

Town chairman restates case against farmland plan

Written by MARK JAEGER

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Town of Saukville officials have already taken a stand against participating in the Working Lands Initiative, but Town Chairman Barb Job offered a postscript on the issue in a summary letter last week to Andrew Struck, the county's director of planning and parks.

Jobs said the letter pulls together input she has received on the state farmland program from local landowners and her own observations.

The key factor in the town's stand against participating in the program is the belief that the local zoning code already adequately preserves farmland.

However, she itemized several other factors in the letter:

The town did not maintain the previous preservation program, rezoning many acres to residential, leaving much of the town no longer viable for future agricultural uses.

The program is not going to be effective as it allows the owner to opt out with no penalty, thereby defeating the purpose of the program.

Participants would have their development rights limited under the preservation program.

Participants felt their rights to farm their land as they felt necessary would be regulated by requirements of the program.

Many landowners did not approve of mega farm practices, mono-cropping, destruction of fence rows, non-existent manure management plans or no enforcement if one existed, and they feel that there are not enough regulations established to protect well water.

Jobs said she was surprised by the lack of backing in the community for the Working Lands Initiative.

"I thought there would be a lot of support for it, but the comments I heard most were from people who said, 'You'd better not put me in it,'" she said.

Although the farmland preservation program does not address the issue, Jobs told the Plan Commission last week that there is a suspicion that the effort will open the door for large, corporate farming operations.

"The whole idea behind farmland preservation is they are looking for big chunks of land, which clears the way for mega farms," she said.

Jobs said the state's policy of taxing farmland on use rather than development potential is more effective in keeping land in agriculture.