



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
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American Farmland Trust Announces Campaign for Wisconsin's Farm & Forest Lands

Washington, DC—American Farmland Trust (AFT) announces the start of the Campaign for Wisconsin's Farm and Forest Lands initiative designed to complement the recommendations of the Working Lands Steering Committee convened by Secretary of Agriculture Rod Nilsestuen.

“Through the Steering Committee, Wisconsin's residents have expressed a strong interest in protecting the working farm and forest lands and recognize that doing so represents a way to preserve a stronger environmental and economic future,” says Bob Wagner, AFT Managing Director of Programs. “As the national organization working on land protection, and the environmental and economic sustainability of farms, AFT is well positioned to help Wisconsin achieve the Task Force's recommendations.”

In recent years, Wisconsin's loss of farmland to development has increased 60 percent, and like other areas of the country, it is increasingly the best farmland being lost. To help stem the loss of working land in Wisconsin, the Steering Committee made recommendations designed to achieve sound land protection goals through modernizing the existing state farmland preservation program and protecting land from future incompatible development.

“Like many states across the nation, Wisconsin is interested in planning for agriculture while balancing housing and business growth in a way that compliments and sustains natural resources,” adds Wagner. “AFT will not be opening a brick and mortar office in Wisconsin but will be providing a representative to serve as a liaison between the stakeholder groups involved in implementing the Steering Committee recommendations.”

Steering Committee co-chair, Dan Poulson, said, “I am delighted that American Farmland Trust is actively joining this effort. Wisconsin food and agriculture is a \$51 billion a year industry, while the paper and timber products represent another \$20 billion in economic impact in Wisconsin. We simply cannot continue to lose 30,000 acres a year and still have vital healthy food and forest industries, but if we can take the right steps now, we can ensure that these cornerstone industries continue to grow and prosper. We are thus very happy to be able to draw on American Farmland Trust's extensive practical experience from states across the country as we move forward.”

Vicki Elkin, Policy Director for Gathering Waters Conservancy, will provide in-state support for AFT's initiative. Elkin served on the Working Lands Initiative Steering Committee and has long been active in farmland preservation in the state. “There is strong support around the state for protecting Wisconsin's working lands,” said Elkin. “AFT's investment will help translate that widespread public support into legislative support at the state Capitol.”

Elkin can be reached at Gathering Waters Conservancy, 211 S. Paterson Street, STE 270, Madison, WI 53703. Her email is Vicki@gatheringwaters.org and phone number is 608-251-9131, extension 17.

American Farmland Trust is a national nonprofit organization working with communities and individuals to protect the best land, plan for agriculture and keep the land healthy. As the leading advocate for farm and ranch land conservation, AFT has ensured that more than a million acres stays bountiful and productive. AFT's national office is located in Washington, DC. The phone number is 202-331-7300. For more information, visit www.farmland.org. To reach the national Farmland Information Center for more data, visit www.farmlandinfo.org.