



Wisconsin Farmers Union Seeks Middle Ground on High Capacity Well Legislation

Madison- SB 239, introduced on August 26th, would make it easier for farmers to repair, replace, or reconstruct their high capacity wells. It would also give farmers a measure of certainty in property values by allowing the well permit to transfer with the sale of property. Wisconsin Farmers Union supports both these provisions in the bill, but urges legislators to not support it unless the bill is amended to include a periodic review of all high capacity well withdrawals.

Without periodic review, two classes of water users will be created under this bill. Those who have permits will continue to have access to as much water as they were originally permitted for while those without permits will be left to fight amongst themselves for whatever remains. This de-incentivizes innovation among farmers by eliminating motivation to use water more efficiently through investment in new irrigation technology. Deterring innovation is a drag on economic growth. New farmers to the area will be put at a distinct disadvantage by having to compete with farmers whose water usage is already guaranteed.

A periodic review of high capacity wells would also provide farmers with information allowing them to make smarter investments. If water resources started to become scarce in an area, they would have some advance warning and could plan accordingly.

Periodic review treats all current and future farmers equally and ensures water is being withdrawn at a sustainable rate. It will help balance the needs of the agriculture and tourism industries and is the middle ground that has been lacking in recent discussions about groundwater and high capacity wells. This review is not uncommon as other upper-Midwestern states have implemented systems that allow for a review of water withdrawals if water resources are significantly depleted.

WFU appreciates the willingness of the bill's authors and co-sponsors to take on this difficult issue, and urges state legislators to support a periodic review of all high capacity well permits. WFU cannot support the bill in its current form, but looks forward to discussion as to how the bill can be improved.

Wisconsin Farmers Union is a member-driven organization committed to enhancing the quality of life for family farmers, rural communities and all citizens through educational opportunities, cooperative endeavors and civic engagement. Learn more at www.wisconsinfarmersunion.com.

###