

Producer-Led Watershed Protection Grants

Bimonthly
E-News Update

Annual Workshop

Farmers Improving Soil Health and Water Quality Throughout Wisconsin's Watersheds

February 2017

The first DATCP Producer-Led Information Sharing workshop was held December 14 at the Wilderness in Wisconsin Dells with over 70 attendees, including producer-led group members, collaborators and interested partners. The day included presentations on cover crop demonstration plots, low-disturbance manure injection, the Discovery Farms Farmer Network and presentations from several of the producer-led groups on their progress so far.

Keynote speaker DATCP Deputy Secretary Jeff Lyon described the event as a great learning opportunity: "The morning presentations were spot on. Each person, representing a producer-led group, highlighted accomplishments and what the groups needed to do to be more successful in the future. The participants were extremely attentive and eager to learn. Hopefully, the participants will take back what they heard and incorporate into their own producer-led activities."

About the program

- Began in Spring 2016
- \$250,000 available each fiscal year
- \$20,000 maximum grant award per group per year



2017 Producer-Led Annual Information Sharing Workshop Attendees

Yahara Pride Farms

First on the agenda was Jeff Endres, board chair of Yahara Pride Farms, to discuss the successes and lessons learned as a producer-led group that existed before the inception of the DATCP program. The group has been working to reduce phosphorus runoff in the Yahara watershed since 2011. Yahara Pride focuses on a conservation practice cost-share program that in 2015 covered 3,460 acres of conservation practices, with members installing an additional 5,373 acres on their own. Yahara Pride hosts an annual conference to give a progress update, Ag Innovation Days to demonstrate various conservation technologies, and farm tours to connect with the non-farming public.

The group also runs a certification program that provides farmers with a walkover and environmental assessment of their operations. So far, 37 farms have been evaluated

covering 30,000 acres. For more information on Yahara Pride Farms programs, visit: yaharapridefarms.org.

Peninsula Pride Farms

Next up was Don Niles, president of Peninsula Pride Farms, who shared the accomplishments of the new organization in Kewaunee and Southern Door Counties. The 43 member group focuses on ideas, practices and technologies that balance water quality with farm sustainability. Peninsula Pride has developed a cover crop challenge to encourage farmers to plant more cover crops, hosted two field days, and is working on pathogen

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Shane Wucherpennig from Wood County Land Conservation Department describes their group's experiences so far.

Annual Workshop *continued*

reduction guidelines.

The group also has implemented a privately-funded Water Well program that provides an emergency water supply for homes whose wells test positive for any type of E.coli. For more information on the group, visit: peninsulapridefarmsinc.org.

Farmers of Mill Creek Watershed Council

John Eron with Farmers of Mill Creek Watershed Council, partnering with Portage County UW-Extension and the Wood County Land Conservation Department, described the group's cost-share program for various conservation practices and their on-farm research demonstration plots. So far, the group has provided financial assistance for 300 no-till acres, 420 acres of cover crops and 14 acres of waterway buffer strips.

They have also set up a cover crop demonstration plot to measure the soil moisture and temperature when using various cover crop seed combinations. Farmers of Mill Creek has already held three educational field days since their inception in April of 2016.

Horse Creek Farmer-Led Watershed Council

Eric Wojchik from Polk County and the Horse Creek Farmer-Led Watershed Council shared their group's lessons learned as a group that existed before the DATCP grant program. The Horse Creek Watershed Council is part of a larger farmer-led initiative that involves three other watersheds and counties, established in 2012. Eric explained how it took time to determine the direction of the group but after many meetings

and brainstorming sessions, they decided to focus on cover crops and soil health to meet their watershed needs and goals. Over the years, the group has cost-shared cover crop seed and planting and has hosted many educational events to promote conservation. Eric ended with the message that there is not a one size fits all approach to farmer-led efforts. All groups are different with different environmental issues to address.

Milwaukee River Watershed Clean Farm Families

Jim Melichar, chair of the Milwaukee River Watershed Clean Farm Families, explained how this group is finding success through partnerships with other farmers, the Ozaukee County Land and Water Management Department, The Conservation Fund, co-ops, implement dealers, sewerage districts and municipalities.

So far, the group has held a field day on managing nutrients and cover crops for healthy soils and offered cost-share on cover crops, nutrient management plan development, low-disturbance manure application and conservation tillage. The group is holding a Soil Health Winter Workshop featuring conservationist Ray Archuleta on February 10, 2017 at The Islands at Waubesa Fire Hall. To RSVP, email aholschbach@co.ozaukee.wi.us or jpmelichar@gmail.com.

Iowa County's Trout Creek-Mill Creek Watershed group

Lastly, Michael Dolan, farmer leader of Iowa County's Trout Creek-Mill Creek Watershed group presented on the successes so far, including a recap of the first farm tour held

in September 2016. The group is working to engage other producers in their efforts through outreach and cost-share programs for practices such as no-tilled cover crops and pasture renovation. The Trout Creek-Mill Creek Watershed group is also very interested in engaging end users which they accomplished through their dinner and farm tour featuring Gulf of Mexico fisherman. The producer-led group is also working in partnership with the Michael Fields Agricultural Institute on outreach and research efforts including hosting field days and on-farm cover crop demonstration trials.

Brainstorming sessions

The day also included breakout sessions for farmers and collaborators to brainstorm on ways to best work together and to be successful as producer-led groups. Joe Bragger moderated the producer breakout and said it was a great opportunity for farmers to network with other farmers, directly asking questions and offering up answers. "The dialog was open and honest and really touched on some of the challenges and opportunities that any size watershed group could come across. It was refreshing to see that farmers felt comfortable to really open up and take advantage of the opportunity to interact directly with some of the more experienced farmer-led watershed groups. Thanks to DATCP for allowing time in the program for farmers to comfortably interact." Next year, we will allow more time for the breakout sessions as many participants enjoyed that portion of the day. If you have any thoughts on how we can improve the program moving forward, please email Rachel.Rushmann@wi.gov. Hope to see you next year!

Farmer Forum Draws Crowd, Focuses on Local Results

UW-Discovery Farms

On January 13th, over 100 farmers and advisors joined the Buffalo-Trempealeau Farmer Network for a Winter Farmer Forum focused on cover crops, soil health and nitrogen. The Buffalo-Trempealeau Farmer Network is one of 14 watershed projects funded by DATCP's Producer-Led Watershed Protection Grant Program.

“I joined the Elk Creek Farmer Network to learn from other farmers in the area. It's all about collaboration and learning from each other.”

“Today we wanted to host a local event to show all of the good our local farmers are doing with conservation”, explained Brian Maliszewski, a founder of the network.

From the location and food to the program offerings, the local focus was a true success. The forum was held in the basement of Saint Peter & Paul Church in Independence, with a delicious lunch made by local church members. Six area farmers led a panel discussion on updates from the field and how utilizing new technologies has helped their farms. It doesn't get much more local than that.

When navigating cover crops and crop insurance, keynote Mark Guitierrez from the USDA Risk Management Agency offered this advice: “Work with your insurance agent and abide by expert research to help plan your cover crop decisions. We want you to make decisions that will allow you to make money on your farm while using conservation practices.”

Another keynote was Dr. Heather



Darby from the University of Vermont. Her talk offered ways to implement cover crops and she shared Vermont success stories. Dr. Darby wants farmers to shift their mindset so that cover crops are not seen as an “optional” crop. “You can't afford to not take care of your soil,” explained Dr. Darby, “Protect your soil from Mother Nature by using cover crops.”

The day was packed with conservation information applied for the local context. Other talks included Francisco Arriaga from UW-Madison highlighting Wisconsin research on soil health, Kevan Klingberg from UW Discovery Farms discussing ways the program is tracking nitrogen on local farms, and Steve Okonek with Trempealeau County UW-Extension providing ten soil fertility strategies for lean economic times.

“The Buffalo-Trempealeau Farmer Network is thankful to have several partners, all of which were instrumental in helping us make the day happen,” expressed Joe Bragger, another founder of the network. “These projects are really all about

collaboration among farmers and partnering organizations.” Forum partners included Trempealeau and Buffalo UW-Extension, Trempealeau and Buffalo County Land Conservation Departments, Western Technical College, Buffalo and Trempealeau County NRCS, Trempealeau and Buffalo County Farm Bureau, and UW Discovery Farms.

For more information about this event, visit: <http://buffalo.uwex.edu/agriculture/cover-crops-projects-and-resources/>

To contact the Buffalo-Trempealeau Farmer Network: Brian Maliszewski at bmali_ent@hotmail.com and 715-530-1107 or Joe Bragger at braggfam@trivest.net and 715-530-0466.



Setting up Cover Crop Demonstration Plots

Recommendations and photos from Heidi Johnson, Dane County UW-Extension Crops and Soils Agent

As cover crops increase in popularity in Wisconsin, cover crop demonstration plots are a great way to help other farmers learn the best cover crops and management practices specific to your region. Before setting up plots, organizers should determine their goals for the plots and what they want to teach other farmers about cover crops. Below are some potential goals for demonstration plots and how to set them up to meet those goals.

Do you want to demonstrate what all the different cover crops look like?

If this is the goal, show as many cover crop species and mixes in the demo plots as you can but be sure to include signage or a handout that shows species, planting rate, cost and recommended uses for the species/mix. This is particularly important if you plant the cover crop at a time of the year when they wouldn't typically be planted. Including a soil pit in the cover crop plots allows attendees to not only look at the top growth on the various cover crops but better understand the differences in root structure.

Do you want to demonstrate something specific...such as the best cover crops for a specific rotation, planting methods or manure application to covers?

Using plots to demonstrate something specific is a great way to show farmers their various options for planting and managing cover crops in your region. Field day timing will be very important for this type of plots so farmers can get a realistic look at the cover crop for a specific rotation or a management practice at a certain time of year.

Do you want to use cover crop demonstration plots to research cover crop practices in your area?

Cover crop demonstration plots can also serve as research plots to compare cover crop practices. If conducting research is a goal, organizers should consider repeating the plots three times in the same field. Repeating the same plots helps to decipher true findings from field and environmental variability. There are many types of measurements that can be taken from the plots to compare practices.

Data collection might include:

- Fall or spring cover crop biomass
- C:N ratio of cover crop
- Percent ground cover in spring
- Soil nitrogen
- Water infiltration
- Yield of the cash crop that follows the cover crop

Cover crop plots are an excellent way for farmers to learn about cover crops. Putting some thought into the goals of conducting cover crop plots can increase their usefulness.

Questions? Reach out to Heidi at Johnson.Heidi@countyofdane.com, 608-224-3716



COVER CROP RECOMMENDATIONS

Encourage farmers to determine their goals for using cover crops

Erosion control
Growing nitrogen
Growing feed
Soil health

Cost effectiveness

Give recommendations that farmers can afford and ideally can pay for without cost share

Keep adoption level in mind

If farmer has never tried cover crops, give recommendations that we KNOW work.

For farmers moderately experienced in using cover crops, give recommendations of things others are experimenting with in this region.

For advanced users, give recommendations of things you've hear of from other regions and encourage small acre trials.

Two great resources for cover crop recommendations:

The Midwest Cover Crop Council selector tool: <http://mcccddev.anr.msu.edu/VertIndex.php>

Wisconsin Cover Crop Website: <http://fyi.uwex.edu/covercrop>

Nutrient Management Farmer Education Grants

DATCP Staff

Producer-led groups are eligible and encouraged to apply for the 2018 Nutrient Management Farmer Education (NMFE) Grants.

NMFE grants provide funding to perform nutrient management training and assist producers with nutrient management plan development and implementation.

Hosting a NMFE workshop is a great way to get other producers involved in nutrient management efforts. A past farmer participant describes his experience of attending NMFE training:

“ I have seen an increase in my crop yields. I wouldn't go to my fields to apply fertilizer without the detailed plans I have put together using SnapPlus and without the results of the soil test reports that I have gotten back on my fields. I have better crops because I have taken this class.”

Why are NMFE trainings beneficial?

Farmers can reduce the cost of developing a nutrient management plan by writing their own. By attending a class through a NMFE hosted workshop, farmers will see the value in developing a nutrient management plan and how it can save time, money and increase crop yield and profitability.

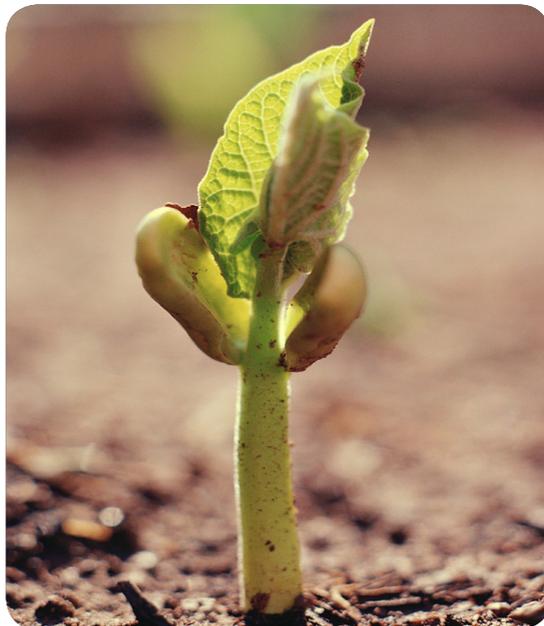
NMFE classes can offer participant stipends and payments to complete soil testing. Talk to the program manager for details on what's currently being offered in your county.

By taking a NMFE class, farmers will be able to:

- Make more informed land management decisions
- Save money by Identifying over-applications of nutrients
- Find value in soil sampling and manure spreader calibration
- Determine most efficient and profitable spreading locations
- Potentially increase crop yields by improving fertility program
- Identify practices that reduce soil erosion
- Redistribute fertilizer dollars more efficiently

The 2018 application is now available: visit: https://datcp.wi.gov/Pages/Programs_Services/NMFEGrants.aspx.

Applications are due on April 15, 2017.



Tier 1 funding: \$20,000 max

To train to producers and plan writers to develop 590-compliant nutrient management plans.

Training includes: workshops, farm mapping to show soil types and nutrient application restriction areas, soil testing and manure spreader calibration. Training focuses on using SnapPlus software for nutrient management planning.

Tier 1 funding can be used for participant payments, to complete soil testing or to attend training as well as for administrative, training and support costs.

Tier 2 funding: \$2,500 max

To offer nutrient management training and education. Developing a NRCS 590 compliant NM plan isn't required.

Tier 2 funding can be used for administrative, training and support costs.

Discovery Farms introduces The WaterWay Network

The Discovery Farms Programs of Wisconsin and Minnesota are excited to announce the launch of an online farmer-only discussion forum.

The discussion forum, known as The WaterWay Network, is a password protected, online platform for farmers, crop consultants, and hand-picked experts only. Do you have questions about cover crops, nutrient management, soil health, or water quality? Members on the site can provide you with the answers you are looking for.

“Farming presents challenges. Solutions can often be found from experience,” said Erica Olson, UW Discovery Farms farmer network manager. “I am excited to provide farmers with a place to connect and learn from others’ experiences and expertise.”

By joining The WaterWay Network, you will become a part of a unique online community that focuses on conservation. Farmers and crop consultants will provide the applied knowledge and experience, while Discovery Farms and University experts will bring science to the discussion.

Getting started is simple and FREE. If you are a farmer or crop consultant, register for an account today and get your questions answered at www.waterwaynetwork.org.

For more information:

[Visit our Producer-Led webpage](#)

Questions?

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