



ROCK COUNTY PURCHASE OF AGRICULTURAL CONSERVATION EASEMENTS (PACE) PROGRAM – GENERAL FACT SHEET

PROGRAM OVERVIEW

- The Rock County Purchase of Agricultural Conservation Easements (PACE) Program protects and preserves productive agricultural lands in unincorporated areas of Rock County by working with willing, eligible agricultural landowners to limit the potential future uses of their land.
- The Program acquires an agricultural parcel's "development rights" (usually meaning the ability to divide a parcel) through an agricultural conservation easement from willing, eligible landowners.
- The landowner retains ownership of the parcel, but its future use is bound to the easement terms. The easement terms state the County will hold the parcel's "development rights" into perpetuity, with the parcel to be utilized for agriculture and not developed.
- The monetary difference between the appraised value of the parcel for agriculture use, and the appraised value of the parcel for its "highest and best use" (such as development), is the value of the parcel's agricultural conservation easement or "development rights." The Program may pay a portion of this monetary amount to the landowner to acquire the easement. Additionally, federal tax benefits are potentially available for landowners who convey an agricultural conservation easement to the County.
- The Program may utilize County and Federal funds to acquire easements.

PROGRAM DEVELOPMENT

1. Rock County Board of Supervisors authorized development of the Rock County PACE Program.
 2. Rock County PACE Program Ad Hoc Committee (Committee), representing various County interests, was formulated to develop the Program.
 3. Committee developed Program Eligibility Criteria to identify agricultural parcels eligible to apply for inclusion in the Program.
 4. Committee developed Land Evaluation and Site Assessment (LESA) System and LESA Scores to prioritize agricultural parcels eligible to apply for inclusion in the Program.
 5. Committee identified Primary Target Acquisition Areas (clusters of high LESA Scores) as lands on which Program easement acquisition efforts were to be focused.
 6. Rock County Board of Supervisors adopted the Program.

PROGRAM IMPLEMENTATION

1. Program staff undertake landowner education and outreach, and review and evaluate easement applications from willing, eligible landowners.
2. After application review and approval by various governmental bodies, Program staff may submit select applications to Federal program for easement acquisition funding.
3. Program staff work with willing landowners to acquire easements.

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

1. How do I convey an agricultural conservation easement to the County?

First, your agricultural parcel needs to be eligible to apply for inclusion in the Rock County PACE Program. If your parcel is eligible, you will need to submit an application to Program staff. Your application will be reviewed and evaluated against all other applications submitted to the Program on an annual basis. Applications that rate highest against the Program's application review and evaluation system will be designated for easement acquisition.

2. How is the value of an agricultural conservation easement determined?

The monetary difference between the appraised value of the parcel for agriculture use and the appraised value of the parcel for its "highest and best use" (such as development) is the value of the parcel's agricultural conservation easement or "development rights."

3. Does the County pay money to the landowner to acquire agricultural conservation easements?

A Federal program offers limited funds to local governmental units (Counties, Towns, etc.) in which to acquire easements. The County also has limited funds in which to acquire easements. As such, the Program may pay the landowner a portion of the value of an agricultural conservation easement. Additionally, federal tax benefits are potentially available for landowners who convey an agricultural conservation easement to the County.

4. Does an agricultural conservation easement cover an entire agricultural parcel?

The landowner determines the area of the parcel that will be covered by the easement.

5. Does the public have the right to access agricultural parcels covered by an agricultural conservation easement?

The public will not have the right to access agricultural parcels covered by an easement, unless the landowner wishes to allow public access.

6. How long does an agricultural conservation easement last?

An easement is perpetual and will remain on the land "forever", regardless of future ownership.

FURTHER INFORMATION

**PLEASE CONTACT ANDREW BAKER, ROCK COUNTY LAND CONSERVATION DEPARTMENT,
AT 608.754.6617 Ext. 3, BAKER@CO.ROCK.WI.US, OR:**

**ROCK COUNTY LAND CONSERVATION DEPARTMENT
ATTN: PACE PROGRAM
440 NORTH U.S. HIGHWAY 14
JANESVILLE, WI 53546**