



December 2024

Cover Crop Insurance Rebate Program – Apply Now!

- [The 2024-2025 application](#) opened at noon on December 2, 2024, and will remain open until noon on January 31, 2025, or until program funding is exhausted.
- The program has \$800,000, or 160,000 acres of coverage, to award on a *first-come, first-served* basis.
- To qualify, cover crops must be planted in the fall of 2024 on fields to be insured with a cash crop in the spring of 2025. The acres cannot receive state or federal cover crop funding support during this same time. FSA maps are needed for the application process. Additionally, **the FSA-578 will need to be submitted with the application.** Contact your local FSA office to obtain these forms if needed.
- Program information and answers to frequently asked questions are available on the [department website](#).

Nitrogen Optimization Pilot Program (NOPP)

- Cycle 3 of the NOPP grants is now open through January 17, 2025. Please visit <https://nop.wi.gov> for application materials or more information. The NOPP team will host [office hours](#) to discuss the application each Monday from 9:30-10:00 a.m. through January 13, 2025. All research plans must be pre-approved by Monica Schauer, the UW research director for NOPP. Email your ideas to her at mschauer2@wisc.edu for approval by December 20. The full application being due January 17, 2025.

Soil and Water Resources Management (SWRM) Grants

- Requests to transfer cost share funds between counties were due to DATCP on December 1, 2024.
- 2024 SWRM cost-share contracts may be extended for one year. The contract must be signed by December 31, 2024 and there must be funds available to extend. Please contact Kim or Hailey with questions. [Extension requests](#) are also due by December 31, 2024.
- SWRM hint: For projects over \$14,000, consider waiting to record the contract until after the project is completed. This will allow you to avoid having to record any change orders that may occur.
- Many of the SWRM forms have been updated with new content and new numbers. Please refer to [Section 3 of the SWRM Grant Resources](#) webpage to access these forms. **We will be switching to using only these forms in 2025.**

ATCP 50 Update

- ATCP 50 updates went into effect on June 1, 2024. Final rule language can be reviewed on the Wisconsin Legislature's [website](#). The Bureau has information on its [website](#) about the updates. If you have any questions, email datcp@wisconsin.gov.
- **NEW PRACTICE INTRODUCTION:** Conservation Cover (ATCP 50.663). This SEG-funded conservation practice allows for the establishment and maintenance of permanent vegetative cover in an agricultural setting to reduce erosion, improve water quality, and better soil health. Available for lands covered with a nutrient management plan. It requires the county to commit to 10-year minimum planning and monitoring period for this practice. SWRM cost-share will cover the initial installation and the creation of the monitoring plan.
- **This fall, DATCP hosted ATCP 50 Office Hours** related to non-structural practice updates. Each Office Hour included a technical primer of the practice, a short discussion of the soil health benefits, and applicable SWRM cost-share requirements. All [Office Hours](#) were recorded and are available for viewing [here](#).

Nutrient Management News

- We have restocked **Runoff Risk Advisory keychains and magnets!** Please reach out to datcpsoilandwatershedmanagement@wisconsin.gov to request magnets and or keychains. When reaching out, please include how many of each you would like, as well as an address to mail them to.
- **Second annual Nutrient Management Regional Meetings: Thank you to everyone who was able to attend. We truly appreciate the participation and feedback!** During the webinar session, we recorded Cody Calkins' DATCP Nutrient Management Update presentation and the SnapPlus V3 Demo. Both are now available for viewing here:
 - SnapPlus V3: <https://wisconsinlandwater.org/members-hub/on-demand-training/nm-snapplusv3-demo-2024>
 - DATCP NM Update: <https://wisconsinlandwater.org/members-hub/on-demand-training/nm-swrmand-nutrient-management-updates-2024>
- Nutrient Management Farmer Education classes are beginning to be scheduled. Please email datcpsoilandwatershedmanagement@wisconsin.gov to request a DATCP NM staff to assist with your training. Please let us know the dates, timeline, and what you would like us to present on.
- **2025 Virtual Nutrient Management Training for Farmers** - This training provides both the basics of nutrient management and an introduction to SnapPlus. The same training will be offered on two dates. Participants only need to attend one training date to be certified as an eligible farmer plan writer.
 - Dates: January 10 and March 14. Times: 10 a.m. to 3 p.m.
 - [Register here](#)
- We have a **new NMFE brochure** that can be found here: <https://datcp.wi.gov/Documents2/NMFEBrochure.pdf> and a **new Nutrient Management Brochure** that can be found here: <https://datcp.wi.gov/Documents2/2024NMBrochureWeb.pdf>.
- Previous SnapPlus trainings can be found here: [Nutrient Management Trainings](#).
- Counties that would like some assistance on Nutrient Management Quality Assurance Reviews should email Cody Calkins at cody.calkins@wisconsin.gov. We are looking at providing assistance this year to at least three counties.

Conservation Engineering

- The first of a series of hydrology and hydrologic restoration trainings through DATCP's grant with EPA will be held on December 11 from 1:00 p.m.-2:30 p.m. It will be a webinar, and details and registration can be found [here](#).
- The posting for the DATCP SE Area Engineer should be out sometime in the month of December. It will be a dual posting in an effort to hire two positions with the second engineer to fulfill the DATCP/NRCS project position of a Hydrologic & Hydraulic Engineer or Ag Engineer–Senior.
- The revised WI NRCS CPS 635 Vegetated Treatment Area (VTA) has been released. The revised VTA standard simplifies and limits the application of VTAs. USDA software will be used to evaluate soil infiltration/percolation based on runoff from the one-year, 24-hour storm event and established parameters for acceptable soil types. The revised standard can be found on the NRCS FOTG website and is also linked [here](#). For more info on the progress and process of the Standards Oversight Council (SOC) VTA work team, see this [project-specific webpage](#).
- One final reminder that the current three-year Professional Development Hour (PDH) cycle ends this December 31, 2024. The 30 PDHs are needed during the three-year cycle to maintain both DATCP Conservation Engineering Practitioner Certification and/or NRCS Engineering Job Approval Authority. Reach out to your DATCP or NRCS area engineering contact with questions.

DATCP Drainage Program

- The DATCP Drainage Program will be re-establishing a quarterly newsletter in the coming months. The intent of the newsletter will be to highlight successes and challenges facing drainage districts and county drainage boards throughout the state. The newsletter is part of the department's overall effort to improve the effectiveness and efficiencies for all stakeholders involved with Wisconsin drainage law. The department is seeking input for the quarterly newsletter. Please send your ideas to Barton T. Chapman, P.E., Drainage Program Manager, at Barton.Chapman@Wisconsin.gov.
- The Wisconsin Association of Drainage Boards (WADB) held their annual meeting on November 19, 2024. Program highlights included presentations from Bart Chapman, DATCP State Drainage Engineer; Tom Nedland, DNR Policy and Professional Services Section Manager; and Adam Dowling, State Watershed Planning Specialist with NRCS. WADB, in cooperation with DATCP, will be holding regional educational outreach meetings throughout the state in 2025. Meeting logistics will be shared as they become available.
- All activities within drainage districts are managed and administered by a county drainage board. Contact information can be found on the [Drainage Program website](#) or by contacting Barton T. Chapman, Drainage Program Manager, at Barton.Chapman@Wisconsin.gov.

Land and Water Conservation Board-LWRM Plans

- At the December 3, 2024 LWCB meeting, Langlade, Vilas, and Wood counties presented LWRM plan revisions to the board.
- The next meeting of the LWCB Advisory Committee on Research will be January 7, 2025 at 9:00 a.m.

Farmland Preservation (FP) Program and Agricultural Enterprise Areas (AEA)

- FP Program staff from DATCP and DOR will be hosting a webinar for county staff to discuss the farmland preservation tax credit. The presentation will cover updates to the tax credits, different forms used by claimants, what to do if a landowner receives a notice from DOR, and what happens to the DOR Participant Spreadsheet after it is submitted. Pre-registration is required. To register click the following link: [Farmland Preservation Tax Credit Updates with DOR](#). This meeting will be recorded.

- For information about the AEA petition process, including application materials, visit the [Petitioning for AEA Designation webpage](#). Please contact Wednesday Coye at wednesday.coye@wisconsin.gov with any questions you have about the AEA program.
- The [DATCP Home Farmland Preservation Tax Credits](#) webpage has been updated with additional information to help landowners and tax preparers choose the correct tax schedule when filing for an FP tax credit. If you receive any questions from landowners or tax preparers regarding questions related to tax credit claims or tax credit denials, please contact Wednesday Coye at wednesday.coye@wisconsin.gov. Landowners who have received a denial letter have a limited amount of time to file an appeal with Department of Revenue; timely action is critical.

Conservation Reserve Enhancement Program (CREP)

- **County CREP Annual In-Kind Cost Reporting:** Counties are asked to report their CREP administrative costs to DATCP by no later than December 6, 2024. The county contributions to administer CREP count toward Wisconsin's overall match requirements for federal CREP funds and are important for meeting statewide CREP program requirements reported to FSA by the end of the year. The reporting form ([LWR-282](#)) is on the CREP website. Completed reports should be sent as a pdf via email to Brian Loeffelholz at Brian.Loeffelholz@wisconsin.gov.
- **Submit Outstanding Items to DATCP for Completion:** If you submitted a request to DATCP for processing but were contacted by State CREP staff requesting additional items for processing, please submit those items as soon as possible. DATCP is waiting for items from counties on several agreements, buyouts, and transfers, which can still be processed in 2024.
- Thanks to all the county staff that worked on CREP easement monitoring and landowner follow up over the summer/fall with the CREP Intern, Mackenzie Shanahan. Mackenzie had great things to say about her experiences with you all in the field and assistance with landowners. Mackenzie has moved on to graduate school at Indiana University, but be on the lookout for the announcement this spring for the 2025 CREP Intern!

Producer-Led Watershed Protection Grant (PLWPG) Program

- 2025 was the most competitive year yet for the Producer-Led Watershed Protection Grant. We received applications from **49 producer-led groups**, for a total funding request of over **\$1.6 million**. With a program budget of \$1 million, the grants review committee had to make extremely difficult decisions. Priorities were to fund new viable groups while also providing the highest level of funding merited to as many existing groups as possible.

All grant proposals were subjected to a thorough review process by a team of internal and external reviewers. Projects were scored and selected based on the review criteria listed in the 2025 Request for Proposals. High scoring proposals from new groups included projects occurring in parts of the state currently lacking in farmer-led conservation leadership, as well as a strong workplan clearly linked to group goals with an emphasis on group development. Strong proposals from existing groups included demonstrated effort to strategically plan and develop sustainable farmer-led organizations, a comprehensive plan for gaining farmer and community participation in conservation efforts, and inclusion of diverse conservation practice offerings.

Soil Health Program

- Soil is the vital living ecosystem that sustains plants, animals, and humans. Soil health is about restoring that capacity to provide five crucial soil system functions: regulating water, sustaining plant and animal life, cycling nutrients, providing physical stability and support, and filtering and buffering potential

pollutants. Healthy soil systems are created by incorporating the five soil health principles: maximize soil cover (think cover crops and no-till), maximize living roots in the soil (think cover crops, diversifying crop rotation, perennial crops), maximize crop/plant diversity (think cover crops, diversifying crop rotation, perennial crops), integrate livestock (managed grazing, proper manure management), and minimize soil disturbance (no-till, reducing chemical fertilizer, reducing pesticides, i.e. nutrient management).

Soils can be broken down to their three primary properties – chemical, physical, and biological. Soil health recognizes that soil biology drives most of the soil functions in a soil system. Incorporating the five soil health principles creates the environment for soil biology to thrive. (in a gram [~1 teaspoon], there are about 7-11 billion organisms). Soil health has proven to be a great motivator for our producer-led groups, helping to reach new farmers. DATCP hopes to build a common understanding of what soil health is, to facilitate statewide coordination on soil health topics and initiatives, and to provide support to conservation partners and farmers in transitioning to a soil health system.

- The new online Soil Health curriculum is now live and available on our soilhealthtraining.wi.gov website. The purpose of this curriculum is to develop a common definition and understanding of Soil Health and develop some guideposts of how to implement soil health systems on Wisconsin farms. Modules 1-3 establish a common language of soil health in Wisconsin agriculture. Module 4 focuses on applying soil health in Wisconsin cropping systems. The curriculum incorporates both traditional and citizen science to demonstrate the mindset necessary to be successful as a soil health farmer. The primary audiences are LCD staff, other Agriculture Professionals in Wisconsin, and Wisconsin farmers. For questions regarding this training or the soil health program contact Randy Zogbaum at randall.zogbaum@wisconsin.gov.

- 2025 Soil Health Trainings and Initiatives

- In 2025, we will work on completing module 4 of the online Soil Health Training focusing on applying soil health principles in Wisconsin cropping systems. Stay tuned for opportunities to be involved in this training.
- Soil health is the systems thinking approach to agriculture implemented by incorporation of the five soil health principles as described on the [DATCP Soil Health](#) webpage. The revised version of ATCP 50 has incorporated several practices to give counties new tools to address the five soil health principles. If you didn't get to see the ATCP 50 New Practice Office Hours provide an overview of the soil health systems thinking approach to conservation planning, be sure to watch the recordings on our [website](#). It takes into consideration how much each practice meets the soil health principles.
- Showing that this work is improving soil health can be demonstrated using [NRCS Soil Health Assessment Techniques](#). Stay tuned in 2025 for more on this initiative.