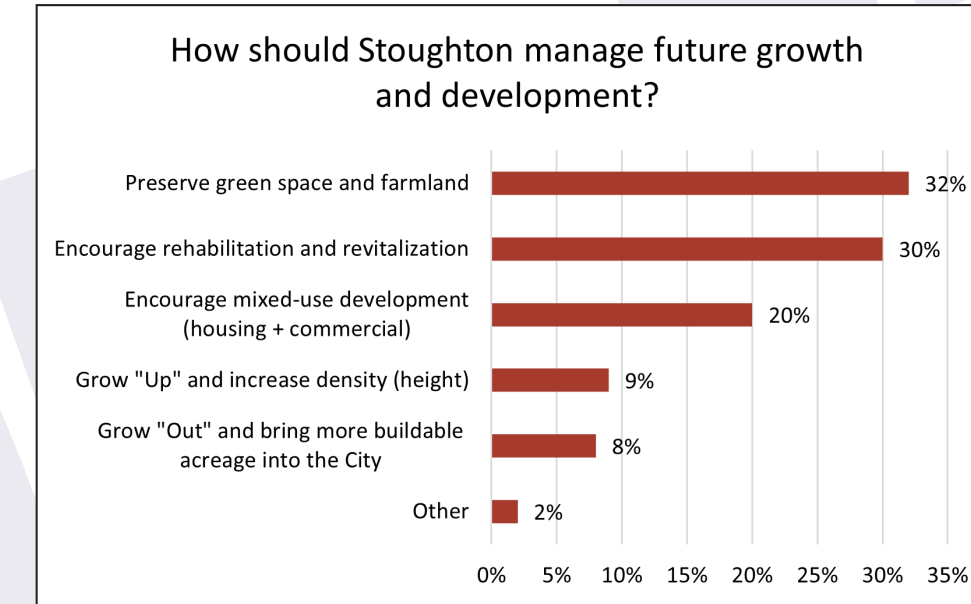
- ◊ Preserve and maintain the City-run community garden in Lowell Park.
- ◊ Identify opportunities for new community gardens in the planning area.

- ◊ Work with community groups and other private entities to develop and manage additional community gardens.

- ◊ Build and maintain food composting infrastructure at City-run community gardens.

## SURVEY RESULTS

When asked “How should Stoughton manage future growth and land development?”, the top response was that the city should “Preserve green space and farmland”. About 8% of responses indicated a desire to “Grow “Out” and bring more buildable acreage into the City”.

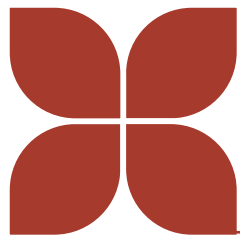


#### Representative comments:

**“We need to work with the surrounding townships and county to preserve farmland while being creative in finding living space in the city.”**

**“Very proud to live here, love the sense of community and farmland that surrounds us.”**

When asked what types of businesses Stoughton should focus on attracting, 266 responses (about 20%) mentioned food services, restaurants (farm-to-table had multiple mentions), or grocery store/food cooperative.



## Agricultural Resources

### AGRICULTURAL RESOURCES INVENTORY

Stoughton is greatly impacted by agriculture – historically, socially, environmentally, economically, culturally, and from a land use and taxation perspective.

Located in fertile southern Wisconsin, the city has had an economy driven by agriculture, through activities such as milling, tobacco warehousing, and wagon manufacturing. Agriculture is the primary land use in Dane County, consisting of 57% of the county’s total land area. Dane County also ranks number one in the state for the value of crops sold and number two in the state for the value of all agricultural products produced. As of 2022 there were 2,284 farms in the County covering nearly 450,000 acres, with an average farm size of 197 acres.<sup>1</sup> 56% of the county’s agricultural sales come from livestock, poultry, and products (primarily dairy and cattle) while 44% are from crops (primarily corn, soybeans, hay, and wheat).

This level of agricultural production requires collection, transportation, processing, warehousing, sales, administration, and management, much of which occurs in Dane County cities and villages, including Stoughton, creating property value, tax revenue, and employment opportunities (Stoughton Trailers and Emmi Roth are just two visible examples) that benefit city residents.

Another significant way that agricultural resources impact Stoughton is at the border – farmland is the source of growth for the city as the population grows. Annexation allows property owners located near the border of a city or village to petition to bring their land into the city so that they may access sewer and water to more intensively develop their land. This is the primary reason Dane County is experiencing such a significant loss of farmland – 17% (76,355 acres) over the past 20 years.

Like Stoughton, nearly all municipalities in Dane County are also experiencing in-fill development and increasing density, however, this is not sufficient to provide the housing stock or new commercial uses needed for a growing population.

At the time this plan was written, a total of 296 acres within the city of Stoughton were zoned Rural Holding, currently the city’s only agricultural zoning district. Rural Holding is intended to function as an Agricultural Transition area, aiming to concentrate urban development while preserving natural and agricultural lands. This zoning classification is typically given to lands upon annexation into the city to allow continuing rural use of the land until development plans requiring a more intensive zoning category are required.

The area of agricultural land in the city has decreased significantly since 2016, when there were a total of 849 acres of agricultural/rural/vacant land. This indicates the supply of developable land within Stoughton is being consumed.

Another way to look at agriculture-related land in Stoughton, aside from zoning, is to look at the property class code assigned by the Wisconsin Department of Revenue. A property class of “4” and only “4” indicates land that is solely in active agricultural use and eligible to be taxed at very low agricultural use property tax rates. A property class code that contains a “4” with other codes means that uses in addition to agriculture occur on the property – most commonly a residence or woodlands which would make the property ineligible to be taxed at the agricultural use rate.

There are currently three areas of Stoughton that have parcels with a property class code containing a “4”: 51 West, Business Park North and Business Park South – all relatively recent annexations into the city.

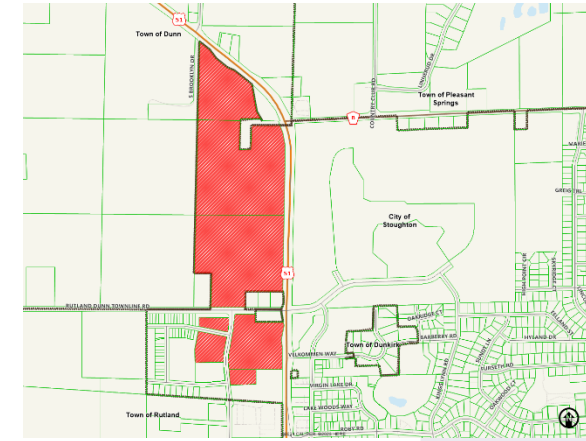


Figure 1: Lands along Stoughton’s northwest border containing an agriculture use property class.

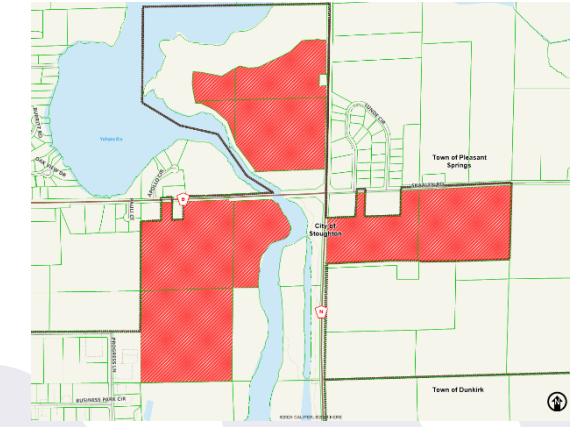


Figure 2: Lands around Business Park North containing agriculture use property class.

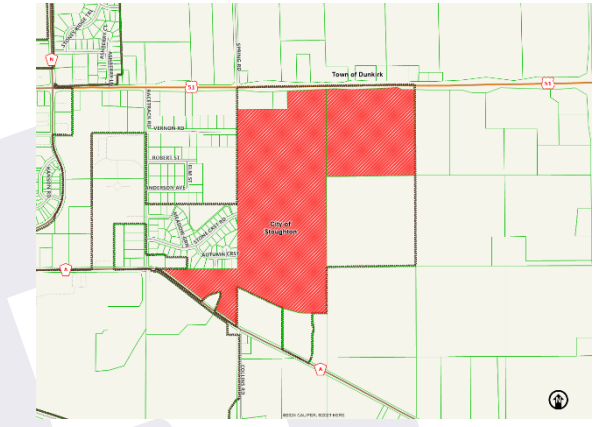
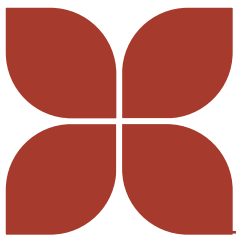


Figure 3: Lands around Business Park South containing an agriculture use property class.

Environmentally, agricultural resources provide open spaces, habitat for wildlife, absorb carbon dioxide, and provide oxygen and many other benefits. Agricultural use of land also provides opportunities for environmental degradation of surface and groundwater from runoff, animal production and chemical use. Stoughton’s water resources are impacted by the agricultural uses around it. Stoughton works with other Dane County cities and villages to implement county-level land use controls and encourages best management practices on farms to protect the region’s water resources.

Most of the land surrounding the city remains in agricultural use, and preserving high-quality farmland that protects water resources remains a top priority for the city.

Although agricultural land in Stoughton is traditionally in transition from rural to urban land uses, there is a growing movement to increase access to fresh, locally-grown food for urban residents by a new type of neighborhood design most commonly called an “agrihood” – a neighborhood with shared gardening infrastructure. According to the National Gardening Association, over 43% of Americans now grow some of their own food. Having shared infrastructure and shared values among neighbors about gardening and food production can help reduce conflict, make household food production easier, increase the amount produced and create opportunities for additional household income.



## Agricultural Resources

Five community-supported agriculture (CSA) farms (farms that sell direct to consumers on a subscription basis) are currently located within 5 miles of Stoughton.

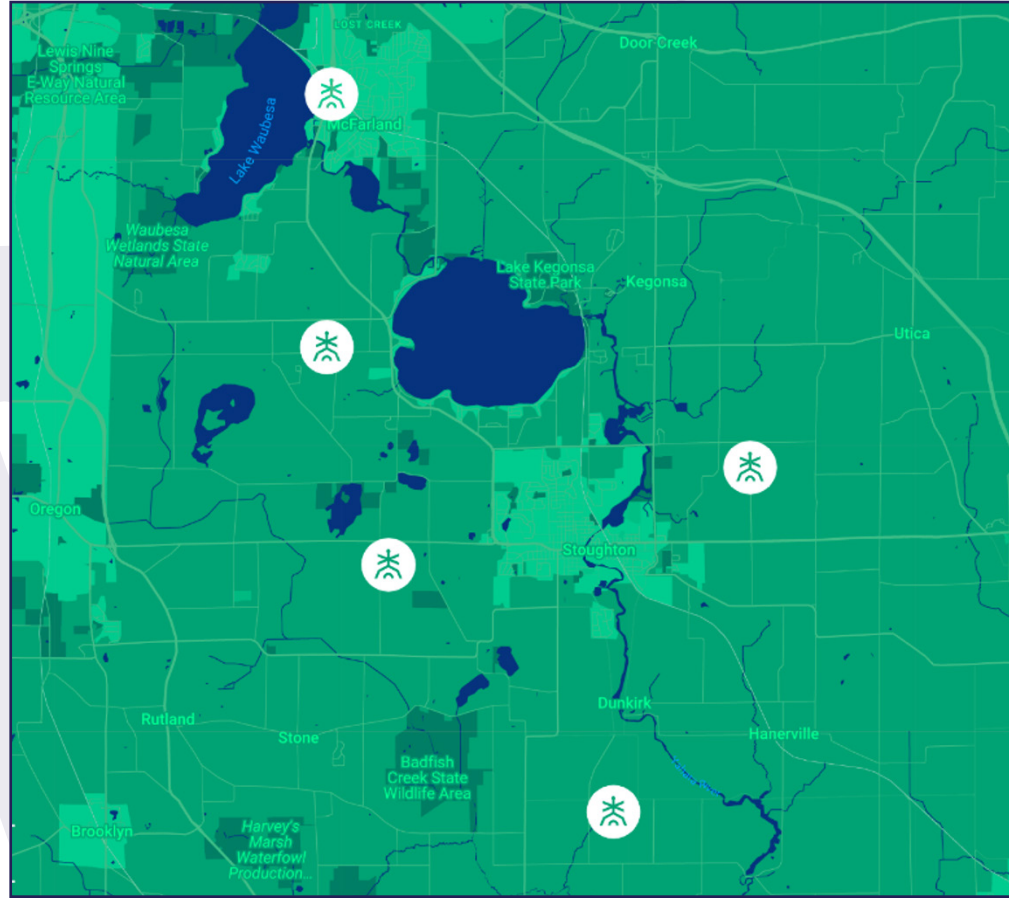


Figure 4: Location of CSA farms serving Stoughton residents. Source: Farm Fresh Atlas; REAP Food Group; <https://farmfreshatlas.org>

Stoughton remains connected to the area's strong agricultural history through active community and city-led initiatives including the Stoughton Community Farmers Market, the Lowell Park Community Garden, local Future Farmers of America and 4-H chapters, Stoughton Area School District agricultural education, and the annual Stoughton Fair.

## AGRICULTURAL PRESERVATION

The [Wisconsin Farmland Preservation Program](#), established in 1977, offers tax credits to farmers preserving farmland by linking local zoning and preservation plans. Although the City of Stoughton does not participate in the State's Farmland Preservation Program, all four adjacent towns (Dunkirk, Rutland, Dunn, and Pleasant Springs) have adopted land use plans that incorporate the County's Farmland Preservation Plan (2022) and preservation zoning ordinance, which helps protect farmland by limiting non-agricultural development and providing tax credits for eligible property owners.

The [Dane County Farmland Preservation Plan](#) divides the county into four major categories with distinct policies for each:

- ◇ Farmland Preservation Areas, where farming will predominate over the next twenty years.
- ◇ Non-Farm Planning Areas which either are, or will be, predominately in residential, commercial, recreational, suburban, urban, or transitional land uses over the next twenty years.
- ◇ Agricultural Enterprise Areas, which are state-designated, high priority Farmland Preservation Areas where farmers can qualify for enhanced tax incentives.
- ◇ Resource Protection Corridors, areas with sensitive environmental features (such as wetlands and floodplains).

All four towns surrounding Stoughton consist of primarily Farmland Preservation areas with a number of Resource Protection Corridors, maintaining that agriculture will continue to be the predominant land use surrounding Stoughton in the coming years.

Landowners with lands enrolled in an effective farmland preservation agreement have the option to release all or a portion of their land from the agreement prior to the natural expiration of an agreement. Landowners may choose to release lands if they plan on developing lands to a land use that would be incompatible with the land use restrictions of an agreement.

Any lands that are released from the agreement are subject to a conversion fee. The conversion fee is equal to three times the per acre value of the highest value category of tillable cropland in the town in which the land is located in, as specified by the Wisconsin Department of Revenue under s.73.03(2a), Wis. Stats. for the year in which the land is released.

The agricultural landscape surrounding Stoughton enhances the community's aesthetic appeal and reinforces the City's separation from the Madison metropolitan area. Seasonal changes of growing crops, colors and textures of farm fields, and the architecturally significant farm buildings all contribute to the rural landscape surrounding the City. An important goal of this Plan is to help preserve the integrity of this resource as long as possible, while also accommodating well-planned, high-quality, compact urban development.