

WATERSHED MOMENTS

Producer-Led Watershed Protection Grant Program Biannual Newsletter



New Producer-Led Groups Launch in 2023

By Dana Christel

The Producer-Led Watershed group network gained four new groups in 2023: Chippewa Valley Producer Led Watershed, Flambeau Valley Watershed Group, Green County Clean Waters, and Kenosha County Regenerative Producers. They have been hard at work organizing their groups and launching some of their activities and programs for the year.

·The **Chippewa Valley Producer Led Watershed** is starting out with 10 farmers. They are collaborating with the Chippewa County Land Conservation Department and Wisconsin Farmers Union. With the proximity to Lake Wissota, they are particularly interested in improving the relations between farmers and non-farmers on environmental issues.

·The **Kenosha County Regenerative Producers** is starting out as a group of six farmers who raise grass-fed beef, goats, sheep, poultry, and pigs, as well as bees for local food markets. They hope to explore and promote pasture management practices, silvopasture, and other regenerative agricultural practices to help improve local water quality, as well as educate consumers on the benefits of their production practices on local resources.

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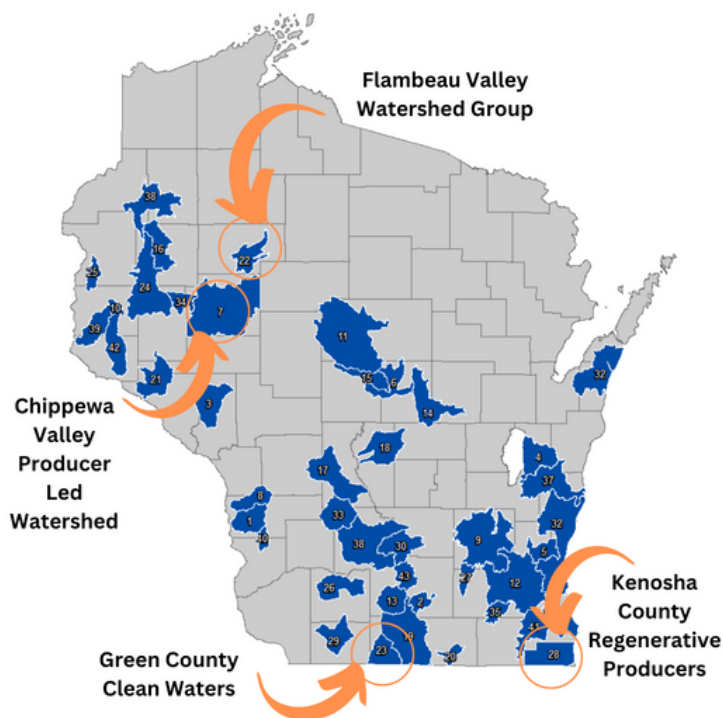
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2022 Conservation Progress Report

by Randy Zogbaum



In 2022 the Producer Led Watershed Protection Program funded 36 groups, consisting of 1,896 members operating 643,829 acres of farmland. This represents an increase from 33 groups funded in 2021 with 807 members operating 526,846 acres of farmland. According to the DNR, phosphorus (P) and sediment are major contributors to degraded water quality in Wisconsin. Producer Led Watershed Groups are working to increase conservation practices and decreasing erosion and P loss from farm fields.

In 2022 the groups had a 35% increase in no-till practices, a 30% increase in nutrient management, and a 27% increase in cover crops leading to a modeled reduction of 218,480 tons of sediment and 154,367 pounds of P from member farms. In addition, increasing no-till and cover crop usage reduced soil-based greenhouse gas emissions by 61,214 tons of carbon dioxide equivalents.

New groups continued

The **Flambeau Valley Watershed Group** is starting out as a group of five farmers. With the support of Rusk County Land Conservation Department, they intend to foster collaboration and idea sharing among local farmers and conservation leaders to maintain and enhance water quality in the Flambeau Valley. One of their goals is to obtain cover and perennial crops on at least 50% of the acres enrolled in their program.

Green County Clean Waters started meeting in 2022. They began by organizing a bus tour over the summer to tour a farm outside of their watershed project area. They also had farmers from two nearby successful watershed groups talk to their group of 23 farmers about how to get started and have held one shop talk for the farmers in their group to get together and freely share ideas. This year they plan to host another bus tour and offer cover crop and soil nitrate and tissue sampling incentives, among other activities.



JUNE FIELD DAYS

Share your upcoming events with the prodledgrants listserve or with your regional team lead!

From Land to Lakes Tour
 Chippewa Valley Producer Led Watershed
 June 23rd, 2023
[Register here.](#)

Conservation Observance Day
 Schoepp Farms, hosted by WI Land + Water
 June 23rd, 2023
[Information here.](#)

Conservation Progress continued

Another milestone for the PLWPG program in 2022 was reaching over 1.1 million conservation practice acres! Many of the groups are exploring multiple practices as part of a larger soil health system on their farms. Along with the increased acres noted above, this included nearly 260,000 acres of soil health system practices such as managed grazing, targeted nitrogen management, crop diversification, and other perennial vegetation practices. Although still relatively small in acreage, managed grazing and grazing cover crops saw a 420% increase in reported acres in 2022! With four new groups added in 2023 these impressive changes are sure to continue! [Read the report here.](#)

DATCP's Soil Health Program: A message from DATCP's Soil Health Specialist

by Randy Zogbaum

You may recall being introduced to me at the 2022 Producer Led Grants Workshop- if not my name is Randy Zogbaum, and I serve as the Soil Health Specialist for DATCP. After six months on the job, our new Soil Health program is starting to take shape and we'd like to give you a brief snapshot of the program. One of the things we have done is create a web presence for the program. [You can check out the landing page here.](#) More will be added soon, but one of the goals of this web page is to be sure we have a common understanding of the term Soil Health.

To start this process, we are following the NRCS definition of "the continued capacity of soil to function as a vital living ecosystem that sustains plants, animals, and humans." DATCP has adopted the Five Principles of Soil Health model adding Integrate Livestock to NRCS's Minimize Disturbance, Maximize Living Roots, Maximize Soil Cover, and Maximize Crop Diversity. These five principles work together to enhance the soil biology bringing back healthy soil systems to our farmland.



An important aspect of the Soil Health Program is the partnership with the Producer Led program. The tracking of conservation practices along with the demonstration and research projects of the Producer-Led Watershed Groups directly inform the content of our Soil Health Programs.

SUMMER PASTURE WALKS

Share your upcoming pasture walks with the prodledgrants listserve or with your regional team lead!

Kenosha Regenerative Producers Group
Starry Nights Farm Pasture Walk
June 8th, 5pm in Burlington, WI
[Registration here.](#)

Rock River Regenerative Graziers
Stock Family Farm Pasture Walk
June 21st, 5pm in Helenville, WI
[Registration here.](#)

JUNE 2023

Soil health program continued

One place this will take direct shape is in the new Soil Health Curriculum we are developing in partnership with UW Nutrient and Pest Management program staff. This curriculum is modeled after the Nutrient Management Farmer Education curriculum and will be in four modules: three introductory- Overview of Soil Health and one advanced-Soil Health Systems. A major theme of both is answering the question “What does it mean to be a successful soil health farmer?” These trainings are being developed with audiences of both farmer and agriculture professionals in mind. The curriculum incorporates the experiences shared through the Producer-Led groups to answer the question and share lessons learned with farmers moving towards soil health and agriculture professionals.

A third important aspect of the Soil Health program is connecting resources to assist in advancing soil health. As mentioned earlier, the partnership with the Producer Led program plays an important role in this goal. Closely related to this is connecting with all the great work currently being done in Wisconsin moving Soil Health forward. There will be much more to come on all of these in the coming year. I look forward to connecting with you and please don't hesitate to reach out! Randy.Zogbaum@Wisconsin.gov.



Recently Published Resources for Producer-Led Groups

[A Guide to Partnerships for Producer-Led Groups](#)

This guide provides contact information and summaries from organizations actively involved and interested in working with farmer-led organizations to assist with administration, project management, or special projects like water quality sampling, research, etc.

[Performance-Based Conservation Pilot Projects](#)

Two projects were completed last year piloting the idea of performance-based conservation incentives. Read the summary reports: [Horse Creek Ecosystem Services Pilot Project](#) [Dodge County Ecosystem Services Pilot Project](#)

[Managing Your Producer-Led Grant](#)

This webinar provides an overview of the forms and processes necessary to managing a DATCP Producer-Led Watershed Protection Grant.

[Business Case Study: Managing Heifers with Rotational Grazing](#)

This study breaks down the financial and water quality benefits of raising dairy heifers on pasture on a Northeastern Wisconsin dairy farm and was published last spring.

Questions about the Producer-Led Watershed Protection Grant Program can be directed to Dana Christel, Program Manager. (608) 640-7270, dana.christel@wi.gov