NEWSLETTER

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Wisconsin's UNIQUE Producer-Led Watershed Program

Water is Important to All of Us

14 Mile Watershed Friends and Supporters . . .

In 2016, Wisconsin Department of Agriculture, Trade and Consumer Protection (DATCP) began an innovative program with a focus on soil health in addition to watershed management. Beginning with 16 groups, this program has grown to 50+ groups **– including the newly-formed Farmers of Fourteenmile Creek.** DATCP provides funding to producer-led groups that focus on nonpoint source pollution abatement activities through their Producer-Led Watershed Protection Grant Program.

Program Goal: ***To improve Wisconsin's soil and water quality by supporting and advancing producer-led solutions that increase on-the-ground practices and farmer participation in local watershed efforts.***

Grants provide support to the producer-led groups to deliver cost share programs, on-farm demonstration and research projects, and education and outreach efforts on conservation systems and innovative practices that improve water quality to farmers and other community members within their local watersheds.

By focusing on soil health, reductions in nitrogen and phosphorus levels have followed. By keeping these nutrients on the fields, farmers may benefit from lower operation costs. DATCP offers online learning programs that address ways to improve soil health. Additionally, local or regional groups will hold field demonstration days to highlight practices that have been introduced. Farmers like to learn from each other and share new practices that have been beneficial to themselves or to a neighbor. When someone you know and respect has been successful with a new approach, it is encouraging for others to try something new.

The producer-led groups have continued to grow each year and have led to increases throughout the state in the use of Best Management Practices such as **1) No-till practices, 2) Nutrient management and 3) Cover crops.** All of these conservation practices result in **better soil health** and have downstream benefits leading to better water quality.

DATCP requires a minimum of 5 farmers to start a group. Each group must have an independent Collaborator Entity and Fiscal Agent for the group. The 14 Mile Watershed Alliance is proud to partner with them in both those roles.

We’re encouraged by the formation of the Farmers of Fourteenmile Creek and look forward to supporting their clean water efforts in our watershed.

Cranberry Marsh Field Trip

As noted in the article above, one of the important activities of producer-led watershed groups is educational outreach to members of the watershed community. As part of their educational outreach the **Farmers of Fourteenmile Creek** recently hosted a field day at a local cranberry marsh. On September 16 Greg Sager, co-owner of J&J Cranberry located on county road D at the “S” curve, welcomed thirty members of the Nekoosa High School conservation program. Facilitating the discussions were several members of the local UW-Extension office.

Greg presented the history of the marsh, described the cranberry growing and harvesting operations and answered questions from the students. He emphasized the importance of carefully managing the phosphorus and nitrogen nutrients applied during the growing season.

While cranberries don’t actually grow in water as is often misunderstood, cranberry operations do rely heavily on water not only for irrigation during dry times of the year, but at harvest time. In the case of J&J Cranberry they store most of the water they use in holding ponds which are primarily fed by the 14 Mile Creek watershed. A DNR study of the J&J Cranberry water operations showed the water leaving the marsh operations and released downstream into 14 Mile Creek drainage had lower nutrient levels than the water that had come into the ponds. In other words, the cranberry operation actually “cleaned” the water of some nutrients before it was released downstream. J&J Cranberry is actually part of the solution to reducing nutrients in the watershed as water moves through the system.

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REMINDER

Deadline for ordering trees/shrubs for 2026 is **December 15, 2025**

Click HERE for more information.

The 14 Mile Watershed Alliance is a nonprofit organization dedicated to the improvement of surface and groundwater in the 14 Mile Creek Watershed in central Wisconsin. See us at 14milewatershed.org or https://www.facebook.com/14MileWatershed

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