

# TODD NOVAK

STATE REPRESENTATIVE • 51<sup>ST</sup> ASSEMBLY DISTRICT

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P.O. Box 8953  
Madison, WI 53708-8953

February 5, 2020

## SB 723

Thank you Chairman Cowles and members of the Committee on Natural Resources and Energy for holding a hearing on Senate Bill 723 which provides almost \$3 million in additional funding for the County Conservation Staffing Grant Program.

This bill is part of a package of bills introduced by the Speaker's Task Force on Water Quality.

As the task force traveled the state, we heard overwhelming testimony in support of the work done by county conservationists. Providing additional funding for the staffing grant program was one of the most frequently heard suggestions.

Current law requires DATCP to attempt to provide funding for an average of 3 staff persons per county with full funding for the first position, 70% funding for the second position, and 50% funding for additional positions. At current funding levels, the state is able to fully fund the first position, but only a portion of the cost-share for the second position. This bill will almost fully fund the state's cost-share directive.

County conservation staff are the boots on the ground when it comes to supporting conservation activities at the local level. These staff work to provide technical assistance to farmers and other landowners as they work to achieve their land management objectives. Depending on the needs of each individual county, conservation staff work on a variety of issues including farmland preservation, groundwater quality, invasive species, soil health, and municipal phosphorous reduction strategies.

Some activities that make up a typical "day in the life" of a county conservationist may include walking farm fields and buildings with a local farmer, then sitting down at a kitchen table to listen and learn about their operation and business goals. The conservation agent may then assist in identifying and applying for grants to execute a customized conservation plan or helping write a nutrient management plan.

To provide this kind of support, conservation staff work to develop relationships with farmers and landowners with the goal of becoming a trusted resource when a farmer or landowner is in need of assistance.

Sustained support for county conservation staff will help realize the value of these staff on the front lines of our water quality challenges and allow for additional investment in staff.

Thank you for your time and I am happy to take any questions.

Todd Novak



State of Wisconsin  
Governor Tony Evers

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## Department of Agriculture, Trade and Consumer Protection

February 5, 2020

**Re: SB 723: county conservation staffing and making an appropriation**

Chairman Cowles and members of the Senate Committee on Natural Resources and Energy. Thank you for the opportunity to provide information about SB 723 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 the work the department does with regards to county conservation staffing, and how SB 723 might impact those efforts.

**Background:**

DATCP provides funding to county land conservation departments (LCDs) to support activities that protect and conserve our state's soil and water resources. Eligible funding activities include: land and water resource management plan development and implementation; engineering, design, and installation of conservation practices; cost-share grant administration; farmland preservation program administration; manure storage ordinance implementation, and other related activities and programs. County conservation staff also play a key role in the implementation of the voluntary Conservation Reserve Enhancement Program (CREP) which is a federal, state, local, and private partnership program aimed at incentivizing removal of environmentally sensitive land from production and establishing permanent resource conserving plant species.

County conservation staff are the "boots on the ground" for implementing nearly all of the state's nonpoint source programs, standards, and regulations. Funding is provided by DATCP to the county LCDs according to a statutory goal. Each county receives a base allocation of \$75,000. As available, remaining funding is then allocated to provide 100% funding for the first LCD staff position, 70% of the second position and 50% for each position thereafter. The number of county land conservation staff differs from county to county based on a county's ability to fund additional positions after receiving its state staffing allocation. To date, DATCP has been able to support 100% of each county LCD's first position and approximately 50% of the second position, but has never been able to meet the entire staffing goal. Therefore, counties either make due with very few conservation staff--which results in less ability to deliver conservation programming to their county's farmer--support additional staff solely through the county tax levy, or seek considerable outside funding to support additional staff in the LCD office.

**Information on the bill:**

SB 723, if enacted, would increase the appropriation for county land and water staff by \$2,960,900, resulting in a total of \$12.4 million annually for county conservation. Importantly, this funding increase will provide the ongoing base funding which would ensure a more reliable funding stream counties need to retain high quality and skilled conservation staff. While it is unclear at the moment if this additional funding will result in the ability for all 72 counties to hire new staff, this funding will ensure an increase in the number of hours LCD staff commit to addressing conservation issues across the state. To effectively allocate this funding and ensure

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counties meet the obligation to maintain dedicated conservation positions, DATCP would need to work closely with Wisconsin Land + Water Association and the county LCDs to identify how to determine that a county has at least maintained its number of county land conservation personnel positions at the average number of such positions in its 2 fiscal years preceding August 1, 2020. Given our existing close working relationship with the WI Land + Water Association and the county land conservation departments, we feel extremely confident we can work together to ensure this funding provided by the tax payers of Wisconsin will be spent consistent with this legislative intent.

Thank you for the opportunity to provide information on SB 723 as it is currently written. I am happy to answer any questions committee members may have.



# COLUMBIA COUNTY

Land & Water Conservation

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112 East Edgewater Street  
Portage, WI 53901

Support for AB 790/SB723

Testimony of Director Columbia County Land & Water Conservation – Kurt R. Calkins

Good Afternoon Chair Cowles, Vice Chair Olsen and committee members.

My name is Kurt Calkins, I am the Director of Land & Water Conservation in Columbia County and also serve as the Chair of the WI Land & Water's Legislative & Administrative Committee. I have worked for 3 different County LCD over my 28-year career. Over that time, I have seen the conservation challenges grow, and with those challenges, the expectations of conservation professionals to address those challenges grow.

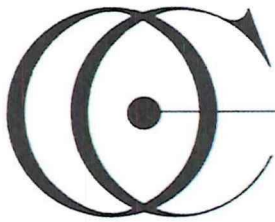
Over 20 years ago, the state put a plan in motion as part of the revision to Wisconsin's Nonpoint Source Pollution Abatement Program, this revision was rooted in local decision making commingled with state directives to ultimately work towards addressing our soil erosion and water quality challenges of the day.

The result of that vision, was a locally driven Land & Water Resources Management Planning process, that includes very detailed implementation strategies that identify issues and define pathways to access technical and financial resources to address these issues. Within this vision, Chapter 92 recognized the value and necessity of having a stable platform to fund staffing resources in partnership with counties. The funding support found in SB 723 will work to shore up and stabilize that delivery mechanism at the local level.

The staffing level of local conservation programs continues to be the single most important link that connects landowners to the knowledge and expertise necessary to lead to the adoption of conservation practices to protect and improve water quality.

SB 723 and the funding associated with it would directly support program delivery in Columbia County by allowing us to focus more stable staff resources into program assistance for programs such as CREP, FPP, NR 151 and TMDL implementation. We would also be able to stabilize and potentially grow local staffing resources to help farmers actively engage in a more detailed utilization of Nutrient Management Plans. County decision makers have continued to support and grow investment in my department over the last 20 years, and they will continue to, but at the same time, are aware of shortfalls that continue to challenge the staffing grant funding from the state. This legislation is necessary to stabilize and grow the foundation that is the County Land and Water Conservation delivery mechanism in Wisconsin and prepare us to address the water quality challenges today and into the future.

Thank You.



# OUTAGAMIE COUNTY

## LAND CONSERVATION DEPARTMENT

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### Support for AB 790/SB723

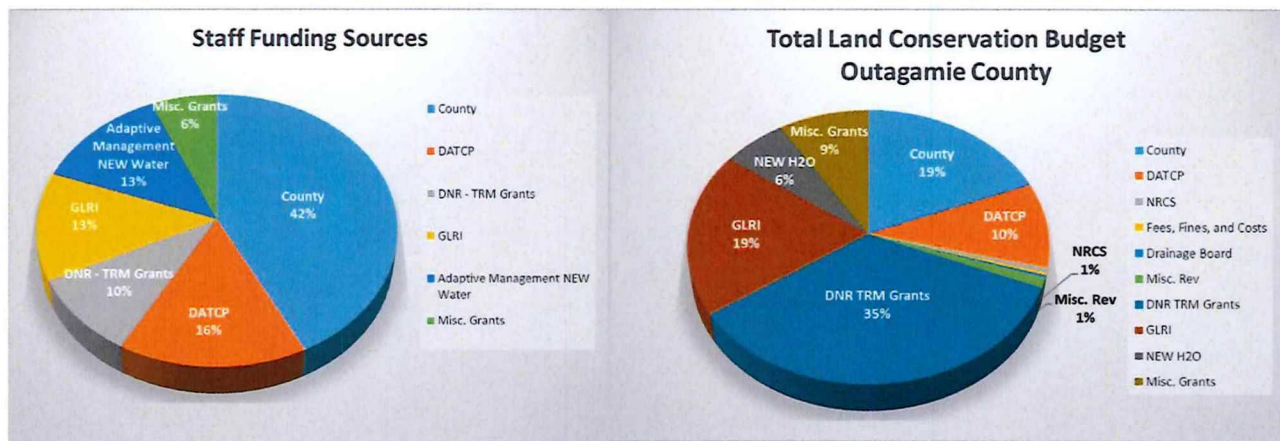
### Testimony of Greg Baneck – County Conservationist

Outagamie County has a strong commitment to improving the soil and water resources of Northeastern Wisconsin. The County invests substantially at the local level with its support of Land Conservation Department Programs and relies on numerous funding sources to support its mission, including funds through the Soil and Water Resource Management program administered through the Department of Agriculture, Trade and Consumer Protection (DATCP). One of the keys to a successful program is being able to **leverage funding** to bring in additional grants to support the mission and get more conservation on the ground.

Staffing grant funding through the Soil and Water Resource Management grant program has declined or remained stagnant for several years. AB790/SB723 will provide additional, stable staff funding for bolstering our programs allowing us to leverage for more program funding through Great Lakes Restoration Initiative funds and other grant sources.

Outagamie County supports AB790/SB723 and urges the Assembly/Senate to approve this legislation to further the protection of Wisconsin’s soil and water resources.

The following pie charts show how the county utilizes County and DATCP funding to leverage additional grants to put more conservation funding on the ground.





## Wisconsin Land+Water Conservation Association

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### **Testimony of WI Land+Water Executive Director Matt Krueger**

AB 790/SB 723

Senate Committee on Natural Resources and Energy

February 5, 2020

Good afternoon Chair Cowles, Vice Chair Olsen, and committee members.

My name is Matt Krueger, and I am the executive director of WI Land+Water. We are a nonprofit, nonpartisan membership organization that represents 800 county conservation department staff and elected county board supervisors across the state. I am here today, on behalf of our members, to speak in favor of AB 790/SB 723.

I want to first thank Chair Cowles and Vice Chair Olsen for their support of this bipartisan bill, and Sen. Testin for his authorship. In light of the strong public support for county conservation demonstrated at the Water Quality Task Force hearings, I'm very excited to see this bill going forward. I also want to thank Senator Miller as a fellow Task Force member for his commitment and engagement in listening to hundreds of Wisconsinites voice their input on water quality issues.

I'd like to provide some information today on the topic of county conservation funding, which I think is important context to inform discussion of this bill. First, it's important to note that Wisconsin is unique nationally in having a professional conservation workforce 350 people strong, rooted in local communities across the state. We are leaders in conservation, and have been, since the days of the nation's first watershed project in Coon Valley, back in 1933. Our Land Conservation Committees (LCCs) are a conservation delivery model that integrates decision-making across disciplines at the county level, balanced with responsibility for implementing state and federal standards. From a design standpoint, our model is the envy of the rest of the country, and for good reason.

In 1999, Wis. Stats. Chap 92 established that the state would augment existing local funding by providing financial support for conservation departments at an average of three staff positions in each county at 100, 70, and 50 percent. But even at the time this target was codified, the state did not meet its own funding goal, and in the two decades following, state support has languished. In 1997, the state funded \$13 million for county conservation staff—adjusted for today's dollars, that amount would be about \$21 million. Yet today, 23 years later, the state funds \$9.4 million.

This is not offered as a complaint, especially as we discuss a funding *increase* to counties, but rather, to highlight where things were previously, compared to where they are today. I want to be crystal clear that the increase of \$2.9 million dollars proposed in the bill is welcome and necessary, and will result in more conservation on the landscape, period. Provided it is a boost to base funding, as I understand it is, it would be the most consequential funding increase counties will have seen in decades. Yet, that cannot be the extent of our investment in conservation.

The reality is, county conservation departments are being asked to implement an ever-increasing set of programs, without increased funding, and with less people available to do it. With 40% fewer state-funded staff than there were 20 years ago, conservation departments are asked to implement statewide performance standards such as ATCP 50 and NR 151 (including new targeted standards), Total Maximum Daily Loads, Nine-Key Element plans, farmland preservation, Conservation Reserve Enhancement Program, producer-led watershed and citizen watershed group support, MS4 stormwater permits, and phosphorus compliance arrangements such as nutrient trading. This is not a complete list. And when combined with the fact that we have not adequately supported sustained, baseline funding of local conservation efforts for the past two decades, we should not be surprised by the contaminated wells and impaired waterways in the news lately.

If I am to convey one message to you today, let it be this: if we are to improve water quality and achieve clean and safe drinking water, and support a viable agricultural industry at the same time, county conservation professionals are the best and most cost-effective solution we have.

Our county conservation staff not only work with farmers to keep soil in place on farm fields so it can grow the next year's crop, but help build its organic matter to better withstand drought and extreme weather events, and ultimately, grow crops with less input. They help waterfront property owners protect their shorelines from the battering waves that literally take from them their biggest investment. They spend years building trust among community members, through early morning pasture walks with producer-led groups, or late-night board meetings in town halls with citizen watershed organizations. Without hesitation, they jump into action after receiving the midnight phone call about emergencies like catastrophic flooding or a manure spill. These folks are trusted leaders in their community, and their work is relied upon to protect Wisconsin's precious soil and water resources.

In return for increasing its investment in conservation, the state will "get" these things and much more, tailored to meet the needs of local communities—which you'll hear more about from county conservation professionals themselves, shortly. This is truly an example of an ounce of prevention being worth a pound of cure. On top of that, conservation departments are masterful at leveraging

state and county dollars to bring external grant funding into local communities, amplifying the impact of that initial investment.

Unfortunately, the work of a conservationist is never “done.” Just as regular maintenance on your vehicle or upkeep on your home is a necessary ongoing commitment, so too is investing in conservation. A single flood event could wipe out years of conservation practices installed on a field; a simple change in farm ownership could reset the five-year clock on establishing enough trust to talk frankly and honestly about management practices with a landowner. This work takes time, and it requires sustained support. This bill gets us much closer to that.

WI Land+Water is very supportive of AB 790/SB 723. If passed, it will be an important step toward addressing the conservation challenges we’re facing today, just as we did in Coon Valley nearly 90 years ago.

Thank you for the opportunity to provide input, and I’m happy to answer any questions.





# WISCONSIN LAKES

*We Speak for Lakes!*

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February 5, 2020

## TESTIMONY TO SENATE COMMITTEE ON NATURAL RESOURCES IN SUPPORT OF SB723

Thank you for the opportunity to testify today in support of SB723. 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 the funding for county conservation staffing that this bill would provide.

In many counties, especially the ones rich in lakes, county conservation staff provide crucial services to waterfront property owners and lake organizations. Many of those services relate to improving water quality issues by advising and participating in projects that reduce polluted runoff to the county's surface waters. But county conservation staff can also play a huge role in other aspects of lake management. For instance, aquatic invasive species education, prevention, and control activities within a county are benefited when an AIS specialist is part of the team.

So much of lake management in Wisconsin, however, is done by citizens - often the property owners that live on the lake. When a county has a fully-staffed conservation department to provide help and support to those citizen volunteers, lake management gets done better. This means that the funding in this bill helps to leverage all that volunteer capacity for lake management that benefit from the work of the conservation staff. That's a proven method for successful lake management in Wisconsin, and an excellent reason, on top of many other good reasons, for you to support this bill.

Thank you, and I urge you to support SB723.

*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.*



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Testimony on Senate Bill 723  
Committee on Natural Resources & Energy  
February 5, 2020

Melissa Schlupp, Conservation Manager  
[melissa.schlupp@saukcountywi.gov](mailto:melissa.schlupp@saukcountywi.gov)  
608-355-4838

Thank you Chair Cowles, Vice Chair Olsen, and members of this committee for allowing me to make the case for providing counties baseline support for our conservation services as proposed in Senate Bill 723. The number one message from the Water Quality Task Force hearings was that county conservation departments are the best solution we have to meet clean water goals and address conservation challenges, but they have not received adequate funding.

My name is Melissa Schlupp, Conservation Manager, with the Sauk County Land Resources and Environment Department. In Sauk County, staff work closely with producer-led watershed groups, waterfront property owners, farmers, and rural landowners to install conservation practices on their property that maintain a productive farm and healthy environment. Having funding available to install these conservation practices is important; however, having knowledgeable, staff trained to implement these conservation practices is essential. They spend years building trust-based relationships with their clients, just as a doctor or financial advisor would. In recent years, staff have worked with landowners to convert nearly 2000 acres of poorly managed cropland and pasture to productive, rotationally grazed pastureland. These lands not only infiltrate greater amounts of rain water that alleviates flooding downstream, but are more profitable and support a comfortable way of life for the farmer and cattle alike. The Yanke Family of Loganville, Wisconsin was the 2018 Conservation Farm Family of the year. Although they couldn't be here to testify, I have attached their letter of support to my testimony.

County conservation departments are relied upon to meet the needs of their local communities. They are proven, and dependable. In 2019, Sauk County Land Conservation staff provided technical assistance to nearly 300 farmers and installed 76 conservation practices that prevented over 1900 tons of sediment from entering our surface waters. It is critical that we provide sustained support for county conservation staff and Senate Bill 723 is a first step in the right direction.

Water quality and conservation issues have become more challenging in recent decades, but the state has not maintained base-level county conservation staffing support. Current state-supported staffing levels are over 40% less than they were 20 years ago. In Sauk County, additional funding would allow staff to install more conservation practices that protect our surface and groundwater resources by preventing soil erosion and reducing agricultural runoff.

The return on investment for county conservation departments is high—not only do they provide valuable, cost-effective services for their local communities, but they also multiply the impact of state funding several times over, by leveraging federal and private grant dollars. These dollars help to protect our most valuable natural resources while maintaining productive agriculture and supporting local economies. Since 2015, Sauk County has successfully secured \$2 million dollars in additional federal grant funding for installing conservation practices in the Baraboo River Watershed, a watershed that is greatly impaired by phosphorus runoff and soil erosion.

We know that our investments in clean water will yield high returns. On behalf of the Sauk County Land Resources and Environment Department, I strongly urge you to support Senate Bill 723.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify. Please contact me with any questions you may have.

January 31, 2020

Senator Robert Cowles  
Chair, Senate Committee on Natural Resources and Energy  
Room 118 South  
State Capitol  
PO Box 7882  
Madison, WI 53707

Representative Tauchen  
Chair, Assembly Committee on Agriculture  
Room 13 West  
State Capitol  
PO Box 8953  
Madison, WI 53708

Dear Senator Cowles and Representative Tauchen,

Thank you for the opportunity to convince you to support AB 790/ SB 723 and provide counties baseline support for their conservation services.

We are the Yanke family, owners and operators of Echo Y Farms. Our fourth generation farm is located near Loganville, Wisconsin in central Sauk County where we grow 1200 acres of corn, soybeans, wheat and alfalfa and rotationally graze a small herd of beef cattle and contract raise Holstein replacement heifers for a large dairy farm.

We know firsthand how valuable the services are provided by land conservation staff. Since the 1960s our family has worked with the Sauk County Land Conservation Department to install conservation practices on our farm. In recent years, the department has helped us convert 280 acres into rotationally managed pasture and fine tune our cover crop program. These practices help to build healthy and resilient soils that are capable of handling extreme rain events - we know what is good for the land and water is good for our business.

It is because of our commitment to conservation that Sauk County nominated us as the Wisconsin Land and Water 2018 Conservation Farm Family of the Year. As the recipient of this award, our farm hosted Conservation Observance Day in August 2018 allowing us to showcase these conservation practices. The Sauk County Land Conservation Department worked hard to organize this successful event that drew over 300 people to our farm. We couldn't have been more pleased with the turnout and the enthusiasm of those in attendance.

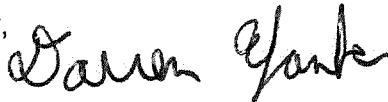
From there, things really took off on our farm. We started organizing more field days to educate our local farmers on the practices we were installing. We also increased our presence on Facebook and now have over 500 followers! We enjoy sharing our successes and failures with the hope that others will see value in the networking opportunities we organize. In 2019, we were among the founding members of the Sauk Soil and Water Improvement Group (SSWIG), a producer-led watershed group focused on promoting soil health practices throughout Sauk County. The creation of this producer led group was heavily supported by the Sauk County

Land Conservation Department. They also assisted our group with applying for and receiving a \$40,000 grant from the Wisconsin Department of Agriculture, Trade, and Consumer Protection.

Although we have always been ones to try different things and willing to take some risks, the Sauk County Land Conservation Department has been a valuable partner to work with. We regularly contact them to troubleshoot different issues on the farm and to seek advice on new practices. They are a trusted resource that we can always rely on. We know they are stretched thin and appreciate all of the countless hours they have been available to us.

For all of these reasons, we strongly urge you to support AB 790/ SB 723 so counties can continue to do the great work they do for farmers like us!

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Dawn York". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

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**Testimony of Amber Meyer Smith, Vice President of Programs and Government Relations  
SB 723/ AB 790  
Senate Committee on Natural Resources and Energy  
February 5, 2020**

Clean Wisconsin is a non-profit environmental advocacy group focused on clean water, clean air and clean energy issues. We were founded fifty years ago and have 20,000 members and supporters around the state.

I urge you to support SB 723/AB 790 to provide additional funding of nearly \$3 million for county conservation departments around Wisconsin. County conservation staff play a critical role in helping farmers implement important practices to protect water quality and environmental health all around the state.

County conservation departments support farmers in implementing on farm best management practices that benefit farmers and the communities they serve. They are the boots on the ground for cleaning up our waterways, yet their funding has been inadequate for years.

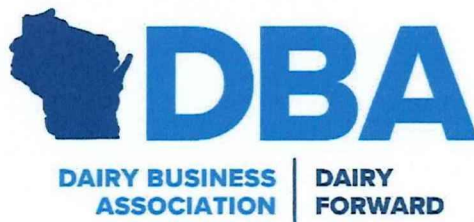
I have heard concerns expressed about this \$3 million being too expensive in the context of the \$10 million Water Quality Task Force package, but I think it's important to put this in perspective.

In the face of similar water quality challenges, other states have stepped up in major ways:

- Ohio's Governor has proposed the \$900 million H2Ohio program to improve and protect the state's water quality
- Iowa proposed a 1 cent tax increase (expected to raise about \$170 million per year) for the Iowa Water and Land Legacy Fund
- Michigan's Governor included \$120 million to clean up drinking water in her budget
- New York has adopted a \$2.5 billion Clean Water Infrastructure Act
- Minnesota's Governor has requested \$300 million for water quality and water infrastructure upgrades in 2020 alone for the Clean Water, Land and Legacy constitutional amendment.

Wisconsin's water challenges are just as grave as these states, but we are offering nowhere near the same level of investment. By comparison, the nearly \$3 million proposed in this bill is a small amount of money, but it will go a long way to directly fund these critical staff positions in local communities across Wisconsin.

By passing this important funding for county conservation departments, you will be taking a necessary step forward for water protection. Please support SB 723/AB 790 to provide \$3 million in funding for county conservation staff positions around Wisconsin.



### **Testimony in Support of SB 723**

My name is John Holevoet and I am the director of government affairs for the Wisconsin Dairy Business Association. I am here to speak in favor of SB 723. DBA appreciates Senator Testin and Representative Novak's commitment to funding for county conservationists. These people are often the first line of defense and offense when it comes to protecting and improving water quality.

Funding for county land and water programming is also at the center of Wisconsin's nonpoint program. This program has never been adequately funded since its creation. That is disappointing, but what is worse is that the farming community is often blamed for our water quality ills without an acknowledgment that they were never given the resources and tools they would have needed to be successful.

In 2018, we enacted new targeted performance standards that apply to a small proportion of farms. The Department of Natural Resources is about to undertake a new rulemaking process to address nitrate concerns that will again result in more rules for the minority of farms that are held accountable for following nonpoint regulations. This makes little sense if we cannot also make sure that all farms are following the baseline standards outlined in NR 151 and ATCP 50.

The funding provided in this bill is just a start. We must make a serious investment to ensure that all farms follow our nonpoint standards. Without that, we will never be able to honestly evaluate their effectiveness. Farmers are willing to be partners in joint efforts to improve water quality, but we do not want to be scapegoats.

When the Clean Water Act was enacted, there were large investments made to help point sources come into compliance. Nearly half a century later, the focus is on nonpoint sources. Expectations have evolved, but funding for the nonpoint program has not evolved with it. This bill takes an important step in providing the support needed, and I would urge you to support it. At the same time, I hope you will support the additional steps that will be needed for us to have a truly effective nonpoint program.

February 4, 2020

RE: SUPPORT AB 790/ SB 723 Funding for County Conservation Staff

Dear Committee Members,

On behalf of South Central WI Farmers Union farmers, I ask that you support AB 790/ SB 723 and provide counties baseline support for their conservation services. The number one message from the Water Quality Task Force hearings was that county conservation departments are the best solution we have to meet clean water goals and address conservation challenges, but they have not received adequate funding. As a beginning dairy farmer in 2001, the services of Serge Koenig of Sauk County were utilized in helping us map rotational grazing pastures, barnyard runoff mitigation, and a nutrient management plan. In Dane County, Marie Raboin has been a force in the promotion of conservation efforts of graziers, foresters and women farmers. Todd Jensen of Green County estimated that from 2015-18, his department had spent over \$50,000 of work hours in monitoring and advising on behalf of residents during the planning of Pinnacle Dairy, a 5800 cow dairy. During that same time, Green County invested in a hydrogeological study the initial cost of which was over \$90,000 and hundreds of hours of time spent by the county conservation staff in compiling the results and recommendations.

As I mentioned to Sen. Marklein on January 15, water quality and conservation issues have become more challenging in recent decades, but the state has not maintained base-level county conservation staffing support to adequately deal with these issues. Current state-supported staffing levels are over 40% less than they were 20 years ago, and funding is now more than \$3 million short of targeted base-level funding, as defined in Wis. State Statutes Chapter 92. AB 790/ SB 723 brings us closer to base-level funding (\$12.8 million, as of 2020). The return on investment for county conservation departments is high—not only do they provide valuable, cost-effective services for their local communities, but they also multiply the impact of state funding several times over, by leveraging federal and private grant dollars. This puts more conservation on the land and brings dollars into local economies at the same time.

It is critical that we provide sustained support for county conservation staff. These professionals work with farmers and landowners to help them meet management goals for their property or business, while meeting basic conservation standards at the same time. Whether supporting producer-led watershed groups, assisting waterfront property owners, helping farmers develop nutrient management plans, or responding to natural disasters like floods, county conservation departments are relied upon to meet the needs of their local communities. They are proven, and dependable. They spend years building trust-based relationships with their clients, just as a doctor or financial advisor would.

For all these reasons, I strongly urge you to support AB 790/SB 723 when it comes before you for a vote.

Sincerely,

Pat Skogen, South Central Wisconsin Farmers Union Board member

1913 12<sup>th</sup> Avenue, Monroe WI 53566

Comments for Wednesday Feb 5, 2020

Dear members of the Senate Committee on Natural Resources and Energy,

I am writing in favor of SB 715, SB 722, and SB 723. With today's growing farm crisis we must act swiftly to help our rural places. Creating a grazing coordinator position would help farmers in a time of need. I am a producer and a Farmer led water shed board member. Our local watershed group has found this program to be advantageous to our farmers as well as our rural communities and municipalities. With the addition of grazing coordinators these watershed groups could further their success stories.

There are many reasons to support grazing education. Farmers deserve assistance in accomplishing a practice that can help their bottom line, watershed, local municipality, current cash crop dilemma and the market. This is timely with the current trade debacle. Some Dairy farmers are transitioning to beef. In 2016 over 70% of the US grass fed beef was imported. Much of the US grass fed beef was coming from Australia, note the countries burnt status. There is a potential market to be filled. The time is ripe to diversify and fill a market, grazing assistance could help during transitional time.

Grazing can help our rural places in phosphorus reduction. Many of our municipalities waste water treatment centers are currently out of compliance with EPA discharge standards. Phosphorus (P) loads can be decreased in a number of ways. The Farmer led watershed groups include this in their goals. Smart grazing and perennial crops show success in reducing P and therefore reducing the need for municipalities to spend millions of dollars in infrastructure updates, saving our tax payers millions of dollars. There are examples of farmers collaborating with their villages on these P reduction efforts. DATCP Farmer led programs are letting the farmers play a leadership role in their watershed, adding a grazing component will only help them further their success.

Furthermore, grazing has many positive externalizes too, as it can foster carbon sequestering, provide habitat for our pollinators and a future for our farmers and earth.

Lastly I will mention again that grazing is an option for farmers, when many are in a time of need. This is a win-win, as it will help address water concerns and farmers needs. Please consider supporting SB 715.



I am also in support of SB 723, increasing funds for our County Conservation staffing grants will help address both Phosphorus and Nitrogen management. WE need the resources to address our problems. Our county folks have done an excellent job in assisting farmers and could some more resources to do their jobs.

Please support SB 722. When working for my township's Rural Land Conservation Committee, there was a great interest in well testing. We need better resources in particular for our rural well testing. We need to better track our rural water quality. Water is a great resource to our dairy state. All of Wisconsin deserves good water.

Respectfully submitted by

April Prusia

Owner/operator

April's Garden LLC and Dorothy's Grange LLC

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608-444-1102



**February 5th, 2020**

**Rachel Bouressa**

**Bouressa Family Farm**

N3775 Ritchie Rd

New London, WI 54961 (Waupaca County)

[bouressafamilyfarm@gmail.com](mailto:bouressafamilyfarm@gmail.com)

(608)228-6617

**RE: Public Hearing - IN SUPPORT OF:**

**SB 723:** Increasing funding for County Conservation staffing grants.

**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.

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

I am a 5th generation farmer in Waupaca County, and rotationally graze beef cattle on my family's land. I am also a UW-Madison CALS alumni, member of Wisconsin Farmers' Union, Farm Bureau, as well as on my local FSA County Committee. It is from my education, experience, passion and pride for what I do and where I'm from that I base my statement of support.

Managed grazing is the most economically and environmentally viable agricultural system to produce quality meat and dairy products in our state, and saved my family farm. 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, literally 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. I think of the 818 dairy farms that finished their last milking, and feel for those.

Recently I spoke with a long-time neighbor and family friend. He highlighted a benefit of the transition to grazing that I hadn't appreciated until he pointed it out. I have a few brothers, who were star athletes in our small town. He noted that when the farm transitioned to grazing, my dad was able to make it to "the kids" events. Managed grazing allowed my dad to be not just a farmer, but also a present and not-so-stressed father.

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.

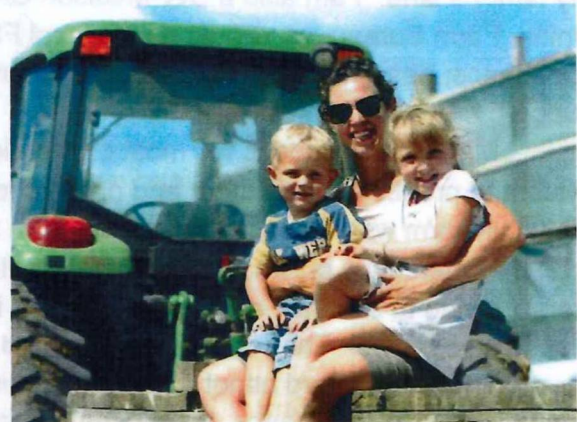
I speak as a beef farmer and advocate for my neighbors and community. I raise beef cattle on the same pastures as my parents because I believe farming and being a steward of the land is a valuable way of life. I will be a life-long advocate for managed grazing. Without quality waterways to enjoy and a vibrant and diverse agricultural community, Wisconsin loses so much of what makes it wonderful.

Much appreciation,

Rachel Bouressa

Beef farmer

Member: Wisconsin Farmers Union, Waupaca County Farm Bureau, FSA County Committee, GrassWorks



February 4, 2020

Dear Members of the Senate Natural Resources and Energy Committee:

I am contacting you as a former Chippewa County Supervisor, Land Conservation Committee member and farmer to request that you support SB 723, funding for County Conservation Staffing.

Sadly our agricultural conservation efforts have suffered over the past 10-15 years due to multiple environmental issues/challenges which have demanded and will continue to demand a substantial amount of county land conservation department staff time. The Conservation Department has been forced to limit its workload due to staff and budget limitations.

We are now faced with making up for lost time and are dealing with an escalating rate and level of nitrate pollution in many of our residential wells as well as other important conservation issues including accelerated erosion of our farmland due to poor practices and conversion of grasslands to row crops. The movement away from our traditional landscape of pastures and hay fields to support small dairy farms in Chippewa County to large cash crop enterprises and CAFO sized dairy farms which rely on more corn silage rather than hay in their rations are a contributing factor to many of these serious issues. Since these enterprises are here for the foreseeable future we must foster a dialogue of the issues and work towards solutions.

I believe county conservation departments are one of the better avenues along with farmer lead watershed councils to do this. Thank you for your consideration of this matter and for your support of Senate Bill 723.

Ken Schmitt

4988 120th Ave.

Colfax, WI 54730

February 4, 2020

Dear members of the Senate Natural Resources and Energy Committee,

I urge you to vote in favor of Senate Bill 723, support for County Conservation staffing grants, and Senate Bill 715, which would create a grazing specialist position at DATCP, support farmer-led watershed initiatives, and create a cover crops pilot program.

My support for Senate Bill 723 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. Senate Bill 715 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 SB 723 and SB 715, 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 Senate Bill 723 and Senate Bill 715.

Lisa Geary, Richland County  
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