

## Producer Led Watershed Protection Grants Program

Explore the innovative 2016 producer led projects throughout Wisconsin's watersheds.



**Intro:** In the effort to improve the quality of Wisconsin's waterways, the Department of Agriculture, Trade and Consumer Protection (DATCP) developed the first Producer Led Watershed Protection Grants Program. In 2016, 14 groups of innovative farmers were awarded \$242,550 to work with resource conservation agencies and organizations to address soil and water issues tailored to their local conditions. Five producer led groups already existed before the program, while nine just recently established to apply for funding.

Secretary of DATCP, Ben Brancel said, "*All of these projects have strong farmer leadership and a commitment to improving water and soil quality on Wisconsin farmland. Each project is unique, and they all include learning about best management practices, installing conservation practices, and forming partnerships to strengthen their efforts. I look forward to seeing what they accomplish.*"

The new grant program was included in the 2015-17 Wisconsin state budget, designed to give financial support to farmers willing to lead conservation efforts in their own watersheds. Each group is eligible for up to \$20,000 a year. Producer groups must work with DATCP, the WI DNR, a county land conservation committee, the University of Wisconsin-Extension, or a nonprofit conservation organization.

### **Buffalo-Trempealeau Farmer Network (BTFN) – Elk Creek Watershed \$17,700**

*Understanding and improving nitrogen application in the Elk Creek Watershed*

The BTFN – Elk Creek Watershed group is working with UW Discovery Farms on a nitrogen use efficiency project in order to better understand alternative nutrient application rates, timing and methods. The group will also host field days and meetings throughout the year to develop a farmer network regarding nitrogen use topics. To learn more about the nitrogen use efficiency (NUE) project with UW Discovery Farms, [please visit the NUE webpage](#).

### **Buffalo-Trempealeau Farmer Network (BTFN) – Waumandee Creek Watershed \$12,000**

*Reducing soil and nutrient loss through the adoption of cover crops*

The BTFN Network – Waumandee Creek Watershed group is collaborating with Buffalo County Land Conservation Department to host a cover crop symposium and field day, run cover crop trials, and install conservation practices on highly erodible lands. At the symposium, the group will bring in regional cover crop experts to explore opportunities for new technologies in cover crop seeding and delayed seed germination.

**Peninsula Pride Farms – Ahnapee Watershed \$20,000**

*Working with agriculture to protect groundwater in southern Door County and Kewaunee County*

Peninsula Pride Farms is promoting protective land management practices, identified through WI DNR work groups, in the karst region of Kewaunee and Door counties. Collaborating with UW Discovery Farms, the group will use field days, conferences, incentive programs and research demonstration projects to engage additional farmers in their conservation efforts. For more information on their group, [please visit their webpage.](#)

**Farmers for Lake Country – Oconomowoc River Watershed \$7,000**

*Improving water quality in the Oconomowoc River watershed*

Collaborating with Tall Pines Conservancy, Farmers for Lake Country will offer incentives to install filter strips, plant cover crops and adopt reduced tillage systems as part of a larger effort, the Oconomowoc Watershed Protection Program (OWPP) Adaptive Management Program. They will also use a flow monitoring system to define target areas and measure runoff reductions from installed practices.

**South Kinni Farmer-Led Watershed Council, Dry Run Creek Farmer-Led Council, Horse Creek Farmer-Led Watershed Council, Hay River Farmer-Led Watershed Council \$20,000 each**

*Improving water quality and building soil health*

Four farmer-led councils are collaborating with Dunn, Polk, Pierce and St. Croix county land conservation departments to offer incentives and evaluate the effectiveness of conservation practices including cover crops, grassed waterways, reduced tillage systems and increased crop diversity depending on their specific watershed needs. To increase farm participation, they also host field days and conferences within their separate watersheds.

**Milwaukee River Watershed Clean Farm Families \$20,000**

*Improving soil health and water quality in the Milwaukee River watershed*

Collaborating with Ozaukee County Land Conservation Department and the Milwaukee River Watershed Conservation Partnership, the Milwaukee River Watershed Clean Farm Families group will showcase conservation practices tailored to their watershed needs, host workshops, and sponsor cover crop, harvestable buffer and tillage demonstrations. Their producer council will provide a platform for producers and landowners to communicate concerns and priorities, and share lessons learned from using conservation practices on their own farms.

### **Farmers of Barron County Watershed \$16,000**

#### *Reducing nutrient and sediment loss in the Yellow River watershed*

Working with Barron Land Conservation Department, the Farmers of Barron County Watersheds will establish baseline data for land use and target areas, and use on-farm research and demonstration trials to address nutrient and sediment loss. They will engage additional farmers by hosting field days, education sessions and on-farm meetings.

### **Farmers of Mill Creek Watershed Council \$20,000**

#### *Water quality improvement and public outreach in Mill Creek*

Farmers of Mill Creek Watershed Council will work with Portage County UW-Extension to perform cover crop research regarding effects on soil moisture and temperature, as well as research on agricultural drains to improve water management. The group will also offer incentives for planting cover crops and focus on outreach to farmers through educational field days.

### **Farmer Led Watershed Group in Iowa County \$20,000**

#### *Farmer led watershed group in the Trout Creek-Mill Creek watershed*

The Farmer Led Watershed Group in Iowa County will provide incentives for conservation practices that address the watershed's erosion and groundwater quality concerns, and will also work to improve nutrient management. Additionally, the group will perform on-farm demonstration trials in partnership with the Michael Fields Agricultural Institute to learn more about cover crops in the Trout Creek-Mill Creek watershed.

### **Yahara Pride Farms \$20,000**

#### *Reducing agricultural phosphorus loss to surface waters in the Yahara watershed*

Yahara Pride Farms, working with UW Discovery Farms and many other partners in the agricultural industry, will continue to focus on conservation and nutrient management to reduce nutrient runoff, work on comprehensive farm assessments, offer incentive payments for testing conservation practices and perform on-farm research regarding nitrogen use efficiency, cover crops, manure stacking and composting, manure injection and strip tillage.

### **Upper Sugar River Watershed Coalition \$9,850**

#### *Forming a producer-led coalition in the Sugar River watershed*

Collaborating with the Upper Sugar River Watershed Association, the producer led coalition in the Sugar River Watershed will work with UW-Whitewater to identify highly erodible areas to focus conservation efforts. As a newly formed group, members will be using some of their funding to establish and expand their coalition of farmers to address their watershed's resource concerns. Additionally, they will host a "Lunch and Learn" workshop in partnership with Dane County UW Extension.