

## Testimony on 2019 Senate Bill 715

Senator Robert Cowles

Senate Committee on Natural Resources and Energy – February 5, 2020

Thank you, Committee Members, for allowing me to testify on 2019 Senate Bill 715. This bill is titled ‘Assistance to Farmers for Conservation’ because the goal is simple: demonstrating that the state is a partner and a friend to Wisconsin producers looking to go above and beyond what’s required in an effort to improve environmental health and water quality.

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

2019 Senate Bill 715 invests about \$850,000 in Wisconsin farmers by building on existing successful programs and creating new initiatives to advance our state’s waters. Total, there’s seven different provisions in this legislation, each of which I’ll discuss individually.

### Managed Grazing Specialist and a State Grazing Plan

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

However, the complexity behind grazing can often cause farmers to implement pasture processes and aren’t as beneficial as they could be. Some of these complexities include the number of animals per acre, the number of grazing days per acre, the availability of drinking water sources, the dispersal of shade options, and more. Senate Bill 715 creates a managed grazing specialist position at the Department of Agriculture, Trade and Consumer Protection (DATCP) which will, among other tasks, lead the creation of a State Grazing Plan, leverage federal funding, and assist farmers with implementing grazing. This bill provides \$64,800 in FY 2019-20, and \$86,400 in FY 2020-21.

### Cover Crop Incentives: Crop Insurance Payment

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

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

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

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

Senate Bill 715 mimics the successful programs by our neighboring and measures the appetite for a similar program in Wisconsin by incentivizing the implementation of cover crops through a \$5 per acre crop insurance subsidy for farmers not currently taking advantage of other state or federal incentive programs. This bill provides \$200,000 in FY 20-21, for a total of about 40,000 acres.

### **Alliance for Water Stewardship Certification**

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

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

Senate Bill 715 supports producers looking to receive the AWS Certification by reimbursing up to 50% of the costs up to \$10,000. The farmers may work with an outside party such as a nonprofit or county conservationist to achieve the standard. This bill provides \$250,000 in FY 20-21.

### **Producer-Led Watershed Protection Grant Program Funding and Other Changes**

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

The program, which was first started in 2015 with \$250,000 in funding, was provided \$750,000 in each Fiscal Year of the 2019-21 State Budget and is equally matched by producer-led groups. The increase in funding to \$750,000 was first initiated at the end of the 2017-18 Legislative Session from a bill I authored with Representative Kitchens at the request of Governor Walker. Late last year, DATCP announced awards to 27 groups, including three new recipients, totaling \$750,000. They fell short of fulfilling the just over \$1,000,000 in requests, and were oversubscribed for the second year in a row. Senate Bill 715 increases the funding to the Producer-Led Watershed Protection Grant program by \$250,000 for a total of \$1,000,000 in funding.

This bill also makes two other changes to promote Producer-Led Watershed Protection Grants. First, this bill allows producer-led groups to exist in more than one watershed if the watersheds are adjacent. Second, Senate Bill 715 allows producer-led groups to qualify for the Department of Natural Resources (DNR) Lake Protect Grant Program. This existing funding stream, which is part of a broader Surface Water Grant Program that received about \$2.5 million in funding in the 2019-21 State Budget, is already available to lake management groups, local governments, and nonprofit organization. Producer-Led Watershed Protection Grant groups would have to compete for the funding with other groups, but this change opens another potential source of funding to Wisconsin's farmers and further ensures the best use of this funding to advance water quality with the most effective proposals.

### **County Conservation Staff Funding Considerations**

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

For the seventh and final change, Senate Bill 715 alters this funding criteria to require DATCP to account for externalities, including weather, which may have impacted a county's ability to implement their land and water resource management plan.

### **Conclusion**

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

At nearly every hearing of the Water Quality Task Force, farmers spoke about the efforts they've been taking to preserve and improve water quality, but also noted the challenges they face in addressing water quality while trying to make ends meet. Senate Bill 715 builds off producers' comments and recognizes that no one knows the land better than the farmers who cultivate it. By providing a little boost to help with their water quality efforts, the positive impacts could be immense.

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



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Senate Committee on Natural Resources and Energy  
Senate Bill 715  
Assistance to Farmers for Conservation  
February 5, 2020

Dear Chairman Cowles and Committee Members:

Thank you for taking the time to hold a public hearing on Senate Bill 715 today. I would like to thank Senator Cowles for being the lead senate sponsor of this bi-partisan legislation. We have 30 Republican and 26 Democrats signed on in support of this legislation. Every one of us wants to make sure we have clean and safe water in Wisconsin.

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

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

SB 715 builds off producers' comments and recognizes that no one knows the land better than the farmers who cultivate it. By providing a slight boost to help with their water quality efforts, the positive impacts could be immense for the farmer and our state's water quality.

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

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

demonstrate that we're a partner and a friend to Wisconsin producers looking to go above and beyond.

4. **Increasing the funding to the Producer-Led Watershed Protection Grant program** at DATCP by \$250,000 to accommodate the constantly growing number and size of producer-led groups to continue achieving their water quality goals. These grants will fund land and water conservation projects driven by farmers. This includes group start-up costs, outreach efforts such as field days or water quality monitoring, incentive payments for cover crops, nutrient management plan development, no-till farming, and buffer strips.
5. SB 715 changes current law to **allow producer-led groups to exist in more than one watershed and qualify for an additional existing funding source** with the DNR's lake protection grant program.
6. **Changing the soil and water resource management funding criteria to encourage DATCP to account for externalities that may have impacted a county's ability to implement their land and water resource management plan.** During the hearings, we heard from counties that expressed frustration with potentially being penalized in the next grant cycle after extreme weather impacted their environmental quality goals. This change prevents counties from being penalized for events outside of their control.

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

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

SB 715 has broad support from many agriculture, environmental and conservation groups across the state including:

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

Thank you for taking the time to hear SB 715 today. I would be happy to take any questions you may have.



State of Wisconsin  
Governor Tony Evers

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**Department of Agriculture, Trade and Consumer Protection**

February 5, 2020

**Re: SB 715: grants and funding for water stewardship certification, a grazing coordinator position, producer-led watershed protection grants, lake protection, soil and water conservation, and crop insurance premium rebates for cover crops**

Chairman Cowles and members of the Senate Committee on Natural Resources and Energy. Thank you for the opportunity to provide information about SB 715 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'd like to describe how SB 715 might influence our department's efforts to provide resources to farmers for the purposes of implementing nutrient management and conservation practices.

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

**Comments on the bill:**

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

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

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

- SB 715 enables the department to establish a program for Wisconsin farmers to incentivize farmers who are not currently participating in other programs to implement cover cropping practices via another mechanism. The incentive would come in the form of a \$5/acre reimbursement for crop insurance premiums paid on the acres planted in cover crops that are not otherwise receiving incentives via other federal, state or local programs. We are aware of similar programs in adjacent states. In Iowa, this program augments the federal crop insurance program through a multi-year partnership with USDA-RMA, and is part of a pilot program to evaluate if cover crops reduce the risk of crop loss due to extreme weather or other events. In Illinois, the program established a link to the federal crop insurance program as well, and was created just last spring. While DATCP has begun looking at each of these program templates for consideration should this bill move forward, there is still a great deal of work to do to establish the framework for implementing this multifaceted incentive program in Wisconsin and ensuring a partnership is established with the USDA-RMA.
- Producer-Led Watershed Protection Grants
  - DATCP administers the producer-led watershed protection grant program, and is currently provided \$750,000 annually to award to this program's participants. SB 715 would increase that appropriation by \$250,000 to provide a total of \$1 million annually. Considering that DATCP received funding requests totaling just over \$1 million in 2020, this funding increase would enable DATCP to provide more financial assistance to eligible projects.
  - The language in this bill will also give flexibility in allowing a producer-led group to operate or expand into an adjacent watershed and have access to new funding opportunities through the DNR.
- Soil and Water Resources Conservation Grants Allocation Plan
  - Current law enables county LCDs to request funding for projects that address statewide soil and water conservation priorities and implement their county land and water resource management plans by submitting an annual grant allocation application to DATCP. This bill ensures that when making funding decisions DATCP considers externalities, such as extreme weather conditions that may have impacted the county's ability to implement those projects and accomplish its goals in the previous funding cycle. Since these considerations are already part of the decision making process at the department, we see no impediments to assuring this is a perennial component of our assessment.

Thank you for the opportunity to provide information on SB 715 as it is currently written. I would be happy to answer any questions committee members may have.





## Senate Committee on Natural Resources and Energy

### *2019 Senate Bill 715*

#### *Producer-led watershed protection grants and lake protection grants*

*February 5, 2020*

Good morning Chairman Cowles and members of the Committee. My name is Carroll Schaal, and I am the Lakes and Rivers Section Chief in the Bureau of Water Quality with the Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources. Thank you for the opportunity to testify, for informational purposes, on Senate Bill 715 (SB 715), relating to producer-led watershed protection grants and lake protection grants.

Since the Department of Agriculture, Trade and Consumer Protection (DATCP) is the primary agency impacted by SB 715, I will limit my testimony to the sections of the bill that impact the Department of Natural Resources. Sections 11, 12, and 13 add “producer-led groups” that have the same definition as those under DATCP’s producer-led grant program authorized under s. 93.59, Wis. Stats., to the list of entities eligible to apply for Lake Protection and Classification grants and contracts under s. 281.68, Wis. Stats.

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

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

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

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

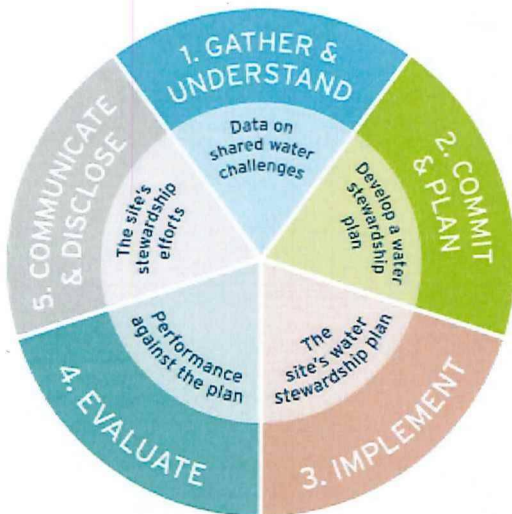
# AWS Certification for Wisconsin Farms

*Farmer-led water stewardship.*

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

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

## Certification Gives Farms a Comprehensive Water Stewardship Plan



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

### Wisconsin Farmers Leading the Way:

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

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

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



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WATER  
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RIVER ALLIANCE  
of WISCONSIN

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February 3, 2020

Senator Robert Cowles  
Room 118 South  
State Capitol  
PO Box 7882  
Madison, WI 53707

RE: Senate Bill 715: An Act relating to grants and funding for water stewardship certification, a grazing coordinator position, producer-led watershed protection grants, lake protection, soil and water conservation, and crop insurance premium rebates for cover crops; granting rule-making authority; and making an appropriation.

Dear Chairman Cowles,

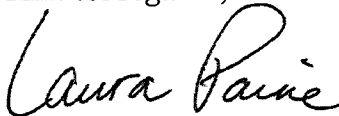
I am writing in support of Senate Bill 715. While I support all six provisions of this legislation, I am especially excited about the restoration of the grazing coordinator position at the Department of Agriculture, Trade and Consumer Protection. Having held that position for eight years starting when it was first established in 2006, I have a unique perspective on the effectiveness of such a position.

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

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

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

Kindest regards,



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February 4, 2020

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

I am writing to encourage you to support Senate Bill 715, in particular the portion of the bill that would add a Grazing Specialist at DATCP.

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

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

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

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

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

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

Thank you for the opportunity to share my support of Senate Bill 715. I hope you as members of this committee will vote to advance the bill forward.

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



February 4, 2020

I am writing in support of AB 795/SB 715.

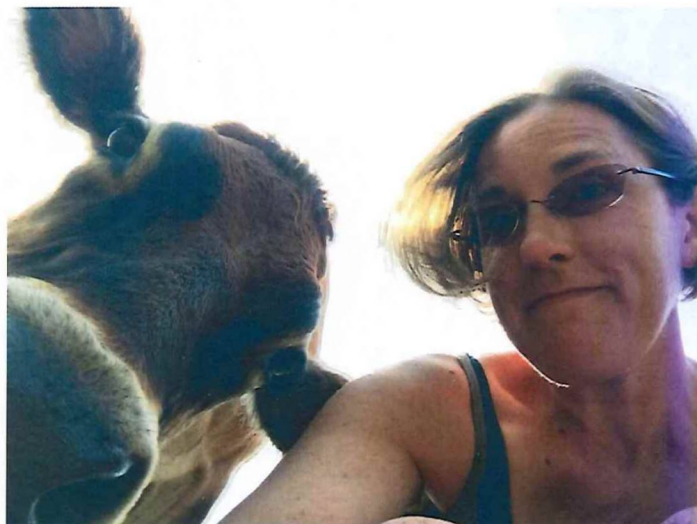
I am a 46 year old beginning farmer. Before farming I had always lived in cities, had studied urban planning, and had a good career at the public library. I love thinking about how we live...how humans create civilizations and how we thrive in them. At age 40 I made a thoughtful decision to change careers and become a farmer because good farming, which is to say good land management, is the foundation of everything else we create, and is an area that currently needs more of our attention and care.

I graze livestock because grazing is one of our most effective and efficient management practices for sustaining a good quality of life in both town and country. Among farming and land-management practices grazing stands out for it's ability to work in collaboration with natural systems, both supporting and benefiting from the natural systems that sustain us, systems whose robustness underlie our quality of life.

Grazing is like anything else: it can be managed well or poorly, and that makes all the difference. Wisconsin would benefit greatly from more organized support of well-managed grazing. I, and many others, are turning our life-efforts to this practice, and we do so in the spirit of public service. There is currently a lot of good energy and effort behind grazing, coming from farmers, consumers, nonprofits, and all levels of government. That energy could be more efficiently put to work with the creation of a state grazing coordinator. In my experience many resources and information on grazing exist but are disparate, state agencies are not all up-to-speed, efforts are both duplicated and lacking, and existing educational resources and other programs are not fully utilized because outreach is hodgepodge. Many pieces are there, but we need a coordinator to coordinate them.

I write in support of AB 795/SB 715. Thank you for reading.

Amy Fenn  
Ferryville, WI



February 5th, 2020

**Rachel Bouressa**

**Bouressa Family Farm**

N3775 Ritchie Rd

New London, WI 54961 (Waupaca County)

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(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





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 diary state. All of Wisconsin deserves good water.

Respectfully submitted by

April Prusia

Owner/operator

April's Garden LLC and Dorothy's Grange LLC

W8707 Sawmill Rd

Blanchardville WI 53516

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

608-444-1102



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



Caleb and Lauren Langworthy  
Blue Ox Farm  
N11253 State Road 25  
Wheeler, WI 54772

February 4, 2020

**Re: Senate Bill 715**



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

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

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

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

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

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

Sincerely,  
Caleb and Lauren Langworthy



# WISCONSIN LAKES

*We Speak for Lakes!*

716 Lois Dr / Sun Prairie WI 53590

608.661.4313

info@wisconsinlakes.org

February 5, 2020

## TESTIMONY TO THE SENATE COMMITTEE ON NATURAL RESOURCES IN SUPPORT OF SB715

Thank you for the opportunity to testify today in support of SB715. 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.

Wisconsin Lakes strongly supports all of the different provisions of SB715, but I would like to concentrate my testimony on one section - that related to Producer Led Councils.

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

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

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

Thank you, and I urge you to support SB715.

*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.*

My name is Mariann Holm, a citizen and farmer from Dunn County, and I support SB715. I support establishing a grazing coordinator position in the state, provide funding for producer-led watershed groups, soil and water conservation initiatives, and offer crop insurance premium rebates for cover crops.

Looking back, historically, in Wisconsin, through supportive funding for organization and facilitation, networks of farmers desiring education around grazing were formed across our state and gained ground in the 1990's. These farmer groups were integral in establishing a low cost way of dairy production that enhanced animal and soil health.

Our farm directly benefited from these networks and the information and innovation shared. We purchased our 100-acre farm in 1997 and started a dairy in 2001 with the support of the networks and programming provided. I attended pasture walks in the late 90's...before we even owned cows.

These grass based farms then set the stage for the explosive growth in organic dairy in our state over the last two decades. The National Organic Program requires 30% of a ruminant's dry matter demand come from pasture during the grazing season. Some farmers have captured additional markets by certifying their herds to add on standards such as Grass-Fed which requires 60% dry matter intake from pasture.

It makes sense to encourage and support these farmer grazing and watershed groups as well as the promotion of cover crops. As an organic inspector - in the last year - I visited over 85 farms in our state. I can tell you, the most successful farmers are ones who are connected to resources and especially supportive networks. This is where professional leadership and facilitation of grazing and watershed farmer groups can make a big difference in the success of a farm.

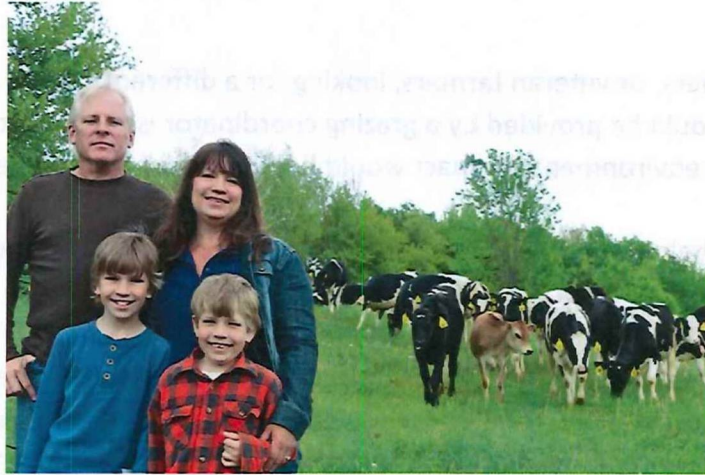
Wisconsin has been a leader in organic agriculture for 30 years and at this time we are number two in the country for numbers of organic farms. Other states such as Pennsylvania and Oregon have recently pledged to replace Wisconsin in this ranking and have programs in place to do just that.

The programs and practices proposed in this bill are modest and yet, are forward thinking and contain holistic means to support our farmers and as such provide a way for young people to enter farming, These proposals provide benefits to our larger community by protecting water quality and ensuring more families are able to engage in a rural enterprise.

I ask you to move this bill and any others like them forward.

Thank you,  
Mariann Holm  
E10025 690th Ave  
Elk Mound WI 54739  
[mariannholm86@gmail.com](mailto:mariannholm86@gmail.com)

Feb. 5, 2020



My name is Doran Holm. My wife Mariann and I own a farm in Dunn County. Thank you for taking time to hear my testimony in support of Senate Bill 715 which provides financial support to the DATCP to hire a grazing coordinator.

We are first generation farmers. We bought our farm 23 years ago. It was run down and depleted, in foreclosure...a mess. We had all we could do financially back then, in our 30s, to purchase this run down farm, fix up the buildings while at the same time correcting the soils, fixing and replacing fences, wells, lanes, waterways and as best we could afford it, a repair and update a 100-year-old farm house, all while raising a large young family at the time. 22 years of fencing, seeding, building organic matter, grazing dairy milk cows and organic dairy heifers has made a dramatic difference on our farm. Our pastures are now so dense, our farm land is like a sponge. The rain is always welcome on our farm. I can smell the grass as the cows move, like one might smell when a lawn is just cut in a June evening at your own home.

The money has never been in the farm budget to buy real decent equipment, which is a common challenge for beginning farmers. Fortunately, the invention years ago of step-in fence posts and electric poly wire on winding spools has given beginning farmers like ourselves, the ability to manage their farms in a way that is affordable and profitable. Keys to success was to sell most farm equipment and engineer the farm in a way that the animals could do the vast majority of the harvesting of feed and fertilizing of the farm while enhancing the grasses and legumes and reviving the microbiology on our farm.

Managed intensive grazing has also saved many multi-generation family farms from going out of business. Unfortunately, managed intensive grazing may seem simple, and in many ways it is, but in many ways, it can take an adult lifetime to learn and or realize so many things about

grazing in order to become what many describe as a "master grazer". It is very much a "craft" to master.

Giving beginning farmers, or veteran farmers, looking for a different way to manage their farms, the help that could be provided by a grazing coordinator is really hard to quantify. The economic, social and environmental impact would be, for lack of a better term....Huge!

I am thankful for the help I was able to find with other farmers, grazing groups and my years of daily experience managing our grass farm to its highest potential.

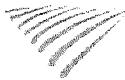
I often would say to myself years ago, I wish someone could advise me to help me know if I am making the right decisions today, this week, this year on my farm. A well-qualified grazing coordinator could be a great jump start or saving grace to many a Wisconsin farmer. I would encourage all the committee members here to attend a pasture walk if you ever have the opportunity. A good pasture walk event is a great way to wrap one's brain around the value of grazing. You would also likely hear enough stories to fully understand the need to support the technical and networking support that would come from a DATCP grazing coordinator.

Here are some other things I have observed on our farm:

- Our cows and heifers loving moving around on the grass. From mid-May until the snow nearly flies, I move a wind up spools of wire with about 25 step in posts under my arm – every day. The animals come right around behind me as I wind the crosswire onto the spool and put the spool in my back pocket and the posts under my arm again to step off and set up the next day's meals. I often have to call out "Hey!" as the cattle are coming around behind me, as they are always so close to knocking me over. The cows and heifers are always excited to get new grass and exhibit their natural behaviors and eat their absolute favorite food.
- The cattle will care for the grassland birds and their nests. If they are aware of a nest in the grass, they will eat around the nest and step around it. Sometimes a nest with eggs will be a foot off the ground like on grass stilts, like a home on stilts. An amazing sight.
- With so much micro-biology in our soils and lush grasses to catch and intake the water - We know what rain falls on our farm, stays on our farm. There is a non-grazed hay field just across the road. Our field is like a soft mattress and absorbs rain; the field across the road is like driving across a brick laid city street - because of the life in our soil and what is living on top of it, daily managed grazing cattle.

I thank you for your time and for your support of Senate Bill 715.





January, 2020

## **Proposal to Reduce Insurance Premium on Wisconsin Cover Crops Acres**

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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



**Testimony, Margaret Krome, MFAI Policy Director, Feb. 5, 2020**

**Hearing, Wisconsin Senate Committee on Agriculture, Revenue & Financial Institutions**

The Michael Fields Agricultural Institute (MFAI) is a non-profit organization focused on advancing sustainable agriculture on a state and federal level. Founded in 1984 in East Troy, Wisconsin, it is our mission to nurture the ecological, social and economic resilience of food and farming systems through education, research, policy, and market development. We work closely with beginning, and experienced farmers across the state and nation. Our long history of working on nutrient management issues includes collaborating with UW-Madison and USDA researchers on a 20+ year trial on farming systems, conducting cover crops research for many years, convening several statewide meetings on “Rethinking Nutrient Management” from 2011 into 2015 and, more recently, serving as Collaborator for the Uplands Farmer-Led Watershed Group in SW Wisconsin.

We appreciate the Assembly’s Speakers Task Force on Water Quality’s leaders’ dedication to listening to farmers and other stakeholders, creating a bipartisan-led package of proposals, and this Committee’s consideration of several Senate bills resulting from this process, which we support.

SB 715 – We support each of the following provisions:

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

SB 718: creating a pilot grant program for farmers to reduce nitrate loading, funding research for nitrate loading reduction methods.

SB 723 - Increasing funding for County Conservation Staffing Grants – The Uplands watershed group’s close collaboration with Iowa County’s Conservationist and her office is a perfect example of the essential role that county conservation staff plays. Without the boots on the ground, farmers’ ability to develop and implement conservation plans is severely compromised.

SB 724 – Expanding the well compensation program

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

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

I am writing in support of SB 715 and AB 795 specifically the provision to create a State Grazing Coordinator position.

Managed Grazing is a successful practice that can enhance the water and natural resources of Wisconsin while providing an economically viable way to farm. As an organic certified dairy farm it is a requirement that we graze and provide a large percentage of forage from pasture. The health of the people of the state is ensured with products from Grazing and organic farms. The rural and urban citizens can benefit from the economic, environmental, and social benefits Managed Grazing and Organics provide.

Wisconsin has had a rich history of supporting Managed Grazing with a State Grazing Coordinator and support for grazing networks across the state. This support was substantially cut with the elimination of support for the WI Grazing Lands Conservation Initiative about ten years ago. The grazing community has moved forward with various efforts to maintain service to grazing farmers but it has been difficult and we simply don't have the level of service and financial backing needed to support the needs of new and existing graziers at this time.

I also personally support this whole package of this broad agricultural legislation geared to improving the lives of the citizens of Wisconsin. Agriculture is the main economic and social force in our great state and this legislation can enhance our farming and citizen's future. I thank the Legislature for working on these vital conservation issues.

Thank you,

Kevin Mahalko

715 314 0338

-Multiple grazing networks, non-profits, agencies, and businesses work with farmers sometimes on a volunteer basis to help farmers lead conservation and education efforts on a very limited funding structure

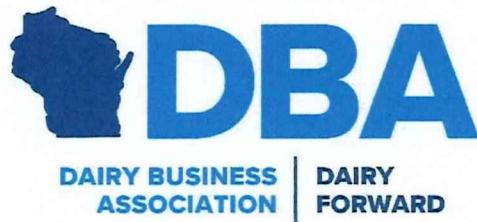
-Grazing Farmers invite legislators to pasture walks to learn and share the experiences of Managed Grazing

-Grazing farmers work to establish permanent or long term diverse cover crops to build optimal soil health and water quality. Livestock on biodiverse pasture are a fundamental enhancement to the overall biological farming ecosystem. Livestock can perform in conditions and geography where equipment cannot feasibly operate

-Grazing farms can partner with crop farmers to harvest cover crops or crop residue, while providing an opportunity to introduce crop rotation and diversity, and crop farmers could add livestock to the system

-Grazing can be adopted by beginning farmers, could be a positive factor in farmer led watershed efforts.

-Grazing groups and networks are farmer led and pasture walks serve as a model of farmer cooperation



### **Testimony in Support of SB 715**

My name is John Holevoet and I'm the director of government affairs for the Wisconsin Dairy Business Association. I would like to take this opportunity to speak in favor of SB 715. I want to thank Senator Cowles and Representative Tranel for their work on the Speaker's Taskforce for Water Quality and for authoring this legislation.

This bill contains many worthwhile ideas to advance water quality in Wisconsin. In the interest of time and not wanting to be duplicative, I will speak on just the portions of the bill that impact producer-led watershed groups. The growth and success of these groups is something of which all Wisconsinites can be proud.

We have been engaged with these groups from the very beginning. DBA is one of three farm organizations that first proposed the idea of DATCP grants to support farmer-led conservation initiatives during the Walker administration. We work closely with five of these groups around the state. DBA provides in-kind and monetary support for these groups to help ensure their success. We welcome the additional investment in these groups that is made by this bill. We are also glad to see this bill would allow groups that receive grants to operate in more than one watershed. Our hope is this will allow successful models to spread across the state more efficiently.

At the heart of these group's success is the idea that farmers will learn more and create more positive change by working with other farmers than through top-down regulation. These groups are not about doing the bare minimum to check some regulatory box. Instead, they are about continuous improvement and the agricultural community pushing itself to do the very best it can. This is something that should be encouraged as much as possible and this bill would help do that.

We also recognize that these groups must have measurable results. The Dairy Strong Sustainability Alliance, which DBA helped start, is working with farmer-led groups to collect the data necessary to show the progress that is being made as well as to identify the areas that still need more improvement. We welcome the calls for more accountability for these groups and appreciate the opportunity to showcase what farmers can do when put to a task.

The history of American agriculture is one of constantly evolving goals and continuous innovation. This has resulted in American farmers becoming the most productive people in human history. We all want positive improvements in water quality and farmers are well positioned to help us meet our goals.