

# Sen. Cowles, Rep. Kitchens: Incentives for farmers to go above and beyond on land and water management practices now funded

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*Kitchens/Cowles Applaud Budget Committee Action to Release Funds for Programs Under Act 223*

MADISON– Representative Joel Kitchens (R-Sturgeon Bay) and Senator Robert Cowles (R-Green Bay) released the following statement after the Joint Committee on Finance (JCF) unanimously approved a s. 13.10 request from the Department of Agriculture, Trade and Consumer Protection (DATCP) to fund programs related to 2021 Wisconsin Act 223, a bill which they authored:

*“Since I was first elected to the Assembly in 2014, my philosophy in dealing with complex environmental issues has always involved bringing both conservation and agriculture groups together to find common interests and work on a compromise,” Rep. Kitchens said. “It is vital to the future of our state that we preserve our natural resources, while also protecting our farm economy. I have found that this collaborative approach leads to more positive outcomes. I do not believe we will tackle our state’s environmental challenges without involvement and buy-in from the agricultural community. This new law is the perfect example of that.”*

*“Clean waterbodies are as much a part of the foundation of our great state as*

*agriculture,” said Sen. Cowles. “For decades, farmers have voluntarily been a substantial part of efforts to maintain and improve water quality throughout the state. With today’s action to release program funding, we can help farmers to 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 again lead the solutions of tomorrow. I want to thank my co-authors, the bill’s supporters, the Joint Finance Committee and DATCP for helping us launch these important efforts.”*

[2021 Wisconsin Act 223](#) was authored by Representatives Joel Kitchens, Todd Novak (R-Dodgeville), Travis Tranel (R-Cuba City), Katrina Shankland (D-Stevens Point) and Scott Krug (R-Nekoosa), and Senators Robert Cowles, Patrick Testin (R-Stevens Point) and Joan Ballweg (R-Markesan). Act 223 created two new programs, both targeted at addressing the issue of nitrate leaching into groundwater but with the opportunity to result in other benefits such as improved surface water quality, soil health, and agricultural yields in the short and long-term. The funding for these programs was kicked to a [s. 13.10 request](#) from DATCP to JCF, with the following funding for these two programs approved today on a vote of 14-0:

- \$1,600,000 to create a Commercial Nitrogen Optimization Pilot Program which allows 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. Along with the [new statutes](#), this DATCP program will be governed by [Emergency Rule EmR2208](#).
- \$800,000 to provide farmers with a \$5 per acre rebate on their crop insurance premiums if they plant cover crops and have not received funding for cover crops from other state or federal programs. Along with the [new statutes](#), this DATCP program will be governed by [Emergency Rule EmR2210](#).

Along with these two new programs at DATCP, Act 223 also required the UW’s Geological and Natural History Survey to create one new hydrogeologist project position for a period of three-years to assist localities with their efforts to increase their knowledge of local natural features. This may include creating interactive depth to bedrock, depth to groundwater, and soil depth maps that can help farmers to make more informed yet voluntary application rate and land management decisions. [This position](#) opened for recruitment on August 4th and the application

deadline is August 25th, with a goal of having the position filled in September.