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County Executive

County Of Dane
Office Of The County Executive

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Dane County Unveils New Program to Protect the County's Rural Character, Reduce Flooding

As Population and Development Pressures Continue to Increase, County Executive Parisi Marks Start of Earth Week by Announcing New County Grant Program to Preserve Small Family Farms, Rural Lands

County Executive Joe Parisi celebrated the start of Earth Week by visiting a family farm in the Town of Dunkirk this morning to announce the start of a new county program to help protect small farms and rural lands while encouraging the use of crops that reduce runoff from flooding rains. Parisi announced the creation of Dane County's brand new "Continuous Cover Program" with farmer James Amera who is in the process of transitioning the farm his grandfather owns in the Town of Dunkirk.

"We've seen too many heart-breaking stories on the news these past several months about farmers across the state and beyond having to walk away from their dreams of continuing to work the land," Parisi said. "This new program will give some of our small family farms and other property owners in rural Dane County peace of mind knowing the land they love will be preserved and protected, and less susceptible to contributing to flooding like we've seen with recent rains," Parisi added.

The new "Continuous Cover Program" will incentivize property owners to convert lands used for annual row crops or unimproved pasture into areas planted with perennial grasses that reduce run-off during heavy rains like what the area experienced last August. Payments from the county to property owners will be made up-front when the initial grant is awarded and area has been established. This provides economic and environmental incentive for property owners interested in protecting the land they own from future development.

"By transitioning parts of the farm to managed grazing I am able to focus on livestock management, lower my input costs, and reduce erosion on steeper ground," Amera explains. "As a young dairy farmer, I need to find strategies that keep costs low and improve profitability - managed grazing is a way to do that."

Funds to get this initiative started (\$750,000) were included in the County Executive's 2019 budget. That start-up funding should help pay for the protection of around 300 acres in this pilot year with around 100 acres each devoted to managed grazing, wildlife, and buffers between lands vulnerable to run-off and water

resources like lakes, rivers, and streams. Those who sign up in the program will enter into 15 year agreements with the county.

"The new Continuous Cover Program will help farmers and landowners restore sensitive lands and habitat while allowing them greater flexibility in managing the land than traditional Conservation Reserve Programs," Town of Primrose Supervisor Martha Gibson said. "Thanks to Dane County for creating such a program."

A recent report indicated Dane County is experiencing the fastest population growth in the state, adding nearly 6,000 new residents per year. The U.S. Department of Agriculture recently released a report showing Dane County has lost 142 dairy farms since 2007, demonstrating the need as to why land conservation and preservation is timely and important.

Dane County will take applications from interested landowners until May 31st. Those interested in participating can apply at: <https://lcd-lwr.dane-county.gov/Continuous-Cover-Program>

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