



Wednesday, March 15th, 2023

Senate Committee on Agriculture & Tourism

Re: Senate Bill 59: Relating to: eligibility for producer-led watershed, lake, and river protection grants.

Michelle Ramirez-White – Policy Coordinator, Wisconsin Farmers Union

Chair Ballweg and members of the committees, thank you for the opportunity to submit testimony in support of Senate Bill 59.

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