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Assembly Committee on Agriculture

Assembly Bill 795
Assistance to Farmers for Conservation
February 4, 2020

Dear Chairman Tauchen and Committee Members:

Thank you for taking the time to hold a public hearing on Assembly Bill 795 today. I would like to thank Senator Cowles for being the lead senate sponsor of this bi-partisan legislation. We have 30 Republican and 26 Democrats signed on in support of this legislation. Every one of us wants to make sure we have clean and safe water in Wisconsin.

This bill is part of a package of recommendations from the Speaker's Task Force on Water Quality. The bipartisan and bicameral task force was created in February of 2019 at the request of Rep. Todd Novak and myself. Over the summer the task force traveled the state holding 14 hearings. Members of the task force heard from hundreds of citizens, over 70 organizations, and traveled thousands of miles gathering information to address Wisconsin's water quality challenges.

At nearly every hearing, Ag producers spoke about the efforts they've been taking to preserve and improve water quality, but also noted the challenges they face in addressing water quality while trying to make ends meet.

AB 795 builds off producers' comments and recognizes that no one knows the land better than the farmers who cultivate it. By providing a slight boost to help with their water quality efforts, the positive impacts could be immense for the farmer and our state's water quality.

'Assistance to Farmers for Conservation' tackles the objective of helping farmers implement conservation practices from multiple fronts by:

1. **Creating a managed grazing specialist position at DATCP** which will, among other tasks, lead the creation of a State Grazing Plan. Grazing, among other advantages to the farmer and the environment, has been shown to be one of the most effective nitrate reduction tools.
2. **Incentivizing the implementation of cover crops** through a \$5 per acre crop insurance subsidy for farmers not currently taking advantage of other incentive programs. Cover crops can reduce runoff and manage nutrient loads while improving long-term soil health. This payment will help to offset the cost of cover crops, which cost between \$10 and \$25 per acre, and will help to increase the total cover cropped acreage, which currently is less than 10%.
3. **Supporting producers looking to receive the Alliance for Water Stewardship International Water Stewardship Standard** by reimbursing up to 50% of the costs up to \$10,000 to achieve certification. This 'gold standard' for water quality has only been achieved by one North

American farm to date: Miltrim Farms in Athens. By incentivizing certification, the state will demonstrate that we're a partner and a friend to Wisconsin producers looking to go above and beyond.

4. **Increasing the funding to the Producer-Led Watershed Protection Grant program** at DATCP by \$250,000 to accommodate the constantly growing number and size of producer-led groups to continue achieving their water quality goals. These grants will fund land and water conservation projects driven by farmers. This includes group start-up costs, outreach efforts such as field days or water quality monitoring, incentive payments for cover crops, nutrient management plan development, no-till farming, and buffer strips.
5. AB 795 changes current law to **allow producer-led groups to exist in more than one watershed and qualify for an additional existing funding source** with the DNR's lake protection grant program.
6. **Changing the soil and water resource management funding criteria to encourage DATCP to account for externalities that may have impacted a county's ability to implement their land and water resource management plan.** During the hearings, we heard from counties that expressed frustration with potentially being penalized in the next grant cycle after extreme weather impacted their environmental quality goals. This change prevents counties from being penalized for events outside of their control.

Farmers typically have the best intentions to protect our watersheds. However, knowledge on land and water conservation strategies are constantly updated with new economic and technological advancements. Many farmers don't have enough time in their day or flexibility in their finances to keep up with the newest land and water conservation measures.

This legislation invests about \$850,000 in our farmers through accountable measures which will allow them to more effectively implement land and water conservation strategies that can store more nutrients in soil and crops instead of those phosphates and nitrates leaching into groundwater or running-off into surface waters. In short, these common-sense strategies will strengthen water quality and help the farmer's bottom-line.

AB 795 has broad support from many agriculture, environmental and conservation groups across the state including:

Wisconsin Cattlemen's Association, Wisconsin Conservation Voters, Wisconsin Corn Growers, Wisconsin Farm Bureau Federation, Wisconsin Farmers Union, Wisconsin Independent Business, Inc., Wisconsin Land and Water Conservation Association, Inc., Wisconsin Pork Association, Wisconsin Potato and Vegetable Growers Association, Wisconsin Public Health Association, Wisconsin Soybean Association, Wisconsin State Cranberry Growers Association, Wisconsin Wetlands Association, Wisconsin Association of Lakes, The Water Council, River Alliance of Wisconsin, Clean Wisconsin, GROWMARK, Midwest Environmental Advocates, Outagamie County Board of Supervisors, Wisconsin Association of Local health Departments and Boards, and Wisconsin Association of Professional Agricultural Consultants.

Thank you for taking the time to hear AB 795 today. I would be happy to take any questions you may have.

Testimony on 2019 Assembly Bill 795

Senator Robert Cowles
Assembly Committee on Agriculture – February 4, 2020

Thank you, Chairman Tauchen and Committee Members, for allowing me to testify on 2019 Assembly Bill 795. This bill is titled ‘Assistance to Farmers for Conservation’ because the goal is simple: demonstrating that the state is a partner and a friend to Wisconsin producers looking to go above and beyond what’s required in an effort to improve environmental health and water quality.

Farmers typically have the best intentions to protect the watershed, but with knowledge on land and water conservation strategies constantly being updated and new economical or technological advances, many farmers don’t have enough time in their day or flexibility in their finances to keep up with the newest land and water conservation measures. This is evidenced by the 818 farms that went out of business and the decline of more than 10% of the state’s dairy herd in 2019.

2019 Assembly Bill 795 invests about \$850,000 in Wisconsin farmers by building on existing successful programs and creating new initiatives to advance our state’s waters. Total, there’s seven different provisions in this legislation, each of which I’ll discuss individually.

Managed Grazing Specialist and a State Grazing Plan

The benefits of proper grazing over land application of manure are numerous, including a more proper dispersal of animal waste over a longer period of time to allow for the nutrients to be absorbed and better utilized by plants or crops. Studies done by Iowa State University showed an 85% reduction in nitrate leaching and runoff and a 9% reduction in phosphorus leaching and runoff in grazed pastures. Additionally, soil health and resiliency, insect health, and animal welfare all benefit greatly from implementing grazing practices.

However, the complexity behind grazing can often cause farmers to implement pasture processes and aren’t as beneficial as they could be. Some of these complexities include the number of animals per acre, the number of grazing days per acre, the availability of drinking water sources, the dispersal of shade options, and more. Assembly Bill 795 creates a managed grazing specialist position at the Department of Agriculture, Trade and Consumer Protection (DATCP) which will, among other tasks, lead the creation of a State Grazing Plan, leverage federal funding, and assist farmers with implementing grazing. This bill provides \$64,800 in FY 2019-20, and \$86,400 in FY 2020-21.

Cover Crop Incentives: Crop Insurance Payment

Crop insurance has been purchased by agricultural producers for well over a century to protect against either the loss of their crops due to natural disasters or the loss of revenue due to declines in the prices of agricultural commodities. Nationally in 2018, 1.1 million policies were sold, protecting more than 130 different crops covering over 300 million acres, with an insured value of more than \$100 billion.

Cover crops, which cost about \$10 to \$25 per acre, are planted either in-between rows of crops or in a rotation outside of the growing season. There are many types of cover crops that can be planted in Wisconsin, including winter-hardy plants such as barley, rye, and wheat. Cover crops reduce wind or water erosion by covering the soil. They also use up excess nutrients in the soil reducing risk of runoff, they sequester carbon and suppress weeds, and improve soil structure, organic matter, and insect health.

After a corn harvest, the amount of plant residue remaining is usually in the 75% to 90% range. However, during winter, 40% or more of the plant residue is lost. Cover crops offer a more sustainable option to reduce soil erosion during spring melts and heavy rain events. A study done by Iowa State University showed that rye cover crops reduced nitrate leaching and runoff by 31%, and oat cover crops reduced nitrates by 28%. The same study also found a 50% reduction in phosphorus leaching and runoff from rye cover crops.

In Wisconsin, it's estimated that just 6% of cropland had cover crops in 2017. Iowa was facing a similar situation in 2017 with just 3% of their cropland with cover crops. However, a pilot program to offer a \$5 crop insurance subsidy took off, with 700 farmers receiving premiums for 170,000 acres of cover crops. A separate program in Illinois, called 'Fall Covers for Spring Savings: Crop Insurance Reward Pilot Program', also pays farmers \$5 per acre of cover crops planted. The program, which was funded at \$300,000 in the first cycle in May, 2019, was fully subscribed within just two weeks.

Assembly Bill 795 mimics the successful programs by our neighboring and measures the appetite for a similar program in Wisconsin by incentivizing the implementation of cover crops through a \$5 per acre crop insurance subsidy for farmers not currently taking advantage of other state or federal incentive programs. This bill provides \$200,000 in FY 20-21, for a total of about 40,000 acres.

Alliance for Water Stewardship Certification

Alliance for Water Stewardship (AWS) is an international organization dedicated to enhancing water quality through a multi-year certification process including an independent audit to ensure compliance with stringent standards. The certification process is seen as a global benchmark for responsible water stewardship. As of January, 2020, a total of fourteen entities have received an AWS Certification in the United States, including three in Wisconsin: Miller-Coors and the Global Water Center in Milwaukee, and Miltrim Farms.

The only farm in North America to receive an AWS Certification is Miltrim Farms in Athens, Marathon County. The farm, with 1,800 cows and 4,800 acres, achieved the standard by converting marginal land back into wetlands and pollinator habitat, reducing wash water for livestock by about 16 million gallons per year, implementing cover crops, no-till practices, and manure injection, and more.

Assembly Bill 795 supports producers looking to receive the AWS Certification by reimbursing up to 50% of the costs up to \$10,000. The farmers may work with an outside party such as a nonprofit or county conservationist to achieve the standard. This bill provides \$250,000 in FY 20-21.

Producer-Led Watershed Protection Grant Program Funding and Other Changes

The Producer-Led Watershed Protection Grant (PLWPG) Program, run by DATCP, is available to groups of at least five eligible farms in the same watershed entering into an MOU to improve soil and water quality. Grants may be used for start-up costs, water quality monitoring, and incentive payments to producers for cover crops, nutrient management plan development, no-till farming, and buffer strips.

The program, which was first started in 2015 with \$250,000 in funding, was provided \$750,000 in each Fiscal Year of the 2019-21 State Budget and is equally matched by producer-led groups. The increase in funding to \$750,000 was first initiated at the end of the 2017-18 Legislative Session from a bill I authored with Representative Kitchens at the request of Governor Walker. Late last year, DATCP announced awards to 27 groups, including three new recipients, totaling \$750,000. They fell short of fulfilling the just over \$1,000,000 in requests, and were oversubscribed for the second year in a row. Assembly Bill 795 increases the funding to the Producer-Led Watershed Protection Grant program by \$250,000 for a total of \$1,000,000 in funding.

This bill also makes two other changes to promote Producer-Led Watershed Protection Grants. First, this bill allows producer-led groups to exist in more than one watershed if the watersheds are adjacent. Second, Assembly Bill 795 allows producer-led groups to qualify for the Department of Natural Resources (DNR) Lake Protect Grant Program. This existing funding stream, which is part of a broader Surface Water Grant Program that received about \$2.5 million in funding in the 2019-21 State Budget, is already available to lake management groups, local governments, and nonprofit organization. Producer-Led Watershed Protection Grant groups would have to compete for the funding with other groups, but this change opens another potential source of funding to Wisconsin's farmers and further ensures the best use of this funding to advance water quality with the most effective proposals.

County Conservation Staff Funding Considerations

In the 2019-21 State Budget, county land and water conservation staff funding, distributed by DATCP, was provided about \$9 million. Under ATCP 50.30, DATCP takes into account a county's commitment to implementing their land and water resource management plan when awarding funding. Externalities such as weather, are not properly considered and may impact future grant awards.

For the seventh and final change, Assembly Bill 795 alters this funding criteria to require DATCP to account for externalities, including weather, which may have impacted a county's ability to implement their land and water resource management plan.

Conclusion

'Assistance to Farmers for Conservation' helps farmers implement land and water conservation strategies that can store more nutrients in soil and crops instead of those phosphates and nitrates leaching into groundwater or running-off into surface waters. We accomplish that by tackling this objective from multiple fronts by both boosting initiatives that have been proven to work in Wisconsin and by mimicking successful efforts in other states.

At nearly every hearing of the Water Quality Task Force, farmers spoke about the efforts they've been taking to preserve and improve water quality, but also noted the challenges they face in addressing water quality while trying to make ends meet. Assembly Bill 795 builds off producers' comments and recognizes that no one knows the land better than the farmers who cultivate it. By providing a little boost to help with their water quality efforts, the positive impacts could be immense.

In short, these common-sense strategies will strengthen soil and water quality and help improve the farmer's bottom-line.



State of Wisconsin
Governor Tony Evers

Department of Agriculture, Trade and Consumer Protection

February 4, 2020

Re: AB 795: grants and funding for water stewardship certification, a grazing coordinator position, producer-led watershed protection grants, lake protection, soil and water conservation, and crop insurance premium rebates for cover crops

Chairman Tauchen and members of the Assembly Committee on Agriculture. Thank you for the opportunity to provide information about AB 795 related to county conservation staffing. My name is Sara Walling, and I am the Administrator of the Division of Agricultural Resource Management at the Department of Agriculture, Trade and Consumer Protection. I will describe how AB 795 might impact the department in providing resources to farmers for the purposes of implementing nutrient management and conservation practices.

DATCP's mission and vision statements succinctly describe the goals and process by which our department provides assistance to our state's farmers and the agricultural and conservation professionals they rely on every day. Our mission is to "partner with all citizens of Wisconsin to grow the economy by producing quality food, healthy plants and animals, sound use of land and water resources and a fair marketplace." We do this by ensuring we deliver efficient and effective programs and service to our state's agricultural community, consumers and businesses. This bill provides opportunities for the department to continue toward our internal goal of increasing our technical and financial support roles for the direct benefit of our agricultural producers and the professionals that advise and service those operations.

Comments on the bill:

This bill, if enacted, would bolster our department's technical and financial service efforts in agricultural conservation by creating a managed grazing position, a grant program for farmers who receive their Alliance for Water Stewardship Program Certification, a reimbursement program for crop insurance rebates when farmers effectively utilize cover crops, providing additional funding for producer-led watershed protection grants, and ensuring DATCP fairly assesses the county's performance in meeting its conservation practice implementation commitments. I will briefly discuss these items, and take any questions committee members may have.

- **Managed Grazing**
 - DATCP had a similar granting coordinator position in the past. In FY08, federal funding created the Grazing Lands Conservation Initiative (GLCI), included a DATCP position to administer a statewide program to develop grazing plans and work with the grazing network in Wisconsin to further expand the number and extent of grazing operations in the state. Federal funding for this program was eliminated, and the temporary state funding was repealed in FY14. While this bill does not include funding for a grazing grant program, it does rebuild the department's capacity to provide much needed technical assistance and training to livestock producers and agricultural professionals across the state to ensure profitable livestock operations are sustained while enjoying the conservation benefits grazing systems can provide.

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- The position created under the bill would serve as the primary point of contact and agency representative on grazing management and related topics. This position would work with farmers, county land conservation departments, nutrient management planners, agronomists, and other federal, state and local agencies and organizations to provide technical assistance and scientific data related to the economics and environmental benefits of grazing and grazing management planning including training on how to effectively implement grazing systems on new or existing livestock operations, key components of effective and sustainable grazing management planning, and information about the economic and environmental benefits of grazing systems with the end goal being to increase the extent of pasture-based systems in Wisconsin. This position would accomplish this goal by enhancing our state's grazing resource network through the development of training programs for county LCDs, UW-Madison Division of Extension staff, and agronomists and crop consultants as well as by providing technical assistance to farmers, conducting on-site assessments, and working through on-farm transitioning and implementation issues. This position would assist livestock producers in identifying local, state or federal financial assistance programs to support their grazing goals. Lastly this position could conduct analysis and provide recommendations to improve statewide implementation of grazing programs, through collaboration with the Natural Resources Conservation Service, non-governmental conservation organizations, other state and local agencies, and agricultural industry groups.
- The addition of this resource at DATCP would enable farmers to explore the viability of grazing as an alternative to other livestock practices which may put more pressure on water resources, and pose more risk to water quality than grazing systems.
- Grants for Alliance for Water Stewardship Program Certification
 - Under the Alliance for Water Stewardship (AWS) Program, businesses and farms voluntarily undertake a series of steps to receive certification that the facility meets all of the stewardship practices in the AWS standard. The AWS program, in partnership with a third-party organization assists farms in gathering water-related data, identifying water related issues on their farms, creating and certifying a water stewardship plan, and evaluating their performance over time. The grant program included in this bill enables farms which have obtained AWS certification to receive a reimbursement for a portion of the cost to have AWS assess and certify their water stewardship plan for adherence to the strict certification requirements of the AWS standard.
 - To administer this grant money, DATCP anticipates drafting a memorandum of understanding to identify eligible costs, accountability provisions and award prioritization criteria. However, given the multiple parties involved in this program's implementation (including multiple certified farms, multiple third-party consultants, certification auditing firms, the Alliance for Water Stewardship, and the Water Council), we are interested in receiving confirmation from the legislature that a MOU would provide the department with sufficient authority to establish and implement the criteria for awards and accountability of the program without explicit rule making authority and development.
- Crop Insurance

- AB 795 is intended to enable the department to model that program for Wisconsin farmers which could incentivize farmers who are not currently participating in other programs to implement cover cropping practices via another path. The incentive would come in the form of a \$5/acre reimbursement for crop insurance on those acres that were planted in cover crops. We are aware of similar programs in adjacent states. In Iowa, this program augments the federal crop insurance program through a partnership with USDA-RMS, and is part of a pilot program to evaluate if cover crops reduce the risk of crop loss. In Illinois, the program is not a part of the federal crop insurance program, and is a state-only program. While DATCP has begun looking at each of these program templates for consideration should this bill move forward, there is still a great deal of work to do to establish the framework for implementing this multifaceted incentive program in Wisconsin.
- Producer-Led Watershed Protection Grants
 - DATCP administers the producer-led watershed protection grant program, and is currently provided \$750,000 annually to award to this program's participants. AB 790 would increase that appropriation by \$250,000 for a total of \$1 million annually. Considering that DATCP received funding requests totaling just over \$1 million in 2020, this funding increase would enable DATCP to provide more financial assistance to eligible projects.
 - The language in this bill will also give flexibility in allowing a producer-led group to operate or expand into an adjacent watershed.
- Soil and Water Resources Conservation Grants Allocation Plan
 - Current law enables county LCDs to request funding for projects that address statewide soil and water conservation priorities, and activities necessary to implement their county land and water resource management plans by submitting an annual grant allocation application to DATCP. This bill would ensure that when making funding decisions through the annual allocation DATCP considers externalities, such as extreme weather conditions that may have impacted the county's ability to implement those projects and accomplish its goals in the previous funding cycle. Since these considerations are already part of the decision making process at the department, we see no impediments to assuring this is a perennial component of our assessment.

Thank you for the opportunity to provide information on AB 790 as it is currently written. I would be happy to answer any questions committee members may have.



Assembly Committee on Agriculture

2019 Assembly Bill 795

Producer-led watershed protection grants and lake protection grants

February 4, 2020

Good morning Chairman Tauchen and members of the Committee. My name is Carroll Schaal, and I am the Lakes and Rivers Section Chief in the Bureau of Water Quality with the Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources. Thank you for the opportunity to testify, for informational purposes, on Assembly Bill 795 (AB 795), relating to producer-led watershed protection grants and lake protection grants.

Since the Department of Agriculture, Trade and Consumer Protection (DATCP) is the primary agency impacted by AB 795, I will limit my testimony to the sections of the bill that impact the Department of Natural Resources. Sections 11, 12, and 13 add “producer-led groups” that have the same definition as those under DATCP’s producer-led grant program authorized under s. 93.59, Wis. Stats., to the list of entities eligible to apply for Lake Protection and Classification grants and contracts under s. 281.68, Wis. Stats.

These changes will allow producer-led groups additional access to state funding to implement water quality improvements. The Department views this as a positive change that may stimulate more agricultural community participation in solving water quality problems by providing a more direct path to funding. Under current law, these funds would have to first flow through, and be administered by, a county, lake association, or some other entity who would need to identify and develop agreements with individual cooperative producers.

While the direct cost for adding new applicants to the grant program can be easily absorbed by the Department, overall competition for a limited amount of funding may increase. Some groups may see additional competition for limited funds as a negative.

The Department is currently promulgating a rule that seeks to administer the Lake Protection Grants in conjunction with the very similar River Protection Grants and Aquatic Invasive Species (AIS) Prevention and Control Grants. Establishing producer-led groups as eligible for River Protection Grants under s. 281.70(4), Wis. Stats., would allow producer-led groups that are not upstream of a lake but that impact a stream or river, to be eligible for similar cost-share assistance. We believe eligibility for AIS grants is broad enough to include these groups currently. In regard to the increased competition concern raised previously, it should be noted that River Protection grant funding is much more limited than Lake Protection (\$2.2 million versus \$292,838).

On behalf of the Bureau of Water Quality, I would like to thank you for your time today. I am happy to answer any questions you may have.



January 30, 2020

Representative Gary Tauchen
Assembly Committee on Agriculture, Chairman
Room 13 West
State Capitol
PO Box 8953
Madison, WI 5370

RE: **Assembly Bill 795:** An Act relating to grants and funding for water stewardship certification, a grazing coordinator position, producer-led watershed protection grants, lake protection, soil and water conservation, and crop insurance premium rebates for cover crops; granting rule-making authority; and making an appropriation.

Dear Chairman Tauchen,

CROPP Cooperative | Organic Valley strongly supports Assembly Bill 795. The legislation advances a number of initiatives that can improve water quality and assist producers in being more effective stewards of their farm enterprises.

While we support each of the six provisions in the legislation, we are particularly excited about the development of a grazing coordinator position at the Department of Agriculture, Trade and Consumer Protection.

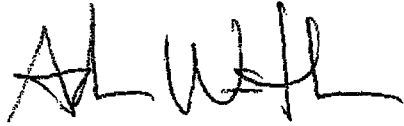
Grazing is the cornerstone of good organic dairy management as it provides many benefits to the land and the livestock. There is an emerging market for a variety of grass-fed dairy products produced with milk from operations that rely on grazing throughout the entire grazing season. Offering technical advice on best practices for grazing management will support this emerging market and the many dairy operations who provide grass-fed milk. We also know perennial cover on a farm and well managed pastures have high environmental and water quality benefits. Productive grazing landscapes increase water filtration, reduce nutrient runoff, and stabilize erodible lands.

Wisconsin was traditionally a leader in supporting and enabling grazing on the landscape, but that attention has waned in the past years. The investment in a dedicated staff person to focus on development of a state grazing plan as well as grazing strategies and technologies to assist Wisconsin farmers is smart and needed.

As a cooperative, Organic Valley represents hundreds of organic dairy farmers in Wisconsin and maintains a dairy processing presence with not only our internal operations, but also with 34 processing partners in the state. We appreciate your leadership to support the dairy sector into the future.

If you have any questions or if we can assist in seeing this legislation realized, please feel free to reach out.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Adam Warthesen'. The signature is stylized with a large 'A' and 'W'.

Adam Warthesen
Director of Government and Industry Relations
CROPP Cooperative | Organic Valley

AWS Certification for Wisconsin Farms

Farmer-led water stewardship.

The Alliance for Water Stewardship's *International Water Stewardship Standard* ("AWS Standard") is the world's only comprehensive industry water use standard. When applied to agriculture, through programs like Clear Water Farms, AWS Certification **ensures farms surpass compliance** with all regulatory standards, and creates a **market-driven demand** for water-sustainable agricultural products.

Section 6 of SB 715 / AB 795 supports **public-private partnerships in agriculture** by partially funding on-farm adoption of the AWS Standard and certification via **credible, independent auditors**, as has already been achieved by industry leaders like MillerCoors and General Mills.

Certification Gives Farms a Comprehensive Water Stewardship Plan



- **Process:** Farms collect data and build a stewardship plan using the AWS Standard's 30 criteria and 98 indicators. The plan is audited by an accredited third-party auditor and the certification is awarded.
- **Timeline:** Certification in a growing season, check in at 18 months, and re-certification after three years.
- **Benefits:** A comprehensive stewardship plan that exceeds regulatory standards, including NR151, reduces supply chain risks, and offers a credential useful for market advantages and nutrient credit trading
- **Costs:** The primary cost to certification beyond practice changes is the independent audit. This bill (SB 715 / AB 795) helps farms pay for the process of certifying.

Wisconsin Farmers Leading the Way:

A Wisconsin dairy farm was the first farm to receive AWS certification in North America.

River Alliance of Wisconsin's Clear Water Farms Program translates the AWS standard for application to agriculture and assists farms in achieving the certification.

In 2019, **Miltrim Farms**, a large family-owned dairy in Marathon County, was the first farm in North America to be awarded the certification. The funding in SB 715 / AB 795 will make AWS certification **financially accessible for many other farms**—farms of all sizes and production systems. More certified farms mean better water stewardship in Wisconsin.



ALLIANCE FOR
WATER STEWARDSHIP



CLEAR
WATER
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RIVER ALLIANCE
of WISCONSIN

Contact: Michael Tiboris, Clear Water Farms Director, River Alliance of Wisconsin
(608) 257-2424 x125 mtiboris@wisconsinrivers.org | wisconsinrivers.org/clear-water-farms

Testimony for Public Hearing
Assembly Agriculture Committee

Ryan Klussendorf
W2072 State Highway 64
Medford, WI 54451

Good Afternoon, my name is Ryan Klussendorf. I'm a dairy farmer from Medford WI. I own and operate a 125-cow rotational grazing dairy farm with my wife Cheri and three sons; Kale, Owen and, Max. I'm here today to ask for your support for Assembly bill 795. This bill supports three core principles that define my farming operation.

Assembly Bill 795 will provide funding for a Grazing Coordinator. Under the bill, the new position will help to develop a state grazing plan, working as the primary point of contact for a stake holder working group to identify new technologies and best practices for grazing farms. This is extremely important to me; on my first-generation farm. I was able to start farming at the age of 21 by using managed intensive grazing and the low-cost philosophy. There were few support groups, or guidance when I started my farm. As farmers continue to sell herds at an alarming rate, there are, few young farmers to join the dairy farming ranks, especially if they have no farm to return to. Supporting a grazing coordinator would help show the youth of Wisconsin there is a way to farm without expanding a family operation. Having a primary contact to assist with plans and innovation in the grazing enterprise would be another huge step in the right direction for Wisconsin agriculture.

Being from a managed intensive grazing farm we are believers in conservation efforts like using no-till and cover crops to keep a root system to hold soil in place year-round. According to Assembly Bill 795, DATCP will work with the Risk Management Agency of the United States Department of Agriculture to provide rebates on crop insurance premiums on acres planted to cover crops. Our farm uses cover crops primarily to benefit the soil rather than the crop yield. We can manage soil erosion, build soil fertility, and promote biodiversity on our farm. As the cost of land rent continues to rise and margins decrease farms are likely cut out planting cover crops to keep expenses low. Using conservation practices like cover cropping will build up Wisconsin soils for generations to come.

Lastly, I would like to speak on behalf of the Farmer Led Watersheds. These groups, contain farmers learning from other farmers. Farmer Led watershed groups such as, Farmers of Mill Creek Watershed work together to protect and improve water and soil quality now and in the future. It has continually been a great two-way partnership allowing farmers to innovate and adapt to fit their local watersheds. Supporting Assembly Bill 795 is an excellent value for everyone involved and is a true testament to the power of farmer leadership.

Conservation is a cause that has no end, there is no point at which we will say our work is finished. Supporting Assembly Bill 795 will prove your commitment to Wisconsin for our residents now and in the future. To do the right thing will always cost more than to do the minimum.

Thank you for your time and consideration on this Bill.

Caleb and Lauren Langworthy
Blue Ox Farm
N11253 State Road 25
Wheeler, WI 54772
(715) 308-7566

Re: Assembly Bill 795

I would like to thank the Assembly Agriculture Committee for considering the addition of a grazing coordinator for the Department of Agriculture Trade and Consumer Protection (DATCP).

My wife and I started our farming operation custom grazing sheep and beef for a landowner in Mondovi, Wisconsin. In 2012, we were finally in a position where we could purchase our own farmland in Wheeler, Wisconsin. The farm that we were able to purchase had not been well-managed, leading to significant erosion and poor crop yields.

At that time, there was a grazing specialist funded to work in our area. That position was funded through the River Country Resource Conservation and Development (RC&D) program, but after state funding was ended, the position was eliminated. Early in our tenure on the farm, we were able to utilize that grazing specialist's experience and technical expertise to plan and implement a successful grazing operation of our own. That assistance included helping us to access federal and local support programs and connect to a network of other experienced graziers.

Because of the experience and support that we gained through the grazing specialist, we were able to triple the production of our flock of sheep and add a small beef herd to our operation. This has allowed us to build a profitable enterprise - while improving soil and water quality - in an economic environment where very few farmers are able to do the same.

Because this successful transition was easily visible from the state highway that we live on, other landowners in the area began to approach us and offer access to their land base for grazing. These landowners wanted to see the same obvious benefits of grazing brought to their fields. The need for graziers that has been brought to our attention in this way is greater than our capacity to grow our operation. We would like to see other farmers grow the regional capacity to graze all the land available. When we host or attend pasture walks, we see a growing demand for the knowledge base that would help farmers to transition to this model of production.

We urge you to fund at least one grazing specialist position through DATCP. The massive impact of this small investment is important to rural communities, our water quality, and the future of farmers who are struggling. Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,

Caleb Langworthy

Feb. 4, 2020



- Doran Holm, Elk Mound (Dunn County) WI, farm, family, thank you for listening
- Express my support for Assembly Bill 790 for increasing funding for county conservation staffing grants and AB795 for creating a grazing coordinator position, Funding for a producer led watershed protection grants, soil and water conservation, and crop insurance premium rebates for cover crops.
- Grazing is crucial to a family run, smaller and medium scale farm being successful both financially and environmentally.
- Bought our farm 1997, run down and depleted, in foreclosure...a mess. Bought some cows in Sept 2001, went organic in 2004, can view short video named Chores at Holm Girls Dairy (YouTube)
- 22 years of fencing, seeding, building organic matter, grazing dairy milk cows and organic dairy heifers
- Keys to success was to sell most farm equipment and engineer the farm in a way that the animals could do the vast majority of the harvesting of feed and fertilizing of the farm while enhancing the grasses and legumes and reviving the microbiology on our farm.
- Also, help from local sources was a great contributor to our success. To get input on the best set ups for our farm for: perimeter fence, grazing practices, wildlife protection practices, things we do to help the grassland birds, repairing a major water run, rebuilding our main lane which goes over a hill, to halt any erosion. Inter-seeding a diverse

mix of grasses and legumes that help hold our very alive soil intact. Grass is our cover crop. It also covers over all the rocks. We have a very rocky farm.

- Our pastures are now so dense, our farm land is like a sponge. The rain is always welcome on our farm. With so much micro-biology in our soils and lush grasses to catch and intake the water - We know what rain falls on our farm, stays on our farm.
- Our cows and heifers loving moving around on the grass. From mid-May until the snow nearly flies, I move a wind up spools of wire with about 25 step in posts under my arm – every day. The animals come right around behind me as I wind the crosswire onto the spool and put the spool in my back pocket and the posts under my arm again to step off and set up the next day's meals.
- I often have to call out “Hey!” as the cattle are coming around behind me, as they are always so close to knocking me over. The cows and heifers are always excited to get new grass and exhibit their natural behaviors and eat their absolute favorite food I can smell the grass as they move, like one might smell when a lawn is just cut in a June evening at your own home.
- The cattle will care for the grassland birds and their nests. If they are aware of a nest in the grass, they will eat around the nest and step around it. Sometimes a nest with eggs will be a foot off the ground like on grass stilts, like a home on stilts. An amazing site.
- Non-grazed hay field across road just across the road. Ours is like driving across a bed mattress, field across the road is like driving across a brick laid city street - because of the life in our soil and what is living on top of it, daily managed grazing cattle.
- Again, I ask for your support for these two bills. Thank you.

February 3, 2020

Representative Gary Tauchen
Assembly Committee on Agriculture, Chairman
Room 13 West
State Capitol
PO Box 8953
Madison, WI 5370

RE: Assembly Bill 795: An Act relating to grants and funding for water stewardship certification, a grazing coordinator position, producer-led watershed protection grants, lake protection, soil and water conservation, and crop insurance premium rebates for cover crops; granting rule-making authority; and making an appropriation.

Dear Chairman Tauchen,

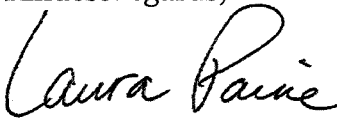
I am writing in support of Assembly Bill 795. While I support all six provisions of this legislation, I am especially excited about the restoration of the grazing coordinator position at the Department of Agriculture, Trade and Consumer Protection. Having held that position for eight years starting when it was first established in 2006, I have a unique perspective on the effectiveness of such a position.

Managed grazing is a low-cost, environmentally sustainable practice that can deliver value-added products within a profitable system. In the role of DATCP grazing specialist, I was able to capitalize on limited state and federal resources to catalyze adoption of managed grazing. By maintaining statistics on grazing operations, analyzing the marketing and profitability of grass-based products, and supporting grazing networks, I worked in partnership with other state and federal agencies to optimize the value of those scarce resources in support of Wisconsin dairy and livestock farmers.

Over my 40 years in Wisconsin, I have come to love my adopted home's rural communities and landscape, and the diverse agricultural systems that have shaped them. Dairy farming has had an outsized role in that culture and history. Today, as the dairy crisis begins to ease, I believe we have arrived at a watershed moment: Wisconsin can't afford to lose more of its dairy industry. Managed grazing is a scalable practice that is easily incorporated into any livestock production system and can make a dramatic difference in a farm's bottom line. As dairy producers recover from the economic crisis, adoption of low cost practices can help them recover and adapt their production systems to build resilience. The environmental benefits of perennial pasture and forages contribute to making promotion and adoption of managed grazing a win-win for Wisconsin agriculture.

I appreciate your leadership in support of the livestock and dairy sector. If there is anything more I can do to assist in seeing this legislation realized, please feel free to contact me.

Kindest regards,



Laura Paine
Paine Family Farm
Columbus, WI
608-338-9039
lkpaine@gmail.com

Jane Hansen, owner/farmer
Autumn Larch Farm LLC
W7120 County Road O
Prentice WI 54556
715/767-5958
AutumnLarch@gmail.com

February 4, 2020

Dear members of the Assembly Committee on Agriculture,

I am writing to encourage you to support Assembly Bill 795, in particular the portion of the bill that would add a Grazing Specialist at DATCP.

My husband and I (both having grown up in New Berlin, WI) moved to northern Wisconsin from Chicago in July 2000. We purchased 40 acres with about 8 acres open and 32 acres forested. I began soon after to grow vegetables and sell them at a local farmer's market. At that time, our Price County UW Extension office was fully staffed and I took advantage of the many workshops offered. Having never farmed before, the help I received from our local agricultural educator Mark Kopecky was invaluable. I often think about what it would be like to move here now that the Extension office has been diminished so much, having no agricultural, horticultural, community development or 4-H educator.

I began to raise pastured poultry in 2005 and sheep in 2009. Extension, Price-Rusk-Taylor Resource Conservation & Development Council (PRI-RU-TA) and USDA Natural Resource Conservation Service (NRCS) all had robust programs and staffing at that time which helped this new grazer so much. Bob Brandt was a grazing specialist at PRI-RU-TA then and his assistance was invaluable in helping me to plan a fence layout and grazing system that are still working well for me today. There are a lot fewer resources available for beginning farmers today. All of the agencies I looked to for livestock and grazing technical assistance have experienced significant staff cuts. PRI-RU-TA went dormant after federal funding was cut in 2013. After this, Bob Brandt was only able to provide a much-diminished level of assistance by working with the Taylor County Land Conservation office. Two of the four NRCS grazing specialist positions in Wisconsin are currently vacant. When Mark Kopecky left the Price County Extension office in 2012, the Agricultural Educator position was never filled.

The creation of a DATCP grazing coordinator position would be extremely valuable to me and to the many other currently practicing graziers in our state. And, this resource would be of particular value to beginning farmers and graziers who today have fewer options for learning and asking questions than they might have had in the past.

Currently on my farm I have a small flock of sheep that I management-intensive graze and outwinter on my pastures primarily for wool. I add value to the wool by having it locally milled and by dyeing it myself with natural plant-based dyes. I market the wool products through

direct marketing and online. I have joined Three Rivers Fibershed based in Minneapolis with a strategic geography comprising a 175 mile radius from Minneapolis, Minnesota that includes portions of Minnesota, Wisconsin, Iowa, and South Dakota and which “seeks to be a resource to our fiber community by providing opportunities for connection among farmers and mills, artists and makers, consumers and everyone in between.”

My connection with the fibershed has been particularly valuable since here in Wisconsin we have been without an Extension sheep specialist for quite some time. We also lost the sheep research station in northern Wisconsin in 2016 due to budget cuts, so our options for site specific technical know-how are quite limited. This is another reason that adding the grazing specialist position at DATCP would be beneficial.

Thank you for the opportunity to share my support of Assembly Bill 795. I hope you as members of this committee will vote to advance the bill forward.

Please contact me if I can be of assistance by answering questions or by providing additional information about my farm and my sustainability/grazing practices.



I am Kevin Mahalko, a Grazing Organic farmer from Gilman WI, Chippewa County

I am writing in support of AB 795 and SB 715 to create a grazing coordinator position.

Managed grazing and organics are both successful practices that can enhance the water and natural resources of Wisconsin while providing an economically viable way to farm. The health of the people of the state is ensured with products from Grazing and organic farms. The rural and urban citizens can benefit from the economic, environmental, and social benefits Managed Grazing and Organics provide.

I also personally support this whole package of this agricultural legislation geared to improving the lives of the citizens of Wisconsin. Agriculture is the main economic and social force in our great state and this legislation can enhance our farming and citizen's future.

Thank you,

Kevin Mahalko

715 314 0338

January 4, 2020

Assembly Agriculture Committee
RE: AB 790 and AB 795

Dear Committee Members:

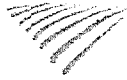
I am writing in support of AB 790 and AB 795.

AB 790: Increasing funding for County Conservation Departments is critical to improving the work in agriculture in our local communities. Here in Crawford County our staff do an excellent job. The knowledge and skills they share are used widely, and more resources would strengthen the opportunities for the department and thus for our rural community.

AB 795: Creating a grazing coordinator position, funding for producer-led watershed protection grants, soil and water conservation, and crop insurance premium rebates for cover crops would all be useful here in the SW part of the state. We have many rotational grazing field days in our region, often put on by independent groups as our topography is highly suited to rotational grazing. Producer-led watershed projects are gathering much needed data on water quality in this part of the state, and showing how vital changes are needed to address water quality issues.

Thank you for considering my comments on these bills.

Edie Ehlert
Crawford County
Ferryville, WI



Testimony of Margaret Krome, MFAI Policy Director

Wisconsin Assembly Committee on Agriculture Hearing February 4, 2020

The Michael Fields Agricultural Institute (MFAI) is a non-profit organization focused on advancing sustainable agriculture on a state and federal level. Founded in 1984 in East Troy, Wisconsin, it is our mission to nurture the ecological, social and economic resilience of food and farming systems through education, research, policy, and market development. We work closely with beginning, and experienced farmers across the state and nation.

The Institute has a long history of working on nutrient management issues, including collaborating with UW-Madison and USDA researchers on a 20+ year trial on farming systems, leading cover crops research for many years, convening several statewide meetings on “Rethinking Nutrient Management” from 2011 into 2015 and, more recently, serving as Collaborator for the Uplands Farmer Led Watershed Group in SW Wisconsin.

We want to congratulate the Assembly Speakers Task Force on Water Quality for its leaders’ dedication to listening to farmers and other stakeholders and bringing forward a bipartisan-led package of proposals. The Institute is here today to speak in favor of several of those proposals:

AB-790 - Increasing funding for County Conservation Staffing Grants – The Uplands watershed group’s close collaboration with Iowa County’s Conservationist and her office is a perfect example of the essential role that county conservation staff plays. Without the boots on the ground, farmers’ ability to develop and implement conservation plans is severely compromised.

AB-795 – We support each of the following provisions:

- Creating a Grazing Coordinator at DATCP – The demonstrated value to water quality of the continuous living cover provided by managed grazing systems, the ability of rotationally managed grass-based systems to mediate water infiltration and flow, the relative ease of entry into farming provided by this system of livestock and dairy farming, and the potential for value-added markets and products make it a high priority for significant state investment.
- Funding for Producer-Led Watershed Protection Grants - Demand is growing rapidly statewide for this demonstrably effective outreach and information exchange mechanism on issues associated with water quality.
- Crop Insurance Premium Rebates for Cover Crops (please see handout) MFAI also recognizes the need to increase the staffing at DATCP to support this program.

AB-796: creating a pilot grant program for farmers to reduce nitrate loading, funding research for nitrate loading reduction methods.

For more information, please contact Margaret Krome, Policy Program Director at Michael Fields Agricultural Institute (608) 628-2503 mkrome@michaelfields.org



January, 2020

Proposal to Reduce Insurance Premium on Wisconsin Cover Crops Acres

Why do cover crops matter? Cover crops have been demonstrated to reduce soil erosion and related nutrient runoff, reduce nitrogen leaching, increase crop diversification and resilience in the face of adverse weather, increase soil health, increase soil carbon, increase water infiltration, and they can be established successfully and profitably in Wisconsin.

Experience from Nearby States. In 2017, Iowa established a 3-year pilot program to reduce the farmers' crop insurance premium by \$5/acre for acres planted into cover crops. Last year, the program enrolled 700 farmers on nearly 170,000 acres.

In May of 2019, the State of Illinois followed suit, committing \$300,000 /year to fund a similar 3-year pilot program, with a similar \$5/acre. Its funding was subscribed within two weeks.

Wisconsin - In Wisconsin, fewer than ten percent of farmers plant cover crops. In 2017, approximately six percent of acres were planted to cover crops.

In 2019, the Michael Fields Agricultural Institute surveyed state farmers to assess interest in creating such a program in this state. Although not a random sample survey, the 119 respondents nonetheless demonstrated considerable interest in a crop insurance premium reduction program similar to those of Iowa and Illinois. 68% of farmers who had already planted cover crops said that such a program would increase their acreage or frequency of planting cover crops, and 64% of those who had not planted cover crops said it would increase their likelihood of planting them.

Legislative Proposal - On January 8, Wisconsin State Representatives Todd Novak (R-Dodgeville) and Katrina Shankland (D-Stevens Point) introduced a bill whose measures derive from the testimony received as part of 14 hearings conducted in summer of 2019 as co-chairs of the Speaker's Task Force on Water Quality. The bill proposes \$200,000 to support a pilot program similar to those created in Iowa and Illinois.

Details are subject to determination by the Wisconsin Department of Agriculture, Trade, and Consumer Protection, which would implement the program. (Neither the NRCS nor county conservation offices would be the point of application.) For example, Iowa's program precludes cover crop acres for which crop insurance discounts are received through this program from being already enrolled in NRCS or state cost-share conservation programs for cover crops practices.

For more information, please contact Margaret Krome, Policy Program Director at Michael Fields Agricultural Institute (608) 628-2503 mkrome@michaelfields.org

Scott Mericka
Co-owner of Grass Dairy LLC and Uplands Cheese Co
5025 SR 23 Dodgeville, WI 53533
dsmericka@gmail.com (608)-553-1212

I am a first-generation dairyman.

A label that once embarrassed me, now gives me pride and purpose given that the barriers to farm ownership have never been higher or the risks greater.

How does a 28-year-old buy a farm and start a family?

For me, the answer was holistic grazing!

Agriculture is at a crossroads and we need to choose a path that will revitalize our rural communities and regenerate the land that we call home. I strongly believe that holistic grazing should have a role in addressing the challenges at hand.

I have no desire to demonize other farmers. After all, they are my friends and neighbors. I want to see them thrive because without them the infrastructure goes too.

But I also realize that the 'high production confinement dairy model' is a race to the bottom. We've been led to believe that production is profit and get big or get out is the only way.

I'd like to offer up my own experience to serve as an alternative.

Out of college, I yearned to farm but working with my uncle on his cattle ranch was not a viable option. So, I went looking for a Herdsman job and managed a confinement dairy in California. The dairy had to operate like clockwork, or the three-time-a-day milking could easily be thrown out of whack. Mixing feed, managing manure, dealing with high producing cows around the clock made me realize that I was a fish out of water and grazing had always been my sweetheart.

I remember asking the dairy's owner if we could devise some sort of equity building scheme. He abruptly said no way, and I went home that night vowing to find a way to achieve my goal. Several months later, I got lucky and found a very successful grazing dairy and cheese company in need of a manager who could eventually buy them out. After 4 years of profit sharing my business partner (A Cheese Legend) and I bought them out in 2014 with a loan package that gave our banker a few gray hairs.

I'd be lying if I said I never looked back, because I do. Yet, when the dust settles, I realize how amazing it is to raise my kids on a Wisconsin dairy farm.

For me, Holistic Grazing checks all the boxes:

- Enjoyable and conducive to family life
- Climate smart farming through carbon sequestration
- Reduces soil erosion and eutrophication of water ways
- Reduces the risks of ground water contamination
- Meets consumer demands and trends
- Is profitable and yields a strong balance sheet
- Adds to the local economy and promotes Wisconsin Agriculture

It is cheaper to fund regenerative agriculture than it is to undo the effects of low margin/high input systems on our communities and environment. We deserve a seat at the table. To disregard what regenerative agriculture has to offer is a tremendous mistake. Now is our chance to build a better future for all farmers.

A small step forward is to appropriate funds that encourage growth of regenerative agriculture. From fully funding county extension agents to a grazing specialist with DATCP, we can give farmers the resources to branch out without losing their shirts. In my own experiences working with my county extension agent, I've found counsel without a sales pitch. He has helped me develop grazing plans that make my business more viable. Therefore I support AB 790, AB 795, and AB 796.

February 4, 2020

Dear members of the Assembly Agriculture Committee,

I urge you to vote in favor of Assembly Bill 790, support for County Conservation staffing grants, and Assembly Bill 795, which would create a grazing specialist position at DATCP, support farmer-led watershed initiatives, and create a cover crops pilot program.

My support for Assembly Bill 790 is based on my own experience as a farmer. Last year I was trying to get assistance from my local conservation office and had to wait for a few months, until they finally assigned me someone from an office further away from me. If we had more funding for staffing then perhaps my county would have had enough staff to help me in a more timely way, which was important for plans I was making in my grazing operation. Now I am set back a year in my plans, which has a financial impact on my family.

On our farm we pasture broilers, sheep, beef and hogs on our farm and on a friend's farm in the Driftless area of Wisconsin. We direct market to our customers. As a new farmer who is grazing multiple species of livestock, I would really benefit from more assistance with grazing planning and education. Assembly Bill 795 would help with this by creating a grazing specialist position at DATCP. I also see a need for more encouragement and assistance with farmer-led watershed programs and the planting of cover crops. Both of these are ways in which we can help protect our watershed, and farmers are in a perfect position to make significant improvements in the quality of our water, which would benefit everyone. But to implement changes on our farms that will be win-win for everyone, we need additional support from government agencies.

In addition to supporting AB 790 and 795, I also want to mention that mobile processing has been a very important part of our farm model. Our customers really appreciate that we can have an inspected mobile processing facility come to our farm, and that is something that I understand we are lucky to have and I hope to see more of in Wisconsin. We are implementing silvopasture and permaculture practices on our farm as a way to ensure a good quality of life in our animals, our land, and our watershed. I feel very grateful to be able to care for these animals and this land. I remember that my grandparents felt the same humble gratitude in caring for their farm, and I know some of my inspiration to farm comes from them.

Thank you for the opportunity to share my views, and I hope you will support Assembly Bill 790 and Assembly Bill 795.

Lisa Geary, Richland County
12664 County Highway I
Viola, WI 54664
mariposa@mwt.net



February 4/5th, 2020

Rachel Bouressa

Bouressa Family Farm

N3775 Ritchie Rd

New London, WI 54961 (Waupaca County)

bouressafamilyfarm@gmail.com

(608)228-6617

RE: Public Hearing - IN SUPPORT OF:

AB 790/SB 723: Increasing funding for County Conservation staffing grants.

AB 795/SB 715 : Creating a grazing coordinator position, funding for producer-led watershed protection grants, soil and water conservation, and crop insurance premium rebates for cover crops.

AB 796/SB 718: Creating a pilot grant program for farmers to reduce nitrate loading and funding research for nitrate loading reduction methods.

I am sharing my voice and story to encourage support for the above-listed bills.

Managed grazing saved my farm family, and is the most economically and environmentally viable agricultural system to produce quality meat and dairy products in our state.

I am a 5th generation farmer in the central part of the state. My family farm was a conventional dairy farm (planting corn, beans, hay). During the late 1980's - 1990's when dairy prices dropped significantly, my parents began milking 3 times a day, trying to squeeze every ounce of milk from their herd. My dad tweaked rations and took a seed sales route. They could not work hard enough to make ends meet. It was a tough time. Then they heard about managed grazing and were desperate and curious enough to attend a grazing conference. It changed our family's farm story.

The evidence for the many benefits of managed grazing exists, but there needs to be an advocate at the state level. There was a state Grazing Coordinator in the late 1990's that greatly helped advance research, marketing, networks, and partnerships within Wisconsin's agriculture and conservation groups. I ask that this position is reinstated to enhance Wisconsin's rich agricultural landscape and save other multi-generation farms and family stories.

County Conservation staff and programs are crucial to provide the technical assistance and support to new farmers looking to start grazing and those looking to transition. Additionally, I approached my county to inquire about starting a farmer-led watershed group. I was told that they lacked the resources to support my efforts in our area. Much of our neighborhood is in land managed by a local CAFO. The most recent water test resulted in a nitrate level of 22.3mg/L

(10mg/L is the state health standard). Many of us also got flu-like symptoms after the last manure application this fall.

I speak as a beef farmer and advocate for my neighbors and community. I raise beef cattle on the same pastures as my parents because I believe farming and being a steward of the land is a valuable way of life. I will be a life-long advocate for managed grazing.

Without quality waterways to enjoy and a vibrant and diverse agricultural community, Wisconsin loses so much of what makes it wonderful.

Much appreciation,

Rachel Bouressa

Beef farmer

Member: Wisconsin Farmer's Union, Waupaca County Farm Bureau, FSA County Committee, GrassWorks



WISCONSIN LAKES

We Speak for Lakes!

716 Lois Dr / Sun Prairie WI 53590

608.661.4313

info@wisconsinlakes.org

February 4, 2020

TESTIMONY TO ASSEMBLY COMMITTEE ON AGRICULTURE IN SUPPORT OF AB795

Thank you for the opportunity to testify today in support of AB790⁷⁹⁵. My name is Michael Engleson, and I am the Executive Director of Wisconsin Lakes, also known as the Wisconsin Association of Lakes. Wisconsin Lakes is a statewide non-profit conservation organization of waterfront property owners, lake users, lake associations, and lake districts who in turn represent over 80,000 citizens and property owners. We are the only statewide association of lake organizations.

Wisconsin Lakes strongly supports all of the different provisions of AB795, but I would like to concentrate my testimony on one section - that related to Producer Led Councils.

We firmly believe that the best and most lasting way to solve the polluted runoff problems that arise from agricultural areas is through cooperation between the lakes and the agricultural communities. Strong producer led councils help that cooperation take place, because the PLC can interact group-to-group with a lake organization, rather than a lake organization trying to work with individual farmers. The lines of communication are better, the chances for both groups to learn from each other are higher, trust between the groups is improved, and the opportunities to collectively solve runoff issues in a way that works best for everyone are more plentiful.

This bill not only supports PLC's by providing more financial support in general, but also opens up DNR's lake protection grant program to the Councils. This provides another way for the lake and ag groups to collaborate, possibly on projects at a larger scale than a single lake organization seeking a grant. For instance, a PLC could apply for a grant to fund a project that benefits more than one lake, projects that the lake groups alone might not be able to make happen.

While the lake protection grant program is currently undersubscribed and has been for some years, we believe that even without adding PLC's the program will eventually use all of its funds annually. And while we certainly would advocate for adequate funding for all lake organizations with appropriate projects, even if the lake grant program is fully subscribed we would still welcome PLC's into the fold because we believe Wisconsin will get even better lake management projects and cleaner lakes as a result.

Thank you, and I urge you to support AB795.

Wisconsin Lakes is a statewide non-profit conservation organization of waterfront property owners, lake users, lake associations, and lake districts who in turn represent over 80,000 citizens and property owners. For over 20 years, Wisconsin Lakes has been a powerful bipartisan advocate for the conservation, protection, and restoration of Wisconsin's lake resources.