

Farms Under Threat: State Of America's Farmland



JENNIFER FILIPIAK, MIDWEST DIRECTOR
2019 PRAIRIE STATE CONSERVATION COALITION ANNUAL MEETING

A photograph of a rural landscape. In the foreground, there is a field of tall, green and yellow crops, likely corn. In the middle ground, a red barn with a white roof is visible. The background shows rolling hills and more trees. A semi-transparent circular graphic is overlaid on the right side of the image, containing text.

American Farmland Trust

Saving the land that
sustains us by:

- Protecting farm and ranch land
- Promoting sound farming practices
- Keeping farmers on the land

American Farmland Trust and the Conservation Agriculture Movement

- Farmland Protection Policy Act
- First Conservation Title
- EQIP, CRP, ACEP
- State & Local Programs (100+)
- Agricultural Land Trusts (40+)
- Current Use Taxation Programs





Will we have enough
farmland to meet our
basic needs?

Today the U.S.
is home to
>10% of the
world's most
arable soils

By 2040:

- 9 billion people
in the world
- 380 million in the
U.S.

American farmland is threatened by chronic trends

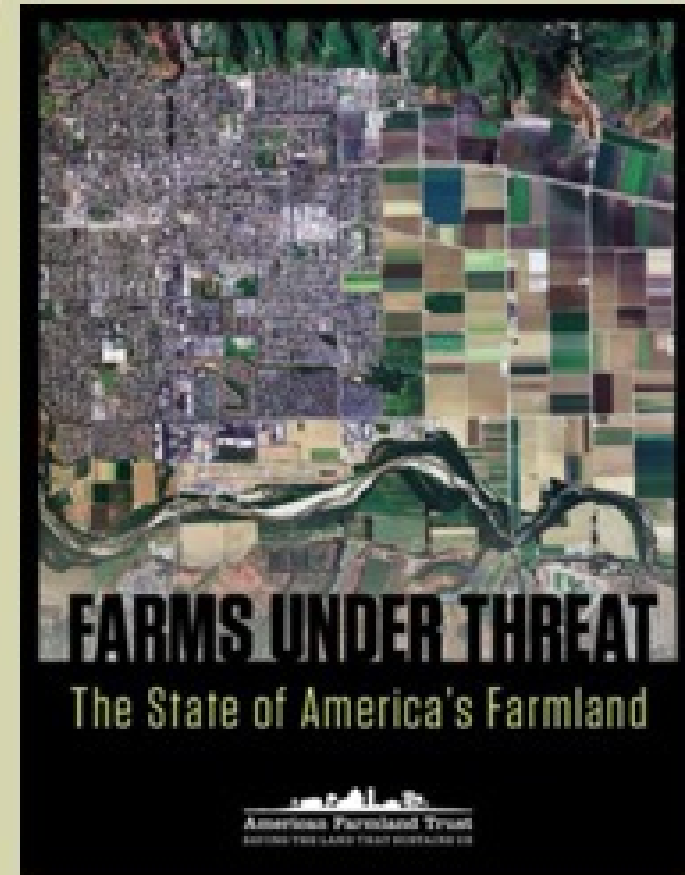
- Urbanization and fragmentation
- Aging farmers/landowners plus a decline of beginning farmers
- Climate change: droughts, fires, floods ...
- Weakened farm viability/consolidation



Farms Under Threat

AFT's multi year, multi-faceted initiative to:

- Analyze the conversion of farm and ranch lands
- Link findings to policies and solutions
- Predict impacts of future threats



Land Cover and Use across the U.S.

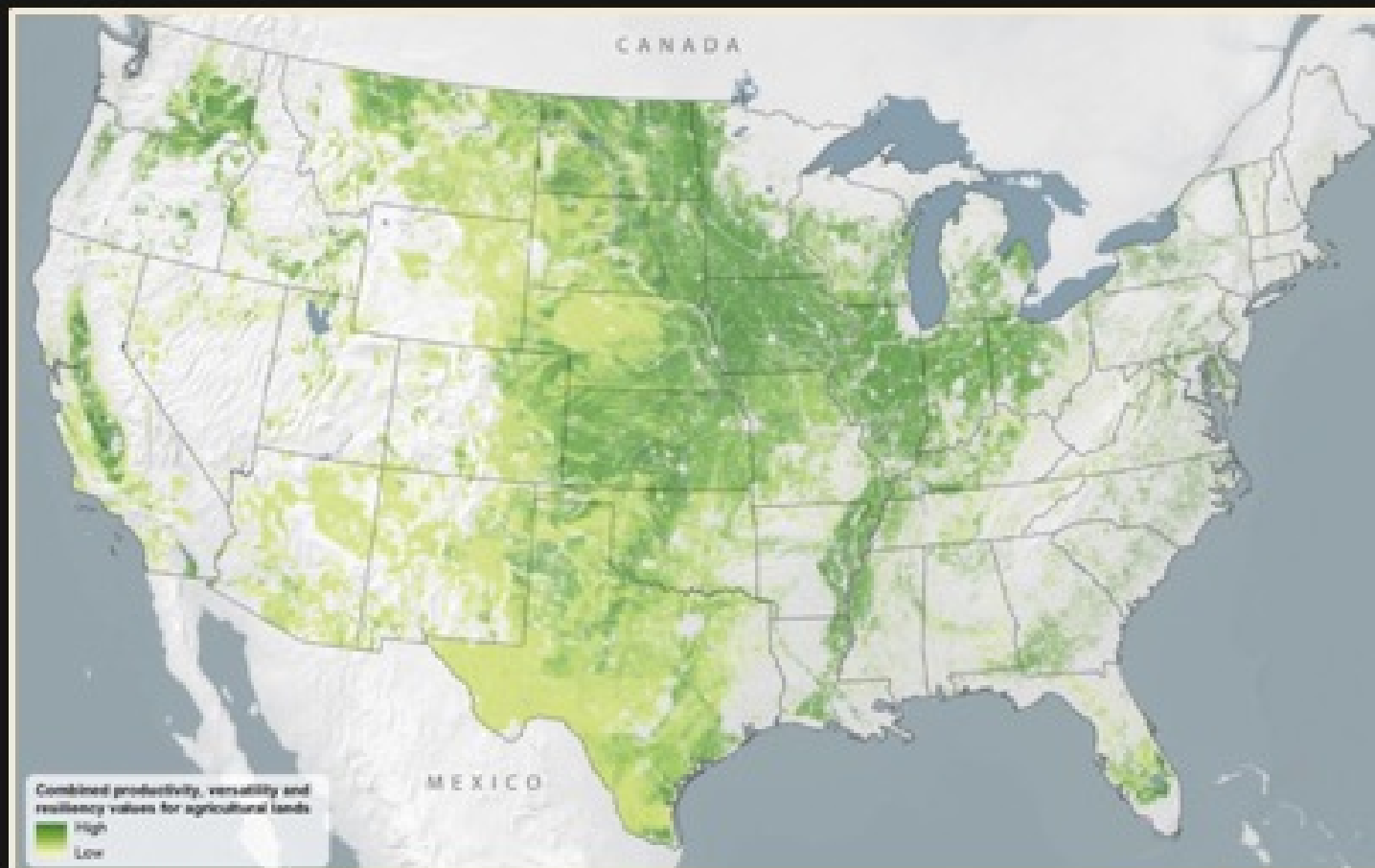


Quality matters as well as Quantity

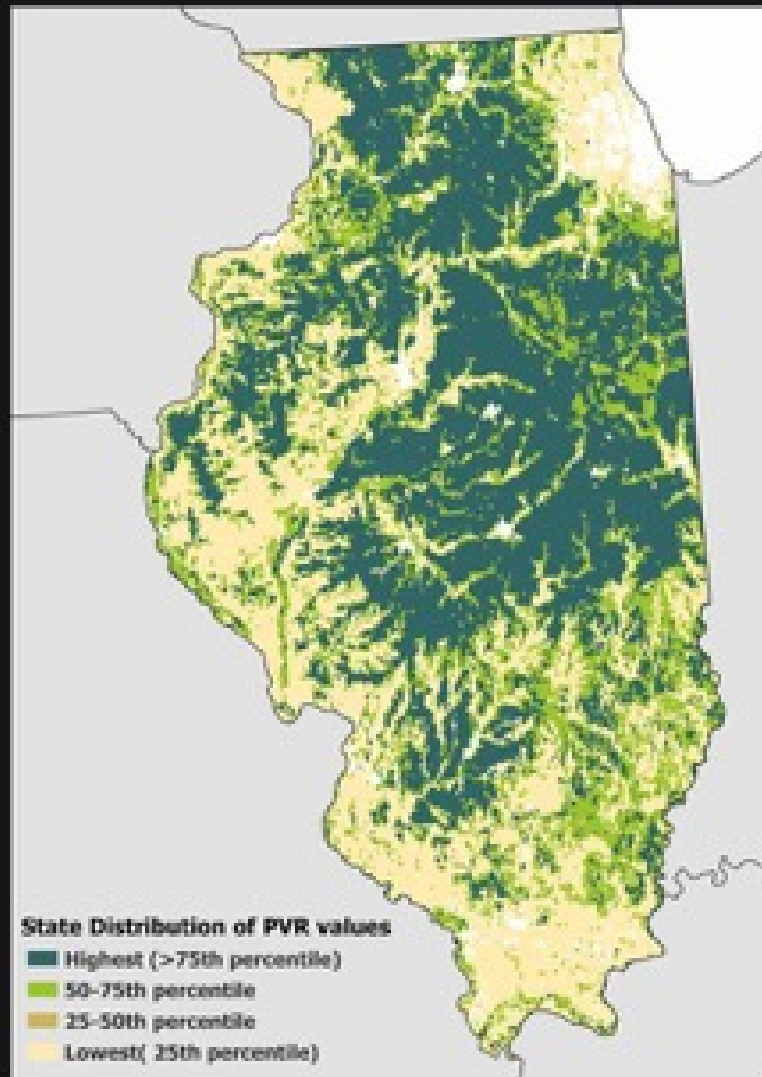
- What makes farmland ideally suited for food and crop production?
 - **Productivity:** Supports high yields, few limitations
 - **Versatility:** Supports a wide range of crops
 - **Resiliency:** Supports production over time



Productive, Versatile and Resilient Land Continuum



PVR continuum in Illinois



So... so what?

~~Farm the best
preserve the
rest?~~

A more holistic approach...



- Conservation cropping systems
- Wetlands as filters
- Buffer to natural areas

A more holistic approach...



- Natural areas provide pollinator habitat and predators for crops
- Farmers combatting climate change

What's Up Next for Farms Under Threat?

- *State of the States*: within state analyses, reports, and state policy scorecards
- Projective analyses: housing density and climate change models
- Enhanced protected farmland layer
- Demographic and infrastructure analyses

What can we do in Illinois?

Maine Farmland
Trust

PCC Farmland Trust
(Washington)

Gathering Waters
(Wisconsin)

Vermont Land Trust

Permanent protection

- Natural areas
- Farmland Ag viability

- Sustainability

- New farmers
Community

- People/land

- Land/farmers



Saving the Land that Sustains Us

Contact me! Jen Filipiak

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Farmland Protection through Agricultural Land Easements as a Tool for Land Trusts

**Emy Brawley, Associate Midwest Director
The Conservation Fund**

Photo by Ivan LaBlanca

THE CONSERVATION FUND



The Conservation Fund:
Creative solutions that make
environmental and
economic sense.

- National non-profit, 180 staff
- Over 8 million acres protected
- 700+ working lands easements transactions; 1.2 million acres of agricultural lands protected

Why work to permanently protect farmland in Illinois?

- Cost-effective buffers and habitat connectors
- We are leaving federal money on the table
- Permanency as Opportunity
 - Succession to next generation of farmers
 - Food production close to urban core – food security
 - Habitat – future restoration if agriculture is not viable



Data compiled from the National Conservation
Reserve Database (NCRD) (2017) and conservation
agreements compiled by David Holm (2018).
NCRD agreements include only those with "Farmland"
labelled "Farm" or "Rural". Farmland is a farmland
agreement within the NCRD dataset, an agreement
that contains a majority of cultivated land as determined
by the 2017 USDA NASS National Farm Layer.

Estimated Total is 25,000 acres

Agricultural Land Under Reversion (Acres)



Scale: 1 inch = 100 miles

Map Source: USDA NASS
2017-2018



Protected Farmland in Illinois

Red = 0

Orange = 1 - 250 acres

Yellow = 250 - 1,000 acres

Light Green = 1,000 - 2,500 acres

Dark Green = 3,500 – 5,500 acres

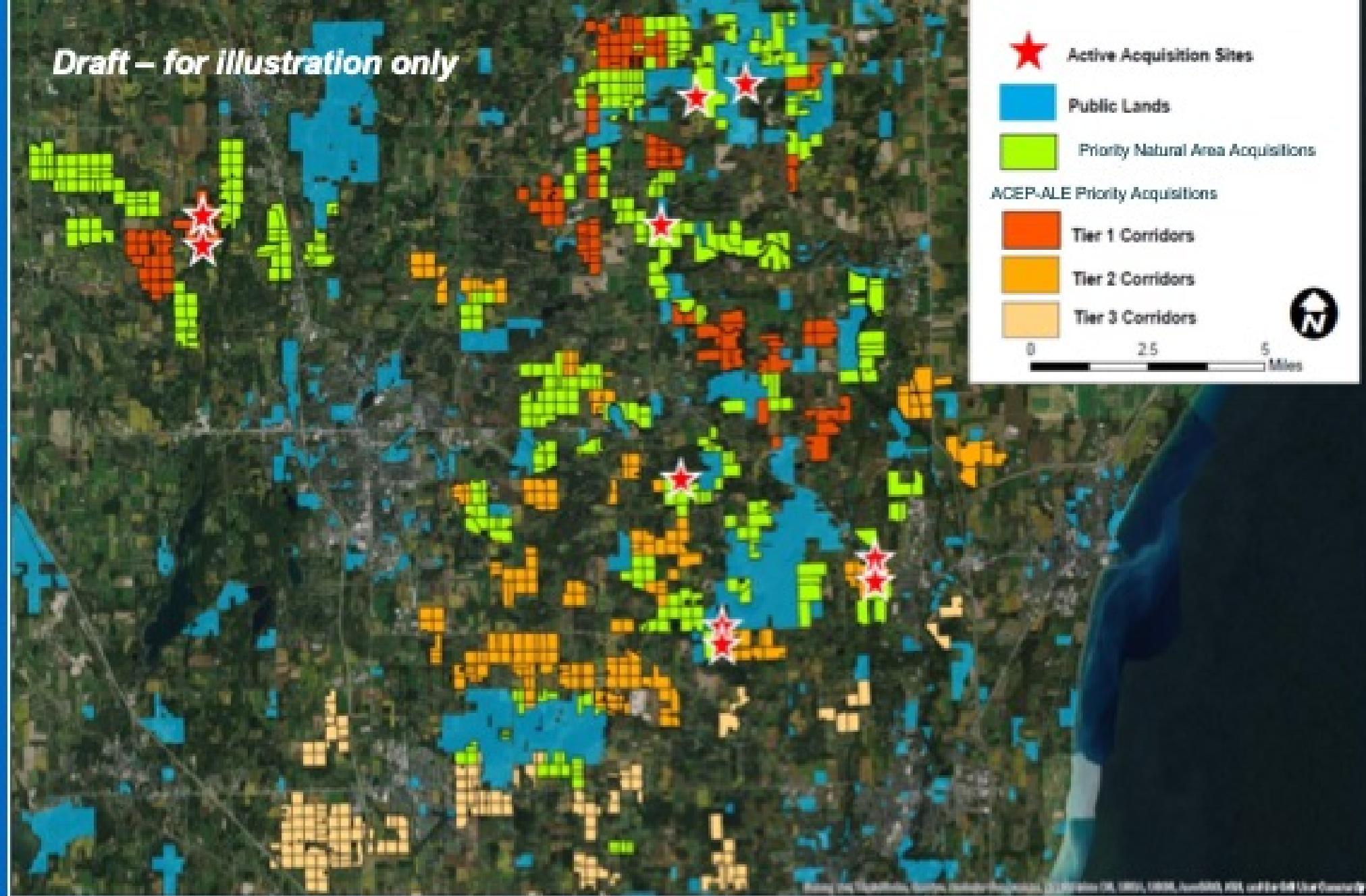
TOTAL: 25,000 acres ±



Agricultural Land Easements (ALE) vs Natural Area Conservation Easements

- Ag Easements more flexible
- Farmland is a business asset
- Works where land is under threat

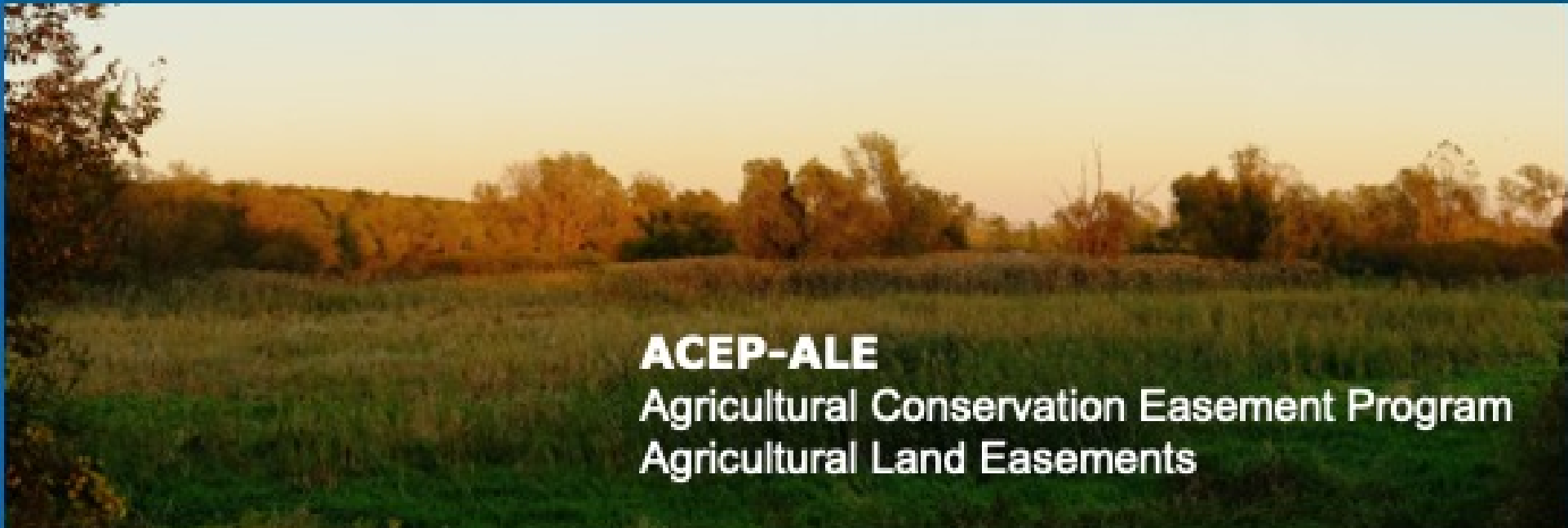
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Federal Funding

“No one wants the federal money, it is too complicated”

Yes it is complicated, but it is a lot of money:
\$450M/year FY2019-2023 is \$2.25B for ACEP over five years



ACEP-ALE

Agricultural Conservation Easement Program
Agricultural Land Easements

ACEP-ALE In a Nutshell:

- NRCS grants 50% of the fair market value of the agricultural land easement (75% for grasslands) to land trusts to buy ALEs.
- **Need an Eligible Parcel**
 - Contain at least 50% prime, unique, statewide, or locally important farmland (or other qualifying terms)
- **Need an Eligible Landowner**
 - includes land trusts if land is sold to a farmer within 3 years
- **Annual call for applications, usually due February**
 - Need a landowner statement of interest
 - Need to know enough about values to make a \$\$ request – no appraisal needed
 - Need to know where the remaining \$\$ is coming from*
 - Bunch of federal forms – of course

**more later*

Making ACEP-ALE Easier:

**Regional Conservation Partnership
Program**





FINDING THE ALE MATCH

- Private: Landowner
- Private: Philanthropic
- Public: Local/County/State

The Value of a Publicly-Funded ALE Match

- **Certainty of funds**
- **Predictability of criteria**
- **Form a deal pipeline**
- **Work at landscape scale**
- **Create farmland blocks to support farming over the long term**

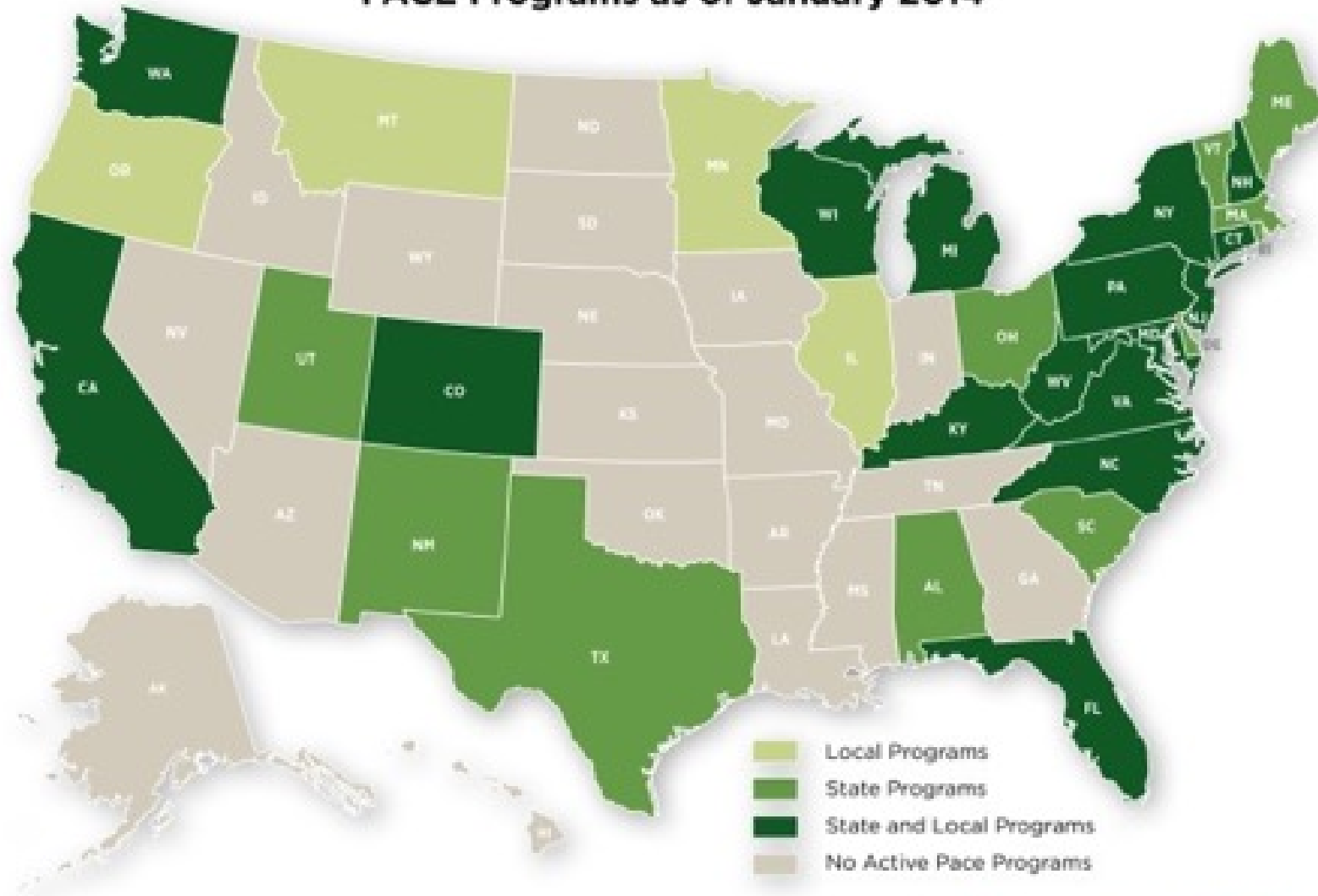
Number of funded Farmland Protection programs in Illinois: One



Kane County Farmland Protection Program

- *Established 2001*
- *\$32.6 million dollars expended*
 - *\$19.9M in Riverboat Gambling funds*
 - *\$12.6M USDA farmland protection*
- *Over 30 family-owned and operated farms (6,000 acres) protected*
- *Current wait list of farms*

PACE Programs as of January 2014



Source: American Farmland Trust

Yes, Illinois is *BROKE!*



Column: What to do with a broken Illinois: Dissolve the Land of Lincoln



Ways other states fund farmland protection:

*Tobacco settlement funds; Landfill fees;
Bottle bill; Mitigation fees; Recording Fees;
Lottery proceeds; Settlement funds; License
plate revenue . . .*

But

Posing the Question:





Thank you!

Emy Brawley

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Photo by Ivan LaBlanca

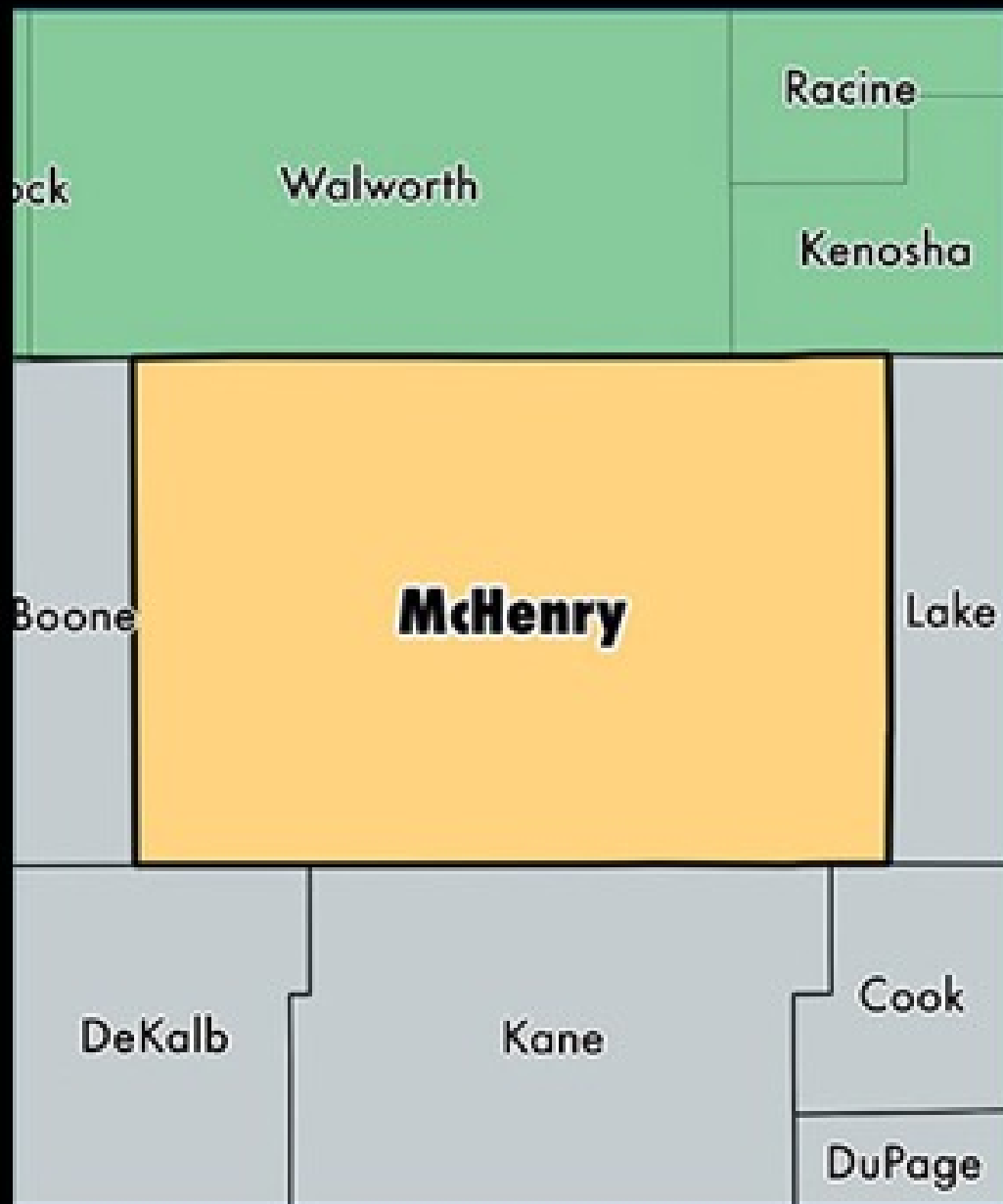
THE
CONSERVATION FUND

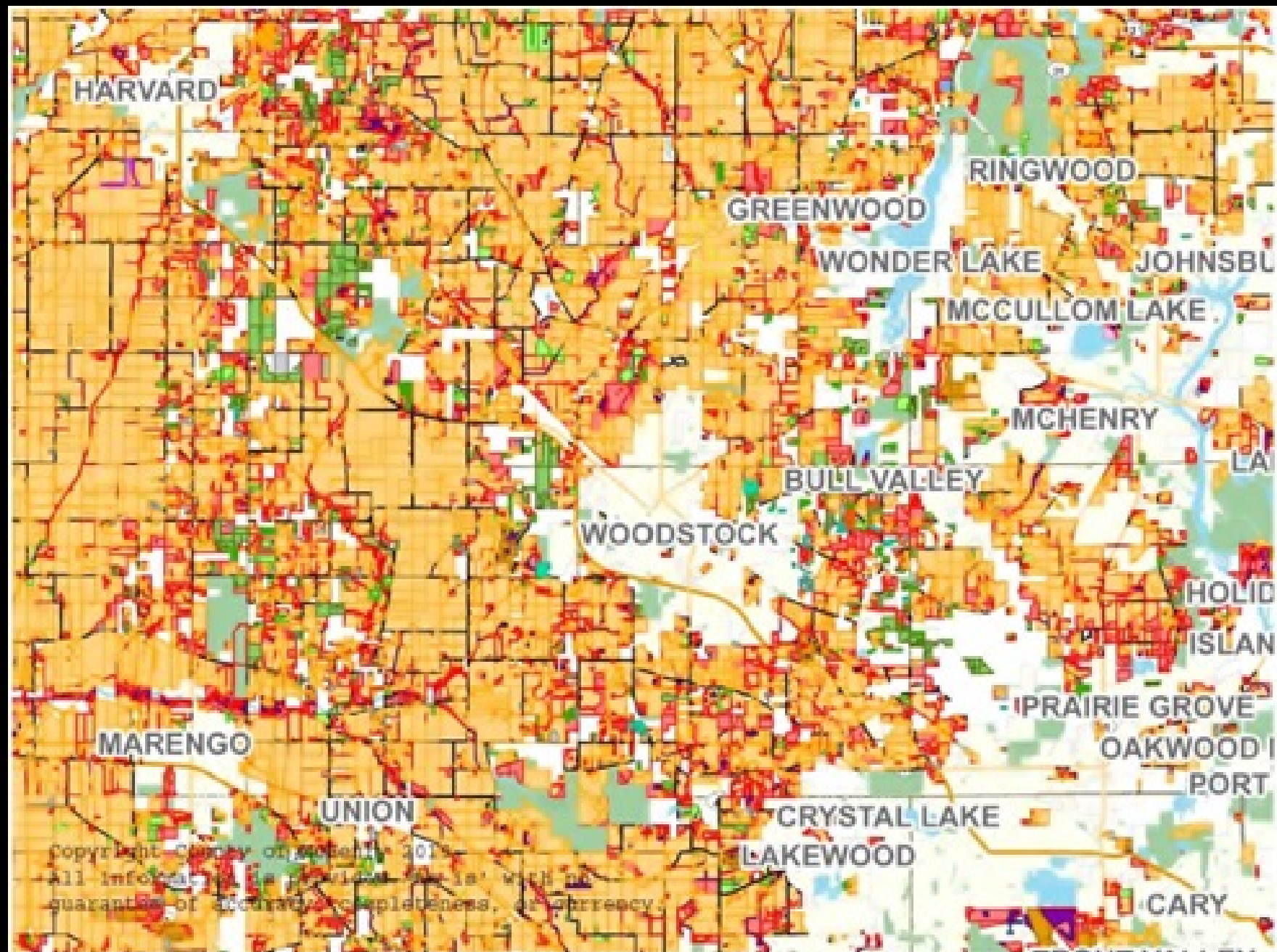
Farmland Conservation in McHenry County

How one land trust is working to preserve farmland and farming

The Land Conservancy of McHenry County

- Founded in 1991
 - 6 full-time and 3 part-time staff
- 2,500 acres preserved
 - Fee-owned = 460 acres
 - Easements = 90 easements
 - 6 farms = 899 acres (629 farmland)





Agricultural conservation easements...
protecting the land for agricultural use in perpetuity

Elena Spiegelhoff



Land to farm...

80 acres cropland



Land for nature

70 acres

~ oak woods



Land for nature

70 acres

~ oak woods

~ wetlands



Land for nature

70 acres

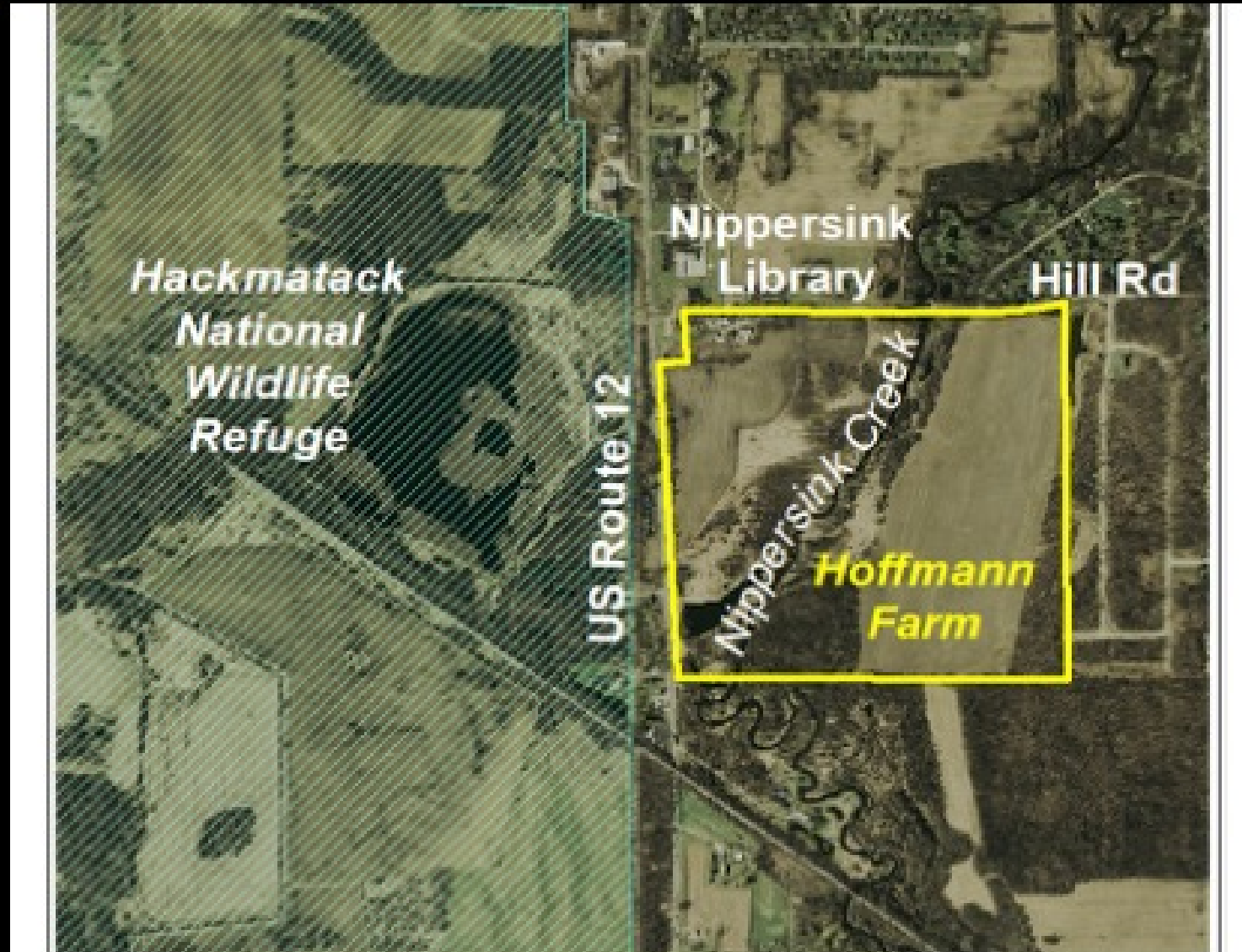
~ oak woods

~ wetlands

~ creek



working land + natural land = a whole farm



The ACE Program

- Agricultural Conservation Easement Program through U.S. Department of Agriculture
- Provides matching dollars to pay the landowner for the easement
- Partnered with Openlands to secure matching funds
- TLC was the first land trust in Illinois to use ACE

*It
can
be
done!*



Beyond Agricultural Easements...

other ways to preserve farmland and farming

Learning Circles for women farmland owners



Farmer-Landowner Match



Networking Events

Bringing together farmers, landowners,
consumers and businesses
to build a strong, vibrant local food system

Wendell Berry film ~ meet-your-local-farmer



Look and See – A Portrait of Wendell Berry



Common Ground Gathering



Transitioning to Organic Grains Seminar



Working with partners is key

- American Farmland Trust
- Liberty Prairie Foundation
- McHenry County Soil & Water Conservation District
- Women, Food & Agriculture Network
- The Conservation Fund
- Openlands
- Natural Resource Conservation Service/US Dept of Agriculture
- U of I Extension
- IDEA Farm Network
- McHenry County Conservation District
- McHenry County College – Dept of Urban Agriculture
- Farmers and landowners