

Clean Wisconsin, Dairy Business Association, The Nature Conservancy, WI Land+Water: Environmental, ag groups applaud new investment in well protections

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Partners in clean water initiative say expansion of grant program is essential step

MADISON, Wis. — Three environmental groups and a dairy organization, working as partners to bring about long-term solutions to Wisconsin's water quality issues, today cheered an announcement that \$10 million will be made available to protect owners of private wells from contaminated drinking water.

[Gov. Tony Evers said](#) Tuesday he was committing federal funds to support replacing or treating private wells that are contaminated. The new grant program will expand eligibility beyond the state's current Well Compensation Grant Program to support more well owners.

"This investment is a significant, fundamental step forward in ensuring that all of our state's residents have clean water to drink," the groups — Clean Wisconsin, the Dairy Business Association, The Nature Conservancy in Wisconsin, and WI Land+Water — said jointly.

Sustained financial support for families with contaminated wells was included in a [budget blueprint](#) the groups presented in 2021 as part of a broad plan to improve water quality in Wisconsin while supporting farmers' conservation efforts. They have been partners in a clean water initiative since 2020.

“Wisconsin must prioritize access to clean water for every resident. This is a responsibility all of us share. We are thankful to see Gov. Evers’ major action toward that goal,” the groups said. “Much more remains to be done to address water quality issues in our state, and we look forward to continuing to work with the governor, Legislature and each other on further improvements.”

The financial support announced Tuesday will come from one-time funds Wisconsin received through the American Rescue Plan Act, a 2021 law that directed federal money to states during the pandemic.

Comments from the organizations about the new program:

“Everyone has a right to clean drinking water, but tens of thousands of Wisconsin families are dealing with wells contaminated with nitrates. Governor Evers has given those families a path to finally get clean water from their taps again. This program will also help small businesses and critical services like day care centers in rural communities that have long been plagued with high nitrate in their drinking water. We look forward to working with the governor and the Legislature to continue this program so that all rural Wisconsinites can get the help they deserve. Clean Wisconsin has long advocated for changes to the Well Compensation Grant Program that would allow families with nitrate-contaminated wells to get help, as well as increased funding given the scale of this problem in our state. With this investment, the governor has delivered.”

— **Scott Laeser, water program director for Clean Wisconsin**

“Ensuring access to clean drinking water is essential to our rural neighbors and our own families and farms, so expanding eligibility for this critical support is significant. It is also part of a larger effort needed to protect and improve water quality while supporting farmers in our important role as caretakers of the environment and business owners. We are part of the solution and will continue to expand the use of innovative conservation practices through scientific research, collaboration with partners, and a commitment to the well-being of our communities.”

— **Amy Penterman, president of the Dairy Business Association**

“Clean water is fundamental to the health and prosperity of people and natural

systems. We applaud the governor's investment in this grant program, which will provide clean, safe water to more people in Wisconsin, including in rural and urban areas where clean water has been harder to access."

— **Elizabeth Koehler, state director for The Nature Conservancy in Wisconsin**

"We celebrate this important step toward ensuring that all Wisconsinites have access to safe, clean water. We look forward to the continued work of addressing water quality challenges through common-sense solutions that promote healthy families and communities."

— **Matt Krueger, executive director of WI Land+Water**

KEY COMPONENTS OF THE NEW PROGRAM:

- Eliminate the requirement that a nitrate-contaminated well is only eligible for a grant if it is used as a water supply for livestock
- Lower the nitrate threshold for nitrate-contaminated wells from 40 parts per million (ppm) to 10 ppm to comply with the state's public health standards
- Lower the arsenic standard for arsenic-contaminated wells from 50 parts per billion (ppb) to 10 ppb to comply with federal drinking water standards
- Allow any source of bacterial contamination that presents a human health risk to be eligible for the program, not just fecal bacteria caused by livestock
- Increase the family income limit for grants from \$65,000 to \$100,000, a threshold that has not been raised since 1995
- Eliminate the requirement that an award must be reduced by 30 percent of the amount by which the claimant's income exceeds \$45,000 if the claimant has a family income that exceeds \$45,000
- Expand eligible applicants to include owners of contaminated non-community wells (churches, daycare centers, rural restaurants and other small businesses) and basing income eligibility on the property or business owner's income instead of family income