



Producer-Led Watershed Protection Grants

Third Round of Funding Awarded to 17 Farmer Groups

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Note: Descriptions of the funded projects and local contacts follow page 2 of this release. A higher-resolution version of the map is available by contacting Donna Gilson.

MADISON – Wisconsin's latest round of Producer-Led Watershed Protection Grants has been awarded to 17 groups of farmers who will work with conservation agencies and organizations to address soil and water issues tailored to their local conditions.

Seven of the groups are first-time grant recipients. Together the 17 groups will receive the full \$250,000 available for 2018. Grants range from just over \$8,200 up to \$27,500, for activities that most often include incentives for farmers to plant cover crops and undertake other conservation practices. All include farmer-to-farmer education via field days, conferences and similar activities.

This is the third round of grant awards since the funding was made available in the 2015-17 state budget. The 2017-19 budget increased the maximum amount that groups could receive to \$40,000, up from \$20,000 previously.

Producer-Led Watershed Protection Grants are intended to give financial support to farmers willing to lead conservation efforts tailored to their own watersheds. The emphasis is on innovation and practices not already covered by other state and federal programs, and the intent is that participating farmers will reach out to other farmers to help them adopt conservation practices.

Producer groups must work with DATCP, the Department of Natural Resources, a county land conservation committee, the University of Wisconsin-Extension, or a nonprofit conservation organization. Grant funds cannot pay for real estate, loans, equipment purchases, or lobbying, and the program places caps on the amount of funding that can be used for staff support to the groups. Each group must start with at least five farmers in the watershed.

First-time grant recipients – please consult map for locations of watersheds:

- Cedar Creek Farmers -- \$13,000
- Dodge County Farmers for Healthy Soil-Healthy Water -- \$27,500
- Farmers for Tomorrow -- \$25,730
- Farmers of the Sugar River -- \$11,550
- Lafayette Ag Stewardship Alliance -- \$12,000



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GRANTS – ADD ONE

- Sheboygan River Progressive Farmers -- \$21,000
- Tainter Creek Farmer-Led Watershed Council -- \$13,000
- Watershed Protection Committee of Racine County -- \$13,000

Previously funded projects receiving new grants -- please consult map for locations of watersheds:

- Buffalo-Trempealeau Farm Network -- \$12,000
- Farmers of Mill Creek Watershed Council -- \$23,000
- Horse Creek Farmer-Led Watershed Council -- \$12,000
- Milwaukee River Watershed Clean Farm Families -- \$13,000
- Peninsula Pride Farms -- \$10,000
- Uplands Watershed Group -- \$13,000
- Upper Sugar River Producer Coalition -- \$12,000
- Waumandee Watershed -- \$8,220
- Yahara Pride Farms -- \$10,000

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First-Time Grant Recipients

Cedar Creek Farmers: \$13,000

Cedar Creek is a tributary of the Milwaukee River in Washington County. Cedar Creek Farmers has developed an incentive payment plan for conservation practices to offset costs of establishing grasses in concentrated flow channels, reduced and no-tillage, fall cover crop establishment, and nutrient management planning. The goal is to spend 80 percent of the grant on incentive payments, with the remainder going to host field days and distribute informational materials. Washington County Land and Water Conservation Division is their collaborator. *Contact: Allen Schmidt, (262) 483-0683*

Dodge County Farmers for Healthy Soil-Healthy Water: \$27,500

Operating in the Upper Rock River Watershed, this group's long-term goal is to increase cover crop use and decrease sediment and nutrient runoff. They intend to research what timing and planting methods work best for both spring and fall, and what grains produce good cover without harming yields of commodity crops. They will hold two winter workshops, a summer field day and an autumn tour for farmers, lake associations and the general public, and provide incentive payments to help farmers with costs including seed, equipment rental and soil testing. Dodge County University of Wisconsin-Extension will be the group's collaborator. *Contact: Loretta Ortiz-Ribbing, (920) 386-3791*

Farmers for Tomorrow: \$25,730

This group in the Tomorrow River/Waupaca River watershed, with its highly permeable sandy soils, is focused on groundwater protection. Nutrients also reach the rivers via groundwater. To reach their goal of reducing nitrates entering groundwater from farm fields and barnyards, they will offer incentives for planting cover crops and cost-sharing for manure testing that can help prevent over-application. The funding will also go toward a kickoff dinner to raise awareness of farmers in the watershed, a field day, and demonstration plots. Waupaca and Portage County UWEX and Wisconsin Farmers Union are collaborators. *Contact: Matt Hintz, (715)824-6706*

Farmers of the Sugar River: \$11,550

Working in the mid and lower Sugar River basins, these producers aim to show that conservation practices such as nutrient management planning, reduced and no-tillage, and cover crops can be profitable and to increase use of innovative conservation practices. They also want to raise public awareness of farmers' efforts to protect the environment. They will use their grant to put on a winter kickoff event, provide incentive payments to farmers to try new practices, host a summer field day and plant a demonstration plot. They are collaborating with Green County Land and Water Conservation Department. *Contact: Dan Truttmann, (608) 513-8363*

Lafayette Ag Stewardship Alliance: \$12,000

Lafayette County faces groundwater issues presented by its karst topography. The alliance is focusing on cover crops to minimize soil loss and nutrient runoff as well as threats to surface waters. They will try to identify the species and planting methods that are most likely to increase use of cover crops as a conservation measure. They plan to conduct farm assessments to prioritize conservation goals, offer cost-sharing to promote use of cover crops, establish a research plots and host an annual meeting to present results to farmers. The Dairy Business Foundation is collaborating with the group. *Contact: Jim Winn, (608)778-3271*

Sheboygan River Progressive Farmers: \$21,000

This group plans to use much of its funding to provide incentives to farmers to do soil, manure and tissue sampling; develop nutrient management plans; and use conservation tillage and low-disturbance manure injection. Members seek improved soil health, greater farming efficiency and reduced environmental impact in their operations. They also intend to undertake gypsum trials as a means of increasing water filtration and reducing runoff on their heavy clay soils. They will host summer and fall field days. The Nature Conservancy is the collaborator. *Contact: Joe Wagner, (920) 838-1102*

Tainter Creek Farmer-Led Watershed Council: \$13,000

This watershed in Vernon County is characterized by steep hills, highly erodible soil, and karst topography, so land use has a direct, dramatic effect on quantity and quality of water in streams. In addition, trout fishing is a local economic driver. The council seeks to reduce the impacts of flooding and erosion, learn what the surface water baseline is, learn good farming practices and share knowledge among neighbors, and improve agriculture's image. This grant will help fund farm evaluations, surface water testing, a field day, a DNR stream ecology day, and cost-sharing for 500 acres of cover crops. Their collaborator is Vernon County Land and Water Conservation Department. *Contact: Berent Froiland, (608) 391-0570*

Watershed Protection Committee of Racine County: \$13,000

This new group will lead efforts to control erosion and improve water quality, providing information to farmers and other rural landowners about conservation practices including grassed buffers, ditch bank sloping, streambank protection, strip till, no-till and cover crops. They will be working in the Hoosier Creek, Eagle Creek and Goose Lake Branch watersheds, focusing on being good land stewards while improving yields. Grant funds will go toward incentives for planting grassed buffers and cover crops, and toward hosting a winter meeting and summer field day. Their collaborator is Racine County Land Conservation Department. *Contact: Tom Greil, (414) 651-4076*

Previously Funded Grant Recipients**Buffalo-Trempealeau Farm Network: \$12,000**

The Elk Creek and Middle Trempealeau watersheds are in the upper reaches of the driftless region, with steep slopes and many streams. The two counties have higher average nitrogen concentrations than most of the rest of the state. The network plans to work with farmers to budget and track nitrogen applications, and improve nitrogen management practices. They also want to work on methods and economics of cover crops, with a goal of planting at least 500 new acres or trying new methods, with a per-acre rebate. They will host a winter meeting. UW Discovery Farms is the collaborator. *Contact: Brian Maliszewski, (715) 530-1107*

Farmers for the Upper Sugar River: \$12,000

This Dane County group started with the idea that improving water quality required making conservation practices more accessible, increasing education opportunities, and establishing baseline phosphorus levels in the watershed. With this funding, they will expand phosphorus monitoring for producers who own land along or near streams. They will also host spring and fall field days, rent equipment for low-disturbance manure injection and vertical tillage, and offer cover crop incentives for 400 acres. The Upper Sugar River Watershed Association and Dane County UWEX are their collaborators. *Contact: Wade Moder, (608) 437-7707*

Farmers of Mill Creek Watershed Council: \$23,000

The Mill Creek Watershed lies in eastern Wood County and western Portage County. The council works to reduce phosphorus loading from farm fields and barnyards, and to educate themselves and their neighbors about management practices that will improve water quality. They will use their grant to offer financial incentives to farmers to offset the cost of trying cover crops and no-till planting, to set up trial plots, and host three field days. Portage County UW-Extension is the collaborator. *Contact: John Eron, (715) 498-5222*

Horse Creek Farmer-Led Watershed Council: \$12,000

Horse Creek lies in Polk County, and drains to Cedar Lake, which is listed as an impaired water because of high phosphorus levels. Ultimately runoff from this watershed reaches the St. Croix and Mississippi rivers. The group was one of the earliest of the farmer-led groups in Wisconsin. This year it plans to use grant funding to cost-share soil and manure sampling, phosphorus indexing, manure spread calibration, as well as planting cover crops and vegetated field

borders. Polk County Land and Water Resources Department is the collaborator for this project. *Contact: Eric Wojchik, (715) 485-8699*

Milwaukee River Watershed Clean Farm Families: \$13,000

This group will use its grant funding to provide incentive payments to offset 70 percent of the costs of cover crops and harvestable buffers, and to plant cover crop demonstration plots to test varying slope, soils, microclimates and other field conditions, as well as different planting methods. They will also host several field days and a winter workshop. The group's goal is to promote and showcase best soil and water conservation practices in the watershed, which drains to Lake Michigan near urban areas. Ozaukee County Land and Water Management Department is the collaborator. *Contact: Jim Melichar, (262) 206-1731*

Peninsula Pride Farms: \$10,000

Active in the Ahnapee River and Stony Creek watersheds, the Peninsula Pride group focuses on protecting both surface waters and groundwater through innovative practices. They plan to use the entire grant to cost-share farm assessments to identify and prioritize management practices, farming systems and landscape features to reduce the risk of groundwater contamination. Collaborators in the project are the Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources, UW Discovery Farms, Lakeshore Natural Resource Partnership, Door County Soil and Water Conservation Department, and Kewaunee County Land and Water Conservation Department. *Contact: Don Niles, (920) 621-3253*

Uplands Watershed Group: \$13,000

This group of producers farms in five contiguous sub-watersheds in Iowa County: Meudt Creek-Mill Creek, Trout Creek, Knight Hollow-Mill Creek, Lowery Creek and Rush Creek. They will have a particular emphasis on a citizen water-quality monitoring project. Their goals for 2018 include having all farmers in the group using nutrient management plans, and increasing use of cover crops, no-till drilling and managed grazing. They also want to continue a relationship with Gulf of Mexico fishermen and extend it from Louisiana to Alabama and Mississippi. Their collaborator is the Michael Fields Agricultural Institute. *Contact: Michael Dolan, (608) 444-4759*

Waumandee Watershed: \$8,220

This Buffalo County group intends to demonstrate the economic and environmental benefits of cover crops as part of a farming system over a multi-year project. The ultimate goal is to encourage more farmers to use cover crops long-term. They will also encourage reduced tillage, and aim to expand their reach to absentee landowners and farmers renting cropland. They will use their grant to establish cover crop demonstration plots and to replicate early field trials, host two field days and a winter meeting, and hold a meeting/webinar on conservation compliance and rental agreements. Buffalo County Land Conservation Department is collaborating. *Contact: Dustin Ellis, (608) 797-0380*

Yahara Pride Farms: \$10,000

Yahara Pride aims to enhance the Farmer-Led Water Quality and Farm Sustainability Initiative in the Yahara River watershed. The group will use its grant to provide cost-sharing and incentives, and to conduct farm certification and research programs. The ultimate goal is to cover at least 70 percent of the 40,000 tillable acres in the watershed with conservation practices, and to engage at least 80 percent of the 400 farmers in the watershed in efforts to improve soil and water quality. Collaborators are UW-Discovery Farms and the Dairy Business Association. *Contact: Jeff Endres, (608) 279-8991*