

Wayne County Agricultural Land Use/Land Cover Study

A study examining the change of agricultural land use and land cover
in Wayne County from 1959 to 2002

Executive Summary



This Wayne County Agricultural Land Use/Land Cover Study examines changes in Wayne County from 1959 through 2002. This study is the most in-depth land use/land cover analysis ever conducted for Wayne County. Through the use of historical aerial photographs (1959) from the United States Department of Agriculture, 1997 aerial photographs and the technology of Geographic Information Systems (GIS), the Wayne County Department of Planning has been able to collect historical data, compare it to current data and provide a basis for future planning activities in Wayne County and for the 28 townships and boroughs that make up Wayne County. The following are some of the major findings of the report.

- In 1959 cropland covered 18.4% of Wayne County, in 2002 it covered 12.9%.
- In 1959 pasture/brush covered 20.4% of Wayne County, in 2002 it covered 11.2%.
- In 1959 forest covered 55.6% of Wayne County, in 2002 it covered 65.2%.
- 61.2% of the 1959 cropland was still used as cropland in 2002, 18% was pasture/brush, 10.9% was forested and 7.2% was residential.
- 68.6% of the 1959 cropland on prime agricultural soil was still used as cropland in 2002, 12.6% was pasture/brush, 8.5% forest and 7.7% was residential.

More farmland in Wayne County from 1959 through 2002 was claimed by forest than by development activity. These findings reveal that as Wayne County farmers close their dairy operations, it has more to do with a national dairy economy than growth and development pressures. Historically, when one mentioned farming in Wayne County it meant the dairy industry. Due to the national dairy program, the future of Wayne County's agricultural makeup may become more diverse than it was traditionally in the past.

Wayne County has instituted programs that assist farmers to help stay in business. Over \$4,700,000 has been invested in Wayne County's Agricultural Conservation Easement Purchase Program. In addition, over 116,000 acres of land is enrolled in the Farmland and Forest Land Assessment Program (Act 319 – Clean & Green). These together, help preserve agricultural land and open space, something that has long been characteristic of Wayne County.

This report will be an aid to local decision makers in examining past and current conditions relating to agriculture in their individual municipalities as well as their neighbors in understanding regional trends in land use change.

Each municipal section contains tables, charts and maps that examine the many aspects of land use from 1959 and 2002. They are designed as part of the overall Wayne County report, but can also stand alone as individual reports.

The land use information assembled in this report will add tremendously to background studies for the Wayne County Comprehensive Plan as well as local municipal plans.