Farmland has a friend in the Sangamon Conservancy Trust.

The local organization is dedicated to preserving farmland throughout the area and in an effort toward that goal it established the **Sangamon Conservancy Trust Farmland Preservation and Conservation Fund** through the Community Foundation for the Land of Lincoln.

“It’s been a longtime goal to build up reserves and get funding built up so we can expand services,” said John Hawkins, President of the Sangamon Conservancy Trust. “This is a good way to get our name out before the public.”

The Trust provides a variety of services including environmental education programs and wetland habitat demonstration programs like the wetland at Farmingdale Junior High. Its main goal, though, is to preserve farmland.

Sangamon Conservancy Trust takes an active role in helping landowners preserve farmland from becoming housing developments and shopping centers. The organization meets with prospective participants that have applied to the program. The landowners have multiple ways to work with the Trust to preserve the land and often receive tax breaks in exchange for placing acreage under the Trust’s control. The plan helps families to keep farmland within the family’s control for future generations.

“We take applications from farm and landowners who want to put together an estate plan or conservation plan in which they can protect their farm from development,” Hawkins said. “This allows them to make the transfer to the next generation much easier. We’re trying to enhance that and make sure the property stays in farming. Often families have to sell part of the property to housing developers or shopping centers to pay estate taxes. This is a way to protect future farmland.”

The organization currently oversees 2,400 acres of land in Sangamon, Menard, Christian Counties and West Central Illinois. It develops a plan for the land and reviews the progress at least once a year. The Trust hopes to increase the amount of property as it meets with more soil and water conservation districts and other landowners. The desire to increase the Trust’s visibility helped lead it to the Community Foundation.

“We thought it would raise the visibility of our organization,” Hawkins said. “It would help get the word out about our mission and some of our projects and expand to other projects.”