

Producer-Led Watershed Protection Grants

E-News Update

2018 Grants Awarded

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

May 2018

Two more farmer-led groups will receive funding for soil and water conservation efforts, and 17 groups will receive additional funding as a result of a recently signed bill that triples funding for Producer-Led Watershed Protection Grants through 2019.

"We applaud the Governor for his leadership in calling for the increase in funding as part of his new initiative for rural communities," said Sheila Harsdorf, Secretary of the Department of Agriculture, Trade and Consumer Protection. "We've now had three grant cycles, and each time interest has grown. Funding requests actually tripled in 2018 from the previous year."

The program previously received \$250,000 a year for grants, with funds coming from DATCP's overall soil and water allocation. In April, the Legislature approved and the Governor signed legislation to boost the total funding to \$750,000 per year during the 2017-19 biennium.

Producer-Led Watershed Protection

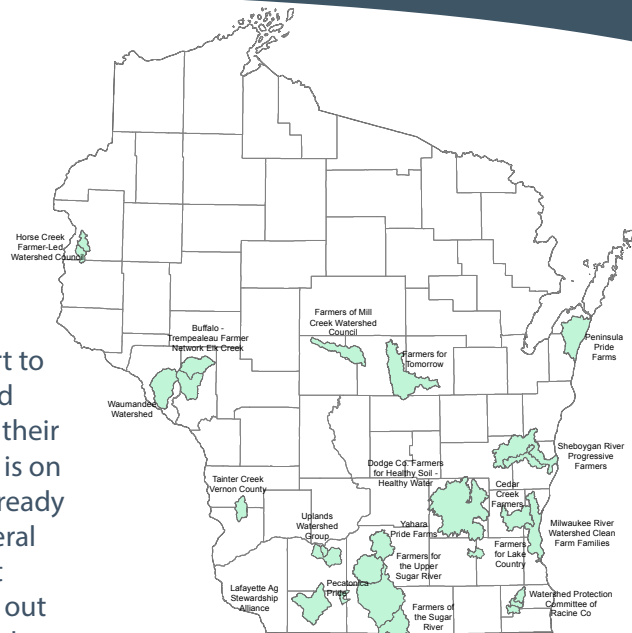
About the program

- Began in Spring 2016
- Encourages innovative ideas for conservation
- Fosters locally-led decision making by producers
- Improves water quality and soil health

Grants provide financial support to groups of farmers willing to lead conservation efforts tailored to their own watersheds. The emphasis is on innovation and practices not already covered by other state and federal programs, and the intent is that participating farmers will reach out to other farmers to help them adopt conservation practices.

Producer groups must work with DATCP, DNR, a county land conservation committee, the University of Wisconsin-Extension, or a nonprofit conservation organization. Groups may receive up to \$40,000 a year. From 2015-2017, the department awarded a total of over \$689,600 to 25 different groups.

As a result of the new funding, the 17 groups (7 of which are first-time applicants) that received grants in January will get full funding rather than the prorated amount. Two groups that did not receive grants then will now be funded. Those groups are Farmers for Lake Country, receiving \$38,375, and Pecatonica Pride, receiving \$30,500. For 2019, the department will again award up to \$750,000.



2018 Producer-Led Grant Recipients

"We commend the Legislature and Governor for recognizing the importance of these farmer-led efforts in protecting and conserving our land and waters in ways that work for them."
DATCP Secretary Harsdorf

The department will begin taking grant applications in July for 2019 funding. Application materials will be posted to the producer-led webpage.

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Project Descriptions

Cedar Creek Farmers: \$23,000

Cedar Creek is a tributary of the Milwaukee River in Washington County. Cedar Creek Farmers has developed an incentive payment plan for conservation practices to offset costs of establishing grasses in concentrated flow channels, reduced and no-tillage, fall cover crop establishment, and nutrient management planning. The goal is to spend 80 percent of the grant on incentive payments, with the remainder going to host field days and distribute informational materials. Washington County Land and Water Conservation Division is their collaborator. Contact: Allen Schmidt, (262) 483-0683

Dodge County Farmers for Healthy Soil-Healthy Water: \$39,552

Operating in the Upper Rock River Watershed, this group's long-term goal is to increase cover crop use and decrease sediment and nutrient runoff. They intend to research what timing and planting methods work best for both spring and fall, and what grains produce good cover without harming yields of commodity crops. They will hold two winter workshops, a summer field day and an autumn tour for farmers, lake associations and the general public, and provide incentive payments to help farmers with costs including seed, equipment rental and soil testing.

Dodge County University of Wisconsin-Extension will be the group's collaborator. Contact: Loretta Ortiz-Ribbing, (920) 386-3791

Farmers for Tomorrow: \$37,120

This group in the Tomorrow River/Waupaca River watershed, with its highly permeable sandy soils, is focused on groundwater protection.

Nutrients also reach the rivers via groundwater. To reach their goal of reducing nitrates entering groundwater from farm fields and barnyards, they will offer incentives for planting cover crops and cost-sharing for manure testing that can help prevent over-application. The funding will also go toward a kickoff dinner to raise awareness of farmers in the watershed, a field day, and demonstration plots. Waupaca and Portage County UWEX and Wisconsin Farmers Union are collaborators. Contact: Matt Hintz, (715)824-6706

Farmers of the Sugar River: \$16,500

Working in the mid and lower Sugar River basins, these producers aim to show that conservation practices such as nutrient management planning, reduced and no-tillage, and cover crops can be profitable and to increase use of innovative conservation practices. They also want to raise public awareness of farmers' efforts to protect the environment. They will use their grant to put on a winter kickoff event, provide incentive payments to farmers to try new practices, host a summer field day and plant a demonstration plot. They are collaborating with Green County Land and Water Conservation Department. Contact: Dan Truttmann, (608) 513-8363

Lafayette Ag Stewardship Alliance: \$20,000

Lafayette County faces groundwater issues presented by its karst topography. The alliance is focusing on cover crops to minimize soil loss and nutrient runoff as well as threats to surface waters. They will try to identify the species and planting methods that are most likely

to increase use of cover crops as a conservation measure. They plan to conduct farm assessments to prioritize conservation goals, offer cost-sharing to promote use of cover crops, establish a research plots and host an annual meeting to present results to farmers. The Dairy Business Foundation is collaborating with the group. Contact: Jim Winn, (608)778-3271

Sheboygan River Progressive Farmers: \$30,000

This group plans to use much of its funding to provide incentives to farmers to do soil, manure and tissue sampling; develop nutrient management plans; and use conservation tillage and low-disturbance manure injection. Members seek improved soil health, greater farming efficiency and reduced environmental impact in their operations. They also intend to undertake gypsum trials as a means of increasing water filtration and reducing runoff on their heavy clay soils. They will host summer and fall field days. The Nature Conservancy is the collaborator. Contact: Joe Wagner, (920) 838-1102

Tainter Creek Farmer-Led Watershed Council: \$30,004

This watershed in Vernon County is characterized by steep hills, highly erodible soil, and karst topography, so

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land use has a direct, dramatic effect on quantity and quality of water in streams. In addition, trout fishing is a local economic driver. The council seeks to reduce the impacts of flooding and erosion, learn what the surface water baseline is, learn good farming practices and share knowledge among neighbors, and improve agriculture's image. This grant will help fund farm evaluations, surface water testing, a field day, a DNR stream ecology day, and cost-sharing for 500 acres of cover crops. Their collaborator is Vernon County Land and Water Conservation Department. Contact: Berent Froiland, (608) 391-0570

Watershed Protection Committee of Racine County: \$40,000

This new group will lead efforts to control erosion and improve water quality, providing information to farmers and other rural landowners about conservation practices including grassed buffers, ditch bank sloping, streambank protection, strip till, no-till and cover crops. They will be working in the Hoosier Creek, Eagle Creek and Goose Lake Branch watersheds, focusing on being good land stewards while improving yields. Grant funds will go toward incentives for planting grassed buffers and cover crops, and toward hosting a winter meeting and summer field day. Their collaborator is Racine County Land Conservation Department. Contact: Tom Greil, (414) 651-4076

Buffalo-Trempealeau Farm Network: \$25,120

The Elk Creek and Middle Trempealeau watersheds are in the upper reaches of the driftless region, with steep slopes and many streams. The two counties have higher average nitrogen concentrations than most of the rest of the state. The network plans to work with farmers to budget and track nitrogen applications, and improve



nitrogen management practices. They also want to work on methods and economics of cover crops, with a goal of planting at least 500 new acres or trying new methods, with a per-acre rebate. They will host a winter meeting. UW Discovery Farms is the collaborator. Contact: Brian Maliszewski, (715) 530-1107

Farmers for the Upper Sugar River: \$20,000

This Dane County group started with the idea that improving water quality required making conservation practices more accessible, increasing education opportunities, and establishing baseline phosphorus levels in the watershed. With this funding, they will expand phosphorus monitoring for producers who own land along or near streams. They will also host spring and fall field days, rent equipment for low-disturbance manure injection and vertical tillage, and offer cover crop incentives for 400 acres. The Upper Sugar River Watershed Association and Dane County UWEX are there their collaborators. Contact: Wade Moder, (608) 437-7707

Farmers of Mill Creek Watershed Council: \$33,075

The Mill Creek Watershed lies in eastern Wood County and western Portage County. The council works to reduce phosphorus loading from farm fields and barnyards, and to educate themselves and their neighbors about management practices that will improve water quality. They will use their grant to offer financial incentives to farmers to offset the cost of trying cover crops and no-till planting, to set up trial plots, and host three field days. Portage County UW-Extension is the collaborator. Contact: John Eron, (715) 498-5222

Horse Creek Farmer-Led Watershed Council: \$20,000

Horse Creek lies in Polk County, and drains to Cedar Lake, which is listed as an impaired water because of high phosphorus levels. Ultimately runoff from this watershed reaches the St. Croix and Mississippi rivers. The group was one of the earliest of the farmer-led groups in Wisconsin. This year it plans to use grant funding to cost-share soil and manure sampling, phosphorus indexing, manure spread calibration, as well as planting cover crops and vegetated field borders. Polk County Land and Water Resources Department is the

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collaborator for this project. Contact: Eric Wojchik, (715) 485-8699

Milwaukee River Watershed Clean Farm Families: \$35,000

This group will use its grant funding to provide incentive payments to offset 70 percent of the costs of cover crops and harvestable buffers, and to plant cover crop demonstration plots to test varying slope, soils, microclimates and other field conditions, as well as different planting methods. They will also host several field days and a winter workshop. The group's goal is to promote and showcase best soil and water conservation practices in the watershed, which drains to Lake Michigan near urban areas. Ozaukee County Land and Water Management Department is the collaborator. Contact: Jim Melichar, (262) 206-1731

Peninsula Pride Farms: \$40,000

Active in the Ahnapee River and Stony Creek watersheds, the Peninsula Pride group focuses on protecting both surface waters and groundwater through innovative practices. They plan to use the entire grant to cost-share farm assessments to identify and prioritize management practices, farming systems and landscape features to reduce the risk of groundwater contamination. Collaborators in the project are the Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources, UW Discovery Farms, Lakeshore Natural Resource Partnership, Door County Soil and Water Conservation Department, and Kewaunee County Land and Water Conservation Department. Contact: Don Niles, (920) 621-3253

Uplands Watershed Group: \$26,300

This group of producers farms in five contiguous sub-watersheds in Iowa County: Meudt Creek-Mill Creek, Trout Creek, Knight Hollow-Mill Creek, Lowery Creek and Rush Creek. They will have a particular emphasis on

a citizen water-quality monitoring project. Their goals for 2018 include having all farmers in the group using nutrient management plans, and increasing use of cover crops, no-till drilling and managed grazing. They also want to continue a relationship with Gulf of Mexico fishermen and extend it from Louisiana to Alabama and Mississippi. Their collaborator is the Michael Fields Agricultural Institute. Contact: Michael Dolan, (608) 444-4759

Waumandee Watershed: \$13,700

This Buffalo County group intends to demonstrate the economic and environmental benefits of cover crops as part of a farming system over a multi-year project. The ultimate goal is to encourage more farmers to use cover crops long-term. They will also encourage reduced tillage, and aim to expand their reach to absentee landowners and farmers renting cropland. They will use their grant to establish cover crop demonstration plots and to replicate early field trials, host two field days and a winter meeting, and hold a meeting/webinar on conservation compliance and rental agreements. Buffalo County Land Conservation Department is collaborating. Contact: Dustin Ellis, (608) 797-0380

Yahara Pride Farms: \$40,000

Yahara Pride aims to enhance the Farmer-Led Water Quality and Farm Sustainability Initiative in the Yahara River watershed. The group will use its grant to provide cost-sharing and incentives, and to conduct farm certification and research programs. The ultimate goal is to cover at least 70 percent of the 40,000 tillable acres in the watershed with conservation practices, and to engage at least 80 percent of the 400 farmers in the watershed in efforts to improve soil and water quality. Collaborators are UW-Discovery Farms and the Dairy

Funding overview

- FY 2016 Funds - 14 groups; \$242,550
- FY 2017 Funds - 11 groups; \$197,065
- FY 2018 Funds - 19 groups; \$558,246

Program Highlights

- Voluntary, farmer-led approach
- A platform for farmers to talk and share ideas with other farmers
- Ability to try new practices and application methods with low risk

Business Association. Contact: Jeff Endres, (608) 279-8991

Farmers for Lake Country: \$38,375

In the Oconomowoc River Watershed, Farmers for Lake Country will host a field technology day, continue their water friendly farm certification program and offer cost-share for aerial seeding of cover crops. The group will also transition to "Producer-Led Shed Talks" to engage more producers and provide smaller, more targeted presentations. Collaborators are Tall Pines Conservancy and the Oconomowoc Watershed Partnership Program. Contact: Tom Steinbach, (414) 531-7006

Pecatonica Pride Producer-Led Watershed Association: \$30,500

Working with Southwest Badger Resource Conservation and Development, Pecatonica Pride will offer farm assessments, provide incentives to farmers to try new conservation practices, host a Whole Farm Planning Workshop, host outreach events and continue and expand sites for Phosphorus testing and development of in-stream baseline data. The group will also place significant effort on engaging the entire community through different outreach events and trainings. Contact: Kriss Marion, (608) 558-0501

Buffalo-Trempealeau Farmer Network Farmer Forum

Amber Radatz, UW Discovery Farms

On January 18, more than 80 farmers and advisors joined the Buffalo-Trempealeau Farmer Network for the third annual Winter Farmer Forum. This year's theme was Cover Crops and Conservation for the New Year. Farmers from the Elk Creek and Middle Trempealeau River Watershed hosted the event with the help of 9 local sponsors.

The Buffalo Trempealeau Farmer Network is 1 of 17 groups who received a grant through the Wisconsin Department of Agriculture, Trade and Consumer Protection's Producer-Led Watershed Protection Grants Program to work with conservation agencies and organizations to address soil and water issues tailored to local conditions for 2018. The group has been in operation since 2016, and this is the third annual grant awarded to the group.

"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," explained Brian Maliszewski, chairman of the network. "Today we are glad to again host a local event showcasing the innovation our local farmers are putting to work with conservation and cover crops."



This year the event was held at the Arcadia Country Club in Arcadia. Area farmers and agronomists led a panel discussion on methods for establishing cover crops, including their experiences with practices that have been successful and some that have been failures.

One of the three featured speakers was Barry Bubolz from USDA NRCS in Eastern Wisconsin. He talked about the farmers he works with in the Lower Fox Demonstration Farms Network. The farmers are advancing their conservation efforts through using cover crops, low disturbance manure incorporation, strip till or no till, and grazing. Especially of interest was his experience with different equipment modifications and varieties of cover crops. The second featured speaker was Andy Bensend of AB Farms in Barron County, Wisconsin. Andy is a previous winner of the National Conservation Legacy Award from the American Soybean Association. He gave the group perspective on how his practices have changed and evolved over the years as the best available knowledge has changed. He encouraged farmers to move farming systems forward through keeping your own records through the years and visually inspecting how practices are holding up through different seasons. The third featured speaker was Emil Giese, of Giese Farms in Jackson County. Emil and his son, James, have gone through a couple seasons of relay cropping soybeans and winter wheat. He shared things that have worked, and some that haven't, including the equipment, seed varieties and herbicide programs that are key to making this system work. He was candid about how interesting it has been and that they will continue to tweak this system because of the soil and rotation benefits they've already seen.

Again this year the forum was made possible because of partners including Trempealeau County UW Extension, Trempealeau County Land Conservation Department, Western Technical College, Trempealeau County Farm Bureau and UW Discovery Farms. For the first time, local sponsors chipped in together to cover the financial obligation for lunch, morning break items and speaker fees. These businesses all support local cover crop and conservation efforts and are a wonderful resource for area farmers: Trempealeau County Farm Bureau, Allied Cooperative, Tractor Central Arcadia, Value Implement, Compeer Financial, Trempealeau County UW Extension, Nelson Seed Service – Kellen Nelson, Midwest BioAg – Joe Danzinger, Bob Schmidtknecht, and Bob DeJong, Channel Seed-Broc Kensmoe and Kris Lien

For more information about this event or the Buffalo-Trempealeau Farmer Network, contact Brian Maliszewski at bmali_ent@hotmail.com or 715-530-1107 or Joe Bragger at braggfam@triwest.net or 715-530-0466.

Second Annual Producer-Led Workshop

Over 60 farmers and collaborators attended the 2nd annual Producer-Led Annual Workshop on December 13, 2017 at The Wilderness in Wisconsin Dells to network and learn from other producer-led groups throughout the state. The morning started with a welcome by Sara Walling, DATCP Nutrient Management and Water Quality Section Chief who highlighted the successes of the program and the importance of the producer-led concept to achieving water quality goals in our state.

Four of the DATCP funded producer-led groups then discussed each of their group's achievements and what they've learned so far. Some highlights included the Farmers for Lake Country's Water Friendly Farm program to recognize producers who have exhibited continuous conservation improvement on their land to preserve and protect soil and water quality as well as the Farmers of the Barron County Watersheds' results of trying various cover crop applications.

Natalie Cotter with DATCP discussed how an Agricultural Enterprise Area (AEA) can complement a producer-led group. AEAs could be used as an additional tool to accomplish your watershed protection goals as landowners claiming the farmland preservation tax credit need to comply with the state soil and water conservation standards. For more information, visit farmlandpreservation.wi.gov and click on AEAs. Petitions are due to DATCP by June 8, 2018.

Eric Cooley with UW Discovery Farms then gave a presentation on how groups could incorporate monitoring into their projects. If groups want to evaluate a condition, understand how a practice works/responds and prove or verify the effects, monitoring is something to consider. Developing a strong work plan is key, since monitoring does come with a price tag for the equipment and analysis that it requires.

The afternoon began with the breakout sessions, one for collaborators and one for farmers, to share lessons learned and what has and hasn't been working in the projects. Farmers discussed the startup process of groups, setting up cost-share programs, using SnapPlus as a tool to track the phosphorus reductions associated with practices and noted the benefit of promoting positive agricultural conservation stories to the public.

Collaborators focused on how to expand partnerships within the groups, how to increase the diversity of funding sources beyond the DATCP grant and how to establish baselines for groups to work from.



Jamie Patton closed out the conference with tips on hosting a successful field day or similar event. The three items to focus on: planning, price and promotion. Check out all of her tips at: <https://datcp.wi.gov/Documents/HostingaFieldDay.pdf>

Thanks to all that participated, to our facilitators, presenters, note takers and conference organizers. Please join us next year at The Wilderness in Wisconsin Dells on **Tuesday, December 11, 2018.**

If you have any ideas for how to improve the workshop, please email rachel.rushmann@wi.gov.

For upcoming events, reimbursement forms, report templates and other resources, please [visit our Producer-Led webpage](#)

Questions?

Contact:
608-224-4622
Rachel.Rushmann@wi.gov

ANNOUNCEMENTS

- Application materials for 2019 Producer-Led funding will be sent out on our list-serve and posted to our webpage.
- To join the general producer-led list-serve, click 'Sign up for email updates' at the bottom of the DATCP webpage.
- An annual program report for 2016-17 will be released mid-summer and will be posted to the producer-led webpage.

