

Farmland decision placed on hold

Written by MARK JAEGER

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Town Board wants local farmers to study proposed county map before voting on revised state program

The Fredonia Town Board put off a decision on whether to participate in the state's revised farmland preservation program until next month.

The Working Lands Initiative is the state program which offers tax credits to landowners who agree to keep their property in agricultural use for 35 years.

Before local farmers can participate in the program, the township needs to decide whether it wants to take part in the program, and to designate which parcels should be eligible. That designation must be included in the town's 2035 comprehensive land-use plan.

The county's Planning and Parks Department has been working with the town in developing maps that identify where prime agricultural parcels are located.

In the Town of Fredonia's case, more than half of the community was earmarked as possible preservation land.

The Plan Commission recommended that the town participate in the farmland preservation program earlier this month, but the Town Board was reluctant to take action last week because few local farmers have been able to study the county's proposed map to determine if their parcels would be included in the program.

"The town's 2035 Comprehensive Plan dovetails with the farmland preservation plan," Andrew Struck, the county's planning and parks director, told the board last week.

Several local communities, including the towns of Port Washington and Grafton, have chosen not to take part in the program.

"It is still up to the town whether to participate, but if we don't take part in the program (local landowners) aren't eligible for the tax credits," Town Chairman Richard Mueller said.

Supr. Chris Janik said the farmland preservation program is far less objectionable to landowners since the state has eliminated the penalty for pulling out of the program.

"This has a lot less impact now that the land conversion fee doesn't exist. The question is, 'Could it come back?'" Janik asked Struck.

"I would never presume to guess what could happen in Madison, but if the law is changed, the

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town would probably get a chance to react and drop out of the program," Struck said.

The board is expected to vote on the program at its February meeting.