



Thursday June 15th, 2023

Assembly Committee on Environment

Re: Assembly Bill 220: Relating to: funding for the Fenwood Creek watershed pilot project.

Michelle Ramirez-White – Policy Coordinator, Wisconsin Farmers Union

Chair Oldenburg and members of the committees, thank you for the opportunity to submit testimony in support of Assembly Bill 220.

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

“Wisconsin Farmers Union calls for further study on how to minimize the entry of phosphorus into place. In addition, Wisconsin Farmers Union supports the use of state and federal resources to improve manure management in the area of capturing more of the phosphorus that is being put into and onto the ground.”

“Wisconsin Farmers Union supports the concept of economically rewarding land use practices that reduce nutrient loss. Any legislation that rewards these land use practices should include provisions that ensure transparency, accountability, and enforcement. Furthermore, any such legislation should be applicable to all farm-land owners, not just large landowners. Land owners with existing conservation practices should be financially rewarded for having a good land use practice already implemented.”

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 the Fenwood Creek Watershed pilot project.

This incentive-based performance program for the Fenwood Watershed, encourages farmers to do better than the phosphorus and sediment requirements, to improve water quality of the Big Eau Pleine Reservoir.

Fenwood Creek is like many small and large-scale impaired watersheds in the State of Wisconsin. Phosphorus and sediment loads are impairing the water quality of downstream water bodies from runoff pollution, primarily from agriculture. Traditional conservation approaches have not improved water quality to the point where the water body is removed from the DNR impaired waters listing.



This pilot project mimics a current smaller-scale project running on 5 farms in the Fenwood Watershed, for the past four years. This smaller project has sequestered 6,000LBs of phosphorus to date. We support funding to widen this program, and unlike previous programs, to provide monetary incentives for superior farming systems. This project is applicable to all farm-land owners, regardless of farm size or land management system, requiring full implementation of the State agricultural performance standards and manure management prohibitions to be eligible for incentives.

If implanted, this action will bring all farmers in the Fenwood Watershed to base-level conservation standards. This program shifts from rewarding poor performers, based mainly on practice implementation of difficult to understand criteria to rewarding farms based on easy-to-understand actual on-farm performance.

Wisconsin Farmers Union would support developing a way to ensure that these pivotal programs have a permanent funding source, which would be increasingly important as councils age and continue to expand.

For too long, we have been presented with a false choice between agriculture and clean water. Wisconsin Farmers Union believes that it is possible to have clean water, thriving family farms, and vibrant rural economies, and that farmers can be champions in this effort. All of us have an interest in ensuring our water is clean and safe for ourselves, our environment, and future generations.

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

Sincerely,

Michelle Ramirez-White

Policy Coordinator, Wisconsin Farmers Union