

Mississippi Valley Conservancy looking to preserve farmlands permanently

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Coon Valley, WI (WXOW) - -

According to the Mississippi Valley Conservancy, 30,000 acres of farmland are lost to development each year. One way the conservancy tries to combat that trend is entering into permanent legal agreements with owners called conservation easements, which are permanent legal agreements giving up those lands' development rights. It may sound sinister, but it's really in the name of preserving the integrity of the land, according to the conservancy.



"They still own the land, they still farm it, live on it, hunt it, fish it... whatever they like to do," said MVC's Executive Director Carol Abrahamson. "And they can sell it just like they would whether it had the easement or not, but it just means that they and any future landowners wouldn't be able to have it be a housing development or a golf course or a frac sand mine. A lot of people are concerned about that."



Farming has been a part of Rod Ofte's family history for generations. Ofte grew up on a dairy farm and became the owner of Willow Creek Ranch in Coon Valley in 2007. His children aren't planning on taking over the family business, meaning if the farm needs to change hands, without this easement, the land is at risk of being altered for new developments. That's a concern of his, especially as it pertains to clean water.

"If good healthy food is important to all of us as humans, better improved water quality is also important and having agriculture seen as a positive contributor to that, making things better not worse, that's also very important," Ofte said. "You can't rush nature, you can't fight nature... and working with nature, natural processes and facilitating them is not only a lot easier, it ends up in a better

product as well."

So far the conservancy said they have entered into 130 easements for roughly 18,000 acres of land.