

# Sen. Cowles: Kitchens/Cowles bill promoting farmer-led conservation passes Senate

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MADISON– Senator Robert Cowles (R-Green Bay) released the following statement after 2017 Assembly Bill 946, authored by Senator Cowles and Representative Joel Kitchens (R-Sturgeon Bay), passed the Senate:

“Understanding that no one knows the land better than the farmers who cultivate it, the Producer-Led Watershed Protection Grant Program is working to improve Wisconsin’s water and soil quality by encouraging farmer-led conservation decision making and solutions. By organizing farmers with industry experts and sharing the cost of implementing land and water conservation strategies, more phosphorus will be contained in the soil. Reducing runoff will not only strengthen water quality, but will also improve the farmer’s bottom-line. It was a pleasure to work with Representative Kitchens on this proposal and I am thankful that Governor Walker came to us to help push this imperative part of his agenda.”

Assembly Bill 946 increases the available funding in Department of Agriculture, Trade, and Consumer Protection’s (DATCP) Producer-Led Watershed Protection Grant Program by \$500,000 for each fiscal year in the current biennium. This transfer from the Environmental Fund brings the total annual funding to \$750,000. The grants, which are capped at \$40,000 and require a 50/50 match by the recipient, will fund land and water conservation projects including group start-up costs, implementation and outreach efforts, and incentive payments to producers for cover crops or buffer strips.

In the previous grant cycle, three of seventeen recipients were located in Northeast Wisconsin, including Peninsula Pride Farms in Kewaunee and Southern Door Counties, Farmers for Tomorrow in Waupaca and Portage Counties, and Sheboygan River Progressive Farmers in Sheboygan and Fond du Lac Counties. During this grant cycle, DATCP received more proposals than they could fund. AB 946 was introduced to ensure that more producer-led groups are formed and more projects to limit nonpoint source runoff are completed. AB 946 passed the Assembly in February, and now heads to the Governor's desk to be signed into law.