

# The Farm Business Development Center

at Prairie Crossing Farm

## LOOKING AT LAND? – QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER

By Mike Sands and John Hendrickson – 3/13/14

As a beginning farmer begins to look at land, either to purchase or for lease, there are a wide range of questions that are important to ask. The following is no more than a beginning list to stimulate your thinking.

### **Region:**

1. Are there other farmers in the area? What are they producing? Is there a local livestock producer with quality manure close by? Are there other grass-based, organic, or “sustainable” producers nearby with whom you might network, barter or learn from?
2. Where are direct sales market possibilities? How far to the nearest quality farmer’s market? Is there a logical magnet (school, hospital, coffee shop, corporate HQ) for starting a CSA? How good are those markets?
3. How far to the local input dealers? i.e. tractor mechanic, hardware store, seed sources, fertility inputs.
4. How much development pressure is there in the local area?
5. What are the prospects for you to find willing, able and skilled employees for your farm operation?

### **Farm – General:**

1. How big is the farm?
2. Is there a residence? What kind of shape is it in?
3. Is there road frontage? Who owns/maintains/plows the road?
4. Are there utilities available? What is their capacity for upgrades?
5. What is the zoning?
6. Are there neighbors close by who might object to noise and odors from your farm operation?
7. Are there neighbors close by who might be a resource (for custom field work, hay, straw, manure, hired labor, etc.)
8. What authority (municipal or county) controls issues like building permits, roadside stands, or well permits?
9. How much usable farmland for crops and/or livestock?
10. If the farm size is small (< 15 acres?), is there additional land adjacent that might be available in the future?
11. Are there aerals or plats?

The Farm Business Development Center is a program of the Liberty Prairie Foundation,  
[www.libertyprairie.org](http://www.libertyprairie.org).

12. Is the land owned outright or is it in a trust?
13. Does the land have conservation easements on it? Who holds the easements? Are there restrictions that would affect farming practices? (Ultimately, you would want a copy of the easement.)
14. Does the land have utility or access easements recorded on it? Is there a snowmobile route? Who holds the easements? Are there restrictions that would affect farming practices? (Ultimately, you would want a copy of the easement.)

**Water:**

1. Is there a water source for irrigation?
  - a. Well? What is the capacity (gallons per minute)? How deep is it? Is there 3-phase electric available?
  - b. River or pond? Does it go dry in August?
2. What is the distance and what is the elevation change between the water source and the majority of fields?
3. How deep is the water table?
4. Has the water ever been tested?

**Farmstead:**

1. What outbuildings exist? What is in them?
2. What is their condition?
3. How adaptable are they to other purposes?
4. Is there electric or water to any of them?
5. Is there a greenhouse?
6. Are there any underground fuel tanks?
7. Are there any underground utilities?

**Equipment:**

1. Is there any equipment included? What kind? What condition?
2. Is it compatible with your existing implements/tractors?

**Farmland & Fields:**

1. What is the history of the farmland? What was last crop?
2. How big are the individual fields?
3. What is the topography?
4. What is the orientation of any slope (ie south, north etc)?
5. What types of soils?
6. Any soil tests available?
7. Are the soils poorly drained or do they dry out quickly?
8. Are the fields protected from winds, drift or drainage from other fields by slopes or vegetation?
9. How close are the fields to the source of irrigation water or outbuildings?
10. Are there noxious weeds or significant rodent or problems on the farm? Deer pressure?