



December Board Cycle

Milwaukee County Parks
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Date: November 12, 2019
To: Theodore Lipscomb, Sr., Chairman, County Board of Supervisors
From: Guy Smith, Executive Director, Milwaukee County Parks
Subject: **Update on agricultural leasing policy and feasibility to use agricultural lands for hemp growth and production - INFO**

Background

In April 2019, the Milwaukee County Board of Supervisors passed File #19-341 which, among other things, requested that Parks review its policies for agricultural leases and provide a report to the County Board on the best use for agricultural lands, including whether hemp growth and production would be feasible on the lands, prior to entering into any new agricultural leases.

Agricultural Leasing Policy

Attached to this report is Milwaukee County's Agricultural Land Lease Policy, which was established by the Milwaukee County Board of Supervisors in 1995, modified in 2004, updated in 2009 pursuant to Resolution File No. 03-547(a)(b), and updated most recently pursuant to Resolution File No. 19-341. The Land Lease Policy makes the agricultural lease program systematic and equitable and addresses the following important issues:

- Ensuring that impacts on the environment from agriculture such as nutrient depletion, soil erosion, and the discharge of fertilizers and pesticides to waterways are minimized.
- Standardizing the process for awarding leases with priority being given to County residents that actively farm.
- Establishing rental rates comparable to those charged in the southeastern region of Wisconsin based on USDA & DATCP statistics. Per Resolution File No. 03-547(a)(b) non-County residents pay a higher rate.
- Directing rental revenues to assist in the administration of Park's agricultural/natural lands management program and to furnish funds for the acquisition of additional parklands.



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Pursuant to Resolution File No. 19-341 the policy has been reviewed and updated. Rental rates were increased by \$43 per acre, per year, to bring the rate in line with the rates published by the USDA & DATCP for the southeastern region of Wisconsin. Additionally, the policy now includes the ability to review on a case-by-case basis requests to use agricultural land for hemp growth and production.

Milwaukee County Agricultural Lands for Hemp crops

Wisconsin was an important state in hemp production in the early 1900's. It is likely that Wisconsin will continue to be a promising state to grow hemp, but the right field conditions are essential to successful harvests. Ideal fields for hemp should not have wet soils and will be well drained so that they do not stay saturated after rains. Ideal fields will have low weed pressure and high fertility. In order to determine if field conditions are ideal for hemp crops it is essential to perform soil tests.

With assistance from Supervisor Ortiz-Velez, Parks recently provided a Right of Entry permit to Wisconsin Growers Alliance, LLC, to take soil samplings per every ten acres of Milwaukee County's agricultural fields across the county to determine if the soil conditions are appropriate for hemp crops. This work is being conducted in November and testing will be done in a lab after samples are gathered.

As noted in the Wisconsin Hemp Pilot Program FAQ attached to this file, one of the previous issues with growing hemp was that farmers could not get insurance for their crops, making growing hemp a very risky business. This issue has been resolved with the 2018 Farm Bill. Federal agencies no longer consider hemp a controlled substance and therefore farmers can now get federal crop insurance as long as they hold a current hemp grower license and registration from DATCP. Although this risk was not a concern for Parks, it was an impediment for farmers that is now improving.

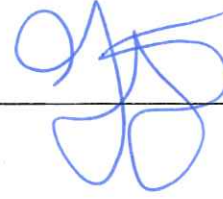
Also attached to this file is Minnesota's 2018 Annual Industrial Hemp Pilot Program Report, which provides additional information on outcomes and some of the difficulty's hemp growers are facing due to the newness of this emerging market.

Recommendation

This report is for informational purposes. Based upon the ongoing study of the agricultural fields, it is recommended that Milwaukee County continue to lease fields for non-hemp agricultural purposes to ensure the continued environmental benefits to parkland while also continuing its work to determine if Milwaukee County's agricultural land is conducive to hemp crops. Per the updated land leasing policy, Parks will also consider leases to farmers looking to grow hemp on a case-by-case basis.

Prepared By: Erica Hayden, Contracts Manager, Milwaukee County Parks

Approved By: Guy Smith, Executive Director



Attachments

- Milwaukee County Agricultural Land Lease Policy
- Wisconsin's Hemp Pilot Program FAQ
- Minnesota 2018 Industrial Hemp Pilot Program Report

Copy

- Chris Abele, County Executive
- Raisa Koltun, Chief of Staff, County Executive's Office
- Jason Haas, Parks, Energy & Environment Chair, Supervisor District 14
- Sheldon Wasserman, Parks, Energy & Environment Vice-Chair, Supervisor District 3
- Marcelia Nicholson, Parks, Energy & Environment Committee Member, Supervisor District 5
- Felesia Martin, Parks, Energy & Environment Committee Member, Supervisor District 7
- Steven Shea, Parks, Energy & Environment Committee Member, Supervisor District 8
- Kelly Bablitch, Chief of Staff, County Board of Supervisors
- Kelsey Evans, Committee Coordinator, Office of the County Clerk
- Emily Peterson, Research & Policy Analyst, Office of the Comptroller
- Fiscal Mgt. Analyst, Admin & Fiscal Affairs, Department of Administrative Services



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