



**Town of
SHERMAN
Sheboygan County**

**Responses to 2011 Agricultural Land and
Open Space Preservation Survey**

Final Report: January 3, 2012

**Submitted by Kevin Struck
Growth Management Educator
UW-Extension Sheboygan County**

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Executive Summary

Introduction

To obtain public feedback on the preferences of Town residents and property owners regarding agricultural land and open space preservation, Town officials partnered with the Sheboygan County UW-Extension Office to create an opinion survey. The survey includes 11 questions created in a series of open meetings between UW-Extension educator Kevin Struck, the Town Plan Commission, and the Town Board. Audience participation was also encouraged during these meetings.

Surveys were delivered by mail on or about October 22, 2011 to a current list of property owner addresses supplied by Sheboygan County and a list of individuals on the voting roll in an effort to reach renters. Two individuals who did not receive a survey also picked up a copy of the survey in person at the Town Hall. The deadline for the survey's return was November 7, 2011; however, surveys were accepted until November 30, by which time the daily returns had slowed to one or less per day.

Respondents

In total, **322** of 620 surveys were returned — a response rate of **52%** — and entered over a period of four weeks by UW-Extension staff into an Excel spreadsheet. To protect the integrity of the survey results and to ensure a "one vote for each property" tally, respondents were required to include their address, which was then permanently removed from the survey after being received by the UWEX Office.

Three questions at the end of the survey asked for information about individuals filling out the survey. Respondents' ages were generally in their upper 40s and 50s; only one individual was under the age of 25, which, unfortunately, is typical of community surveys. The average respondent had lived in the Town for 28 years, and there was a 99% chance he or she owned their property rather than rented. Based on the addresses that were included on the surveys, respondents were well distributed geographically throughout the Town.

Results

The **first three questions** simply asked whether the preservation of various types of land is important. At least two-thirds of respondents marked "Agree" to each of these three questions, with the most support being shown for forested areas.

The **fourth question** examined how development should occur in the rural areas of the Town of Sherman. By a significant margin, the top response favored concentrating development in a few already developed areas, such as around Silver Creek, Adell, and Random Lake.

Question 5 asked respondents how restrictive the newly revised Town of Sherman zoning ordinance should be in comparison to the existing ordinance. The clear top choice was a future ordinance that is less restrictive than the current one.

The maximum setback of 300 feet for new dwellings was the subject of **Questions 6a** and **6b**. Respondents overwhelmingly disapproved of the existing 300-foot setback and, in fact, were not in favor of any maximum setback for new dwellings from the road right-of-way.

Questions 7a and **7b** sought input regarding site plan review. There were more responses dismissing the importance of site plan review than in support of it, with one exception — the principle of avoiding siting a home on prime agricultural soils, which had more votes in favor than against. Even then, most respondents favored a case-by-case determination of whether to apply this principle.

A solid majority of survey respondents indicated in **Question 8** that they would prefer wind towers be at least 1,800 feet from neighboring residences rather than only 1,250 feet.

The next three questions were addressed specifically to the owners of agricultural land. When asked in **Question 9** whether they currently receive farmland preservation credits, 41 individuals said they do. **Question 10** followed up by asking whether the Town of Sherman should consider participating in the Working Lands Initiative in order to allow agricultural landowners to be eligible for future tax credits. A clear majority were in favor of this. Finally, **Question 11** asked ag landowners what their general plans were for the future of their land. The top four responses out of a mix of eight options all included some form of continued agricultural activity, from renting out land for farming to passing the farm on to the next generation.

Questions 12-14 were included to obtain some general demographic information. Most respondents were in their upper 40s and 50s in age, they've lived in the Town of Sherman almost 30 years, on average, and 99% owned rather than rented their home.

On the back page of the survey, there was a large space in which to write **Additional Comments**. About 30% of respondents (92 persons) took advantage of this option. The most oft-repeated comments were those opposing the 300-foot maximum setback, which was mentioned by 22 of the 92 commenters.

Purpose Statement

The primary purposes of the survey were:

- 1) Determine whether the preservation of agricultural land in the Town is important to residents
- 1) Determine whether the preservation of open space in the Town is important to residents
- 3) Obtain guidance for the upcoming revision of the Town zoning ordinance

Results Color Coding

To help readers of this report quickly identify key findings, the following color coding, if applicable, has been used to highlight key data:

GREEN = Highest (or Best) Percentage or Number

GREEN = Close Second

RED = Lowest (or Worst) Percentage or Number

RED = Close Second

Methodology and Response Rate

On four occasions in August and September of 2011, Kevin Struck met with either the Town Plan Commission or Town Board to discuss potential questions for an opinion survey, as well as the details of printing, distribution, and tabulation. To promote a fair tally, the Board decided to limit survey distribution to one survey per household. A line on the survey was included where respondents were asked to write their address. The UW-Extension Office then kept a log of incoming addresses in order to spot any duplicates. To ensure confidentiality, addresses were detached from the rest of the survey after it was logged in.

Surveys were delivered by mail on or about October 22, 2011. The mailing list included property owner addresses supplied by Sheboygan County. This is the same tax parcel-based list the County uses to send out tax bills; therefore, duplicate names for individuals owning more than one parcel had to be removed in order to prevent a person from having more than one "vote." This removal was done by the County, but many duplicates remained. Additional removals were performed by the Town Clerk and UW-Extension staff.

In an effort to reach renters, who do not show up on the County list, non-property owning individuals on the Town's voting roll were added to the survey mailing. Two individuals who did not receive a survey even with these efforts picked up a copy of the survey in person at the Town Hall. Ultimately, a total of 631 surveys were either mailed or personally handed out; 11 of these were returned via the USPS as undeliverable, leaving a final total of **620**. Of these, **322** surveys were returned — a response rate of **52%** — and entered over a period of four weeks by UW-Extension staff into an Excel spreadsheet specifically designed for input of data from this survey. For comparison's sake, the response rate for the Town's 2004 survey was 47%. (The response rates for the most recent surveys in Lyndon, Scott, and Holland were 30%, 28%, and 26%, respectively.)

Respondent Characteristics

What area of the community are they from?

Respondents came from throughout the community. Please see the map on page 6.

What was the most common age range of those filling out the survey? (Q12)

Under 18 yrs: 0.0% (0)

18-24 yrs: 0.3% (1)

25-34 yrs: 4.8% (15)

35-44 yrs: 10.8% (34)

45-54 yrs: 26.8% (84.5)

55-64 yrs: 29.2% (92)

65-74 yrs: 18.3% (57.5)

75+ yrs: 9.8% (31)

How many years had the average respondent lived in the Town? (Q13)

28.3 years

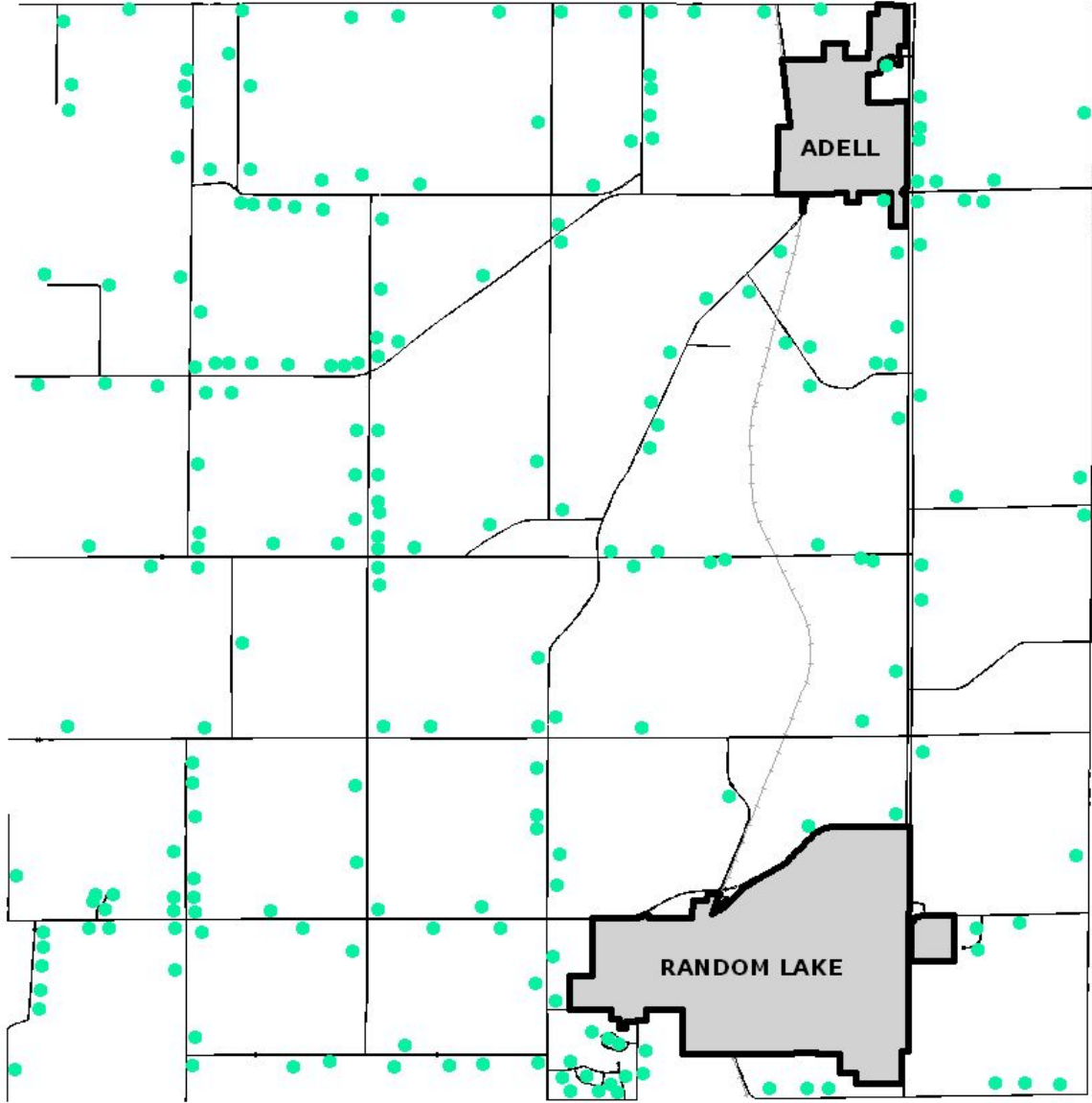
What was the least amount of time living in the Town for any respondent? The most? (Q13)

- ◆ Least: Less than 1 year
 - ◆ Most: 82 years
-

What percentage of respondents owned their homes? Rented? (Q14)

- ◆ Owned: 99.0%
 - ◆ Rented: 1.0%
- (No response: 7.5%)
-

Geographical Distribution of Responses



Survey Results

QUESTION 1: Preservation of agricultural land in the Town of Sherman is important.

RESPONSE	PERCENTAGE	NUMBER
Agree	68.0%	217
Neutral	21.0%	67
Disagree	11.0%	35
(No response)		3 (0.9%)

QUESTION 2: Preservation of forested areas in the Town of Sherman is important.

RESPONSE	PERCENTAGE	NUMBER
Agree	73.2%	232
Neutral	18.3%	58
Disagree	8.5%	27
(No response)		5 (1.6%)

QUESTION 3: Preservation of natural areas in the Town of Sherman is important.

RESPONSE	PERCENTAGE	NUMBER
Agree	68.9%	219
Neutral	21.4%	68
Disagree	9.7%	31
(No response)		4 (1.3%)

QUESTION 4: How should residential and small business development occur in our rural areas? (check one)

RESPONSE	PERCENTAGE	NUMBER
Scattered throughout the Town	33.4%	106
Concentrated in a few already developed areas like around Silver Creek, Random Lake, and Adell	51.7%	164
Residential and small business development should <u>not</u> occur in rural areas	7.3%	23
Not sure	7.6%	24
(No response)		5 (1.6%)

QUESTION 5: A revised Town of Sherman zoning ordinance should ... (check one)

RESPONSE	PERCENTAGE	NUMBER
Be <u>less</u> restrictive	50.0%	157
Be <u>more</u> restrictive	12.4%	39
Be restrictive to the <u>same</u> degree as the current ordinance	37.6%	118
(No response)		8 (2.5%)

QUESTION 6a: Are you in favor of a maximum setback for new dwellings from the road right-of-way?

RESPONSE	PERCENTAGE	NUMBER
Yes	32.0%	102
No	68.0%	217
(No response)		3 (0.9%)

QUESTION 6b: To avoid a site plan review process, the current maximum setback specified by the Zoning Ordinance is 300 feet. What is your opinion of the 300 foot limit? (check one)

RESPONSE	PERCENTAGE	NUMBER
Too long	12.1%	38
Too short	13.3%	41.5
Just right	27.2%	85
Don't like it at all	47.4%	148.5
(No response)		9 (2.9%)

QUESTION 7a: On the 2004 opinion survey, 72% of respondents agreed that a site plan showing the location of a home on a parcel should be required of all new residential development requests and used as one of the criteria by the Town Board to approve or disapprove the request. How do you feel about each of the following potential “guiding principles” that might be part of a review checklist?

GUIDING PRINCIPLE	IMPORTANT Percentage / Number	NOT IMPORTANT Percentage / Number
Avoid siting a house or accessory building on a hilltop	16.0% / 50	84.0% / 263
The view of a house or accessory building from the road should be limited	9.6% / 30	90.4% / 284
Avoid siting a house in the middle of a large parcel (10+ acres)	40.9% / 128	59.1% / 185
Avoid siting a driveway that splits a large parcel (10+ acres) in half	40.1% / 126	59.9% / 188
Avoid siting a house or accessory building on prime agricultural soils	57.3% / 181	42.7% / 135
Avoid siting a driveway that crosses prime agricultural soils	49.2% / 154	50.8% / 159
Avoid forested and natural areas	49.4% / 154.5	50.6% / 158.5
(No response)		+/- 8 (2.5%)

QUESTION 7b: How should a checklist be used by the reviewers of site plans? (check one)

RESPONSE	PERCENTAGE	NUMBER
The guiding principles on a checklist should be followed all of the time, with rare exceptions	12.7%	40
The guiding principles on a checklist should be considered, but unique site characteristics should take precedence	36.0%	113.5
There should <i>not</i> be a checklist—each site plan should be evaluated on a case-by-case basis	51.3%	161.5
(No response)		7 (2.2%)

QUESTION 8: Large wind farms with dozens of towers, such as some of those in nearby counties, are regulated by the state's Public Service Commission (PSC). The much smaller wind energy system recently erected at the Preder farm is regulated by a Town of Sherman ordinance. Keeping in mind that state statutes do not allow wind towers to be restricted in a town except under narrowly defined circumstances, how should the Town of Sherman respond to proposals for "mini" wind farms (less than 10 towers) that are too small in total wattage to be regulated by the PSC but too large to be covered under the Town's current ordinance? (check one)

RESPONSE	PERCENTAGE	NUMBER
Towers should only be allowed if they are at least 1,250 feet from neighboring residences	41.3%	118
Towers should only be allowed if they are at least 1,800 feet from neighboring residences	58.7%	168
(No response)		36 (11.2%)

If you own agricultural land, please respond to Questions #9-11.

QUESTION 9: Do you currently receive farmland preservation tax credits as part of your WI income tax return?

RESPONSE	NUMBER AND PERCENTAGE OF RESPONSES TO THIS QUESTION	PERCENTAGE OF OVERALL SURVEY RESPONDENTS
Yes	41 / 25.3%	12.7%
No	121 / 74.7%	n/a

QUESTION 10: Would you like the Town of Sherman to consider participating in the state's new farmland preservation program (known as the Working Lands Initiative) so you might be eligible to receive tax credits (\$7.50 per acre) in the future for preserving your agricultural land?

RESPONSE	NUMBER AND PERCENTAGE OF RESPONSES TO THIS QUESTION	PERCENTAGE OF OVERALL SURVEY RESPONDENTS
Yes	92 / 60.5%	28.6%
No	60 / 39.5%	n/a

QUESTION 11: What, generally speaking, best describes your future plans? (check all that apply)

RESPONSE	PERCENTAGE	NUMBER
Keep farming in the Town of Sherman until retirement	26.2%	39
Move elsewhere in order to keep farming until retirement	2.7%	4
Pass the farm on to children or others in the next generation	44.3%	66
Get out of farming as soon as practical	0.7%	1
Increase the size of the farm	12.8%	19
Decrease the size of the farm	0.7%	1
Split off part of your farmland for development	10.7%	16
Rent out all or part of your farmland	56.4%	84
(No response)		173 (53.7%)

ADDITIONAL COMMENTS :

92 respondents took the time to write additional comments in the space provided on the back page of the survey. Many of the comments touched on multiple subjects. The most common subjects were the following:

- 300-foot maximum setback a bad idea (22 comments)
- Property rights should be a high priority (17)
- Rural atmosphere is an important part of the Town (17)
- Farmland should be preserved (15)
- Restrict wind turbines as much as possible (14)
- Plan for the Town's future (13)
- Eliminate the 35-acre minimum lot size (12) [6 commenters wanted to keep it]

Technical Notes

I. Fractional results on Questions 6b, 7a, 7b

The “number of responses” to these Questions that contain fractions of whole numbers are due to a tiny number of respondents checking more than one answer even though the question instructed respondents to “check one” of the choices listed.

Since no assumption could be made as to which response was the primary response, a decision was made to allocate the respondent’s answers in proportion to the number of answers he/she gave. This was deemed to be more fair than eliminating the response altogether or giving the respondent multiple “votes.”

II. Calculating percentages for “check one” questions

Percentages for these questions were calculated by dividing the number of responses to each choice by the number of respondents to the particular question. An exception to this is the percentage of “No response,” which was calculated by dividing the number of no responses by 620, the total number of surveys returned.

III. Calculating percentages for the “check all that apply” question

Percentages for Question 11 — where respondents were invited to check more than one possible response — were calculated by dividing the number of responses for each choice listed by the total number of responses to the question (149). Because respondents were not limited to one choice, this naturally yields a total percentage that exceeds 100% and is not an error.

IV. Quality control

One “unauthorized” copy of the survey was detected; it was set aside and was not tabulated.

Appendix A - Survey Instrument

AGRICULTURAL LAND & OPEN SPACE PRESERVATION SURVEY



The TOWN of SHERMAN, in cooperation with UW-Extension, has developed this survey to obtain your opinions about agricultural land and open space preservation. The results will help guide the Town as it updates its 33-year-old zoning ordinance and decides whether to participate in Wisconsin's newly revised farmland preservation program.

Please fill out and return the survey in the enclosed envelope by November 7, 2011. THANK YOU FOR YOUR

1. Preservation of agricultural land in the Town of Sherman is important.

Agree Neutral Disagree

2. Preservation of forested areas in the Town of Sherman is important.

Agree Neutral Disagree

3. Preservation of natural areas in the Town of Sherman is important.

Agree Neutral Disagree

4. How should residential and small business development occur in our rural areas? (*check one*)

- Scattered throughout the Town
- Concentrated in a few already developed areas like around Silver Creek, Random Lake, and Adell
- Residential and small business development should not occur in rural areas
- Not sure

5. A revised Town of Sherman zoning ordinance should . . . (*check one*)

- Be less restrictive
- Be more restrictive
- Be restrictive to the same degree as the current ordinance

6a. Are you in favor of a maximum setback for new dwellings from the road right-of-way?

Yes No

6b. To avoid a site plan review process, the current maximum setback specified by the Zoning Ordinance is 300 feet. What is your opinion of the 300 foot limit? (*check one*)

Too long Too short Just right Don't like it at all

7a. On the 2004 opinion survey, 72% of respondents agreed that a site plan showing the location of a home on a parcel should be required of all new residential development requests and used as one of the criteria by the Town Board to approve or disapprove the request. How do you feel about each of the following potential “guiding principles” that might be part of a review checklist?

GUIDING PRINCIPLE	Important	Not Important
Avoid siting a house or accessory building on a hilltop		
The view of a house or accessory building from the road should be limited		
Avoid siting a house in the middle of a large parcel (10+ acres)		
Avoid siting a driveway that splits a large parcel (10+ acres) in half		
Avoid siting a house or accessory building on prime agricultural soils		
Avoid siting a driveway that crosses prime agricultural soils		
Avoid forested and natural areas		

7b. How should a checklist be used by the reviewers of site plans? (*check one*)

- The guiding principles on a checklist should be followed all of the time, with rare exceptions
- The guiding principles on a checklist should be considered, but unique site characteristics should take precedence
- There should *not* be a checklist—each site plan should be evaluated on a case-by-case basis

8. Large wind farms with dozens of towers, such as some of those in nearby counties, are regulated by the state’s Public Service Commission (PSC). The much smaller wind energy system recently erected at the Preder farm is regulated by a Town of Sherman ordinance. Keeping in mind that state statutes do not allow wind towers to be restricted in a town except under narrowly defined circumstances, how should the Town of Sherman respond to proposals for “mini” wind farms (less than 10 towers) that are too small in total wattage to be regulated by the PSC but too large to be covered under the Town’s current ordinance? (*check one*)

- Towers should only be allowed if they are at least 1,250 feet from neighboring residences
- Towers should only be allowed if they are at least 1,800 feet from neighboring residences

If you own agricultural land, please respond to Questions #9-11. If you do not own ag land, you may skip to Question #12 on the next page.

9. Do you currently receive farmland preservation tax credits as part of your WI income tax return?

- Yes
- No

10. Would you like the Town of Sherman to consider participating in the state's new farmland preservation program (known as the Working Lands Initiative) so you might be eligible to receive tax credits (\$7.50 per acre) in the future for preserving your agricultural land?

Yes No

11. What, generally speaking, best describes your future plans? (check all that apply)

- Keep farming in the Town of Sherman until retirement
- Move elsewhere in order to keep farming until retirement
- Pass the farm on to children or others in the next generation
- Get out of farming as soon as practical
- Increase the size of the farm
- Decrease the size of the farm
- Split off part of your farmland for development
- Rent out all or part of your farmland

The following questions are for all residents and are intended for statistical purposes only. Responses will remain confidential.

12. What is your age?

- Under 18
- 18-24
- 25-34
- 35-44
- 45-54
- 55-64
- 65-74
- 75 or older

13. How many years have you lived in the Town of Sherman?

- ___ years I own property but don't live in the Town of Sherman

14. Do you rent or own your place of residence?

- Rent Own (If you own, approximately how many acres? _____)



As the Town revises its zoning ordinance, it will rely on public input from citizen advisors to the Plan Commission. If you would like to be considered for one of these advisor positions, please contact Rhonda Klatt, the Town Clerk, by October 26, 2011.

Phone: 994-9421 (Business hours are Mon. - Wed., 2:00 - 4:00 pm)
Email: townofsherman@yahoo.com

IMPORTANT:

To protect the integrity of the survey results, only one survey will be accepted per household. Please print your address number and road name on the line below. When your survey arrives at the UW-Extension Office, your address will immediately be detached from your survey to ensure the confidentiality of your responses.

(address number and road name)

Appendix B - Cover Letter

October 20, 2011

Dear Town of Sherman Resident,

The Town of Sherman Plan Commission will soon begin a major revision to the *Town of Sherman Land Use and Zoning Ordinance*. There are many reasons for a revision to occur at this time.

- 1) The existing ordinance is over 30 years old, contains outdated terms and concepts, and is lacking several modern land use types.
- 2) Because word processing software was not readily available in the early years of the ordinance, various versions have evolved over the years—this needs to be corrected.
- 3) Sheboygan County is about to begin a revision of its Farmland Preservation Plan, and this revision will likely require the Town to adjust the provisions of its Exclusive Ag zoning district if farmland owners wish to continue to collect property tax credits.
- 4) The most recent citizen opinion survey, conducted in the Town seven years ago in 2004, indicated over 90% of respondents greatly valued the scenic views and open space within the Town. However, since certain provisions within the existing *Zoning Ordinance* that are intended to preserve scenic views and open space have been questioned by some Town residents, it will be helpful to gauge the current views of residents and potentially consider alternatives.
- 5) Staff at the Sheboygan County UW-Extension Office is available at this time to assist the Town in an ordinance revision, thus saving the Town the considerable cost of a consultant.

The accompanying survey has been developed by the Plan Commission, Town Board, and UW-Extension to gain input from Town residents like you prior to beginning work on the *Zoning Ordinance* revision. Since the Town will also be asked by the County whether it wants to participate in the new Farmland Preservation Program (also known as the Working Lands Initiative), **the enclosed FAQ sheet and questions #9-11 are specifically for agricultural landowners. Agricultural landowners should respond to all of the survey questions, especially #9-11. If you do not own agricultural and, you may ignore the FAQ sheet and questions #9-11.** In either case, please fill out and return the survey in the enclosed stamped envelope by November 7, 2011. Results will be tabulated by UW-Extension and made public through the Town's website (www.townofshermanwi.com) and *The Souder* newspaper by year's end.

Best regards,

Town of Sherman Board and Plan Commission members