



Tuesday, April 4, 2023

Assembly Committee on Agriculture

Re: Assembly Bill 64: Relating to: nitrate contamination and the well compensation grant program.

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 64.

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

“Wisconsin Farmers Union members are very concerned that if Wisconsin waits any longer, allowing drinking water contamination, where about one-quarter of private wells sampled fail to meet standards, will become an accepted practice with Wisconsin Farmers Union members and their rural neighbors being “on their own” for finding safe water if they can afford it.”

“Wisconsin Farmers Union strongly supports steps be taken during the 2023 Wisconsin legislative session to enact the recommendations prepared by the Speaker’s Task Force. These include measuring water quality in different parts of the state, determining the sources and causes of contaminants impacting water quality, investigating remedies that will protect a healthy and stable supply of water for residents and industry, and studying best practices for designing and constructing wells.”

Wisconsin Farmers Union submits testimony today in favor of Senate Bill 58, relating to Well Compensation Grants. Our members see this bill as a first step toward ensuring clean drinking water for rural Wisconsin residents.

Wisconsin Farmers Union is an organization of farmers and rural residents, and thus many or most of our members rely on private wells for drinking water. As we learn more about the unsafe levels of bacterial and nitrate contamination in our groundwater, our members are increasingly looking to the legislature to advance both short-term and long-term solutions for ensuring that they have clean water to drink.

Senate Bill 58 removes the requirement that a well must be used by livestock in order to qualify for the state Well Compensation Program. This is helpful, because even on farms that do have livestock, the well that serves the livestock and the well that serves the humans that care for the livestock may be different, but the aquifer that the wells tap into is

the same. Making sure that both livestock and people have access to clean water is essential for Wisconsin farm families.

Making the well compensation program available for wells with less than 40 parts per million of nitrates, as this bill provides, will also be helpful for our members.

Agricultural areas and those with porous bedrock or sandy soil are most susceptible to nitrate contamination.

DNR's well compensation program helps households offset the cost of remediating contaminated wells. We support increasing funding for the well compensation program and raising the income cap, with priority given to lower income households.

Wisconsin Farmers Union also supports removing the requirement that only nitrate-contaminated wells are eligible. Furthermore, we support the creation of a Well Compensation Grant Program Administrator at the DNR.

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

Sincerely,

Michelle Ramirez-White

Policy Coordinator, Wisconsin Farmers Union