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## Land trust helps protect farmland

By AARON MARTIN, Staff Reporter

TOWN OF TRENTON — When Carl and Bonnie Werner noticed land development creeping closer and closer to their home on Basswood Road; keeping their beloved 148-acre farmstead as pristine agriculture land for generations to come became a top priority.

After researching options, the Werners contacted the Land Trust Network of Jefferson County and in December filed a conservation easement that will ensure future owners won't develop the land.

"This is something we are doing for generations to come," Werner said. "I've lived here all my life and I know what it was like 50 years ago. When you've seen all the land between here and Beaver Dam more or less getting destroyed by development, it makes you wonder what we are coming to."

In signing a conservation easement donation, Martine Koeppel, who chairs the land trust network, a landowner forever forfeits his or her rights to parcel off or develop land. Tax breaks, however, can add extra incentive for landowners. The Werners will receive an income tax deduction for 15 years that is based on the assessed development value of the land.

But to Carl Werner, that is just icing on the cake. Keeping the Werner farmstead intact for future generations is the true prize.

The farm, situated in the rolling fields of Basswood Road north of Walnut Road, has been in the Werner family for more than 130 years. Carl Werner grew up tending its cattle, and took over the operation in 1962 — the fourth generation Werner to do so. He and Bonnie, high school sweethearts, were married in 1965 and raised four children on the farm.

Today the Werners maintain a registered herd of 90 cattle. Most of the farm's 148 acres lie in pasture for the cattle to graze. One of the finest red oak stands in the area, the Werners have been told, consumes about 12 acres; and the remainder is marshland.

"As farmland and green spaces become more scarce in Wisconsin our land trust is fortunate to be able to help landowners like the Werners protect their land for future generations," Koeppel said.

The tipping point came, Carl Werner said, about four years ago when the city of Beaver Dam annexed land from the town of Trenton that was developed into the Wal-Mart Distribution Center about a mile down the road from the Werner farmstead.

"That kind of made me wonder; we don't want to see this farm turn into that," he said.

After mulling over the decision for a few years the Werners contacted the land trust network in November, and by the end of December had a conservation easement filed. They can rest assured knowing that whatever happens in the future, their land will remain as it has for more than 130 years: unchanged.

The land trust network primarily focuses on south-central Wisconsin. To learn more about conservation easement donations log onto its Web site, [www.landtrustnetwork.org](http://www.landtrustnetwork.org).