



---

# JOEL KITCHENS

---

STATE REPRESENTATIVE • 1<sup>ST</sup> ASSEMBLY DISTRICT

**Testimony for the Assembly Committee on Environment  
Assembly Bill 65  
Thursday, March 16th**

Thank you Chairman Oldenberg and members of the committee for holding this public hearing and allowing me to testify on Assembly Bill 65.

As we listened to testimony all around the state for the Speaker's Task Force on Water Quality it became very clear that our producer-led watershed groups were making tremendous strides in improving our water and that they would be an essential ally as we moved forward.

Every farm field is different in terms of topography, soil type, and soil depth and there are dozens of other factors that influence the level of water contamination that results from farming. We need to have buy-in from farmers and a commitment to protecting our water in order to successfully navigate these many factors and make the right decisions. We cannot simply regulate our way to clean water.

Producer-led watershed groups allow farmers to work together and share information and try innovative practices that allow them to remain profitable while protecting our water.

In my own area, I have witnessed the tremendous positive impact these groups can have. Eight years ago, Kewaunee County was seen as the poster child for groundwater contamination from manure spreading. Now, the most recent well testing shows that the groundwater in Door and Kewaunee Counties is substantially cleaner than the state average, in spite of having the shallowest soil in the state.

The efforts of Peninsula Pride members, together with new manure-spreading rules that they supported, are largely responsible for this improvement. One only needs to take a ride through the countryside this time of year to see the fields covered by cover crops to see the change. Peninsula Pride members know that they need to change their practices to protect the water if farming is going to remain viable in the future in our area.

Through the Water Quality Task Force, we invested in grant programs to incentivize these groups to try new practices. History has shown that they continue to implement these practices once they are proven to work, even after the grant money is gone. This bill builds on that success. AB 65 expands eligibility for watershed protection grants, lake protection grants, and river protection grants.

Under current law, the Department of Natural Resources provides lake protection grants and lake management grants for monitoring and improving water quality in lakes and lake classification grants for classifying lakes. Currently, eligible recipients for these grants include nonprofit conservation organizations, counties and municipalities, qualified lake associations, town sanitary districts, qualified school districts, public inland lake protection and rehabilitation districts, and other local governmental units that are established for the purpose of lake management. The DNR also provides river protection grants for monitoring and improving water quality in rivers.

Currently, eligible recipients of these grants include local governmental units, qualified river management organizations, and conservation organizations. The bill provides that producer-led groups are eligible to receive lake protection, management, and classification grants and river protection grants provided by DNR.

Assembly Bill 65 will also build on a successful program by expanding eligibility for producer-led groups to farmers in adjacent watersheds. The success of the current program is proof alone that the program needs to be expanded. This bill will mean more farmers will learn better ways to farm and protect our water.

Thank you for your time and I hope you consider supporting Assembly Bill 65. I am happy to answer any questions you might have.



**Testimony in Support of Assembly Bill 65**  
**Assembly Committee on Environment**  
*March 16, 2023*

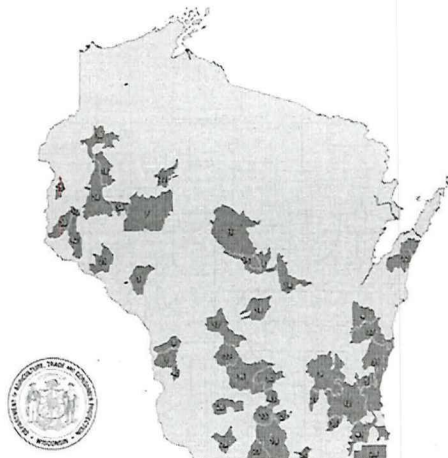
Chair Oldenburg, Vice Chair Kitchens, and members of the committee, I appreciate the opportunity to testify in support of Assembly Bill 65, legislation to improve our state's water quality by expanding access to the DNR's surface water grants and allowing more farmers to participate in producer-led watershed protection groups.

We can all agree that everyone deserves access to clean and safe drinking water and healthy lakes, rivers, and streams. As we traveled the state in previous sessions as part of our work on the Water Quality Task Force, people in every corner of Wisconsin encouraged us to offer meaningful solutions to prevent nitrate contamination, the most common contaminant in our state's drinking water. When they testified, they especially emphasized that farmers are part of the solution, and Assembly Bill 65 builds on this core concept by recognizing the important role these groups play in encouraging farmers to adopt conservation best practices, while also bringing community members and leaders into their efforts.

Assembly Bill 65 makes two changes to the Producer-led Watershed Protection Grant Program administered by DATCP: first, it clarifies that grants may be awarded to producer-led watershed groups that span multiple adjacent watersheds. Second, it allows these producer-led watershed groups to qualify for Lake Protection Grants and River Protection Grants administered by the DNR. Across Wisconsin, these producer-led groups have grown to 43 grantees strong since they were first created in 2016, when just 14 groups were awarded grants from DATCP. Our farmer-led initiatives are shining examples of grassroots leadership, and we've seen producer-led watershed groups work together to invest in cover crops, no-till, interseeding, grazing covers, alternative forages, and other best practices to reduce nitrate, phosphorus, and other contaminants in our surface waters and groundwater while improving soil health. Assembly Bill 65 opens up the state's lake protection, management, and classification grants and river protection grants to these farmer-led groups, ensuring more water quality leaders are receiving the resources needed to protect our water and keep it clean for generations to come.

We owe it to the people of Wisconsin to ensure everyone has access to clean drinking water and to do everything we can to reduce and prevent nitrate contamination. Assembly Bill 65 will help more farmers access more resources to invest in practices that support water quality. I appreciate that so many organizations have already registered in support of these bills, and thank you to everyone who has already signed on as a co-sponsor. Thank you for your consideration, and I'd be happy to answer questions at this time.

**2023 Funded Producer-Led  
Watershed Protection Groups**



# **ROBERT L. COWLES**

**Wisconsin State Senator, 2nd Senate District**

**STANDING COMMITTEES:**

Natural Resources & Energy, Chair  
Transportation & Local Government, Vice-Chair  
Economic Development & Technical Colleges

## **Testimony on 2023 Assembly Bill 65**

**Senator Robert Cowles**

**Assembly Committee on Environment**

**March 16th, 2023**

Thank you, Chair Oldenburg and Committee Members, for holding a hearing and allowing me to testify on 2023 Assembly Bill 65. This bill makes two changes impacting Producer-Led Watershed Protection Groups.

Clean waterbodies are as much a part of the foundation of our great state as agriculture, and for decades, farmers have been a substantial part of efforts to maintain and improve water quality throughout the state. But with tight margins on many farms and constantly evolving knowledge about the best land practices to protect ground and surface water resources, Wisconsin's rural residents and agricultural producers are asking for partners to grow their ongoing efforts and begin new initiatives.

Building on investments made in the bipartisan 2021-23 State Budget and borrowing elements from the 2019-20 Speaker's Task Force on Water Quality, we're introducing this legislation to continue advancing beneficial land practices and cleaner ground and surface water throughout our state. Assembly Bill 65 will help farmers implement new land and water conservation strategies to store more nutrients in soil and prevent pollutant leaching and runoff and provide more opportunities for farmers to lead the solutions of tomorrow.

Specifically, Assembly Bill 65 makes two changes relating to Producer-Led Watershed Protection groups. First, currently, these groups are currently only eligible for state funding from the Department of Agriculture, Trade and Consumer Protection (DATCP). We allow these groups to seek additional state assistance and qualify for the Department of Natural Resources' (DNR) competitive Surface Water Grant Programs. Collectively, these DNR programs are funded at about \$2.5 million annually. Second, we make a technical change to clarify that these groups may exist in multiple adjacent watersheds, which allows farmers near an existing group to join-in and make these positive changes extend even further regardless of if they're across the watershed border.

As of 2021, Wisconsin is home to 34 producer-led groups with 807 farmer members and 526,000 acres of participating cropland. Since this DATCP grant program began in 2016, the number of groups has continued to grow annually. Despite increased funding provided by the Legislature to DATCP for this grant program, including the awarding of \$1 million in the most recent annual grant cycle, we've been unable to meet all of the requests for funding in nearly every grant cycle to date.

Wisconsin's farmers are not just some of the best land and water stewards in our state, but they're also some of the most knowledgeable people about the topography and hydrology in their region. Allowing producer-led groups to compete for additional funding and ensuring their memberships can expand will help to guarantee that the best intents of these farmer-led initiatives can come to fruition.

2023 Assembly Bill 65 is directly reflective of components of 2021 Senate Bill 678 and Assembly Bill 728, which passed the Senate on a voice vote and the Assembly Committee on Agriculture on a vote of 13-0.





State of Wisconsin  
Governor Tony Evers

**Department of Agriculture, Trade and Consumer Protection**  
Secretary Randy Romanski

**March 16, 2023**

**RE: AB 65 Relating to: eligibility for producer-led watershed, lake, and river protection grants**

Chairman Oldenburg and members of the Assembly Committee on the Environment. Thank you for the opportunity to provide information about AB 65 eligibility for producer-led watershed, lake, and river protection grants. My name is Mark Witecha, and I am the Soil and Watershed Management Section Manager in the Division of Agricultural Resource Management at the Department of Agriculture, Trade and Consumer Protection (DATCP). I will describe how AB 65 might impact DATCP in providing resources to farmers for the purposes of implementing nutrient management and conservation practices.

**Comments on the bill:**

This bill, if enacted, would make technical, eligibility changes to efforts in agricultural conservation by expanding eligibility for producer-led watershed protection grants. I will briefly discuss this item and take any questions committee members may have.

Under s. chapter 93.59, the Department of Agriculture, Trade and Consumer Protection administers a program to provide watershed protection grants to producer-led groups comprised of local farmers. Current statute requires applicants to have a minimum of five farmers within the same watershed to be considered an eligible entity but does not define the scale of an eligible watershed. This bill would: 1) amend eligibility criteria by allowing grants to be awarded to producer-led groups with five farmers located in adjacent watersheds, and 2) define eligible watersheds as those at a hydrological unit code (HUC) 12 scale.

The department appreciates the author for bringing this proposal forward and seeking our input. We are working with the Sen. Cowles on a potential amendment that would remove the language defining eligible watersheds as those at a hydrological unit code (HUC) 12 scale to provide greater flexibility in the program.

Watersheds are delineated by USGS using a nationwide system based on surface hydrologic features. This system divides the country into 21 regions (2-digit), 222 subregions (4-digit), 370 basins (6-digit), 2,270 subbasins (8-digit), ~20,000 watersheds (10-digit), and ~100,000 subwatersheds (12-digit) that nest within each other. DATCP does not currently require all five farmer members to be in a HUC 12 watershed, instead they may apply as part of a HUC 10 or HUC 8 watershed, which encompasses a larger geographic area. In 2023, three groups were awarded funding in a HUC 8, 27 groups were awarded funding in a HUC 10, and 13 groups were awarded funding in a HUC 12. Under current program rules, a group can apply at a HUC 10 watershed level and have five founding members in different HUC 12 watersheds that make up the HUC 10; however, if those five members are not within adjacent HUC 12 watersheds, the group would not be eligible under the current proposal as drafted. During feedback sessions at the 2022 program workshop, groups requested that DATCP continue to allow applicants the flexibility to organize, apply, and operate at a scale they, and the department, feel is appropriate given the group's local interest, membership size, proposed work plan, and capacity to enact water quality practices and outreach. Defining eligible watersheds at the HUC 12 level would

*Wisconsin - America's Dairyland*

2811 Agriculture Drive • PO Box 8911 • Madison, WI 53708-8911 • [Wisconsin.gov](http://Wisconsin.gov)

An equal opportunity employer



standardize the scale at which groups are working, but ultimately does not improve flexibility of the program. Additionally, defining eligible watersheds as HUC 12s could increase work for the groups and department staff by having to identify and map multiple HUC 12 watersheds in the application and reporting processes rather than simply using a single, larger-scale watershed that encompasses those same HUC 12s. Striking the HUC 12 language would alleviate these concerns.

The department looks forward to working with Sen. Cowles and the committee on enhancing the producer-led watershed grant program.

Thank you for the opportunity to provide information on AB 65 as it is currently written. I would be happy to answer any questions committee members may have.



## Assembly Committee on Environment

### *2023 Assembly Bill 65*

### *Eligibility for Producer-Led Watershed, Lake and River Protection Grants*

*March 16, 2023*

The Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources (DNR) welcomes the opportunity to provide written testimony, for informational purposes, on Assembly Bill 65, related to eligibility for producer-led watershed, lake, and river protection grants.

Assembly Bill 65 would allow producer-led groups additional access to state funding to plan and implement water quality improvements through surface water grants. 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.

The bill specifies the eligibility of producer-led groups for lake planning, lake protection and classification and river protection grants incorporating. However, the bill does not include a cross reference which would require the producer-led group to also be a legal entity to directly receive the awarded funds. If a group is not a legal entity, the award should go to a legal entity on behalf of the group. A legal entity is required to enter into binding agreements and contracts such as grants.

It would be beneficial to make this legal entity requirement in a way so that grant eligibility for producer-led groups would be the same under DNR as it is under Department of Agriculture Trade and Consumer Protection. It would also avoid any confusion for producer-led groups that assume they are grant eligible but are not legal entities. We would welcome the opportunity to work with the author on a solution to address these concerns.

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. In FY22, requests for lake and river grants exceeded available funding by \$1.6 million. Some groups may see additional competition for limited funds as a negative.

Thank you for the opportunity to provide this written testimony. If you have questions or if there is any further information the department can provide, please contact Andy Janssen, DNR Deputy Legislative Director, at [Andrewt.Janssen@wisconsin.gov](mailto:Andrewt.Janssen@wisconsin.gov).





March 16, 2023

## Assembly Committee on Environment

*Testimony in favor of Assembly Bill 65*

Good morning, Chairman Oldenburg, Vice-Chair Kitchens, Ranking Member Shankland and committee members. Thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony in support of Assembly Bill 65.

My name is Chad Zuleger. I am director of government affairs representing the Dairy Business Association. Our membership includes dairy farmers, processors and a variety of affiliated businesses combined to ensure producers are successful in our state and, that the products they produce remain delicious, nutritious, and available worldwide.

Assembly Bill 65 builds on efforts begun in the 2019-2020 bipartisan Speakers Task Force on Water Quality and furthered with continued bipartisan support in the 2021-23 State Budget. We appreciate the measured efforts of both political parties to improve access to clean water in our state. This bill makes minor changes to the Producer-led Watershed improving on practices that affect the environment.

**Assembly Bill 65 (AB65)** makes simple, but consequential, changes that promote the continued success of farmer-to-farmer groups established to be proactive in sustainability efforts and innovative in their approach to conservation practices.

One provision in AB 65 provides that producer-led groups may be comprised of farmers in adjacent watersheds. This matters because it will ensure more farmers are able to participate and that they will be eligible for cost share under the current DATCP program. Currently, producer-led groups must be comprised of members entirely within one watershed. While farmers in adjacent watershed may participate with a producer-led group in another watershed, the outside farmer would not be eligible for cost share or grant funding already available through existing resources. The changes in SB 59 remedy this impediment and will help promote greater participation in producer-led groups.

Additionally, AB 65 would make Producer-led Watershed Groups eligible to apply for DNR's competitive Surface Water Grant Program – lake protection grants. Eligible recipients are statutorily named, and producer-led watershed groups would be added to a list of eligible nonprofit conservation organization, counties and municipalities, lake protection districts, sanitary districts, qualified school districts and more.



I would like to thank AB 65 bill authors, Rep Kitchens, Rep Novak, Rep Tranel, Rep Shankland Rep Krug, Sen Cowles, Sen Ballweg. AB 65 promotes producer engagement and innovation with conservation practices. Producer-led Watershed Groups encourage the sharing of those best practices and new, bold ideas among producers across the state

To conclude, DBA members are passionate about their work and their role in conservation. *We encourage your support for improvement to encourage greater participation.*

Thank you, Chairman Oldenburg for holding this public hearing today, and committee members for your time and consideration. This concludes my testimony.



2021

# PROGRESS

REPORT



Farmers for Sustainable Food





# CONTENTS

## 01 Overview

Letter from our president

Mission & vision

2021 Year in review

Letter from our managing director

## 02 Who & where

Our farmer-led groups

Sustainability projects

## 03 How

Survey results

Media coverage

Members

Financials

## 04 Team

Board of directors

Meet the staff







**Todd Doornink**  
*President*

Jon-De Farm

Western Wisconsin  
Conservation Council



*We always have  
the goal of being  
good neighbors and  
stewards of the land  
and water in our  
care. It's a shared  
commitment that's  
evident.*



As a fourth-generation dairy farmer, caring for the natural resources is an inherent part of what my family and I do each day.

It is a true honor to lead Farmers for Sustainable Food in connecting farmers with the rest of the supply chain and our local communities to share ideas and collaborate for mutual success.

What started as an idea from a group of forward-thinking farmers, industry leaders and environmental organizations has grown to support multiple farmer-led watershed conservation groups and several sustainability projects across the Midwest.

I also serve as the president of my local farmer-led group, the Western Wisconsin Conservation Council. Our aim is to bring benefit to the whole community while preserving family farming as a way of life. Having FSF support our local group keeps us connected throughout the state and provides opportunities at a much larger scale.

Farmers are committed to being good neighbors and stewards of the land and water in our care. It's a shared commitment that's evident. The incredible part of FSF is that it highlights the farmer's voice, bringing realistic and innovative ideas to the table, creating environmentally and economically sustainable farms supporting their communities. I am excited to watch this organization continue to grow and make impactful, positive change.

*Todd Doornink*





## Our **Mission**

Empower farmers to develop and implement practical, innovative solutions collaboratively for environmental, economic and social good.



## Our **Vision**

A sustainable food system in which farmers, their communities and the environment thrive.

# 2021 YEAR IN REVIEW



**1**

brand refresh



**14**

new members



**1**

National award



**\$255k+**

raised





*Our work is not slowing down. More partnerships, projects and farmer-led groups are in the works. Connecting our farmers, food processors, brands, retailers and customers is critical in agriculture's sustainability journey.*

I am excited and a little bit in awe as I write this, reflecting on the incredible progress we have made since I started as managing director of Farmers for Sustainable Food in 2019.

First, I want to thank the farmers and the farmer-led conservation groups that we have the privilege to work with. Your belief in our team and willingness to support us was our foundation. Second, I offer thanks to our board members who dedicate their time and talent to lead FSF. Finally, thank you to all of our members. We have grown quickly in a short period of time, and we have only just begun.

2021 was full of progress for our organization. We launched the new brand, Farmers for Sustainable Food, in May. We developed our Framework for Farm-Level Sustainability Projects, wrapped up year one of our pilot sustainability project, announced year one results, won a national award for the project and brought more farmers into the fold. Additionally, we started three more sustainability projects with various partners. Our team and partnerships continue to grow, helping us provide support for farmer-led groups and manage projects.

Our work is not slowing down. More partnerships, projects and farmer-led groups are in the works. Connecting our farmers, food processors, brands, retailers and customers is critical in agriculture's sustainability journey. Every day, our team's top priority remains finding ways to best support farmers in their conservation goals and help them succeed.



**Lauren Brey**  
Managing Director

*Lauren Brey*



*The farmers we are proud to work with continue to take on new challenges by accelerating the adoption of practices that lead to continuous improvement in conservation.*

**Tim Trotter**  
CEO, Farmers for Sustainable Food

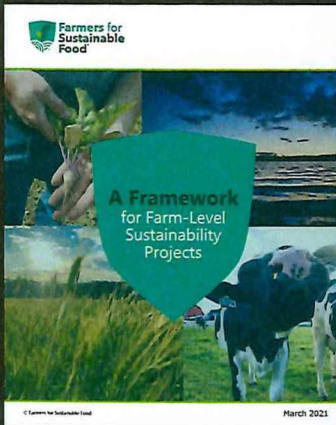




# RECENT HIGHLIGHTS

## FRAMEWORK

Launched a first-of-its-kind framework for sustainability projects. It helps farmers determine what conservation practices are most effective for their individual farms, and document the environmental and financial effects. The framework is being applied across the Midwest.



## YEAR 1 SUSTAINABILITY PROJECT RESULTS

In the first year of the project, participating farms demonstrated that their conservation practices contribute to significant reductions in environmental pollutants reaching streams and rivers.

On average, farms participating have adopted five conservation practices per field that Field to Market's Fieldprint Platform™ recognizes as having a positive impact on sustainability scores.

Reports detailing the findings are on the FSF website.

## OUTSTANDING SUPPLY CHAIN COLLABORATION AWARD

A group of Wisconsin farmers and partners in the dairy food supply chain earned national praise for creating a framework for conservation projects that protect soil and water quality, keep farms financially viable and demonstrate a commitment to sustainability to communities, customers and regulators.

The framework and its use in a pilot sustainability project were recognized by the Innovation Center for U.S. Dairy. The recipients — Farmers for Sustainable Food, Grande Cheese Company and Lafayette Ag Stewardship Alliance (LASA) — drove development of the project, and other key stakeholders are contributing to the initiative.

## DAIRY GENETICS AND SUSTAINABILITY



Dairy farmers are great stewards of the land and the environment around them. What has always been the challenge is the lack of correlation for everyday practices to the reduction of resources needed to achieve high profitability.

In a collaboration between Farmers for Sustainable Food and Zoetis, a multi-site evaluation is occurring to demonstrate how focusing on genetic improvement through the utilization of CLARIFIDE® Plus, the Zoetis genomic evaluation for predicting lifetime profitability and wellness, correlates to not only improving profit on farms but reductions in enteric methane emissions, antibiotic usage and feed needed for maintenance purposes.

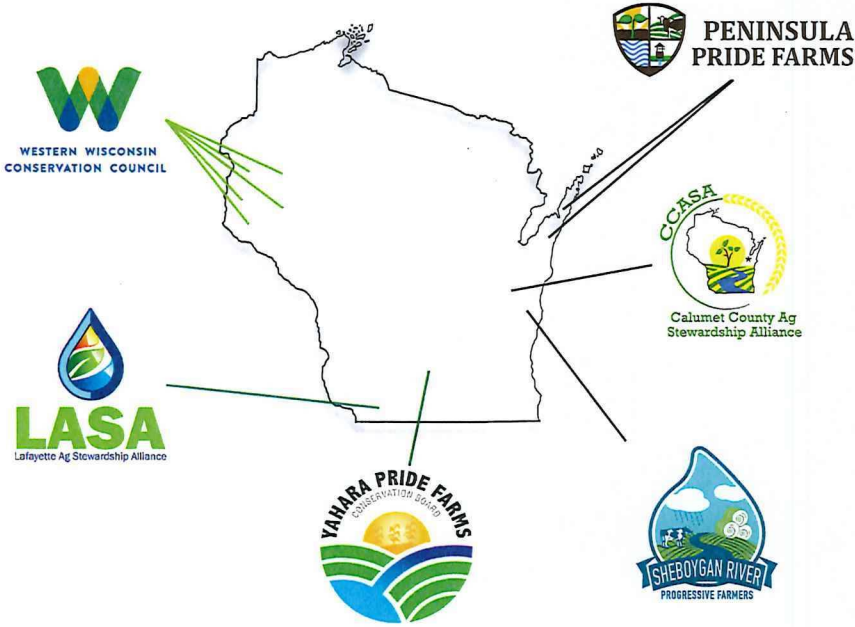


A final analysis and report will be shared at the Dairy Strong conference in Madison, Wis., in January 2023.





# Farmers for Sustainable Food™



## FARMER-LED GROUP SUPPORT

Farmers for Sustainable Food continues to help grow a network of farmer-led watershed conservation groups. In 2021, FSF closely supported six of them in Wisconsin. These groups are expanding innovative farming practices that are proving, through science and data, to be reducing the risk to the environment.

The FSF team supports groups with administration, event planning and execution, communications and marketing, fundraising support, strategy, technical support and project development and management, as well as growing partnerships to help achieve the groups' goals.



## spotlight FARMER MEDIA TRAINING

News media provides an opportunity for spreading the word about the commitment farmers have to environmentally sound farming practices.

So, it is important that members of our farmer-led watershed conservation groups have the ability and confidence to participate in news interviews.

FSF stepped in to help by holding a media training where the farmers learned best practices for interacting with reporters and how to prepare for interviews, and then practiced.

## Special thanks to



Compeer Financial's Fund for Rural America awarded FSF a General Use Grant of \$5,000 that made this training possible.

“  
The best part of the group so far is the media training. I was taught how to interact with members of the media to share facts about the work we're doing and express how we are improving the land and finding new ways to do things.

**Bob Danes**

Farmer from Calumet County  
Ag Stewardship Alliance



# SUSTAINABILITY PROJECTS EXPAND

After seeing the success of the pilot sustainability project in southwestern Wisconsin with LASA and other partners, other organizations reached out to FSF for support in launching their own projects.

FSF's framework serves as a guide to help groups document and communicate the sustainability of farming practices to other farmers, local communities, the agricultural supply chain and regulatory agencies. Each project has its own approach for documenting practices and outcomes based on unique goals.

## PPF

11 members of Peninsula Pride Farms are working to better understand the impact of conservation practices on their cropland, as well as local watersheds.

## Valley Queen Cheese

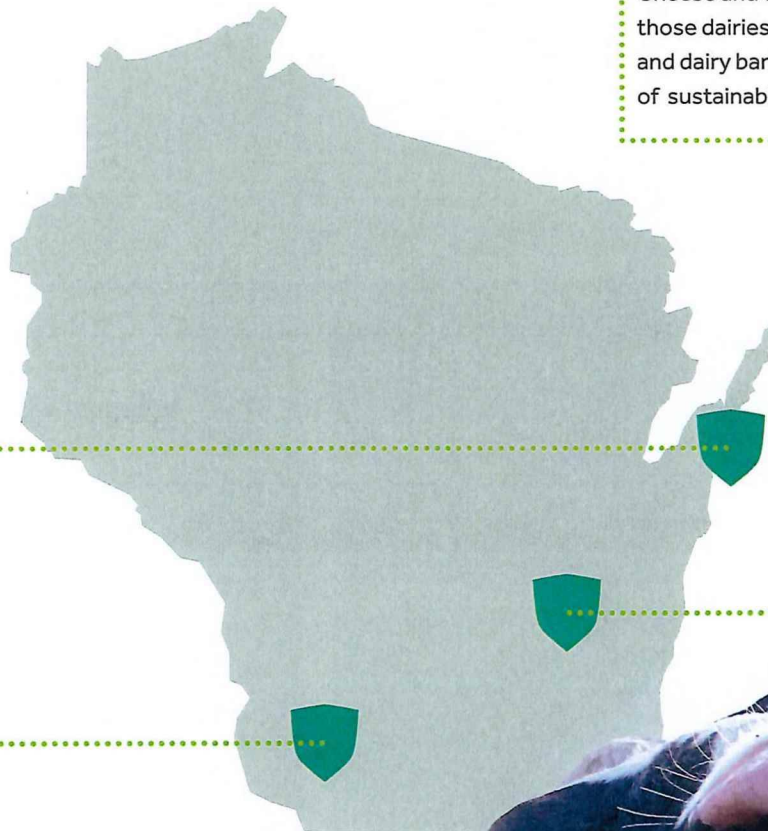
Dairy farmers that supply Valley Queen Cheese and crop farmers that supply feed to those dairies are documenting both field-level and dairy barn data for a "whole-farm" picture of sustainability.

## Crave Brothers Farm

An individual farm started a project to document on-farm sustainability and impact on local water resources from conservation practices used on the farm.

## LASA

15 farmers from the Lafayette Ag Stewardship Alliance track and set benchmarks to measure environmental and financial impacts of conservation practices.





# 2021 SURVEY RESULTS

Five of the farmer-led groups FSF supports complete a member conservation practice survey each year to help track the impact the groups have on water quality, soil health and climate. In 2021, these groups encompassed 231 farmers, 288,925 acres and 243,720 head of livestock.

The survey captures practices farmers are implementing such as soil sampling, nutrient management, cover crop acres, reduced tillage, no-tillage, low disturbance manure injection, planting green, grassed waterways and buffer strips. These are analyzed by the Wisconsin Department of Agriculture, Trade and Consumer Protection; the University of Wisconsin-Madison; and The Nature Conservancy (TNC), giving an overall impact of how the practices are potentially improving the environment.

*Reductions are estimated using models. Actual reductions may be higher or lower. For more information on these figures, contact Dana Christel, conservation specialist, [dana.christel@wi.gov](mailto:dana.christel@wi.gov).*



## Climate

Reduced CO2 equivalents (greenhouse gas emissions) by **49,830 tons**. This equals the greenhouse gas emissions from 10,737 cars driven for a year.



## Soil health

Reduced sediment from leaving farm fields by **106,846 tons**. One dump truck can carry about 10 tons of soil.



## Water quality

Reduced **330,471 pounds** of phosphorus from leaving farm fields. One pound of P that reaches a waterbody can feed 500 pounds of algae.

# AS SEEN IN THE MEDIA

# 258

## MEDIA HITS

FSF has been in front of a potential audience of 16 million viewers/readers.

 **87,065**  
IMPRESSIONS

 **7,618**  
ENGAGEMENTS

 **440**  
FOLLOWERS

 **311**  
POSTS  
PUBLISHED



## Farmers for Sustainable Food

## NEW BRAND

Much has changed for FSF since the group was formed in 2016 as the Dairy Strong Sustainability Alliance. The focus is broader, the projects more innovative and the set of partners more diverse.

In 2021, the board decided that a new name and branding would reflect this evolution. The organization became Farmers for Sustainable Food, complete with new vision and mission statements, sharper messaging and a logo and other design elements that create a more engaging and inclusive look and feel.

## CONNECT WITH US



[FarmersForSustainableFood.com](http://FarmersForSustainableFood.com)



# THANK YOU TO OUR 2021 MEMBERS

Because of your commitment, we can maintain our work supporting farmer-led initiatives and their work in finding solutions to today's environmental challenges.

## GENERAL MEMBERS

Agropur  
Compeer Financial  
Dairy Business Association  
Dairy Farmers of America  
Dairy Farmers of Wisconsin  
DVO, Inc.  
Edge Dairy Farmer Cooperative  
GLC Minerals  
Grande Cheese Company  
GreenStone Farm Credit Services  
Houston Engineering, Inc.

Innovation Center for U.S. Dairy  
Insight FS  
Midwest Dairy  
REV LNG LLC  
Riesterer & Schnell  
Schreiber Foods, Inc.  
The Nature Conservancy  
Tilth Agronomy  
Valley Queen Cheese  
Wisconsin Biomass Energy Coalition  
Zoetis

## FARMER MEMBERS

Brey Cycle Farm  
Cottonwood Dairy  
Crave Brothers Farm  
Dairy Dreams  
Darlington Ridge Farms  
Deer Run Dairy

Double Dutch Dairy  
Dutch Dairy  
Jon-De Farm  
Kinnard Farms  
Pagel's Ponderosa Dairy  
Rosy-Lane Holsteins

## special thanks TO OUR FARMER-LED GROUPS



## HOW CAN YOU HELP?

By joining Farmers for Sustainable Food, you help us grow our resources to make meaningful change. By being on the forefront of change, you will help create a future that benefits the food system and our communities and ensures long-term prosperity.

To join us and help us meet our goals, reach out to [info@farmersforsustainablefood.com](mailto:info@farmersforsustainablefood.com).





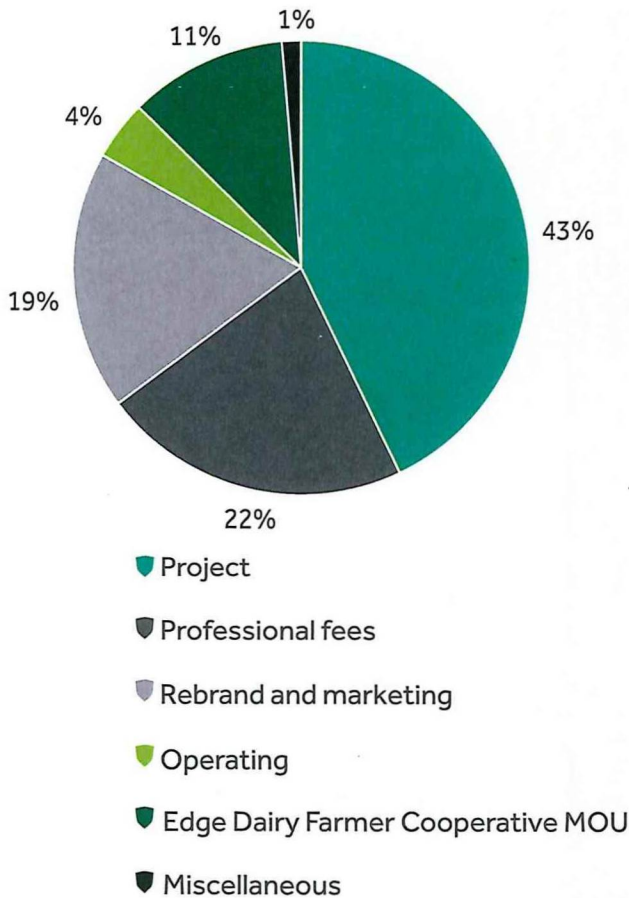
*Our collective effort and outcomes have grown tremendously in a short period, and we are poised for even greater accomplishments in the coming year. It wouldn't be possible without the belief of our members and the farmers doing the hard work.*

**Lauren Brey**  
Managing Director

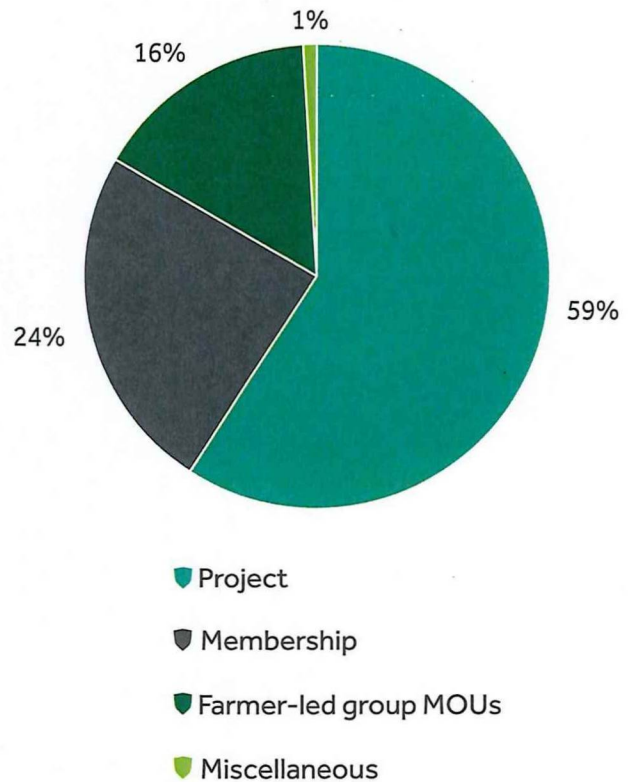
## a quick look at FINANCIALS

In 2021, FSF saw increased revenue compared to budget, and along with that came increased expenses compared to budget. Total revenue for 2021 was \$255,658.87. Total expenses were \$267,283.69. FSF exceeded the budget expectations by \$8.3K.

**2021  
Expense by category**



**2021  
Revenue by category**





---

## 2021 BOARD OF DIRECTORS

---



**Todd Doornink**

*President*

Jon-De Farm  
Western Wis. Conservation Council



**Paul Cornette**

Cornette Dairy  
Peninsula Pride Farms



**Colleen Geurts**

Schreiber Foods, Inc.



**Wes Garner**

*Secretary*

GLC Minerals



**Greg Steele**

Compeer Financial



**Mike Berget**

Berget Family Farms  
Lafayette Ag Stewardship Alliance



**Lee Kinnard**

*Treasurer*

Kinnard Farms



**Lynn Thornton**

Grande Cheese Company

---

## MEET THE FSF TEAM

---



**Tim Trotter**

*CEO*

Tim leads FSF, Edge Dairy Farmer Cooperative and the Dairy Business Association. Under his strategic management, FSF continues to grow partnerships throughout the industry. Originally from Illinois, he grew up on a dairy and crop farm. He farmed for 20 years in Illinois where he and his wife, Rosella, raised three daughters. During his career, Tim has led national agriculture and strategy organizations. Tim and Rosella now live in Sturgeon Bay, Wis.



**Lauren Brey**

*Managing Director*

Lauren leads FSF's support of the farmer-led groups as well as the development and management of sustainability projects. She provides project oversight, develops partnerships, manages budgets and more. Lauren and her family have a dairy farm and direct-to-consumer beef business in Door County, Wis., and are participants in their local farmer-led group.



**Jamie Fisher**

*Project Manager*

Jamie coordinates all administrative services provided to the farmer-led groups that are part of FSF. She leads day-to-day support, including membership services, cost-share management, event planning and more. A former dairy farmer, Jamie has a keen understanding of farming and is passionate about supporting farmers in their improvement journeys.



**Anne Moore**

*Sustainability Communications Manager*

Anne manages all communication efforts for FSF and the farmer-led groups. She carefully crafts messages for FSF and the groups to use in media relations, advertising, social media, member communications and at events. With experience in the farmer cooperative environment for nine years, she has true passion to serve and represent farmers and convey the sustainability journey happening on our farms today.





# Wisconsin Farmers Leading on Conservation

Sharing lessons learned to keep soil healthy, water clean, and farms resilient





# One of the best things about living in Wisconsin is the food.

From summer sweet corn to the delicious cheese made by Wisconsin cheesemakers using milk produced by Wisconsin dairy cows, food grown and raised in the Badger State is hard to beat.

But with food demand expected to increase by more than 50 percent by 2050 as the world's population grows, how will farmers meet that demand in Wisconsin and elsewhere?

And how can they grow the food we need while protecting the health of their soil and keeping our waters clean?

A small, but growing, number of Wisconsin farmers are working together to help find the answers. They have formed groups focused on their local watersheds and are implementing agricultural practices

that build soil health and help improve water quality. Some of the practices they are using, such as cover crops and reduced tillage, will also help capture and hold carbon in the soil.

With support from Farmers for Sustainable Food, The Nature Conservancy, and Wisconsin's Producer-led Watershed Protection Grant Program, these farmers are sharing what they learn with each other and neighboring farmers, and they are setting goals and tracking conservation outcomes annually.

In the following profiles, you'll meet five Wisconsin farmers who are leading the way on changing management practices. In doing so, they are not only protecting soil and water, but helping their farms remain resilient and profitable in the face of ever-changing conditions.

*“Farming is very challenging, and The Nature Conservancy is pleased to be able to support the efforts of these five farmers and others who are part of farmer-led groups to find solutions that improve water quality and soil health and address climate change while sustaining their livelihoods and Wisconsin's economy.”*

Steve Richter, Wisconsin Agriculture Strategy Director  
The Nature Conservancy in Wisconsin





# Steve Carpenter: Caring for Family, Community, and the Land

For Steve Carpenter, a third-generation dairy farmer near Darlington in Lafayette County, it's all about family—staying close, taking care of the land, and passing those values on to the next generation.

"When Lisa and I started at Redrock View Farms in 1985, it was a small operation," Steve comments. "We've been able to really grow it and bring our children in to farm with us, which is something we both wanted. Being able to work with them side-by-side every day, and now having our grandchildren around, brings us so much joy."

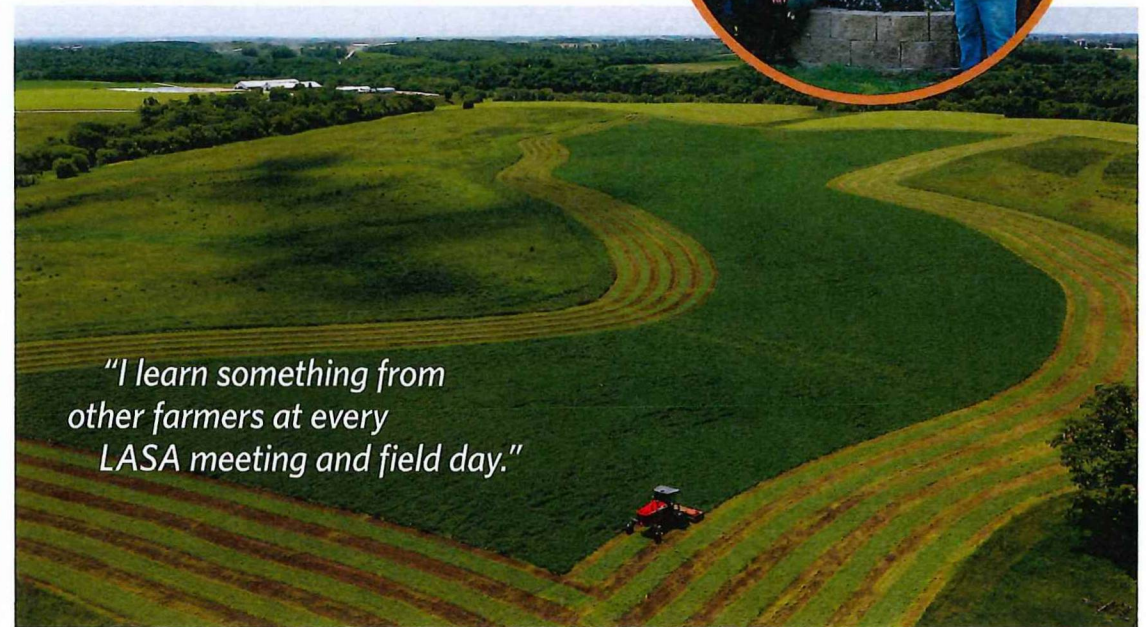
Today, Steve, Lisa, and their three sons Cody, Colton, and Carson, along with seven employees, milk 600 cows and farm 2,000 acres of corn, alfalfa, and soybeans. Their daughter Cora graduated from Iowa State University in agricultural communications and is also pursuing a career in agriculture.



In 2017, Steve and a handful of farmers in Lafayette County formed the Lafayette Ag Stewardship Alliance (LASA). The purpose of the group is to work together to protect and improve their soil, water quality, and environment by identifying, sharing, and promoting conservation practices on their farms. Steve is the group's vice-president.

One of the things Steve is trying on the fields where he has compaction issues is vertical tillage. This type of tillage reduces disturbance to the soil by cutting into it vertically rather than pulling or dragging the blades through the soil. Most of the residue from the previous year's crop is still in place after one pass through the field, reducing erosion and making it easier to plant the next season's crop.

Steve says the biggest benefit of LASA has been learning from other farmers. "I learn something from other farmers at every LASA meeting and field day," he says. "I see what people are trying, listen to how they're doing it, and learn from their successes and their mistakes."



*"I learn something from other farmers at every LASA meeting and field day."*



# Leslie Svacina: Working Alongside Nature

Working harmoniously alongside nature is at the heart of the farming operations at Cylon Rolling Acres near Deer Park, Wisconsin. Leslie Svacina and her husband Scott purchased the farm, which they operate with their two young children, in 2011.

Cylon Rolling Acres covers 140 acres and is home to a herd of up to 200 meat goats, depending on the season, and a small flock of sheep. In 2013, they brought home Boer goats and began crossbreeding with Kiko goats soon after because of that breed's hardiness, growth rate, and ability to feed on a forage-based diet.

Leslie is a member of the Western Wisconsin Conservation Council. She views the group as a great resource for farmers in her area to learn more about conservation practices from fellow farmers and experts.



*"I think no matter how you farm, what you farm, or where you're at in your conservation practice journey, it's important to always learn and improve upon what you're doing," she says. "It can be little steps over time that can build to make a big difference."*



Leslie utilizes rotational grazing with her livestock. Under this managed grazing conservation method, the herd is moved to new pasture paddocks every few days. The plants are either eaten or trampled during each rotation, and as the livestock bite the plants, they encourage plant regrowth. The trampled plants add cover to the soil surface and organic matter as they break down. Goat manure and urine provide fertilizer for the soil, which then feeds the soil microbes.

Leslie plants perennial pastures and hay for winter feeding to help reduce tillage. No-till and reduced till are important concepts on the farm, and Leslie recently purchased a no-till drill for planting after renting one when she needed to plant.

"We don't think of conservation as a checkbox for the farm," Leslie says. "For us, it's about continuing to improve our land and making it better, not just for our farming practices but for the ecosystem above and below the ground."





# The Guilette Family: Continually Improving on Conservation

If you talk to the Guilette family about farming for very long, you're bound to hear the words "continuous improvement." And that can mean one generation improving upon something done by the previous generation or the same farmer doing something better this year than last year.

*"Farmers are, by nature, problem solvers," says Nick Guilette. "Rather than take a wait-and-see approach, we try things, see what works, and learn from our mistakes."*

Guilette Farms, near Casco in Kewaunee County, has been in the family for four generations. A hog farm at one time, today the Guillettes grow corn, soybeans, and wheat on 300 acres. They also do custom combining, tilling, and some planting on about 3,000 acres for other small farmers in the area.

The Guillettes are no-tilling and planting cover crops like radishes, barley, crimson and red clover. They are also using a newer technique called planting green where corn or soybeans are planted directly into a

growing cover crop without killing the cover crop first. Some of the benefits are more organic matter in the soil, weed control, and erosion control because living roots are in the ground longer.

Nick is on the board of directors of Peninsula Pride Farms (PPF) and an advisor with the Door-Kewaunee Watershed Demonstration Farm Network. Both groups offer farmers the opportunity to learn about conservation practices, try them out, and share what they learn with others.

"The PPF and demo farm network farmers are there to support each other and offer their ideas," says Nick. "What we want to avoid is having a farmer try something that's a good practice, fail miserably at it, and never want to try it again. And that's the power and the value of these farmer-led groups when they come together in a collaborative fashion."





# Travis Luedke: Third Generation Farmer, Conservationist

Caring for natural resources is in Travis Luedke's blood. He learned the importance of land and water stewardship from his grandfather and father as he grew up on the family dairy-turned-crop farm just outside Plymouth, Wisconsin.



*"Soil is a living, breathing entity,"  
Travis says. "We try to be cautious  
about how we work with it."*

Today Travis runs the 650-acre family farm with his parents, Warren and Linda, and girlfriend, Jen. They raise corn, beans and winter wheat and have been no-tilling for about 20 years. Three years ago, they began strip-tilling and are now planting cover crops.

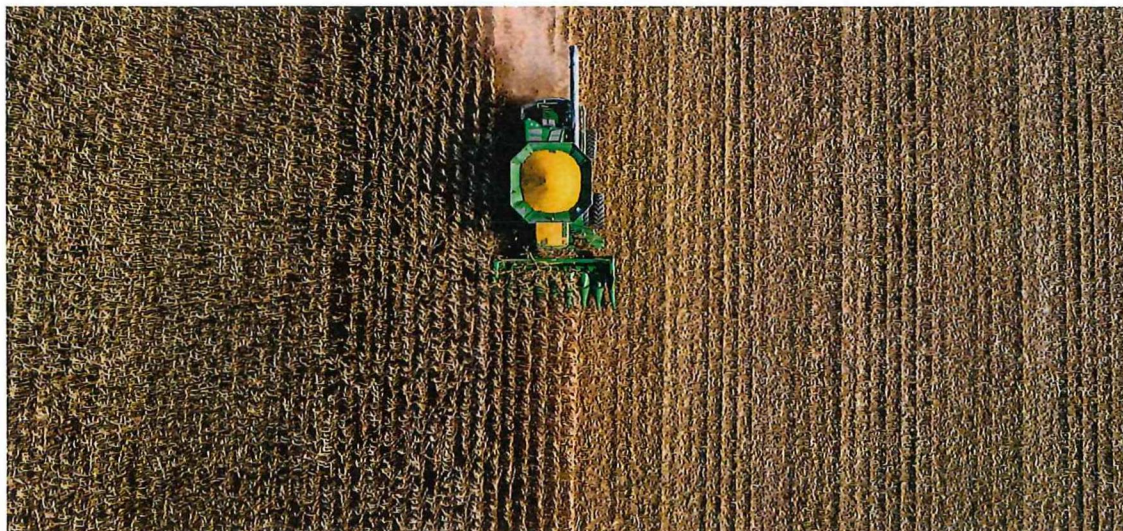
Travis understands how important it is to put new practices in place on his farm not only to learn more for himself and his family but also to share that knowledge with his neighbors. Strip-tilling is a great example of this.

"This is a process of tilling and fertilizing only where the seed is put in," he says. "It keeps the seed and fertilizer exactly where it needs to be, and by doing this, we can grow a better crop using less fertilizer."

Travis first started strip-tilling after he hosted a field day that included demonstrations by several strip-till manufacturers.

Travis is a founding member and current treasurer of Sheboygan River Progressive Farmers. The group is about five years old and continues its focus on cover crops and minimal tillage. Another aspect of the group is networking with other farmers to share stories and trial-and-error results, two priceless pieces of being a member of a farmer-led group for Travis.

"This is not the same as reading about something in a book," he says. "As you listen to others, your mind wanders to the possibility of trying some of these new things yourself and getting similar results."





# Bob Danes: Farm Conservation for Family Longevity



Bob, his wife Kelly, brother Mike, and Mike's wife Christina own and operate their cash crop farm, grain cleaning business, and trucking enterprise near New Holstein. They farm about 3,900 acres and raise many crops, including rye grain and feed, corn and corn silage, soybeans, alfalfa, peas, and green beans.

They also work hard to implement conservation practices to improve land and water stewardship.

"We want to leave the land in better shape than we found it for our next generation to enjoy," says Danes.

Bob is a member of the Calumet County Ag Stewardship Alliance. The young group brings farmers, community members, and allied professionals together to champion sustainable farming practices.

Learning from the group and sharing his experiences with members is a central focus for Bob. Hosting a field day at his family farm in 2021 was a great way to invite fellow farmers in to see the work his family was doing while also learning about practices working for others.



The Danes family has about 2,000 acres in cover crops, which they began planting in 2012. Planting green—the practice of no-till planting conventional crops into living cover crops—is also now a common practice on the farm.

*"With heavy rain, we were seeing a lot of soil washing away along with all the nutrients the plants need," Bob says. "With these changes, we now see the soil staying in place."*

In 2009, they began collecting yield data from their combines, which led to the creation of a new variable-rate planting and fertilizer program with Helena Agri-Enterprises in 2013. The plan is customized for their fields and helps them measure the amount of fertilizer they need so they can achieve higher production rates with fewer inputs.

"This plan is all about redistributing nutrients so the plants can use them more efficiently," Bob says. "What we and other farmers nearby and farther away are doing on our land impacts the groundwater for so many others."







Thursday March 16th, 2023

Assembly Committee on Environment

**Re: Assembly Bill 65: Relating to: eligibility for producer-led watershed, lake, and river protection grants.**

**Michelle Ramirez-White – Policy Coordinator, Wisconsin Farmers Union**

Chair Tranel and members of the committees, thank you for the opportunity to submit testimony in support of Assembly Bill 65.

Wisconsin Farmers Union's grassroots, member-driven policy reads:

***“Wisconsin Farmers Union supports legislation that requires the Wisconsin Legislature to find a permanent funding source for the goals the Task Force has set forth, these include but are not limited to: producer-led water protection grants, and a grant program to reward counties that collaborate with others on water quality issues”***

***“Wisconsin Farmers Union urges the State of Wisconsin to change the eligibility criteria of the Lake Protection Grant: Lake Management Plan Implementation program to include farmer-led watershed councils and the agricultural organizations that support those councils.”***

The Producer-led Watershed program helps farmers share information and collaborate on solutions to protect local water resources. WFU supports the continued advancement of the producer-led watershed program in WI, through expanding eligibility for lake protection grants to producer-led watershed groups.

The extension of the technical range of watershed protection to adjacent areas increases the effectiveness of watershed stewardship. Our work with watersheds has shown us that the ability to include farmers adjacent to the defined watershed is extremely useful in building the effectiveness of producer-led groups. First, it allows the priorities of the council to expand beyond the watershed boundary, but it also allows the group to receive resources from neighboring farmers who can share their expertise. The South Kinnickinnic and Dry Run farmer-led councils are entering their 10th year of existence, and each have farmers operating immediately outside of the watershed boundaries, whose energy, experience, and ideas are becoming increasingly important assets to the council. Developing a way to ensure that these pivotal farmers are able to become part of the



council without having to create their own new council structures from scratch will be increasingly important as councils age and begin to expand.

Thank you for this opportunity to share Wisconsin Farmers Union's thoughts on this issue.

Sincerely,

Michelle Ramirez-White

Policy Coordinator, Wisconsin Farmers Union