



Producer-Led Watershed Protection Grant Applications Now Available

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MADISON – Groups of Wisconsin farmers can now apply for the Producer-Led Watershed Protection grants for 2017. Applications will be accepted July 1-Sept. 1, 2016.

The Department of Agriculture, Trade and Consumer Protection (DATCP) will award grants to producer-led groups that focus on ways to prevent and reduce runoff from farm fields and farmsteads. Each group is eligible for up to \$20,000 a year, with a total of \$250,000 available in this round of funding.

The grants are intended to help farmers find solutions best suited for their particular watersheds, based on topography, soil type, types of operations and other factors that differ among regions of the state and work to increase farmer participation in these voluntary efforts.

The first 14 grants were awarded earlier this year in the new program included in the 2015-17 budget. Some of the producer-led groups were already in existence, but many of them were newly created with the help of the grant funds.

"We particularly encourage new groups to step up and apply for grants," said Sara Walling, DATCP water quality section leader. "We had groups from around the state funded in the last round, and we want to continue to broaden our support of farmers in their conservation efforts. But we also want to help established groups continue their successes."

Applicants must be groups of at least five farmers whose farms are in the same watershed and each produced at least \$6,000 in gross farm revenue last year, or \$18,000 over the past three years. They must work with DATCP, the Department of Natural Resources, a county land conservation committee, the University of Wisconsin-Extension, or a nonprofit conservation organization. The group must work with other producers in the watershed voluntarily work to reduce runoff pollution from farm operations, and contribute matching funds at least equal to the grant request.

A few examples of projects include:

- Startup work such as watershed planning and bringing in experts to speak about soil and water quality issues
- Incentive payments to farmers to do soil testing and nutrient management planning, plant cover crops, install grassed waterways, and other conservation activities
- Develop new approaches to manure storage and applications
- Host conferences, workshops or field days to engage additional farmer participation

Grant funds cannot pay for real estate, loans, equipment purchases, or lobbying and the amount of the funding that can go toward staff time is restricted to 25 percent of the grant request.

Application materials are available at

https://datcp.wi.gov/Pages/Programs_Services/ProducerLedProjects.aspx. They must be submitted by email. Farmers with questions should contact Rachel Rushmann, 608-224-4622, rachel.rushmann@wi.gov.

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