

## Why Protect Farmlands?

Indiana is among the states with a significant amount of prime farmland. Illinois ranks first, with 59% of its land being prime farmland; followed by Indiana, with 58%; Iowa, with 52%; and Ohio and Kansas, with 45% prime farmland.

Indiana, 38th U.S. state in size, is sometimes overlooked in terms of production agriculture. However, Indiana ranks 14th nationally in the production of all agricultural commodities.

Purdue Extension Ag & Natural Resources Educator Rick Chase explains, "The soils that have made Indiana such a strong agricultural producer took millions of years to form. Many fear that, once these soils are built upon, they can never again be used for food production."

### Contributions to the Food Supply

"American farmland plays an important role in maintaining the world's food supply," Chase says.



Farmers depend on productive soils to bring food to the world's table. The 1996 World Food Summit of the United Nations reported that to adequately feed

the world, global food production would have to quadruple in the next 50 years. Chase notes, "U.S. agriculture has an advantage over the rest of the world in that much of the world's best agricultural lands exist here."

### Advantages to Local Communities

Local communities also greatly benefit from farmland. According to studies analyzing revenues and expenditures on a municipal land use basis, privately owned and managed farmland generates more in local tax revenue than it costs a community in schools, fire and police departments, and other government services. Chase adds, "Agriculture can also contribute to local economies through sales, job creation, support services, and businesses."

### Environmental Benefits

In addition, well-managed farmland improves the environment. Soil absorbs and filters wastewater, provides groundwater recharge, and prevents flooding. New uses for corn and soybeans as energy crops have the potential to replace fossil fuels. And farmland provides the bulk of habitat for wildlife such as deer, fox, beaver, squirrels, and rabbits. Chase says, "As land is lost to development, so is wildlife habitat."

### Enhancements to Quality of Life

Some reasons to conserve agricultural lands are difficult to quantify. Chase says, "Agricultural lands



contribute to a 'sense of place' and quality of life." Farm- and ranchlands maintain scenic, cultural, and historic landscapes. This managed open space provides opportunities for hunting, horseback riding, fishing, and other recreational activities that many of us enjoy.

Why protect farmlands? If Indiana's farmlands are lost, the benefits they bring to the state and its citizens will be lost, too.

