

# Producer-Led Watershed Protection Grants

## 2019 Producer-Led Workshop

### Farmers and collaborators sharing ideas

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**F**armers and collaborators in Wisconsin's Producer-Led Watershed Protection groups are leading the way in farming practices and community strategies to improve water quality.

The 2019 Producer-Led Watershed Protection Grant conference on February 19th in Stevens Point focused on sharing those good ideas. Over one hundred farmers and cooperators from the producer-led groups across the state attended the conference. After participants settled in, the Dodge County Healthy Soils-Healthy Waters group and the Watershed Protection Committee of Racine County presented their successes—such as high field day participation and lake group partnerships—and challenges—from distributing farmer leadership responsibilities among more members to dealing with slugs in cover crops.

Then, attendees broke into small

### About the program

- Began in Spring 2016
- Encourages innovative thinking for conservation improvement
- Fosters locally-led decision making by farmers
- Works to improve water quality and soil health



groups to discuss innovative practices they had used within their projects. Following the discussions, groups shared the highlights with everyone. Many groups are working on similar issues, whether it's interseeding cover crops into corn or how to best connect farmers and waterfront property owners or other stakeholders in the watershed. Sharing the lessons learned helps us all avoid future pitfalls.

In the afternoon, Ryan Stockwell, a central-Wisconsin farmer who also works with the National Wildlife Federation, gave an interactive

presentation on understanding and reaching "middle adopters".

The main learning goals for the presentation included:

1. Understanding the different decision making models of farmers
2. Exploring strategies to maximize the reach of your events
3. Studying messaging techniques to impact the largest group of untapped farmers

First studied in Iowa farmers' adoption of hybrid seed corn in

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## 2019 Workshop *continued*



of changing their management practices. Several farmers found greater value in events that allowed time for farmer-to-farmer conversations. The collaborator breakout discussed strategic planning for producer-led groups and the importance of the collaborator's role in facilitating the development of the goals and action steps.

The day's final presentation explained how producer-led groups could establish, collect, and share data from demonstration and test plots on members' farms that would provide them valuable information.

With some liquid incentives and a Soil Health dinner for the following Wisconsin Cover Crop Conference, the majority of attendees stuck around, filling the dwell time by sharing their thoughts in lively conversations.

Links to all of the presentations can be found here: <https://wisconsinlandwater.org/events/producer-led-annual-workshop>

the 1930's, Ryan discussed that ideas spread based on a well-established diffusion model. In the classic diffusion model *Innovators* try a new practice and *Early Adopters* quickly follow. Only after sustained success from the first adopters do the *Early Majority* and (you can guess this) *Late Majority* eventually adopt the practices. Finally, the *Laggards* change last.

Farmers in producer-led groups are primarily innovators and early adopters. Though producer-led group members are excited about their practices and want to connect with more farmers, they should be mindful of using language such as "learning curve", "trial-and-error", or "every-farm-is-different". Those terms may scare away new members who might be more risk-averse, middle adopters.

Ryan also explained that adult learners are more likely to act on new information when we have some "dwell" time to process and discuss new information with our

peers. All too often, we attend (or run) workshops that pack loads of information into the agenda, and then everyone scatters to get home in time for chores and dinner. Ryan stressed that we need to build dwell time into field days and conferences to find the most success.

Farmers and collaborators then attended separate sessions with farmers discussing how to increase participation and collaborators discussing planning strategies and outcomes. They also endorsed soil pits as a persuasive visual learning tool for farmers to see the benefits



# Sheboygan River Progressive Farmers (SRPF)

## Conference Recap

*Provided by SRPF*

*March 11, 2019*

More than 70 farmers, crop consultants, county conservation staff and ag business representatives gathered at Amore Banquet Hall in Plymouth, Wisconsin on Tuesday, February 26th for the Sheboygan River Progressive Farmers (SRPF) first annual conference. The SRPF are a producer-led watershed group representing 26 farms of all sizes and types who have come together to explore farming strategies that reduce environmental impacts, improve soil health, sustain farm profitability and improve water quality in the Sheboygan River Basin. The conference was the group's second public event and an opportunity to share the group's progress, as well as hear from farmer and industry experts on topics of interest to farmers in the watershed.



The day started off with SRPF President Joe Wagner welcoming guests and giving a brief overview of the SRPF's mission and 2018 accomplishments. The group was proud to share that membership had grown to 26 farms in 2018, up from the 10 farms that initially founded SRPF. They also completed their first comprehensive cost-share program in 2018, which resulted in the planting of more than 3,000 acres of cover crops and 4,500 acres of reduced tillage practices. The group plans to offer additional cost-share programs in 2019, thanks in part to another year of funding from DATCP's Producer Led Watershed Protection Grant program.

Following the group updates, event emcee and SRPF board member Travis Luedke introduced Nick Miller, of Miller Farms in Oconomowoc, as the keynote speaker. Nick's presentation, "Going Old School on a Large Scale" included practical information and visuals showing his transition toward a regenerative farm using cover crops and minimum tillage. His presentation sparked an engaging discussion with the audience during the Q&A session that followed.



After Nick's presentation concluded, he was joined on stage by SRPF farmers and board members Warren DeMunck of Ridgeland Farms in Glenbeulah, Clint Hodorff of Second Look Holsteins in Eden, Dan Roehrborn of Roehrborn Farms in Plymouth, and Mike Mulder of Higher Ground Ranch in Plymouth. Together the five

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# Sheboygan River Progressive Farmers (SRPF)

## Conference Recap, cont.

farmers served on a panel entitled “Real Talk: Transitioning to Cover Crops and Reduced Tillage” that was moderated by Mike Ballweg of UW Extension Sheboygan Co. The panel represented a wide range of farming systems and expertise with soil conservation practices and provided valuable insights to the audience.



The panel was followed by a delicious lunch catered by Amore Banquet Hall. Attendees enjoyed food and socializing with their neighbors, colleagues and new acquaintances. After lunch, the final presentation of the day “Succeeding with Aerially Seeded Cover Crops” was given by Damon Reabe of Dairyland Aviation and Heidi

Johnson of UW Extension Dane Co. Darren and Heidi went over important considerations for farmers who are thinking about aerial seeding, like whether or not slugs are present in a field and how much rain is necessary to help the cover crop take off. Their presentation included lots of photos from the field to help the audience understand the concepts that were discussed, as well as a few jokes and jibes among presenters.

The event concluded with Joe Wagner returning to the stage to thank the speakers, audience and to briefly describe a few of SRPF’s plans for 2019. Of note are a scholarship program for area high school students interested in pursuing a career in agriculture and a second spring or summer field day. Interested parties can stay up to date with group happenings and initiatives via the SRPF website, Facebook page or Twitter.

The event was free thanks to support from The Nature Conservancy, the Wisconsin Department of Agriculture, Trade and Consumer Protection and Edge Dairy Farmer Cooperative.

Please visit the SRPF website for additional information: [srpfarmers.com](http://srpfarmers.com)



# Runoff Risk Advisory Forecast (RRAF)

There is now a new version of Wisconsin's Runoff Risk Advisory Forecast (RRAF) that gives a much more localized look at the threat of runoff before plans to spread manure.

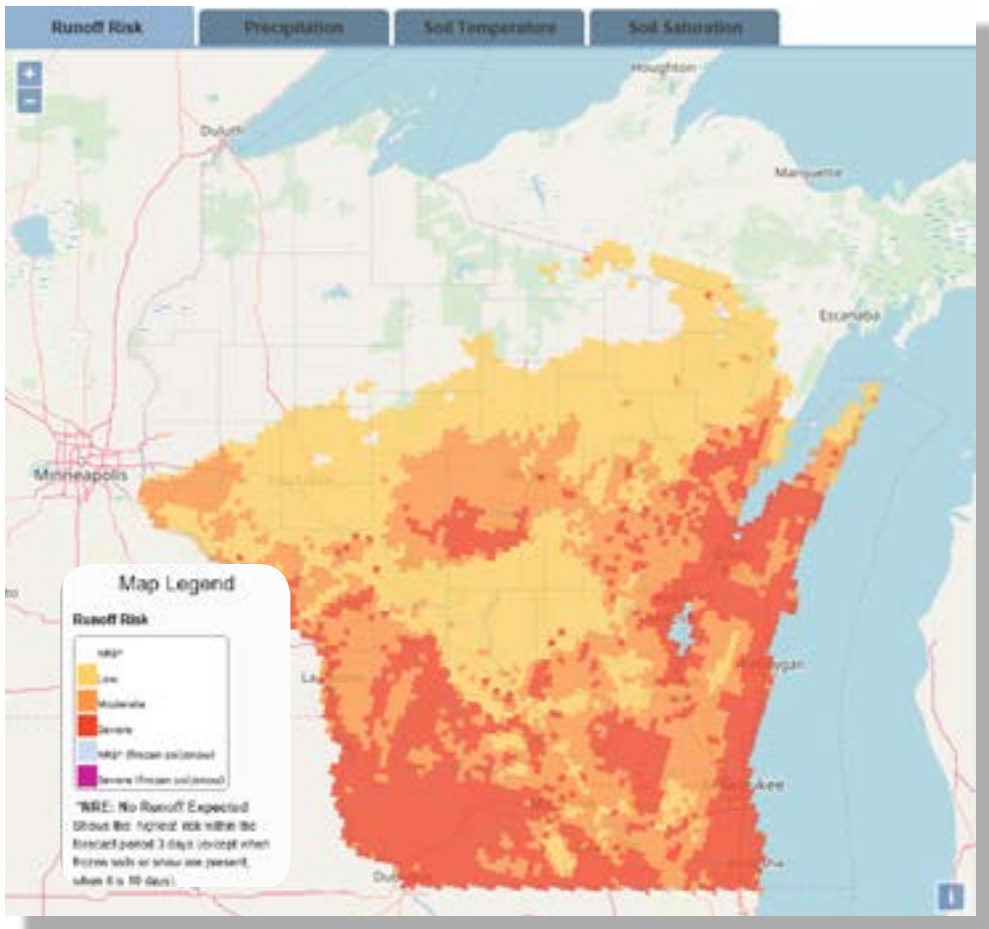
The runoff forecast, available at [manureadvisorysystem.wi.gov](http://manureadvisorysystem.wi.gov), provides maps in 4-kilometer grids that will show the local short-term runoff risk for daily application planning. The first version of the RRAF provided all this data by watershed basins. The new version provides data on a finer scale and lets farmers look at conditions close to home.

The RRAF uses factors including soil moisture, precipitation and temperature forecasts, snow cover, and landscape characteristics to make its predictions. It is updated twice daily by the National Weather Service, using the same computer models used to forecast floods.

In addition to the precipitation forecast, the new version will also provide soil temperatures and saturation, based on computer models. And it will make it easier to find previous day snapshots, a tool that is often used to document adherence to nutrient management plans.

When you open the RRAF, you will see a statewide map (as shown above). By clicking on the map, you will be able to zoom in on your specific area. There will also be a link to a video tutorial to show you how to use the tool.

The runoff risk forecast does not replace nutrient management planning or emergency planning in case of manure spills. It is a tool to help make informed decisions.



## The forecast has new and improved features:

- Runoff risk is shown at a much finer geographical scale
- New tabs for maps showing:
  - Forecast precipitation
  - Modeled soil temperature
  - Modeled soil saturation

For upcoming events, reimbursement forms, report templates and other resources, please [visit our Producer-Led webpage](#)

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### Questions?

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## ANNOUNCEMENTS

- Application materials for 2020 Producer-Led funding will be sent out on our list-serve and posted to our webpage. The 2020 Request for Proposals will be available no sooner than July 1, 2019.
- To join the general producer-led list-serve, click 'Sign up for email updates' at the bottom of the DATCP webpage.
- If you are a member of a producer-led group, you can join the internal listserve by emailing [rachel.rushmann@wi.gov](mailto:rachel.rushmann@wi.gov).

