

NATURAL ECOSYSTEM MANAGEMENT

FARM MANAGEMENT POLICY

The McHenry County Conservation District is responsible for the ecological integrity of each conservation area it owns and must actively manage these lands to prevent the degradation of the natural resources contained thereon. The ongoing urbanization of McHenry County has converted a predominantly agricultural and natural landscape into a mosaic of suburban and urban developments mixed with agricultural and remnant natural areas. Many District properties include tracts of land that are in agricultural production. It is the Farm Management Program's intent to demonstrate that ecologically managed agricultural lands are profitable for the farmer, buffer and improve the District's natural resources, and benefit all the citizens of McHenry County by providing open space and groundwater infiltration areas.

Prior to the implementation of public access and facility improvements or restoration projects, continued agricultural use of the District land is an economically and ecologically sound management strategy. Functioning as buffers for the District's natural areas, some of these tracts may remain in agricultural production indefinitely, effectively becoming an integral part of the District's Natural Areas Management Plan. The enrollment of tracts in the Farm Program also helps produce revenue for the District and allows the District time to generate plans and funding sources for future improvements and projects. The Farm Management Program also allows farm operators the opportunity to continue farming these lands while allowing the tracts to contribute to the local agricultural economy and tax base.

The goals stated within the Policy shall be achieved through implementation of the practices outlined in the Administrative Procedures for the Farm Management Program.

PROGRAM GOALS

The Farm Management Program Policy shall provide clear direction for the implementation of the Program and establish goals that will help the District achieve Program objectives. The five major goals of the program are: 1) implementation of farmland management standards that ensure exemplary protection and conservation of natural resources; 2) building of a partnership between the District and the tenant which utilizes the tenant's agricultural

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management capabilities and reduces their economic risk; 3) instituting equitable and efficient assignment of agricultural leases to farmers; 4) promotion of alternative agricultural on District lands and 5) support of beginning and young farmers entering the field of agriculture.

Goal 1: To protect and conserve natural resources.

Farmers who lease District lands (Tenants) shall use farm practices that protect and minimize degradation of soil and water resources, wildlife habitat, flora, fauna, and cultural resources. With cooperation and assistance from the Natural Resource Conservation Service (NRCS), McHenry Lake County Soil and Water Conservation District (MLCSWCD) and the Consolidated Farm Service Agency (FSA), natural resource conservation on District farmlands shall be achieved through implementation of soil and water quality protection standards combined with more comprehensive, site-specific Conservation Plans (CP). It is understood that the long-term ecological health of District lands are one of the primary objectives of this organization and as such will act as the default criteria for inclusion or removal of lands from the Farm Management Program. The District may add additional conservation practices to an NRCS Conservation Plan if such additional practices are deemed important to maintaining the long-term ecological health of a parcel.

Goal 2: To build a partnership.

Building partnerships involves utilizing both short and longer-term leases on ~~some~~ tracts based on the public access and natural resource management goals for the site. Where appropriate the use of longer-term leases allows Tenants adequate time to recapture the cost of required conservation practices and provides for extended planning. The Tenant will experience reduced risk through the implementation of a variable lease rate formula where the rents are linked to productivity and commodity price.

Goal 3: To be equitable.

The equitable and efficient assignment of farm leases to farmers shall require standard procedures for the transfer of leases on new land acquisitions, for negotiated lease extensions or, when negotiations fail, the public bid process, and for farm lease retirements or acreage reductions.

Goal 4: To Promote Alternative Agriculture on District Lands.

The District may promote alternative agricultural production leases on lands within the Farm Management Program when appropriate and feasible. Examples of such leases may include local food production, conservation grazing and haying, specialty crops and organic farming.

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Goal 5: To Support Beginning and Young Farmers.

The District may utilize the Farm Management Program to support young and beginning farmers entering the field of agriculture when appropriate and feasible.

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