



Winnebago County
The Wave of the Future

Agenda Item Report

DATE: 9/6/2022

FROM: Supervisors Floam and Gustafson

RE: Resolution Concerning Foreign Ownership of Farmland by Entities Party to Adversarial Governments

General Description:

A resolution requesting that the state of Wisconsin, in its next legislative biennium, review and revise its policy on foreign ownership of farmland in order to secure our food supply chain and preclude bad international actors from owning farmland in Wisconsin.

Action Requested:

Motion to approve the attached resolution

Procedural Steps:

(Show each level of committee and board approval needed, with meeting dates.)

Committee of Jurisdiction: <u>Legislative</u>	Meeting date: <u>10/22</u>
Other Committee: _____	Meeting date: _____
Action taken: _____	Vote: _____
County Board: _____	Meeting date: _____

Background:

Family farming in Wisconsin is a tradition that we lose more and more of each day. Combined with an influx of foreign purchases of farmland and the subsequent supply chain disruptions in light of COVID-19, it has become clear that our food supply chain must be secured domestically and kept out of the hands of bad actors.

Currently, Wis. Stat. 710.02 prohibits one foreign individual or corporation from buying more than 640 acres for agriculture or forestry. While this law was enacted in 1887 and has been revised numerous times to lift the exemption on manufacturing, mining, railroads, and more (thanks in large part to the US being a signatory party to the GATS treaty), the 640 acre limit has held firm for these two aforementioned sectors. This is the only safeguard that exists in Wisconsin law as it stands. In 2014, then Attorney General Van Hollen released the attached AG's opinion which affirmed that the 640 acre limit

for agriculture and forestry is not superseded by GATS as the treaty primarily covers the service industry.

Fiscal Impact: \$0

Policy Discussion:

Winnebago County has the opportunity to lead Wisconsin's counties in having the state revisit this discussion. Foreign farmland purchases in the US and Wisconsin are on the rise. While most buyers are transparent, publicly traded firms from nations that follow the international rules of the road when it comes to trade and labor, not all are. It's been the policy of totalitarian foreign governments like the Communist Party of China and Russian Federation to purchase foreign assets in critical infrastructure and supply chains. This resolution encourages Madison to implement sensible reform to foreign purchases of farmland to keep the good actors involved, and the bad actors out.

Attachments:

Included with this memo is a short policy brief with charts and maps regarding foreign farmland ownership from USDA's 2020 AFIDA report, the draft board resolution, and a copy of Attorney General Van Hollen's 2014 opinion.