

SECTION 11 RURAL

Historically, planning within Vanderburgh County has focused on planning for the urbanized area and the immediately adjacent undeveloped land. To a large extent, rural land has been viewed as land which has not yet been suburbanized. In the past, the degree of change expected in rural portions of the County has been considered minimal. This is no longer true, as this Plan projects the land needs to house the 2025 population could use up to 7.4 square miles for new residential development. Therefore, the importance of planning for the efficient use and management of rural land should be as important as planning for urban land. The evaluation of land use potential for this Plan over the planning period has considered the entire County, and both rural and urban needs.

Although this area mainly has agricultural uses, there are many scattered single-family homes and many subdivision developments that also share this land. Much of this residential development utilizes septic systems. Small, unincorporated communities scattered throughout the Transitional and Rural areas include St. Joseph, St. Wendel, and Daylight. The bulk of the rural non-farm development should be encouraged to occur in or near these rural communities, as they provide an alternative to urban city living, and at the same time, help to minimize scattered rural development.

ISSUES AND CONCERNS

The cost of providing utilities and services to rural scattered home sites is higher than the cost of compact/clustered development. The potential for stream pollution and ground water contamination increases with the amount of development utilizing on-site sewage disposal systems. The majority of the land in the County has severe limitations for these septic systems. Only seven percent of the soils in the County have slight to no limitations for development without sanitary sewers. Development pressures on prime agricultural lands could inhibit the economic viability of the agricultural sector.

According to the 1998 APC land use inventory and the 1997 Census of Agriculture, almost 50 percent of the land in Vanderburgh County is currently in agricultural use. Table 11-2 shows the historical trend for the loss of farmland in Vanderburgh County. Agricultural land is lost through conversion to residential and other uses as development occurs in the Transitional and Rural areas. The table also shows that the number of farms in the County is decreasing, while the average size of farms is increasing. The 2025 Plan generally proposes that rural land remain in agricultural uses. This is due to the need to strengthen the support for agriculture as a viable element in our economy, the need to protect valuable agricultural lands and the need to encourage infill development for efficient provision of services and utilities.

TABLE 11-2: FARM LAND USE IN VANDERBURGH COUNTY

YEAR	FARM LAND (ACRES)	PERCENT OF COUNTY LAND AREA*	NUMBER OF FARMS	AVERAGE ACREAGE OF FARMS
1959	100,713	67.08	801	126
1969	92,545	61.58	544	170
1978	89,356	59.52	434	206
1987	85,852	57.18	378	227
1997	72,112	48.03	271	266

Note: * = Total County Land Area = 150,135 Acres

Source: Census of Agriculture; City and County Book, U.S. Census Bureau

In order to maintain Vanderburgh County's agricultural economy, efforts must focus on assuring that agricultural lands are protected to permit economical farming activities. Urban pressures on the County's farm communities pose a significant problem in maintaining viable farm operations. Only those agricultural lands furthest removed from the expanding urban area are unaffected by the pressures of conversion from rural to urban use. Conversion pressures have resulted from rising property taxes, the high degree of mobility, land use conflicts, fees for urban services and utilities, the search for less expensive land for development and the potential for farmers to make an immediate profit from selling their land. There has been and will continue to be an increase in the number of use conflicts between agricultural and urban land uses.

The principal objective in agricultural areas is to preserve agricultural activities. The introduction of nonagricultural uses decreases the efficiency and effectiveness of agricultural operations. Thus, nonagricultural uses should be permitted in such areas only when those uses do not detract significantly from continuing the primary agricultural activities and do not strain the existing infrastructure and services. High quality productive soils should be protected for agricultural uses except in areas designated for a use other than agriculture on the Future Land Use - 2025 Map. Permitted land uses primarily should include farming and the facilities and services necessary to support this activity. Residential, industrial, commercial, recreational, and other activities not necessary for farming operations should be limited.

RURAL ACTION PLAN

GOAL

Maintain the viability of agriculture as a desired way of life and sector in the Vanderburgh County economy.

OBJECTIVE

To preserve prime agricultural lands.

POLICIES

The conversion of prime agricultural land for urban development shall be discouraged, except in those areas designated for other uses on the Future Land Use-2025 Map.

Growth and development in this area shall be encouraged in and adjacent to the existing rural communities dispersed throughout the County, while protecting their rural identity and character.

Development in the agricultural area should create and/or maintain a rural character achieved through density and design except in those areas designated for other uses on the Future Land Use-2025 Map.

Research the feasibility of creating a self-sustaining farmland preservation program that includes the purchase or transfer of development rights.