

Water Quality

Governor Evers has declared 2019 “They Year of Clean Drinking Water”. Who better to talk about the importance of clean water than farmers, the original stewards of the land? Clean water is needed for necessities: drinking, bathing, and laundry. It’s also needed for recreation: boating, swimming and fishing. As farmers grow and raise food, they also need access to clean water for their livestock and crops.

Wisconsin Farm Bureau has been and continues to be proactive in addressing water quality issues. In 1997, WFBF supported the redesign on the State’s nonpoint pollution prevention program that replaced the priority watershed program. WFBF engaged in a stakeholder group with DNR to update the nonpoint rule to create for the first time in Wisconsin targeted performance standards for some areas of the state where there is shallow soil over carbonated bedrock. WFBF is an active supporter of the UW Discovery Farms program that does on farm research regarding the effectiveness of regulations and best management practices.

According to the DNR, agriculture is the primary contributor of phosphorous and sediment in the majority of the impaired water bodies in Wisconsin. Unfortunately, some groundwater contamination has occurred where field-applied manure contaminated neighboring wells. This is leading to numerous local ordinances and referendum discussions to restrict commercial fertilizer and manure applications at the town and county levels. Not only is surface water quality drawing attending, but groundwater quality has some counties starting groundwater testing programs (SWIGG study) or have study committees to look at the issue (Speaker’s Task Force on Water Quality).

Like many aspects of farming, continuous improvement on water quality is important to continue progression. What WFBF is doing in support of water quality may not be enough. We may need to do more such as encourage additional research and use of technology or amplify the proactive things farmers are doing to improve and protect water quality.

However, we may need to do more. Not only from a regulatory perspective, but also support additional research and technological advances to improve water quality. Most importantly, we need to speak up about the good things farmers are doing to improve and or protect water quality.

Through Farm Bureau’s policy development process in the last two decades, WFBF members have adopted extensive policy regarding water regulations, cost sharing, nonpoint pollution and nutrient management plans. Proof of this commitment is shown in the pages dedicated in the 2019 WFBF Farm Bureau Policy Book. Please see notes from these pages in the reference section.

Is the current WFBF policy adequate? Or does it need to be modified?

Reference

Cost Sharing: We support tax incentives and increased cost sharing of pollution abatement practices to encourage their use and to diminish potentially devastating costs.

Environmental Regulations: We support the use of consistent standards and interpretations between all government agencies with respect to environmental issues. Any regulations should consider practical methods of maintaining environmental quality consistent with efficient and economical farming operations. We support remedying at public expense environmental incidents occurring when farmers have complied with accepted guidelines and regulations.

We support having the forfeitures for violating water quality standards directed to the Discovery Farms Program for water quality research.

We support the concept of credit trading and adaptive management between municipal and industrial dischargers and farmers to reduce phosphorus discharge into surface waters, provided farmers are not held liable for non-point sources out of their control.

Groundwater: We support increased monitoring, research and education relating to groundwater problems.

In areas where groundwater quality is an issue, we support DNR establishing groundwater management areas.

Nonpoint: We support nonpoint pollution control efforts that are practical, scientifically-based best management practices, rather than the lowest cost practices, and have adequate cost sharing for farmers to economically implement any required practices, including compensation for lost opportunity costs.

We support conservation credit as part of the non-point program. We oppose any regulation that requires landowners to give an easement for public access to participate. We support allowing temporary manure stacking when weather conditions prevent spreading on eligible land in accordance to NRCS standard 313.

We support 70 percent funding for the cost incurred by farmers to implement any new nonpoint source pollution regulations. Cost sharing should be provided if feed leachate runoff containment is required. We support adequate funding to local units of government to implement the nonpoint program, provided that local regulations do not exceed state standards.

We support allowing regional DNR offices to have short form authority to quickly permit County Land Conservation Department (CLCD) and NRCS cost-share projects.

We support requiring NRCS, DNR, DATCP and CLCDs to coordinate with each other to utilize resources more effectively to serve farmers. We support requiring program consistency and implementation by CLCDs to prioritize local programs of importance. We support base funding for CLCDs to implement programs. We support additional funding going to counties as competitive grants for priority projects.

We oppose the dumping of raw sewage by municipalities into lakes and waterways. We support requiring urban and suburban lands to meet similar nonpoint standards as agricultural lands.

We support the disposal of snow containing road salt to be at least 300 feet from streams and 1,000 feet from lakes.

Nutrient Management Plans: We support allowing farmers to write their own NMP.

We support establishing a tiered NMP program. Nutrient management planning needs to be simplified to reduce paperwork. We support submitting NMP updates once every four years.

NMPs should be exempt from the open records law.

We support federal, state and county agency consistency and uniformity in the NMP application. We support an increase in funding to assist producers in writing the NMP.

We support increased phosphate, nitrogen and potash levels for NMP planning due to higher yields and the ability of hybrids to better utilize these nutrients.

We support efforts to assist agriculture to understand its role regarding nutrient management for surface water and groundwater.

Nutrient Management Regulations: We support reasonable and uniform state laws and regulations governing manure handling and runoff problems with appropriate consequences for those who disregard them. We oppose a ban on the winter spreading of manure. Winter manure applications should be based on a farmer's NMP. We support requiring municipal and industrial waste applications to be at the nutrient needs of the crop rotation and included in the NMP. (i.e. The same as standards for livestock manure applications.)

We oppose towns and counties imposing stricter requirements than state standards without relevant scientific research.

We support allowing manure to be applied by any application methods as long as rates and timing are in compliance with a NMP.

Due to variations in karst areas, we oppose a blanket regulation that would cover the entire state. We support regulations specific to individual areas affected.

We support reasonable scientifically-based best management practices for the protection of groundwater resources in high risk areas like Karst.

We oppose the expansion of the NR151 Silurian bedrock performance standards to other areas of the state until the impact of the implementation of the standards on water quality and agricultural producers can be evaluated.

We support developing technical standards for the irrigation of manure and processed waste water.