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Collective Ownership Project Announced

Partnerships plans for “farmhood” to address housing and farm access issues
in Green County, WI

SPRING VALLEY, Wis., September 17, 2026 -- Marbleseed today announced a partnership with the Green County Development Corporation focused on collective ownership and farmland access.

This one-year planning project will result in a solution to two intertwining issues: the housing crisis faced by many rural communities and the struggle of the next generation of organic farmers to find and afford land.

The Collective Ownership Project is funded by the Minneapolis Foundation’s Great Lakes Thriving Communities Grantmaking Programs. Its goals include:

- Initiation of the planning of a “farmhood” community in south central Wisconsin with a focus on census tracts that lack adequate food and housing access.
- Identification of suitable land for farming as well as 20 residential units in a clustered conservation development.
- Preservation of both farmland and open spaces that provide wildlife habitat and ecosystem services.

The area of focus covers 58 square miles and has a population of just over 6,000. Green County has a higher low-income population than the state average. Environmental concerns include impaired waterways, particulate matter, and nitrogen dioxide. Cancer and disability rates are also higher than the state average. Typical of many rural communities, there is a housing shortage, and the area is designated as a food desert.

The project will foster community connection and belonging by serving as a housing hub. It will provide land for a minimum of five early career farmers, who in turn will grow affordable



and healthy food. By using organic practices, the farms will improve the area's soil and water quality, reducing its current risk for flooding.

Olivia Otte, the executive director of Green County Development Corporation, says her organization will assist with partnership development with local municipalities and land searches. They will also contract with a site engineer and architect for construction budget development and planning.

"As an economic development organization, we know a community can't thrive without housing, without a path forward for the next generation, and without stewardship of the land that sustains it," says Otte. "This project lets us address all three together, and we're proud to lead the local groundwork, partnering with municipalities, landowners, and design professionals, to make it real."

Other organizations that will be involved in the project include The Farmers Land Trust, bringing expertise with easements and collective farmland access; Farm Commons, providing legal advice; and the University of Wisconsin Center for Cooperatives, which will create the initial cooperative formation process.

Healthy housing, farmland access, and environmental stewardship are often siloed efforts. Lori Stern, Marbleseed's executive director, notes that collective farming communities will require the expertise of numerous sectors and a varied capital stack to make it affordable for under-resourced farmers.

"As the leader of a Midwest regional farmer organization," says Stern, "I am excited to be working on this collective farmland access strategy close to home. It feels like we are harkening back to the grouping of small farms that surrounded cheese factories across Green County in shared economic effort. In this moment, the next generation of farmers needs solutions like this to afford land and provide healthy food for our community."

Stern, Otte, and other partners intend to create a replicable model that other communities in the Midwest can put into action. A major part of the work plan is creation and dissemination of a usable planning guide and a live web resource that includes case studies and potential approaches to zoning and financing.

As the team seeks suitable land for the project, project leaders encourage interested parties to reach out to Stern at lori.stern@marbleseed.org with questions.



About Marbleseed

Marbleseed educates, inspires, and empowers farmers to thrive in a sustainable, organic system of agriculture. For nearly 40 years, Marbleseed has been working in community with the Midwest's small- and mid-sized farmers, leveraging its social capital to grow the region's organic farming movement. The organization prides itself in farmer-to-farmer education and partnerships with allied organizations. By nurturing human-scale farms, Marbleseed helps to build vibrant communities rooted in ecological stewardship and resilience

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