Farmland Access via Community Development
The Case of Prairie Crossing

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Illinois has one of the highest rates of loss of prime farmland to sprawl in the nation.
Embracing Urban Sprawl
A New Jersey Grower Changes Its Operation To Take Advantage Of New Neighbors page 10

Plus:
Crop Protection 2006: Disease Control page 12
Our focus in today’s discussion is integrating farmland into new communities versus protecting the last farm.
Public Perception Challenge

- “Working farmland in urban/suburban areas is a temporary holding pattern”
  - Development
  - Restoration or recreation

- “Working farmland in urban/suburban areas is a valued lasting community land use”
Farmland in New Communities
Tradeoffs from Farmer’s Perspective

Potential Pros
• Affordable access to land
• High value market at farm gate
• Member of a community
• Access to community amenities

Potential Cons
• Close proximity of non farm neighbors
• Neighbor complaints of farm nuisances
• Lower status in community
• Lack of farm colleagues close by
Farmland in New Communities
Tradeoffs from Developer’s Perspective

**Potential Pros**
- Creates identity for project
- Creates amenity for community
- Creates civic place and function for community
- Creates value for project
- Enhances potential for entitlements

**Potential Cons**
- Loss of land resource for competing traditional uses
- Adds complexity to design, financing, permitting and management
Farmland in New Communities
Tradeoffs from Policy Perspective

Potential Pros
• Adds diversity to larger community
• Adds economic activity in open space
• Positive balance in COCS
• Adds to status of larger community
• Enhances property values in larger community

Potential Cons
• Doesn’t fit conventional zoning perceptions
• Complexity in permitting
• Neighbor complaints of farm nuisances
Guiding Principles

- Environmental Protection and Enhancement
- Healthy Lifestyle
- Sense of Place
- Sense of Community
- Economic and Racial Diversity
- Convenient and Efficient Transportation
- Energy Conservation
- Lifelong Learning
- Aesthetic Design and High-Quality Construction
- Economic Viability
Conservation Community

- 668 acres in Grayslake, IL
- 40 miles NW of the Loop
- 69% protected open space
- 359 single family homes
- 36 condos
- Mixed use area with condos, retail and commercial uses
- 2 train stations
- Commercial land
Small lot sizes coupled with long views
(5,000 – 23,000 sq ft)
Open Space (69% of total):
1) Turf area (8%)
2) Native systems (60%)
3) Farmland (32%)
Prairie Crossing Farm

Sandhill Organics
Farm Business Development Center
The Learning Farm
Co-op horse stable
Prairie Crossing Farm

• Farm set aside in original community design by developer. Land values amortized across land costs assigned to residential and commercial sales.
• Land (>100 acres) and core buildings owned by Liberty Prairie Foundation (LPF), a private operating foundation.
• Conservation easement held by The Conservation Fund.
• All land is certified organic.
• Sandhill Organics operates with a long term lease (initial 20 yr followed by rolling 10 yr terms).
• Farm Business Development Center is a program of LPF.
• The Learning Farm is non-profit educational program with two schools as primary clients. Prairie Farm Corps summer program.
• Several buildings being constructed by lessees on pads with 99 yr ground leases
Sandhill Organics at Prairie Crossing

- For profit family farm
- Farming for 10 years, 6 at PCF
- Rolling 20 year lease on 40 acres
- Currently farming ~ 19 acres
- Certified organic
- Primary focus on vegetables with season extension
- Market production through CSA, farmer’s markets and some short chain wholesale
- Active member of CRAFT

Collaborative Regional Alliance for Farmer Training
Key Components of Lease

- Long term, initial 20 years, followed by rolling 10 year terms.
- Farmer owns infrastructure
- Business must maintain a “relationship and relevance” with the community.
- Farmer has guarantees of privacy and protection from HOA complaints
- Family has all rights of membership in HOA
Growing New Farmers in the Urban/Suburban Community

- Young people with non-farm background
- Mid-level career changes
- Recent immigrants & disadvantaged communities
- Next generation from farm families
Prairie Crossing
Farm Business Development Center

Goal: increase the number of new farmers successfully establishing urban fringe organic farms in the greater Chicago Region.

Mechanism: provide an opportunity for entrepreneurial beginning farmers to test and refine their individual business model.

Established in 2006

Graduating two new farmers in 2009
Prairie Crossing
Farm Business Development Center

Operation Summary:

- Applicants provide business plan and demonstration of capacity to start a new farm business.

- Successful applicant provided a lease for up to 5 acres (with irrigation), greenhouse access, limited equipment, processing and cooler facilities. Sandhill serves as mentor.

- Beginning farmers responsible for market development, maintaining organic certification, financing etc.

- Progress towards business plan goals monitored annually. Farmers expected to “graduate” in 5 years.
Prairie Crossing
Farm Business Development Center

Projected Results:

▷ Increase the number of new entrepreneurs successfully farming in the peri-urban area around Chicago

▷ increase the supply of fresh, locally produced organic produce,

▷ improve the value/acre of organic farm production to successfully integrate farming as a sustainable land use in the suburban areas of the Chicago region,

▷ increase the number of new high quality jobs in the farm sector.
Prairie Crossing
Farm Business Development Center

“I now have 5 years experience, I need more land, what’s next?”

✓ Working with partners (ie Liberty Prairie Conservancy, public sector land holders, private landowners) find an appropriate opportunity for secure long term access to local farmland. (Example there is almost 1,000 acres in Liberty Prairie Reserve)

✓ Five years of experience and financial results provide a more compelling business plan to potential financing sources.
Protected Farmland in the Liberty Prairie Reserve
Prairie Crossing Learning Farm

Erin Pfeiffer, Farm Educator
Eric Carlberg, Farm Manager

**Mission:** The Prairie Crossing Learning Farm inspires young people and adults to understand the importance of healthy food, land, and community through experiential education and work on an organic farm.
Learning Farm Beginnings…

- Established in 2004 to provide community and schools with experiential educational opportunities in food production
- 5 acres, 2 greenhouses, 200 laying hens
- Contracts with
  - Prairie Crossing Charter School (K-8)
  - Lake Forest Montessori Adolescent Program (6-9th)
  - Prairie Crossing HOA
- Farm-based, integrated education
- Community gardens
Prairie Crossing Learning Farm

Example Programs:
⇒ Curriculum Development
⇒ Daily student involvement
⇒ Farm to Table lunches
⇒ Summer Farm Camp
⇒ Organic Bedding Plant Sale
⇒ Edible Harvest Festival
⇒ Prairie Farmer Corps
What Other Examples Do We Have?
(complete or under construction)

- South Village, VT
- Serenbe, GA
- Fields of St. Croix, MN
- Tryon Farm, IN
- Serosun Farms, IL
- Agritopia, AZ
- Hidden Springs, ID
- Village Homes, CA
- Mountainside Village, ID
- Prospect, CO
- Loma Linda Ranch, CA
What Other Examples Do We Have?
(planned or in permitting)

Hudson Farm, GA
Southlands, BC
Common Ground/Old Chelsea, ON
Pringle Creek, OR
Bishop’s Bay WI
Prospect, CO
Grafton West, WI
Kanawha, NC
Agriburbia, CO
Farmland in New Communities
Some Lessons Learned

- Plan for farm from the beginning
- Ensure sufficient scale
- Definition of appropriate farm enterprises
- Clarity in role of farm
- Due diligence in selection of partners
- Spend the required time ensuring that the lease document addresses everyone concerns
- Look for opportunity to leverage additional protection/access
Looking for more information?

www.prairiecrossing.com
www.sandhillorganics.com
www.prairiecrossingfarms.com
www.pclearningfarm.org