

# 2030 Land Resource Management Plan

## PLANNING ISSUES—AGRICULTURE

### AGRICULTURE Objectives

1. To protect farmland as a valuable natural resource and an economically productive land use by preventing premature conversion of farmland in the county.
2. To encourage and promote agriculturally related businesses as a valued element of the Kane County economy.
3. To encourage the effective use of agricultural land in achieving national and local energy and soil conservation goals.
4. To discourage projects that will have a detrimental impact on the preservation of agricultural lands and the use of public funds for such projects.
5. To support incentives and assist property owners in maintaining agricultural lands and structures to ensure an ongoing food supply and to support those land owners who choose farming as a way of life.
6. To expand the purchase of agricultural conservation easements wherever possible.

### Chapter Focus

Like much of Illinois, Kane County has some of the most productive farmland in the world. Agriculture has been the dominant land use in the county for decades and still occupies 74% of its unincorporated land. Agriculture plays a vital role in the county's economy, even as its historical structure and composition changes with the times. A continued threat to agriculture is the encroachment of development and the conflicts that arise between farm and non-farm land uses. Kane County strongly supports protective land use strategies that discourage premature conversion of farmland in the Critical Growth Area, protect farmland in the Agricultural/Rural Village Area, and guide new development toward planned growth areas.



This chapter examines:

- Economic Role of Agriculture
- Agriculture and Land Use
- Agricultural Protection
- Kane County Agricultural Program

### Economic Role Of Agriculture

Agriculture is an integral part of Kane County's economy, landscape, and natural resource base. Agriculture continues to contribute to a stable and diversified economy, especially as the variety of agricultural crops and products such as nursery and greenhouse crops increases in response to changing markets. Agribusiness services and facilities support the farm economy and need a strong agricultural base for their success. The farm economy creates jobs in equipment sales and service, seed research and sales, fertilizer and herbicide sales, finance and insurance, and food processing and distribution industries such as Con Agra in St. Charles, Power Packaging in Geneva, Kraft Foods in Aurora, and Lipton in Elgin.



Since 1945, the number of Kane County farms has decreased. However, this decline has been offset by a large increase in average farm size. In 2002, the average size of a Kane County farm was 320 acres, representing an increase of 30 acres since 1992 (Refer to Figure 10). In 2002, the average for the State of Illinois was 374 acres, representing an increase of 23 acres since 1992.

Since 1992, the market value of Kane County agricultural products sold has consistently totaled over \$85 million per year. In 2002, 30% of the county's farms produced annual sales of \$100,000 or more.

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The average market value of products sold per farm was \$187,487, considerably higher than the statewide average of \$105,115. The net cash farm income of the county's farms averaged \$24,489 per farm compared to \$28,685 per farm for Illinois farms.



In 2002, Kane County farmers harvested 11.3 million bushels of corn for grain. This represents an average of 126 bushels per acre. The state average was 132 bushels per acre. That same year, the county harvested 3.3 million bushels of soybeans averaging 43 bushels per acre. The state average was 41 bushels per acre. Corn, soybeans, small grains, and nursery and greenhouse crops accounted for 87 percent of the market value of agricultural products sold in 2002. Livestock, poultry, and related products accounted for the remaining 13 percent of market value. In 2002, over 50% of Kane County's 619 farms were classified as cash grain farms. Of the cash grain crops, 53% of total sales came from the sale of corn and 34% from the sale of soybeans.



Figure 12 underscores the economic importance of horticultural production. In 2002, Kane County was the largest dollar producer of nursery, greenhouse, floriculture, and sod crops of all Illinois counties, producing 15% of the state's total. These horticulture producers made up only 11% of the county's farms, yet produced 48% of total agricultural sales. Nursery, greenhouse, sod farms, edible crops, and seasonal crops (for example, Christmas trees and pumpkins) will play an increasing role in Kane County's agricultural economy. These operations are generally located near developing areas such as Kane County. Kane County encourages expansion of nursery and greenhouses and other agriculturally related businesses through the use of the F-2 (agriculturally related sales) zoning district.

### Agriculture and Land Use

**A**griculture is the predominant land use in the county. The Development Department's 2001 land use survey indicates that 74% or 180,576.52 acres of unincorporated Kane County is in agriculture. The agricultural presence becomes stronger as one goes west across the county. Most of these agricultural uses are concentrated in the western and central townships. Within the townships, the percentage of unincorporated land in agriculture in 2001 was: western townships, 88%; central townships, 73%; and river townships, 41%.



Major threats to agriculture in Kane County are encroaching urbanization and the conflicts and incompatibilities that arise between farm and non-farmland uses. Many intruding non-farm uses in agricultural areas not only permanently remove land from production, but also create new problems. These include bringing conflicting land uses into contact, stimulating land speculation, and increasing property assessment and public services cost. Further, encroaching development discourages new investments in farm improvements and causes crop losses due to disruption of drainage and vandalism. The new non-farm neighbors must also contend with odors, dust, noise, and other conditions naturally present in agricultural areas.

An emerging trend in agricultural practice is Concentrated Animal Feeding Operations (CAFO). In general, CAFOs consist of an enclosed facility or open lot where animals, such as cattle, dairy cows, swine, sheep, hens, turkeys or chickens are confined and maintained for a specified time. With such operations, animal wastes are concentrated creating potential environmental and public health issues.

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### Agricultural Protection

**K**ane County's commitment to agricultural protection has evolved over a twenty-year period. On July 22, 1980, Governor James R. Thompson signed Executive Order 80-4, Preservation of Illinois Farmlands. This Executive Order eventually led to the Illinois Farmland Preservation Act establishing a new state policy to promote the protection of Illinois farmland from unnecessary conversion and degradation. The Act required state agencies to develop an agricultural land preservation policy. In 1980, enabled by the new legislation and responding to an increasing threat to agricultural land in Kane County, the County Board amended the 1976 Land Use Plan. Objectives and policies were added to specifically protect agriculture as a valuable natural resource and an economically productive land use. These objectives and policies were reinforced in the 1982 Comprehensive Land Use Plan and were strengthened in the 2020 Land Resource Management Plan.



In 1991 the County Board became the first in Illinois to adopt a Farmland Preservation Policy to minimize conflicts between farming and other land uses. The policy states Kane County will encourage development within the county to occur in such a fashion as to minimize conflict between farming and other land uses. It goes on to assert that Kane County does not intend to enforce any rule, regulation or ordinance in such a manner as to violate the “Farm Nuisance Suit Act” (740 ILCS70).

In 1991 Kane County worked with the Northeastern Illinois Planning Commission (NIPC) to develop an Agricultural Protection Area (APA). The purpose of the APA is to maintain the designated area in farming use and uses ancillary to and supportive of the farming economy and community (Refer to Figure 14). An APA map was prepared based on prime farmland, soils, land use, municipal plans, drainage divides, environmentally sensitive lands, flood plains, and man-made features such as existing subdivisions and roads. Approximately, 165,000 acres or almost 50% of Kane County is included in the Agricultural Protection Areas.

The APA map is used by Kane County and NIPC when reviewing amendments to Facility Planning Areas (FPAs). NIPC and the county advise the Illinois Environmental Protection Agency on proposed FPA amendments for wastewater expansions. The map is an important tool for implementation of state, regional, and county farmland preservation policy and can be useful in preventing land use conflicts and “leapfrog” development in the APAs.

In 2001, the Kane County Board adopted the Agricultural Conservation Easement and Farmland Protection Program. The purpose of the program is to protect farmland through purchase or donation of development rights, or fee simple purchase of land. The program is driven by farmland owners voluntarily applying to sell future development rights to the county. Applications are reviewed and recommended to the County Board by the Kane County Agricultural Conservation Easement and Farmland Protection Commission. Once the county purchases the development rights, a conservation easement is placed on the property in perpetuity, restricting the land to farming uses. As of winter 2005, landowners have submitted applications representing over 5,500 acres of land to the county for preservation.

As Kane County's population grows over the next 30 years, development pressure on the county's productive agricultural land will increase. The county is recommitting to protecting farmland in order to ensure the economic vitality of the agricultural sector and to preserve our agricultural communities and rural lifestyle (Refer to Figures 15, 16 and 17).

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## PLANNING ISSUES—AGRICULTURE

### Policies



1. Protect land best suited for farming from premature conversion to other land uses, and maintain agriculture as an integral part of the county’s economy, landscape and natural resource base.
2. Encourage right-to-farm legislation, support incentives to retain farmland, and further limit the circumstances under which farming operations may be deemed a nuisance.
3. Encourage the use of county-produced farm products through activities such as farmers’ markets and urban produce markets and support the development of new national and international markets.
4. Support agribusiness services and facilities, such as equipment sales and service, research facilities, nurseries and greenhouses, genetic research, biotechnology, grain elevators, and fertilizer services.
5. Discourage sewer and water systems and other projects that would cause the encroachment of development into agricultural areas.
6. Encourage, where appropriate, agricultural land use categories in municipal land use plans, the use of the LESA system for municipal planning projects, and establish transitional areas between residential development and agricultural land.
7. Support Executive Order 80-4, Preservation of Illinois Farmlands and the Illinois Farmland Preservation Act.
8. Participate with the Natural Resources Conservation Service, the Consolidated Farm Service Agency, and the Kane-DuPage Soil and Water Conservation District in programs aimed at implementing good soil conservation practices and improving rural water quality.
9. Encourage development and maintenance of the infrastructure required to support agricultural operations such as roads, bridges, local drainage systems, and drainage districts.
10. Continue to annually fund the Agricultural Conservation Easement and Farmland Protection Program and to maximize the level of federal matching funds from the Farm and Ranch Lands Protection Program for farmland preservation in Kane County.



**Figure 10**

### Kane County Farms

	Number of Farms	Average Farm Size (Acres)	Land in Farms (Acres)
1945	2,029	147	298,489
1950	2,052	145	297,119
1954	1,879	156	293,063
1959	1,550	178	275,207
1964	1,372	195	267,745
1969	1,210	227	275,228
1974	955	251	239,535
1978	995	252	250,469
1982	912	263	240,011
1987	824	277	227,961
1992	703	290	203,590
1997	650	323	209,941
2002	619	320	198,227

Source: Census of Agriculture, National Agricultural Statistics Service, USDA.

**Figure 11**

**Illinois Agriculture Facts**

- Illinois is the leading producer of soybeans, corn, and swine in the United States.
- Food processing is the number-one manufacturing activity, adding almost \$13.4 billion annually to the value of Illinois’ raw agricultural commodities.
- Each year 274 million bushels of Illinois corn are used to produce more ethanol than any other state—about 678 million gallons.
- About 89 percent of the state’s cropland is considered prime farmland, ranking third nationally in total prime farmland acreage.
- Illinois ranks second nationally in the export of agricultural commodities with nearly \$4 billion worth of goods shipped to other countries each year.
- More than 44 percent of grain produced in Illinois is sold for export.
- Illinois’ food and fiber industry employs nearly 1 million people.

*Source: “Facts About Illinois Agriculture,” Illinois Department of Agriculture, August 2004.*

**Figure 12**

**Estimated Value Per Acre of Selected Specialty Crops**

In Kane County 2003

Crop Dollar Value Per Acre in Kane County

Sweet Corn (retail)	\$4,800
Pumpkins (retail)	\$10,000
Apples (retail)	\$21,000
Apples (wholesale)	\$10,500
Strawberries (retail)	\$60,000
Strawberries (u-pick)	\$30,000
Grapes (retail)	\$4,000
Grapes (sold retail as wine)	\$37,500
Balled & Burlapped Woody Plants	\$4,000
Containerized Plants	\$40,000

*Source: Specialty Growers Task Force; St. Charles Horticultural Research Center; University of Illinois; and Midwest Groundcovers, Midwest Trading, 2003.*

**Figure 13**

### **Location Advantage—Terminal Market**

In August of 2003, the Union Pacific Railroad began operations on the new Global III Intermodal Terminal in Rochelle, approximately 25 miles from Kane County. The terminal serves as an interchange hub and as a loading and unloading terminal for rail intermodal shipments moving through the Chicago metropolitan region. The Rochelle rail port provides an opportunity to form a terminal market, an assembly and trading place for agricultural commodities. Terminal markets are usually at or near major transportation hubs. Kane County can partner with DeKalb, Lee, and Ogle counties and the Union Pacific Railroad to develop agriculture enterprise initiatives capitalizing on the new rail port. Proximity to the rail port may give area farmers an opportunity to stimulate development of a system for the delivery of specialized products.

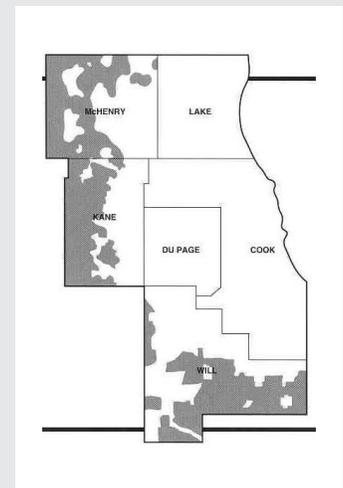
Source: “Global III Update,” Union Pacific Railroad, June/July 2003, website: [www.up.com](http://www.up.com).

**Figure 14**

### **Agricultural Protection**

Agricultural protection is valuable because it:

1. Contributes to a stable economy, both locally and nationally, and provides jobs and a market for products.
2. Preserves a valued livelihood and way of life.
3. Retains open land for possible future extraction for valuable mineral resources.
4. Provides visible, private open space with its rural aesthetics and environmental benefits, including enhanced air and water quality.
5. Controls stormwater runoff and sediment damage, protects groundwater recharge areas, and conserves soil when appropriate farming practices are used.



*“The top of the ridge is a cornfield.  
It rests all winter under snow.  
It feeds the broken snowdrifts in spring  
To a clear stream cutting down hill to the river.”*

—Carl Sandburg

**Figure 15**

**Leveraging Purchase of Development Rights**

On September 2003, the County Board commissioned a report to address strategies for strengthening Kane County’s farm economy into the year 2030. The report, *Leveraging Purchase of Development Rights to build a strong farm economy*, was prepared by Robert Heuer, a Public Policy and Marketing Consultant in Evanston, Illinois. The paper suggests a number of policies and programs to help farmers leverage the county’s location on the edge of a metropolitan market. The net return on conventional farms producing corn and soybeans is extremely low. The report suggests that farm values increase in suburbanizing areas as farmers convert from production of low-value wholesale goods to higher-value direct marketing and ornamental crops. Specialty farms can retain 40 to 50 percent of the net returns versus the conventional farm’s 15 to 20 percent. A focus on mass customization, a common industrial practice that involves tailoring goods and services to meet the particular needs of the customers, in Kane County can boost the economic value of crops. Producing specialized, higher value crops can help ensure that agriculture remains a vital part of the Kane County economy.

One proposal from the report would be to develop an AgriFIRST program to stimulate development of innovative agribusinesses. This program would help farmers and farm cooperatives identify customers’ needs and tailor their production to deliver consumer ready food and agricultural products to meet marketplace demands. A second proposal would be to develop a direct marketing association or forum that works with farmers to market their products to individuals, families, restaurants, companies, and farmers’ markets; and develop agricultural tourism activities and pick-your-own operations. The State of Illinois currently does not have a direct marketing association yet there are demands for high-value products in the Chicago metropolitan region.

*Source: “Leveraging Purchase of Development Rights to build a strong farm economy,” prepared by Robert Heuer, September 2003.*

**Figure 16**

**Kane County Farmland Protection Program**

As of winter 2004, the County Board has approved the purchase of development rights on 2,900 acres, of which 2,153 acres of easements were purchased with a Federal Farmland Protection Program grant awarded to Kane County.

Year	# of farms preserved	# of acres preserved
2002	11	1,425.71
2003	5	708.79
2004	5	774.43

Note: Numbers based on board approved applications.

*Source: Kane County Development Department, Planning Division, 2004.*

Figure 17—Protected Farms Map

# KANE COUNTY PROTECTED FARMS

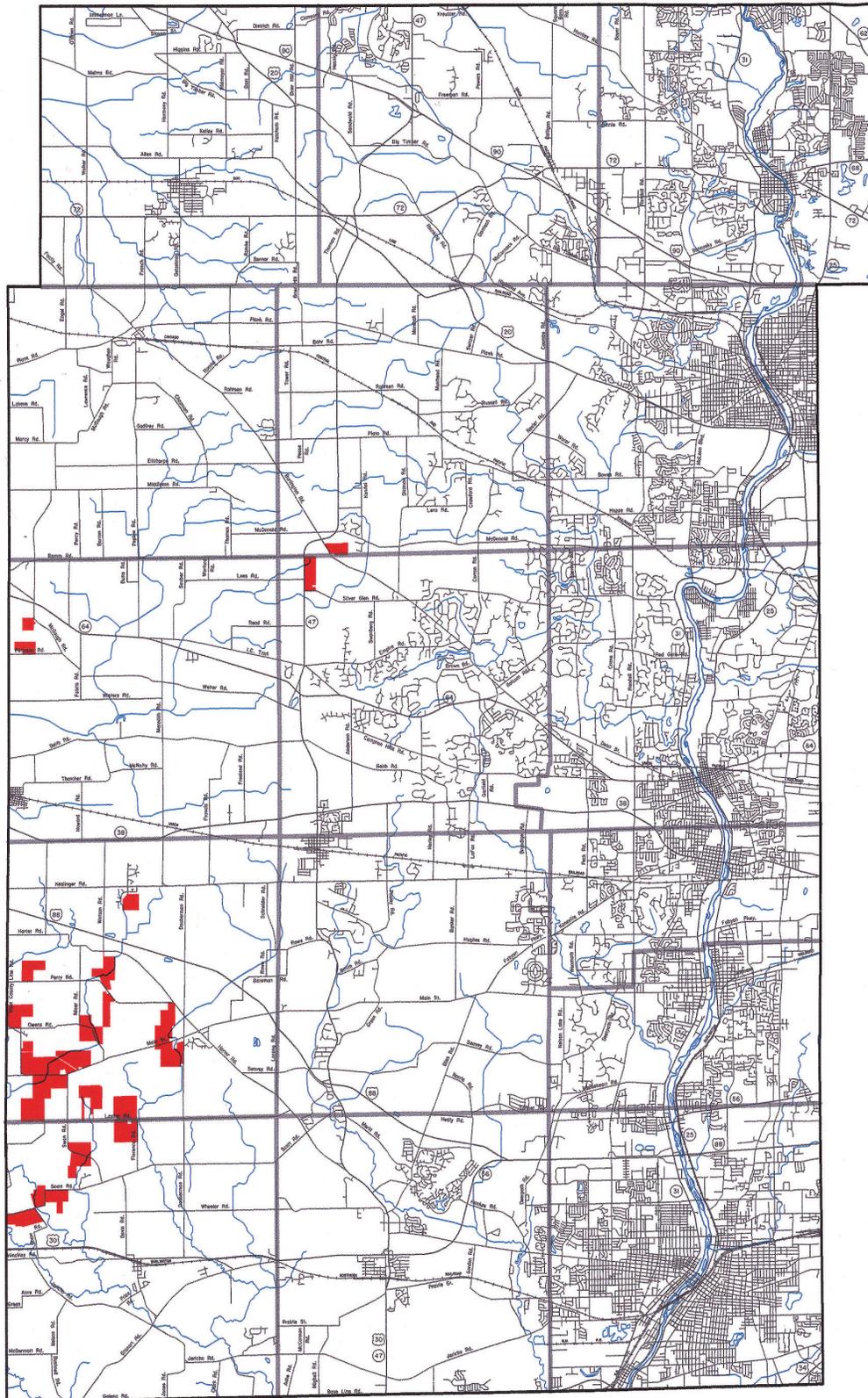


Figure 17

  
PROTECTED FARM