

Producer-Led Watershed Protection Grants

Bimonthly
E-News Update

Locally Led Conservation

Improving Soil Health and Water Quality Throughout Wisconsin's Watersheds

July 2016

Farmers throughout the state of Wisconsin are working together to find innovative solutions to address the water quality issues happening in their watersheds. The new Producer-Led Watershed Protection Grant program (Producer-Led Program) administered by the Department of Agriculture, Trade and Consumer Protection (DATCP), provides funding to groups of farmers to test and promote conservation activities that improve soil and water quality. The Producer-Led Program encourages producers to identify which best management practices can be most effective in reducing nonpoint source contributions in their watershed landscapes and in their operations. Producers will then promote their success and findings to neighbors and other producers within their watersheds in hopes of increasing participation. Producer groups may partner with their county land conservation department,



Members of the Milwaukee River Watershed Clean Farm Families group develop their watershed action plan. Missing from photo: Neal Maciejewski

UW Extension, Discovery Farms, nonprofits and state agencies to develop research, innovative practices, provide outreach and education and evaluate project success.

In the first funding cycle, DATCP awarded fourteen applications for a total of \$242,550 to support a diverse set of farmer led projects throughout the state. Ranging from on-farm research trials to educational field days on conservation practices, these projects display a sustainable movement towards voluntary conservation implementation.

Every other month, this e-news update will highlight various producer-led groups and projects happening throughout the state. For more information on all of the projects, please visit our [Producer-Led webpage](#).

About the program

- Began in Spring 2016
- \$250,000 available each fiscal year
- \$20,000 maximum grant award per group per year



WI Producer-Led Projects

Improving Soil Health and Water Quality in the Milwaukee River Watershed

Milwaukee River Watershed Clean Farm Families

Collaborator: Ozaukee County Land & Water Management Department

The Milwaukee River Watershed Clean Farm Families group, working as part of the Milwaukee River Watershed Conservation Partnership, will provide a platform for producers and landowners to share concerns, priorities and lessons learned regarding farm conservation efforts within the Milwaukee River Watershed. The group aims to showcase the best soil and water conservation practices specific to their farmland by working directly with farmers and the Ozaukee County Land & Water Management Department.

The outreach and education of landowners and producers will allow for a better understanding of soil and water quality benefits from using best management practices and for determining which practices are best for a farmer's bottom line.

The group plans to host two educational field days this fall on cover crops and tillage practices to encourage farmers to try the demonstrated practices on their own farms. They will also host a winter workshop to share lessons

learned during the cropping season. Additionally, the group will offer an incentive payment program for cover crops and harvestable buffers. The cover crop demonstration plots highlighted at the field days will include varying soils and slope, micro-climates and other field conditions as well as the use of different planting methods including inter-seeding, aerial application and seeding at the time of manure incorporation.

The tillage demonstration plots will showcase no-till, strip tillage and vertical tillage.

"This Farmer Led group is geared up to get a lot accomplished in 2016. Our department is grateful to have such an excellent team of farmers to work with in our combined efforts to improve the water quality of the Milwaukee River," stated Andy Holschbach, Ozaukee County Land & Water Management Director.



Look for more information on the group's efforts through letters, flyers, and email advertisements through NRCS, the farmer council, county newsletters, WI DNR newsletters, agronomists, and equipment dealers in the Milwaukee River Watershed.

Project leaders include: Jim Melichar, Neal Maciejewski, Dave Brunquell, Mike Paulus, Bob Roden and Joe Roden; Andy Holschbach, Ozaukee County Land Conservation Department; Ken Falk, Farmers' Implement LLC; Angie Jackson, Conservation Fund.

To get in touch with the group, you may contact Jim Melichar at 262-206-1731 or Andy Holschbach at 262-284-8271.

Grant Requirements

- Groups must be led by at least 5 eligible producers
- Groups must partner and form a MOU with either DATCP, DNR, County, UW-Extension or nonprofit conservation org.
- Groups must provide 50% matching funds to their grant request
- Groups must assist other agricultural producers in a watershed to voluntarily conduct water quality improvement efforts

For additional eligibility criteria, please view the Request for Proposals on DATCP's [Producer-Led webpage](#).



"Two years ago we made it a priority to understand the issues facing both the watershed and the farmers when it came to ag runoff," stated the USRWA Executive Director, Wade Moder.

Forming a Producer-Led Coalition in the Sugar River Watershed

Upper Sugar River Producer Coalition

Collaborators: Dane County UW- Extension and Upper Sugar River Watershed Association

The Upper Sugar River Producer Coalition is targeting the Sugar River and West Branch Sugar River, which are both impaired due to excess phosphorus loading, in their recently funded producer-led project. The Upper Sugar River Watershed Association, who is partnering with the farmers on the coalition, has already established baseline water quality data to help prioritize the coalition's efforts. "Two years ago we made it a priority to understand the issues facing both the watershed and the farmers when it came to ag runoff," stated Wade Moder, the USRWA Executive Director.

The overarching goal of the group is to bring together like minded farmers, strengthening their coalition of water quality improvement efforts. As a newly

formed producer-led group, they will be using some of their grant funding to develop a mission statement, goals and work plan for their watershed. Farmer education will also be a primary focus.

In its first year, the group will host a field day and a "Lunch and Learn" educational workshop in partnership with Dane County UW-Extension's Crop and Soils Educator, Heidi Johnson for all of the producers in the Sugar River Watershed. To further engage producers in the watershed, the group will also develop an incentive program to fund the installation of various conservation practices. "The farmers in our group are excited to get this project off the ground," Moder said. The farmer leaders of the Upper Sugar River Producer Coalition

include: Brian Brown, Mark Keller, John Doerfer, Jerome Zander, Doug Brown, John Judd, Sherry Combs; Wade Moder, Upper Sugar River Watershed Association; Heidi Johnson, Dane County UW-Extension.

To get in touch with the group, contact Wade Moder at 608-437-7707.

For more information on the Producer-Led Watershed Protection Grant Program or on the 2016 funded projects, please visit our webpage.

Incorporating Adaptive Management into Producer-Led Efforts

Several producer-led groups throughout the state are working in partnership with adaptive management efforts in their watersheds. Adaptive management is a collaborative approach to water quality improvement efforts in that it involves urban and rural sources of pollutants working together to implement cost effective nutrient reductions in a watershed. This method, leveraged by many partnerships, has proven to be a successful model in reducing nonpoint source pollution and is being looked at as a potential solution for improving additional impaired waterways. Currently, two producer-led groups are working in partnership with adaptive management projects: Yahara Pride Farms located in the Yahara Watershed and Farmers for Lake Country located in the Oconomowoc River Watershed.

Yahara Pride Farms

In 2011, the US Environmental Protection Agency set a Total Maximum Daily Load (TMDL) for the Rock River Basin due to excess phosphorus and sediment loading. A TMDL sets a limit for how much of a pollutant a waterbody can receive and still meet water quality standards. At that time, Dane County and the Madison Metropolitan Sewerage District (MMSD) were looking at new ways to reduce phosphorus runoff in the Yahara watershed, located within the Rock River Basin. With the impetus to increase conservation in agriculture to address phosphorus runoff, Dane County brought together a group of farmers that “were well respected within the agricultural community and known as progressive producers,” said Kevin Connors, Director



of Land and Water Resources Department at Dane County. This led to the development of Yahara Pride Farms (YPF), a producer-led group, whose initial goal was to get more conservation practices on agricultural land. Yahara Pride Farms would represent farmers operating at a high level of environmental performance, leading the way in conservation. At the same time, MMSD began to explore a new regulatory compliance strategy to address phosphorus in the Yahara watershed. This new strategy, called adaptive management, focused on bringing together a diverse group of partners (municipalities, wastewater treatment plants and agricultural producers) working toward a common goal of reducing phosphorus runoff in the watershed. This led to the development of a four year pilot project called the Yahara Watershed Improvement Network (Yahara WINS). This pilot project was

located in the Six Mile and Dorn Creek watersheds, sub-watersheds of the Yahara. The pilot area was chosen because it fit within several existing projects geographically. The main goals of the project were to determine baseline phosphorus loads in the watershed, identify target areas in need of conservation and then implement and quantify the effectiveness of phosphorus reduction practices within the pilot area.

YPF held an initial meeting to gauge interest in their conservation efforts and newly formed producer-led group. Through this farmer-to-farmer outreach, they developed enough interest to offer a cost-share program in 2012, funded by Dane County, to try out cover crops. Ten farmers in the pilot area participated on approximately 875 acres.

Due to the success of the first cost-share program, funding was made available and distributed

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Incorporating Adaptive Management into Producer-Led Efforts



to YPF through Yahara WINS to perform conservation practices that reduced nutrient runoff from farm fields. The cost-share program grew quickly, with 40 farmers currently participating, which now offers funding to farmers to test cover crops, low disturbance manure injection and strip tillage. "The funding from Yahara WINS helped to expand and diversify our cost-share program," said Jeff Endres, dairy farmer and President of YPF. YPF also hosted demo days for other farmers to see and learn about the conservation practices, as well as informational workshops and conferences to discuss the issues occurring in the watershed. "Farmers can effectively promote practices and conservation to other farmers, while also addressing farm economics," said Connors.

This project highlights the benefits of working collaboratively towards the common goal of water quality and encouraging continuous improvement of

agricultural and urban land management. For producer-led groups considering incorporating adaptive management, Connors and Endres advise to maintain neutrality to help bridge gaps and build partnerships. Adaptive management can be used as a forum to allow for different opinions that lead to innovative water quality solutions.

Lake Country Pride

The City of Oconomowoc Sanitary District, Tall Pines Conservancy, Clean Water Association and many other partners are currently working on a full scale adaptive management project to address the Rock River TMDL through improved agricultural and urban conservation practices such as cover crops, filter strips, improved tillage and nutrient management. Similar to Yahara WINS, the steering committee leading the adaptive management efforts decided the key to getting more practices on the ground was to get more farmers involved.

Takeaways

- Producer-led groups can help get more conservation practices on the land
- Farmer to farmer outreach can increase interest and participation in conservation
- Adaptive management brings together diverse partners and resources to address water quality challenges
- Producer-led groups have the ability to share what role agriculture is playing in conservation with the non-farming community

Farmers who had demonstrated past leadership in conservation were approached by the steering committee to see what role producers may play in these efforts. The producer-led group, Farmers for Lake Country, was then formed to increase farmer interest and participation. "Creating a farmer led group is a key component to success as it encourages peer to peer opportunities to teach best conservation practices," stated Susan Buchanan, Executive Director of Tall Pines Conservancy who is also the fiscal manager for the group.

Farmers for Lake Country intends to work closely with the adaptive management project and will jointly offer a cost-share program that provides funding assistance to farmers to install conservation practices. The group will also host a field day with cover crop trials this fall as well as host an educational conference in the winter to build producer participation.

Request for Proposals

The next Request for Proposals will be available beginning July 1st 2016 with applications due on September 1st.
All application materials will be available on our webpage.

Nutrient Management Farmer Education (NMFE) Grants

Interested in hosting a nutrient management training?

DATCP awards grants for organizations to perform nutrient management training and assist producers with nutrient management plan development and implementation through the NMFE grant program. Producer led groups that are interested in incorporating nutrient management into their projects are encouraged to apply to this program.

For more information on this funding, [visit the NMFE webpage](#).

For more information:

[Visit our Producer-Led webpage](#)

Questions?

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