



by Emma Palova

For Vern and Gay Nauta, farming was more than just a family business. It was a lifestyle that lasted 42 years on the dairy and cash crop farm in Vergennes Township.

With prime farmland on the Parnell Corridor, the Nautas had ample opportunities to sell off the land. As a matter of fact they did sell off a portion of the farm to be able to retire after years of hard work.

"I want people to realize that most farmers are not able to save large sums of money for retirement while farming," said Gay. "A part of our land was sold to enable us to accomplish our goal."

However, as good stewards of the land and agriculture, years ago they learned about the farmland preservation program.

"We became interested in setting a portion of our farm aside," said Gay.

The Nautas applied to the program approximately five years ago, and since they've met the criteria, they have been accepted. But, now they're waiting for funding.

"Our thought has always been, 'what better way to preserve the land for the future?'" said Gay.

And although, the couple will most likely not be living near the preserved

land in the future, the land will remain open.

"We want our grandchildren, great-grandchildren and those generations that follow to be able to visit open, productive farmland," said Gay.

For Vern, a trustee on the Vergennes Township board and former planning commissioner, preserving the land was a natural thing to do.

"Yes, I would encourage other farmers to do it," said Vern. "The country needs to be self-sufficient. Our children have encouraged us."

It is Vern's philosophy, once farmland is gone, it's gone forever. So, in the near future, approximately 80 acres of preserved prime farmland will become part of the preserved Parnell Corridor.

"We have never been, nor ever will be, interested in preserving our land for any other reason than to maintain rural atmosphere in the township that we love," said Gay. "We don't think we should be called farmland preservation elitists."

To be eligible for state funding, Vergennes Township has recently updated the master plan to include an area for farmland preservation.