

Rep. Kitchens and Sen. Cowles: Bill to support farmers and improve water quality signed into law

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MADISON– Representative Joel Kitchens (R-Sturgeon Bay) and Senator Robert Cowles (R-Green Bay) released the following statement after Assembly Bill 727, which they co-authored with Reps Todd Novak (R-Dodgeville), Travis Tranel (R-Cuba City), Katrina Shankland (D-Stevens Point) and Scott Krug (R-Nekoosa) and Sens Patrick Testin (R-Stevens Point) and Joan Ballweg (R-Markesan), was signed into law today as 2021 Wisconsin Act 223:

“This legislation follows our approach of bringing both the agriculture and conservation communities together to collaborate on meaningful changes that improve the quality of our water and our environment,” Representative Kitchens said. “Because farmers are some of the most responsible conservationists and stewards of our land, it makes perfect sense to take advantage of their vast knowledge by giving them a seat at the table. If we can provide farmers with the resources they need to come up with innovative solutions to our water issues, our entire state will be better off.”

“Clean waterbodies are as much a part of the foundation of our great state as agriculture,” said Senator Cowles. “For decades, farmers have voluntarily been a substantial part of efforts to maintain and improve water quality throughout the state, but they’re asking for help to do more. 2021 Wisconsin Act 223 helps farmers implement new land and water conservation strategies to store more nutrients in soil and prevent pollutant leaching and runoff, which provides more opportunities for farmers to lead the solutions of tomorrow.”

[2021 Wisconsin Act 223](#) has three major components, all targeted at addressing the issue of nitrate leaching into groundwater but all programs that can result in other water quality, soil health, and agricultural yield benefits beyond reducing nitrate leaching in the short and long-term. These components of Act 223 include:

- Creating a two-year, \$1 million per year Nitrate Optimization Pilot Program to allow farmers to apply for grants of up to \$50,000 to work with University of Wisconsin-System (UW-System) institutions to try new measures to increase utilization of applied nitrates, reduce nitrate leaching, and monitor the results.
- Allowing farmers to apply to the Department of Agriculture, Trade and Consumer Protection (DATCP) to receive a \$5 per acre rebate on their crop insurance premiums if they plant cover crops and have not received cover crop funding from state or federal programs. This program is funded at \$400,000 per year.
- Requiring the UW-System to create a three-year hydrogeologist position to help localities increase their knowledge of local natural features, such as by creating depth to bedrock and depth to groundwater maps that can help farmers make more informed yet voluntary application rate and land management decisions.