

Dairy Business Association: Applauds Assembly for passing water quality credit clearinghouse

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GREEN BAY, Wis. — The state's largest dairy lobbying group applauded today's approval by the state Assembly of a streamlined process for trading water quality credits, saying the change is an important step toward improving water quality by capitalizing on farmers' innovative nutrient management practices.

Tom Crave, president of the Dairy Business Association and a farmer and cheesemaker in south-central Wisconsin, pointed to the bill's co-authors for their leadership.

The legislation would create a clearinghouse that improves an existing program by making it easier for farmers, municipalities and industries to buy and sell the credits. The bill was approved by the state Senate last spring and needs Evers' signature to become law. "Rob Cowles in the Senate and Joel Kitchens in the Assembly deserve praise for spearheading this legislation. We hope Governor Evers signs it.

"Through science, technology and commitment, dairy farmers continue to build on innovative conservation methods that protect and improve Wisconsin's water by reducing nutrient loss. This centralized approach to selling credits for those efforts would create an even greater incentive for the agricultural community to lead the way on this issue. We are part of the solution," Crave said.

"The clearinghouse is also exciting because it would foster more partnerships between rural and urban stakeholders to improve water quality and reduce the cost of doing so for everyone. We all want our water to be clean, our communities to be

healthy and our farms to be resilient.

How it works

The clearinghouse approach for water quality credits would function something like existing markets for carbon credits. Various entities, including local water treatment facilities, cheese plants and other factories are required to meet limits for what pollutants or nutrients they can discharge to the environment. Phosphorus is one of the most commonly regulated nutrients. It can be expensive for a facility to filter its discharge sufficiently to reach its assigned target. In the case of treatment plants, those costs can result in higher fees for residents.

At the same time, there are environmental and farming organizations that are implementing innovative farming techniques or land use changes that reduce the amount of phosphorus in a watershed. Now, organizations doing that kind of work could sell credits from the phosphorus reductions they achieve, and other entities could buy them to offset the amount of phosphorus they need to remove from their waste.