

# Sen. Cowles: Farmer-led land conservation bill passes Senate Committee

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## Farmer-Led Land Conservation Bill Passes Senate Committee

MADISON– Senator Robert Cowles (R-Green Bay) released the following statement after 2017 Senate Bill 796, authored by Senator Cowles and Representative Joel Kitchens (R-Sturgeon Bay), was unanimously recommended for passage by the Senate Committee on Natural Resources and Energy:

*“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 together with industry experts and helping to share the cost of implementing land and water conservation strategies, more phosphorus will be contained in the soil instead of running-off, which will strengthen water quality and help the farmer’s bottom-line. I am pleased to be working with Representative Kitchens on this proposal and am thankful that Governor Walker has come to us to help push this imperative portion of his rural and agricultural agenda.”*

Senate Bill 796 increases the available funding in DATCP’s [Producer-Led Watershed Protection Grant Program](#) by \$500,000 for each fiscal year in the current biennium from the Environmental Fund, bringing to total 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 previous grant cycles, Peninsula Pride Farms in Kewaunee and Southern Door Counties and Farmers for Tomorrow in Waupaca and Portage Counties are two recipients from Northeast Wisconsin. SB 796 was introduced to ensure that more producer-led groups are formed and more projects to limit nonpoint source phosphorus runoff are completed after DATCP found that they had more requests for proposals than available funding during the last grant cycle.