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SUBURBAN REPORT

\$1.3M grant to aid farmland program

William Presecky

Published September 29, 2002

KANE COUNTY -- The federal government has added \$1.3 million to Kane County's farmland protection effort, and the money will be used to help acquire easements on 758 acres of farmland, County Board Chairman Mike McCoy (R-Aurora) said.

McCoy said nearly all the available funds in the protection program have been committed. The county will pay about \$1.7 million in local matching funds to buy the easements in Kaneville Township.

The Kane County Board has acquired or is negotiating for development rights on more than 1,700 acres of farmland. The deals are worth about \$8 million.

In the last two years, the County Board has committed \$7 million in riverboat grant funds to the voluntary farmland protection program. The funds are derived from a profit-sharing agreement between the county and the Grand Victoria casino in Elgin that yields an average of about \$10 million a year that the county can use for projects and programs.

The county's decision to make preserving cropland a high priority appears to have weighed heavily in the decision to award Kane County the \$1.3 million grant, according to McCoy.

"That's what we're going to be focusing on [next year]," he said. "Preserving cropland, corn and beans, is important to them. So that's what we're going to look to protect."

Kane County has paid about \$5,000 an acre for permanent agricultural easements, based on the difference between the appraised real estate value of the farmland and its value for agricultural production.

As of earlier this month, easements were being prepared for seven sites. Seven others are being processed, including the four connected with the federal grant.

"The bottom line is we've got a lot of landowners that are committed to farming," Hill said.

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