

**UW Culture/Agriculture grant to the Spring Green Center for Creativity and Innovation (C4C)
for “ From Land Ethic to Land Aesthetic”
Report 6/20/06**

The original proposal with method and timeline is attached. It will be seen from this that, at this point, the project is in its early stages of implementation. If required, a further report could be supplied on completion in May, 2007.

The central proposition of the project is to bring the arts and agriculture together by encouraging local landowners to appreciate the beauty of their landscape and, as a result, to enhance it. This is being achieved by, first, collecting reasons for landowners to enhance the aesthetic value of their property and finding practical ways for them to do so. Secondly, methods will be found to disseminate this information in a persuasive way. These include a conference scheduled for April, 2007, and a county-wide brochure to reach all homeowners.

The following steps have been taken so far:

- Two discussion sessions have been held with local dairy farmers and their partners to gather their views on the subject. Every effort is being made to implement a “grassroots” approach to this project and to avoid the impression of “culture” being imposed on agriculture from above.
- Steps are being taken to determine collaborators in the dissemination of the information. The project is focused on a location at the intersection of three counties, Sauk, Richland and Iowa. The Extension service of one of these counties will be involved and local FFA and 4H chapters are also being approached.
- To disseminate the results throughout the Midwest, this project’s findings will be presented at a regional conference, “Creativity and Innovation: Lifeblood of the Small Community” sponsored by C4C and to be held April 27 through 29, 2007 in Spring Green WI.
- An ecology consultant, Gigi LaBudde, Community Forestry Resource Center, has been retained to cover the interface between aesthetics and environmental protection.

Step 2 in the proposal, a web search, will begin soon and, by early fall, a working group will have been formed to progress the project.

Preliminary observations highlight the challenges ahead such as the diversity and subjectivity of views on land aesthetics. A tall grass prairie is a delight to the ecologist but to the grazier it is “a bunch of weeds”. One man’s junkyard is another’s collection of antique farm machinery. The existence of tangible, economic reasons for making farms “look nice” appears to be an easier issue to tackle and encourages us to believe that this is a very worthwhile and realistic project.