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Dept. of Agriculture, Trade and Consumer Protection: Statement from Secretary Harsdorf

Posted on Thursday, Jan 25, 2018

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CONTACT: Bill Cosh, Communications Director, 608-224-5020
William2.Cosh@wisconsin.gov

MADISON – Wisconsin Department of Agriculture, Trade and Consumer Protection (DATCP) Secretary Sheila Harsdorf commends Governor Walker's announcement this week of new initiatives to bolster Wisconsin's rural communities and farm families.

"I applaud Governor Walker for recognizing the significant impact Wisconsin's rural communities and farmers have on the state's economy," said Harsdorf. "Our investments will allow Wisconsin to move forward to protect soil and water quality, prepare students for agricultural careers, develop new market opportunities and encourage economic development."

The Producer-Led Watershed Protection Grant program supports the establishment of farmer-led projects to address unique soil and water quality challenges of their local landscapes and communities using innovative and collaborative approaches. In his announcement, the Governor proposes adding an additional $500,000 each fiscal year over the biennium.

"Demand for the program continues to grow with the funding requests tripling in the past year," explained Harsdorf. "These additional funds will further the work of farmers to implement conservation practices and increase outreach."

The Governor signed Executive Order #275 to encourage agriculture market

development locally, regionally and internationally. The executive order directs the agency to provide technical assistance, referrals and educational seminars for the Wisconsin agriculture industry in its efforts to explore new markets and product opportunities.

“Wisconsin’s agricultural industry is recognized worldwide for our diverse and quality products,” added Harsdorf. “DATCP will continue to collaborate with farmers and agribusinesses as we work to increase profitability by developing new products and identifying new market opportunities for Wisconsin’s agricultural products.”

As part of the Governor’s announcement, he also directed DATCP to fund a scholarship program through the newly-created Governor’s Family Farm Fund. These scholarships will encourage students to take ag-related courses for a career in agriculture.

“The future of our farms and agribusinesses depends on attracting and retaining young people in the rural workforce,” said Harsdorf. “This scholarship signifies that agriculture is an important part of Wisconsin’s future economic prosperity.”

“I thank Governor Walker for valuing the contributions of Wisconsin’s farmers, agribusinesses and communities,” concluded Harsdorf. “I look forward to working with policy makers and industry on implementing these initiatives to grow our rural economy.”

A copy of Governor’s news release is available at walker.wi.gov.