

Farming sustainability project results in lower pollution levels

Posted on Wednesday, Aug 11, 2021

A new agriculture sustainability project being piloted in southwestern Wisconsin has resulted in lower levels of water pollution.

That's according to a report from a nonprofit group called Farmers for Sustainable Food, made up of the state Dairy Business Association, Edge Dairy Farmer Cooperative and The Nature Conservancy. The project aims to assess the environmental and fiscal viability of various conservation practices.

"It's rewarding to see, in concrete terms, that we are making a positive difference," said Jim Winn, a dairy farmer participating in the project and president of the Lafayette Ag Stewardship Alliance.

The report documents results of the first year of the pilot program, undertaken in 2019 by 12 farmers located primarily in Lafayette County. On average, each of the participating farms adopted five conservation practices per field that have been shown to improve farming sustainability. These included nutrient management plans, the use of cover crops and following "university-recommended" fertilizer rates.

Conservation efforts on these farms are reducing the amount of sediment reaching local streams and rivers by 28 percent, the report shows. Farmers for Sustainable Food estimates that adding cover crops to half of the fields in the project area could result in additional pollution reductions of 40 percent in sediment, 28 percent in nitrogen and 23 percent in phosphorus.

The first year of the project was meant to establish baseline metrics for further conservation efforts, with a goal of making the framework applicable to farms in other areas. Going forward, the project aims to determine the return on investment for several of the farmers implementing these conservation efforts.

“We can be proud of what we have accomplished, but it doesn’t stop here,” Winn said. “This is about continuous improvement — more innovation, more collaboration, more data — to make sure we are protecting our natural resources and remaining productive.”

See the full report: <https://farmersforsustainablefood.com/wp-content/uploads/2021/08/Y1-Final-Report-c.pdf>

-By Alex Moe