

Producer-Led Watershed Protection Grant Program

2022-2023 Impact Report



Wisconsin Department of Agriculture,
Trade and Consumer Protection

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Front cover: Farmers gather for a Dodge County Farmers for Healthy Soil and Healthy Water field day. **Photo credit: Dana Christel, DATCP**

Planting green keeps cover crop residue on the field while the corn grow emerges at a Sauk Soil and Water Improvement Group field day. **Photo credit: Randy Zogbaum, DATCP**

Wisconsin's Unique Watershed Protection Program

The Wisconsin Department of Agriculture, Trade and Consumer Protection (DATCP) provides funding to producer-led groups that focus on non-point source pollution abatement activities through the Producer-Led Watershed Protection Grant Program (PLWPG).

This program supports producer-led conservation solutions by **encouraging innovation** through partnerships, on-farm demonstrations, and flexible cost-share programs while emphasizing **farmer-to-farmer learning and outreach** to improve Wisconsin's soil health and water quality.

Program Goal: To improve Wisconsin's soil and water quality by supporting and advancing producer-led conservation solutions that increase on-the-ground practices and farmer participation in local watershed efforts.

“ The producer-led program has been successful in promoting local, farmer-driven solutions to address pressing water quality and soil health issues. Farmers participants are in an excellent position to understand their local resource concerns, and to engage their peers on the economic and ecological benefits of conservation practices and systems. ”

MARK WITECHA

Soil and Watershed Conservation Section Manager, DATCP



Lafayette Ag Stewardship Alliance farmers check out a fall-seeded cover crop after corn silage with their local Extension Agent Josh Kamps.

**Photo credit: Dan Smith,
University of Wisconsin-Extension**

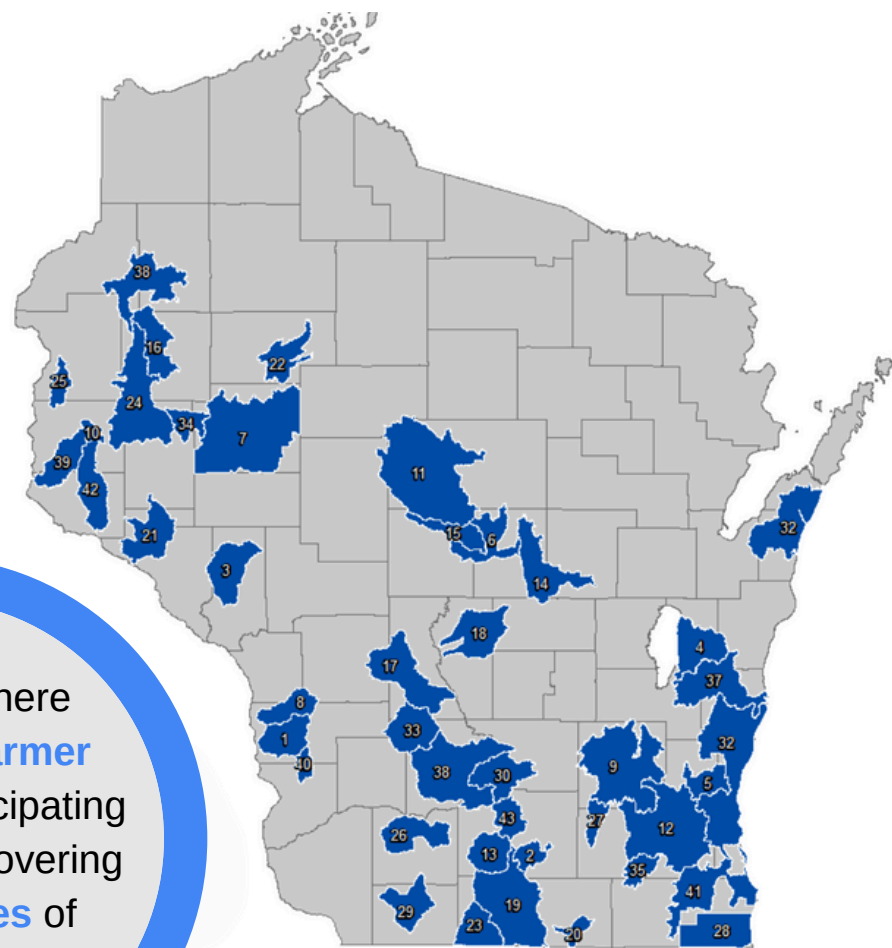
Producer-Led Groups 2022-2023

2023 Producer-Led Groups

ID	GROUP	ID	GROUP	ID	GROUP
1	Bad-Axe Farmer-Led Watershed Council	15	Farmers of Mill Creek Watershed Council	29	Lafayette Ag Stewardship Alliance
2	Biological Farming Friends	16	Farmers of the Barron County Watersheds	30	Lake Wisconsin Farmer Watershed Council
3	Buffalo Trempealeau Farmer Network	17	Farmers of the Lemonweir Valley	31	Milwaukee River Watershed Clean Farm Families
4	Calumet County Ag Stewardship Alliance	18	Farmers of the Roche-A-Cri	32	Peninsula Pride Farms
5	Cedar Creek Farmers	19	Farmers of the Sugar River	33	Producers of Lake Redstone
6	Central Wisconsin Farmers' Collaborative	20	Farmers on the Rock	34	Red Cedar Conservation Farmers
7	*Chippewa Valley Producer Led Watershed	21	FARMERS4HEALTH/Bear Creek Chippewa River	35	Rock River Regenerative Graziers
8	Coon Creek Community Watershed Council	22	*Flambeau Valley Watershed Group	36	Sauk Soil & Water Improvement Group
9	Dodge County Farmers for Healthy Soil & Healthy Water	23	*Green County Clean Waters	37	Sheboygan River Progressive Farmers
10	Dry Run Farmer-Led Watershed Council	24	Hay River Farmer-Led Watershed Council	38	Shell Lake, Yellow River Watershed Council
11	Eau Pleine Partnership for Integrated Conservation	25	Horse Creek Area Farmer Led Watershed Council	39	South Kinni Farmer Led Watershed Council
12	Farmers for Lake Country	26	Iowa County Uplands Watershed Group	40	Tainter Creek Farmer led Watershed Council
13	Farmers for the Upper Sugar River	27	Jefferson County Soil Builders	41	Watershed Protection Committee of Racine County
14	Farmers for Tomorrow River Watershed Council	28	*Kenosha County Regenerative Producers	42	Western Wisconsin Conservation Council
* New Group				43	Yahara Pride Farms, Inc.

In the **2022-2023** biennium, a total of **43 groups** were **funded**, seven of which received DATCP funding for the first time.

MAP OF 43 PRODUCER-LED GROUPS FUNDED BY DATCP FROM 2016-2023



As of 2023, there were **2,016 farmer members** participating in PL groups, covering **782,674 acres** of Wisconsin cropland.

Funding

Total grant requests continue to surpass the budget.

Grant requests are capped at \$40,000 per group. Annual program funding for both 2022 and 2023 grant cycles was \$1 million, compared to \$250,000 in the first grant cycle in 2016.

Fiscal Year	Total Requests	Total Awarded	Number of requests	Number of groups awarded
2016	\$262,550	\$242,550	15	14
2017	\$197,065	\$197,065	11	11
2018	\$619,721	\$558,246	21	17
2019	\$869,815	\$750,000	27	24
2020	\$1,051,871	\$750,000	27	24
2021	\$1,043,910	\$750,000	33	30
2022	\$1,194,543	\$1,000,000	36	36
2023	\$1,525,889	\$1,000,000	45	43

Collaborator for PL group Biological Farming Friends, Marie Raboin, standing in corn interseeded with a multi-species cover crop mix in a farmer member's demonstration plot.

Photo credit: Chelsea Zegler, University of Wisconsin-Extension



2022 and 2023 continued to see interest in the program grow and grant requests exceed available funds.

Cover crops inter-seeded into growing corn crop.
Photo credit: Randy Zogbaum, DATCP

Spending in 2022-2023 still focused on priority incentive programs.

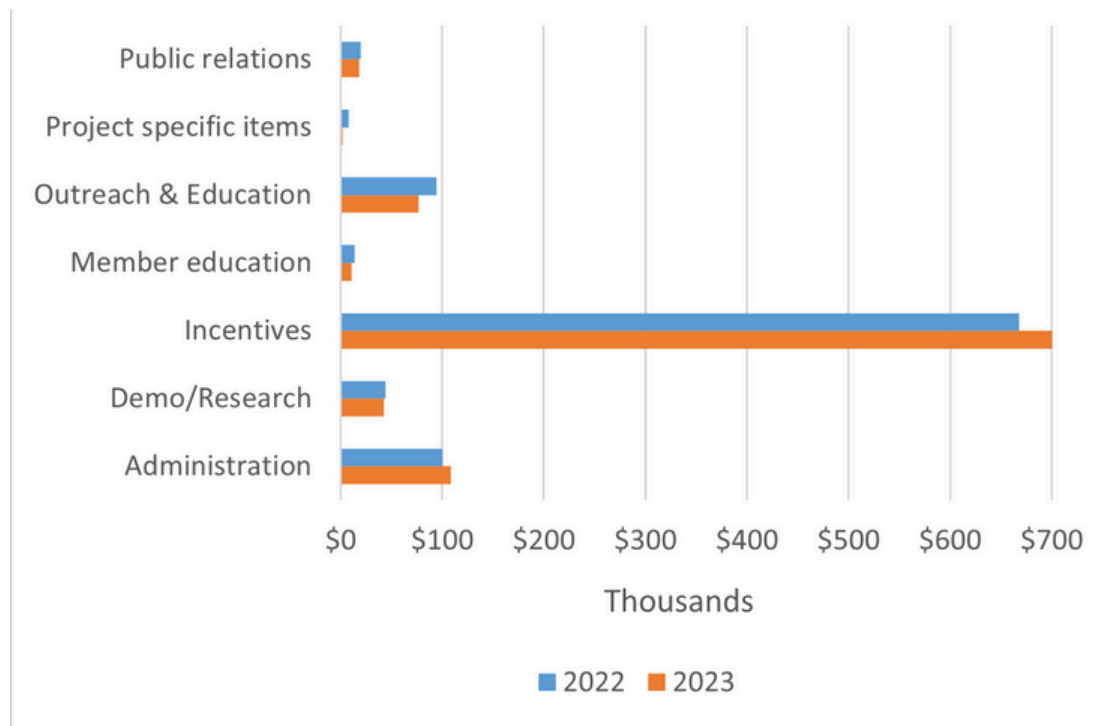
Incentive programs offer payments for a variety of conservation practices.

Administrative costs cover staff time, meetings, and marketing costs.

Outreach includes field days, scholarships, workshops, and other events. **On-**

farm demonstration and research includes costs for materials, supplies and stipends for those projects. **Member education** covers conference fees and costs for attending educational events.

SPENDING BY CATEGORY
2022 AND 2023 GRANT CYCLES



70% of funding in 2022 and 73% in 2023 went toward incentive payments for conservation practices and conservation systems.

Over 11% of funding went to Outreach & Education and Research & Demonstration projects.

Producer-Led Conservation Outreach

Outreach continues to be an important component of the PLWPG. Farmers are faced with persistent and new challenges every day, and having a **reliable place to turn to for assistance and support is key to expanding conservation** and soil health systems in Wisconsin. Producer-led groups put **consistent time, effort, and passion into delivering effective outreach events** that foster farmer-to-farmer networking, learning, and relationship building.

The majority of outreach events in 2022-2023 went towards board meetings, which are often educational as well as important for planning group activities. Field days and pop-up meetings are an effective way to show farmers practices and systems in action. 2022-2023 saw PL groups collaborating to bring in national speakers on soil health, particularly for workshops.

In 2023, producer-led watershed groups held:

54 conferences/workshops

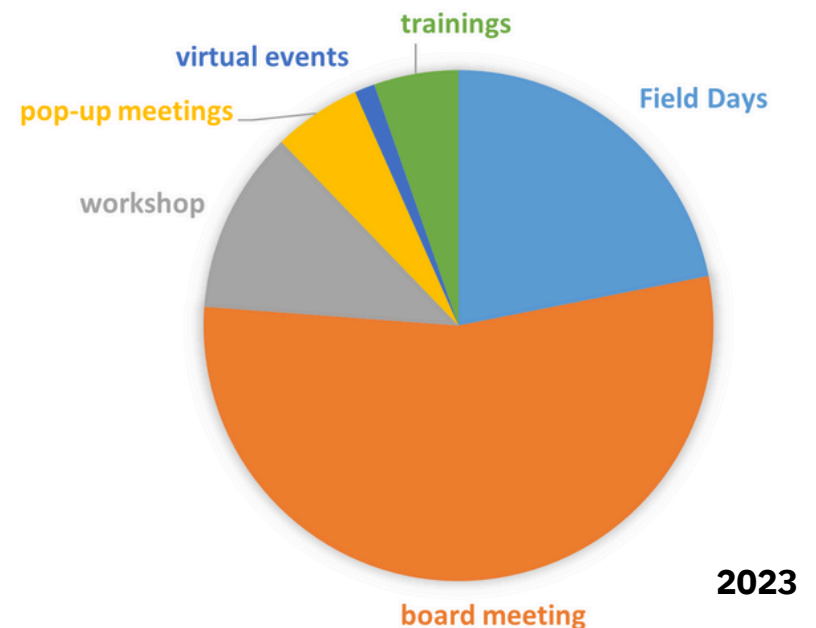
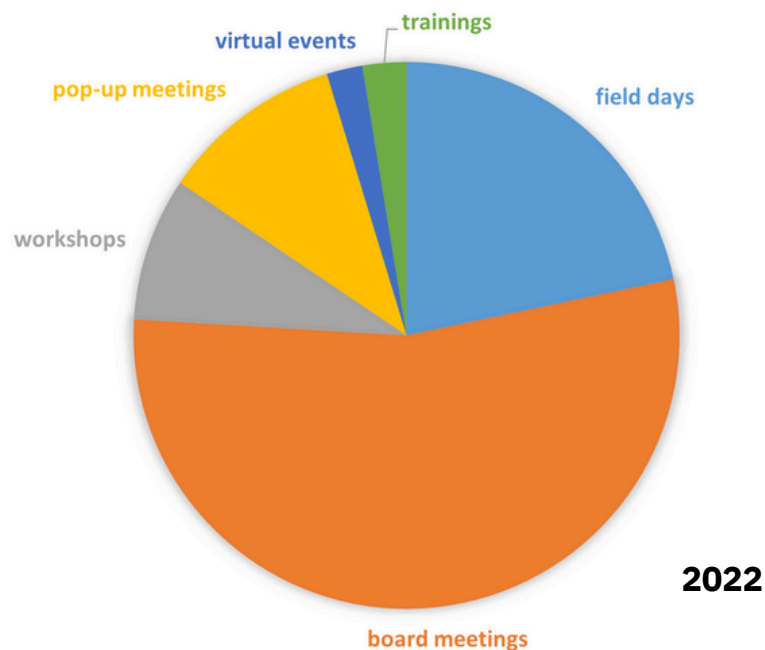
26 “pop-up” meetings

102 field days

Collectively, the groups reached **11,962 attendees at outreach events** and

8,156 farmers and partners via mailing and email lists

PROPORTION OF OUTREACH EVENTS 2022-2023



“ I took an interest in SRPF a few years ago, and was intrigued with the thought of networking with other farmers that are trying similar practices. The ideas, encouragements, and friendships I've already netted have been well worth the investment of my time. ”

BRODY STAPEL

President, Sheboygan River Progressive Farmers (SRPF)



Farmers of Mill Creek members stand in front of a group of local elementary school students teaching them about conservation farming as part of their Youth Conservation Education programming.
Photo credit: Rachael Whitehair, University of Wisconsin-Extension



Collaboration & Partnerships

2022-2023 Producer-Led Collaborators and Partnerships		
County Land Conservation Departments	Rock	UW- Madison
Adams	Rusk	UW- River Falls
Buffalo	Saint Croix	Maandamin Institute
Calumet	Sauk County	Michael Fields Institute
Chippewa	Vernon	University of Wisconsin- Extension
Columbia	Washburn	Natural Resources Institute
Dane	Wood County	Agriculture Institute
Dodge	Non-profit Conservation and Farming Organizations	Other Partners and Collaborators
Dunn	The Nature Conservancy	Upper Fox- Wolf Demonstration Farm Network
Green County	Tall Pines Conservancy	
Juneau	Farmers For Sustainable Food	Madison Metropolitan Sewerage District
Kenosha	Valley Stewardship Network	
Marathon	Sand County Foundation	Seed Companies
Ozaukee County	Wallace Center	Agronomists and Crop Consultants
Pepin County	Pheasants Forever	Lake Protection Groups
Pierce	Wisconsin Farmers Union	Department of Natural Resources
Polk	Research Groups	Natural Resources Conservation Service
Portage County	Grassland 2.0	Watershed Associations
Racine County	UW-Plateville	AND MANY OTHERS!

Each producer-led group is required to identify a collaborator in their grant applications. Collaborators played **important roles in PL groups in 2022-2023**, assisting with **strategic planning, annual work planning, delivering outreach events, organizing meetings, helping groups track practices, and incentive programs**, and the list goes on.

PL groups continued to work with multiple other partners to **bring projects and ideas to fruition in 2022-2023**. Partnerships with other organizations helped groups **conduct on-farm research and demos, strengthen outreach through marketing and promotional assistance, bring in additional funds, and coordinate other important community programming** with the groups.

In 2023, collaborators spent a total of **12,895 hours** assisting producer-led groups.

295 partnerships were created and maintained.

On-Farm Research and Demonstration

In 2022-2023, on-farm research and demonstration projects became a major component of the producer-led program. The majority of the groups are managing multiple research and demonstration projects that look at cropping systems, equipment set-up, water quality impacts, and much more.

On-farm demonstrations continued to be powerful tools for producer-led groups to investigate, learn, and share a new conservation practice or new way of managing a conservation practice in 2022 and 2023.

EXAMPLES OF 2022 PRODUCER-LED DEMONSTRATION PROJECTS

Producer Led group	Project
Bad Axe Farmer-Led Watershed Council	Organic No-Till Soybean
Biological Farmer Friends	Grazing Cover Crops
Buffalo Trempealeau Farmer Network	Different methods for cover crop establishment
Coon Creek Community Watershed Council Inc	Cover crop education, farm equipment
Farmers for Lake Country	Soil health lab analysis
Farmers of Mill Creek	Interseeding cereal rye into growing soybeans and corn with a highboy spreader
Farmers of the Sugar River	Interseeding of cover crops
Jefferson County Soil Builders	Cover crops - Planted 12 different diverse mixes in 2021
Peninsula Pride Farmers	Managed intensive grazing for dairy heifers and beef cattle
Sheboygan River Progressive Farmers	How to inter-seed a diverse cover crop mix
Sauk Soil & Water Improvement Group	Onto greener pastures with rotational grazing and cover crops
Tainter Creek Farmer Led Watershed Council	Different cover crop mixes are based on different rotations
Yahara Pride Farms	Soil pit during Conservation field day

Groups started or maintained
68 on-farm research and demonstrations projects in 2022 and 93 projects in 2023.



*Lead farmer of Biological Farming Friends Karl Sime checks his field after planting cover crops.
Photo credit: Chelsea Zegler, University of Wisconsin-Extension*

On-farm demonstrations also provide opportunities for mentorship by allowing experienced producers to share their knowledge, show the importance of proper timing and equipment set up, and explore new technologies.

EXAMPLES OF 2023 PRODUCER-LED DEMONSTRATION PROJECTS

Producer Led Group	Project
Biological Farmer Friends	Planting green – planter set up, etc
Buffalo Trempealeau Farmer Network	Roll Crimping Rye
Coon Creek Community Watershed Council Inc	Perennial hay & pasture, water infiltration, reducing runoff and reduce soil erosion
Dry Run Farmer Led Watershed Council	Examine how field management affects the decomposition process of cotton over 60 days in field season
Farmers of the Roche-A-Cri	What are the positive effects of incorporating native plantings into dry edges of fields under pivot irrigation systems.
Farmers of the Sugar River	Growth and nutrient advantages to diversity and timing of cover crops
Farmers on the Rock	Interseeding demonstrations using an aerial drone and a gandy box toolbar
Jefferson County Soil Builders	Demonstration of grazing cover crops and drone seeding
Lafayette Ag Stewardship Alliance	Impact of cover crop varieties on surface water runoff and soil erosion.
Sauk Soil & Water Improvement Group	Sauk County Farm Demonstration Plots-How to integrate cover crops into crop rotations and the value of cover crops
Shell Lake-Yellow River Watershed Protection Council	Affect cover crop has on yield and soil health
Tainter Creek Farmer Led Watershed Council	Alternative forage, soil health, seeding rates
Yahara Pride Farms	Manure application



Matt Oehmichen shows how diverse cover crop mixes improve soil health at a field day for Eau Pleine Parntership for Integrated Conservation showing demonstration plots at UW Marshfield Agriculture Research Station.

Photo credit: Randy Zogbaum, DATCP

A Western Wisconsin Conservation Council field day provides opportunity for attendees to learn about new technologies.

Photo credit: Jamie Fisher, Farmers for Sustainable Food



Farmer-Driven Research

Producer-led groups engage in on-farm research with university and other partners to find answers to agronomic, conservation, and water quality questions on varying soils and in farming systems that are representative of different regions of the state.

15 EXAMPLES OF 2022 PRODUCER-LED RESEARCH PROJECTS

Producer Led Group	Project
Central Wisconsin Farmers' Collaborative	Nitrogen rates and timing on multiple varieties.
Dodge County Farmers for Healthy Soil Healthy Water	Conduct nitrogen rate trials to dial in nitrogen credits from multispecies mixes
Farmers for the Upper Sugar River	Zero N trials
Farmers for Tomorrow	NOPP research project – Field-Scale Corn Nitrogen Rate Study on Irrigated Loamy Sand Soils in Portage County
Farmers of the Lemonweir Valley	Is new planter technology more accurate? Does it yield more? And does it pay for itself?
Farmers of the Roche-A-Cri	Can effective grazing systems be implemented under pivot irrigation systems, specifically in vegetable and potato production systems?
Farmers4Health-Bear Creek Chippewa River	Lysimeter study-The effect of cover crops on water movement through the soil
Horse Creek Area Watershed Council	Can cover crops be added to rotations in NW WI? Can the benefits of covers be identified and measured?
Iowa County's Uplands Watershed Group	MFAI soil research and testing
Jefferson County Soil Builders	Legume cover crops after wheat to reduce fertilizer N applications
Lafayette Ag Stewardship Alliance	Impacts of reduced seeding rate/early termination of cover crops on surface water runoff and erosion rates.
Peninsula Pride Farmers	Carbon sequestration and manure technology
Producers of the Lake Redstone Watershed	USGS stream gauging
Sheboygan River Progressive Farmers	UW Cover crop citizen scientist (biomass sampling) research
Watershed Protection Committee of Racine County	Addressing transitional economics to increase conservation adoption for climate-smart agriculture



15 EXAMPLES OF 2023 PRODUCER-LED RESEARCH PROJECTS

Producer Led group	Project
Cedar Creek Farmers	Corn yield response to N applications after cover crops
Coon Creek Community Watershed Council Inc	Cover crop profitability
Dodge County Farmers for Healthy Soil Healthy Water	Sample cover crop after wheat biomass to estimate N credits to following corn crop
Eau Pleine Partnership for Integrated Conservation	Nitrogen Use Efficiency
Farmers for the Upper Sugar River	Zero N trials
Farmers for Tomorrow	Adaptive Nitrogen management on field corn
Farmers of the Roche-A-Cri	Effects of cover crops in irrigated vegetable fields with rotational grazing
Farmers4Health-Bear Creek Chippewa River	Lysimeter study
Jefferson County Soil Builders	Using cereal rye to suppress weeds
Producers of the Lake Redstone Watershed	Edge of field monitoring with Discovery Farms
Red Cedar Conservation Farmers	How practices implemented through RCCF affect surface water nutrient levels
Sheboygan River Progressive Farmers	UW Cover crop citizen scientist (biomass sampling) research
Shell Lake-Yellow River Watershed Protection Council	5 cover crop mixes-8 plots per mix with 4 tilled and 4 no-till
South Kinnickinnic Farmer-Led Council	Effects of no-till and multi-species cover crops on yield
Watershed Protection Committee of Racine County	Comparison of Regenerative vs conventional agriculture

“ The Wisconsin producer-led program has led to an incredible growth in capacity and collaboration across Wisconsin’s agriculture and conservation industries. The heavy farmer involvement has built the next generation of agriculture leaders who have the skills and confidence to advocate, organize, and educate around conservation agriculture. ”

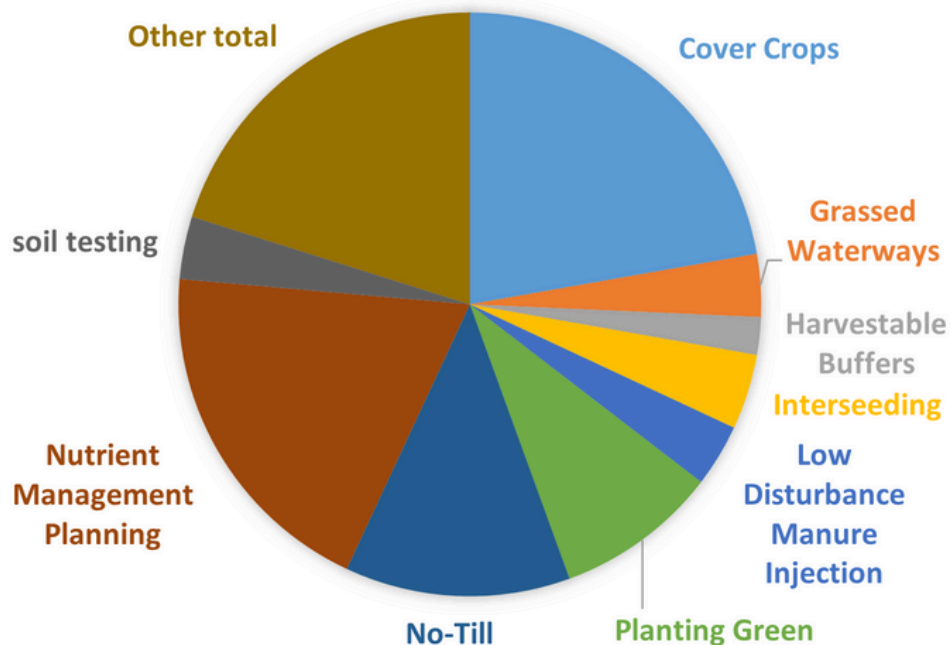
CHELSEA ZEGLER

Ag & Water Quality Outreach Specialist, University of Wisconsin-Extension

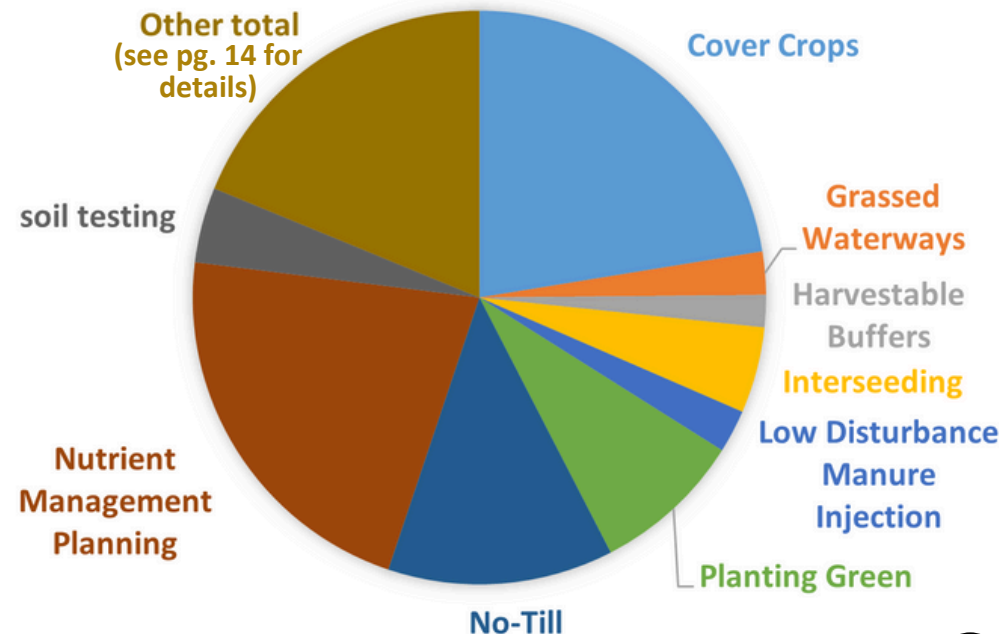
Incentive Programs

Incentive programs are an important part of the PLWPG program, helping expand the implementation of conservation practices designed to improve soil health and water quality. In 2022-2023, groups offered 346 incentive programs. Cover crops, no-till, and nutrient management were the largest categories.

2022 PRODUCER-LED INCENTIVE PROGRAMS



2023 PRODUCER-LED INCENTIVE PROGRAMS



Incentives for Soil Health

Implementing conservation practices that build soil health and improve water quality is part of the goals set forth by all funded producer-led groups in 2022-2023. Innovative cropping system strategies that are designed to meet the five principles of soil health continue to expand the incentive programs and work to improve soil health and water quality.

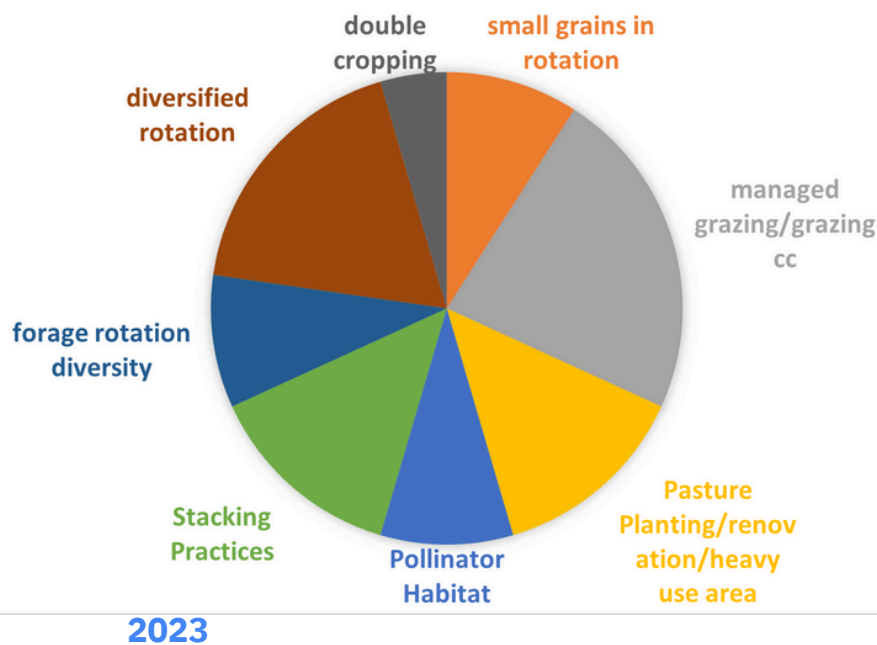
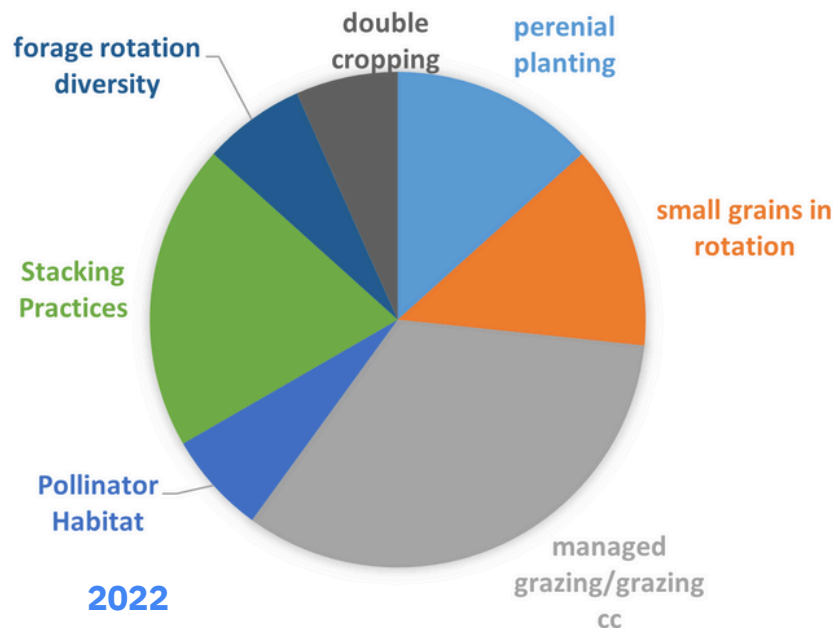


Photo credit: Randy Zogbaum, DATCP

Conservation Practices on the Rise

In 2019, DATCP launched a tracking initiative to track the conservation practices implemented by producer-led groups through their incentive programs and various outreach efforts. Each year, funded PL groups report conservation activity to DATCP to analyze potential conservation impact. **In 2022, conservation practices were over 1.1 million acres and in 2023 over 1.58 million acres.**

Total reported conservation practice acres:

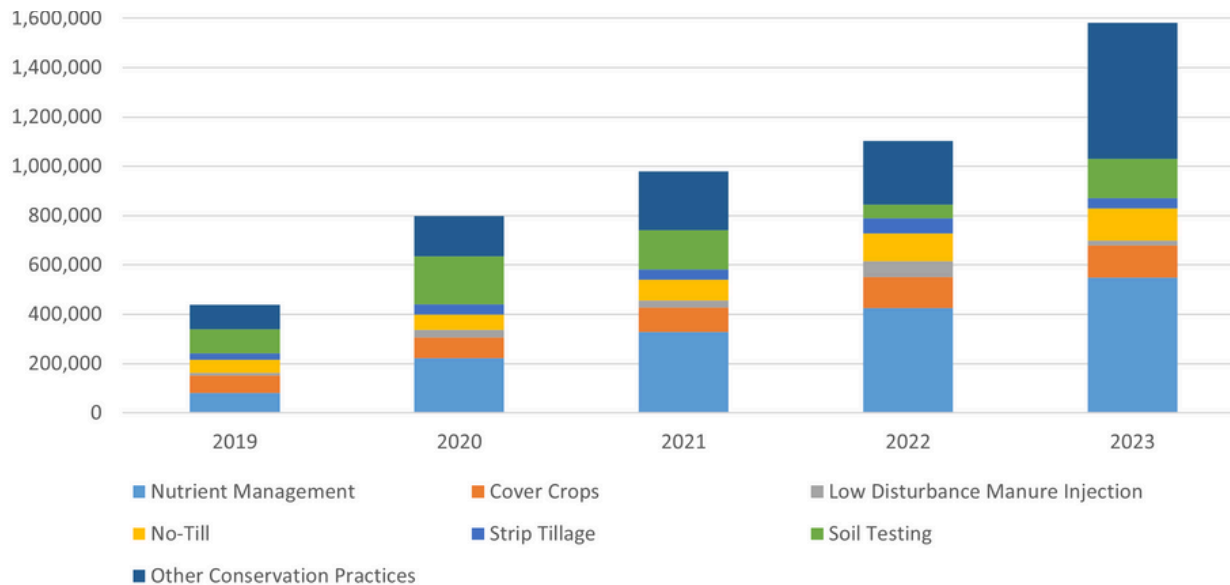
2021: 978,881

2022: 1,103,593

2023: 1,582,866

In 2023, there was a **113% increase in "Other Conservation Practices"** adopted on farms, which includes: **pasture management, perennial habitat, diversified rotations, interseeding, split nitrogen applications, frost seeding, and more.**

REPORTED* CONSERVATION PRACTICES IMPLEMENTED BY PRODUCER-LED GROUPS 2019-2023



**Actual acres of practices implemented by PL groups may be higher. DATCP calculates summary based off reported acres. Also note some acres may be counted more than once for multiple practices.*

From 2022 to 2023
there was a:

43% increase in **total conservation practices**

29% increase in **nutrient management practices**

15% increase in **no-till**

**Photo credit: Anne Moore,
Farmers for Sustainable Food**



Environmental Outcomes: Water Quality & Soil Health

DATCP evaluates the **potential environmental outcomes from the practices** implemented by producer-led groups.

Using Wisconsin's nutrient management planning software, SnapPlus, potential reductions in **phosphorus loss and soil erosion** were estimated for reported cover crop and no-till acres in 2022 and 2023.

DATCP continues to **expand the evaluation of outcomes to include more conservation practices and systems** implemented by PL groups in the program.

In 2022-2023,
producer-led groups
reduced:

320,402 pounds of P
leaving farm fields

425,294 tons of soil
erosion on farm fields

Did you know?

One pound of P that
reaches a water body can
feed **500 pounds of algae.**

One dumptruck can carry
about **10 tons of soil.**

*Dodge County Farmers for Healthy Soil
Healthy Water 60" corn & interseeding trial.*

Photo credit: Dana Christel, DATCP

Environmental Outcomes: Carbon & Climate

DATCP began evaluating the **potential soil-based greenhouse gas emissions reductions** of conservation practices implemented by PL groups in 2020 using a tool called COMET-Planner.

Soil-based greenhouse gas emissions refers to those emissions related to the interaction of fertilizer or manure applications, disturbance to the soil, crop rotation, and roots from crops (i.e carbon sequestration) with the soil. This does not account for any fuel usage or impacts related to the manufacture of farm products or transport of harvested goods off the farm.

Through cover cropping and no-till practices, producer-led groups reduced soil-based greenhouse gas emissions by:

**61,214 tons of carbon dioxide equivalent
(CO₂e) in 2022**

and

70,131 tons CO₂e in 2023

for a total of

131,345 tons CO₂e

Note: Carbon dioxide equivalent, or CO₂e, means the number of metric tons of CO₂ emissions with the same global warming potential as one metric ton of another greenhouse gas. For example, 1 kg of N₂O into the atmosphere is about equivalent to releasing about 298 kg of CO₂. As a reference, 1 CO₂e is equivalent to 113 gallons of gasoline consumed.

This is equivalent
to **greenhouse gas
emissions of 30,637
gas-powered
passenger vehicles
driven for one year.***



*according to EPA's Greenhouse
Gas Equivalencies Calculator

Community members gather at an Iowa
County Uplands Silvopasture field day.
Photo credit: Dana Christel, DATCP



Notes of Success: Regional Collaboration

Producer-led groups are often looking to work with one another to **organize outreach events that can have a farther reach and bigger impact.**

“One of our biggest successes from the 2023 grant cycle was being able to host the first North Central Regional Gathering. The goal of this event was to create a space for groups in the region to connect, collaborate, build partnerships, and have honest conversation. We feel like the event exceeded that goal. There were 25 attendees that represented six producer-led groups, one lake protection group, and one potential new producer-led group. An evaluation of the event showed that 90% of respondents either agreed or strongly agreed that attending the North Central Regional Gathering increased their understanding of other producer-led groups in the region, and 63% discussed or made plans to collaborate with another producer-led group in the region. The evaluation also showed that 88% of respondents agreed or strongly agree that the North Central Regional Gathering should be an annual event. Another significant success for our group was the relationship we developed with Petenwell & Castle Rock Stewards. We have been working with PACRS for a couple of years, but the success and strength of the relationship really showed when they agreed to be our fiscal agent for the upcoming grant cycle. Group members and leaders were quick to show their support for Farmers of the Roche-A-Cri, and we are thankful for their support and are excited to see this relationship grow.” **-Farmers of the Roche-a-Cri 2023 annual report**

Field day planning
words of wisdom:

*Start planning events
early.*

Have a backup plan.

*Make changes as
necessary.*

“In 2023, we were able to co-host the ‘Annual Soil Health Workshop with Gabe Brown’ on February 7, in collaboration with the Producers of Lake Redstone, Farmers of the Lemonweir Valley, Lake Wisconsin Farmer Watershed Council, and the Farmers of the Roche-A-Cri. This workshop brought in 119 people from across Wisconsin and beyond.” **-Sauk Soil and Watershed Improvement Group 2023 annual report**

Gabe Brown continued around the state to several other regional collaboration workshops during his week in Wisconsin.

Notes of Success: Getting Started as a New Group

There were seven new groups funded in the 2022-2023 funding cycle. One of those was the **Chippewa Valley Producer Led Watershed Council**, which started up in 2023. This group first year saw success with their field days in 2023.

“The CVPLWC conducted five field days on six farms. Our programs were well attended, with over 284 attendees at our events in total. Our cover crop demo of a drone seeding on two farms brought more interest in cover crops and getting them seeded on time for great benefits to the land. One attendee purchased a drone and plans to offer services in 2024 to area farm managers. This will help to overcome the late planting of cover crops in the Chippewa Valley. We hosted a winter meeting with topics on soil health, grazing, cover crops, and better business decisions to make for more profits by using resources wisely. We involved lake landowners and hosted a farm to lake event. The group also did a presentation at the Wisconsin Farmers Union Summer Leadership program. At the Beaver Creek Reserve Bees, Trees, & Cheese pop-up event, we met individually with 21 rural landowners that were not producers and learned more should be done to educate them on resource management and land operators’ involvement with landowners to get more positive things accomplished on the land.” **-CVPLWC 2023 annual report**

Each of the seven new groups were successful at meeting their goals, putting them on the path to success in the future.

*Prairie planting with managed grazing.
Photo credit: Randy Zogbaum, DATCP*



Notes of Success: New Practices

In 2022-2023, groups used many of the demonstration and research projects to explore new practices. In 2022, the several groups looked at interseeding methods such aerial seeding with drones and using highboys in their demonstration projects. Integrating livestock in row cropping systems through grazing cover crops was a focus of several 2023 demonstration projects.

Partnership with another program, the Nitrogen Optimization Pilot Program (NOPP), was a major part of the 2022-2023 on-farm research. The projects look at fine tuning nitrogen recommendations for local conditions.



The goal of the NOPP projects will be to find the rate of nitrogen and type of nitrogen source.

Both on-farm research and demonstration projects are used for outreach projects by the groups. Field days give participants the experience of seeing comparisons in the growing season. Data from the projects are presented at workshops around the state.

Roller crimper in action for the Red Cedar Conservation Farmers demonstrations.

Photo credits: Steve Olson, Dunn County LWCD



Notes of Success: Expanding the Social importance of the Program

As the PLWPG Program continues to grow, the social aspects of the program are being recognized for their importance in seeing conservation expand. Farmers teaching farmers is an important aspect of the program that helps build confidence in trying new practices. Farmers are also developing public speaking skills as they lead the groups and host field days on their farm or give presentations on their experience at workshops in their community, around the state, regionally, and nationally.

Farmer mentorship continues to be an important aspect of the groups. Many of the groups are working to help develop networks of local farmers willing to provide mentorship as people are changing their cropping systems. Many groups have also realized the importance of reaching audiences outside the farming community. There are several groups that have formed formal partnerships with lake and river groups, provide educational opportunities for school and youth groups, and opening their events to the non-farming community.

“The public pasture walks and on-farm dinners that the Stock Family Farm began hosting in 2022 became such a hit that they were continued, and more were added in 2023. These successful events educated over 225 individual attendees over the course of the 2023 grazing season. Having a first-hand experience walking through rotationally grazed pastures at sunset and enjoying the delicious smells and flavors of the nutritious proteins raised in such a regenerative manner changed the buying habits of many consumers. A few of the attendees indicated that they are absentee landowners and are now seeking tenants to steward their farms regeneratively. A few others are indicated they were farmers and have already sought technical assistance to begin converting their farms to rotational grazing. “ **-Rock River Regenerative Graziers 2023 annual report**



Notes of Success: Expanding the Social importance of the Program

“The group came together to hold an event called ‘Conservation Night by the Lake’. They invited predominately lake homeowners out to see what local farmers are doing to help protect the lake. Around 100 participants attended. A key to the night was that group members were the ones to give the tour of the farm, which included four stops, rainfall simulator, soil pit, grazing, and general farming-cover crop tour stops. The success of this event created a good start communicating about conservation between farmers and their urban neighbors. They hope to continue and grow this event in 2023.” **-Lake Wisconsin Farmer Watershed Council 2022 annual report**

“In September, we were able to organize and host both a Youth Fall Field Day and a Farmer/Agronomic Professional Fall Field Day. It was a huge accomplishment to make a connection with the West Bend High Schools, inviting the AP Environmental Students (grades 11 and 12) to the farm. Their advisors stated that this information would be taught throughout the year, and what a great opportunity it was for them to see soil/conservation/agriculture/cover crops/drones/careers firsthand.” **-Cedar Creek Farmers 2023 annual report**

Looking Ahead

As the PLWPG program grows, DATCP will continue to look for ways to best support the development and success of producer-led groups. Specifically, the program will:

- Continue to encourage flexibility and farmer innovation in conservation practice offerings
- Coordinate statewide demonstration and research efforts to better analyze practices and systems and compare results across soils, geography, and crops
- Support groups in tracking and communicating successes
- Strengthen the program's existing Regional Teams to foster continued collaboration and idea sharing across groups in different regions of the state
- Encourage PL groups to continue refining and promoting perennial-based systems and practices that help provide continuous living cover
- Continue to build partnerships vital to success and growth of the program and individual groups
- Provide outreach and assistance on topics such as developing farmer leaders, organizational development strategies, and other topics key to addressing challenges like farmer burnout, stifled growth, and limited administrative capacity
- Continue to provide learning and relationship-building opportunities for PL groups in the network, including the annual workshop and more regional trainings

Photo credit: Randy Zogbaum, DATCP





Contacts:

Questions about this report may be directed to:

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*Photo: Drone seeding cover crops at Jefferson County
Soil Builders Field Day.*

Photo credit: Randy Zogbaum, DATCP