

Venture Dairy Cooperative: Farmers ask Gov. Evers to ensure new position isn't used for activist driven agendas

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WEDNESDAY, March 9, 2022: Yesterday, the Wisconsin State Senate passed Assembly Bill 727 sending it to the Governor's desk for his signature. Assembly Bill 727, authored by Senator Cowles and Representative Kitchens contains a number of provisions beneficial to farmers, but valid concerns remain.

The bill creates a commercial nitrogen optimization pilot program which recognizes that farmers are the conservation experts and rewards the implementation of practices that reduce nitrogen application on farms. The bill also provides cover crop insurance premium rebates for practices that improve water quality.

"Wisconsin Dairy Alliance thanks the legislature for recognizing that farmers are tremendous conservationists. When farmers are incentivized to innovate, we reduce costs and improve water quality," said Cindy Leitner, President of Wisconsin Dairy Alliance (WDA).

WDA and Venture Dairy Cooperative (VDC) supported the above measures in the legislation. However, an additional provision drew concern from WDA and VDC.

According to the actual bill language, AB 727 creates a new hydrogeologist position that "shall focus on developing groundwater resource information primarily at county or local scales and assisting state and local governments, industries, and the public in interpreting and using this information."

After receiving feedback from members raising concerns with this new position, WDA and VDC, along with Wisconsin Manufacturers and Commerce, stood alone in raising these objections and provided proposed changes to the bill.

Despite assertions from the authors and other agricultural groups that this position is not intended to be regulatory in nature, nothing about the language in the bill prevents the data from being used for regulatory purposes or in supporting activist driven agendas.

“While only one position might seem harmless enough, the dairy industry and especially our members, have expended significant time and resources correcting the record to combat biased research conducted by just one agenda-driven researcher. Local units of government and anti-farm activists rely on the same flawed and biased studies and weaponize them against our members across the entire state,” said Kim Bremmer, Executive Director of Venture Dairy Cooperative (VDC).

“We appreciate the authors’ mitigation of some of our concerns through the passage of an amendment which ensures that DATCP and DNR will be required to follow the normal rulemaking process and removes funding for the position to ensure the Governor cannot exercise his partial veto authority,” said Leitner. “However, when discussions regarding the future funding of this hydrogeologist ensue, we request this position be clearly defined as a resource specific to helping farmers, of all sizes, to support practices that improve the environment and compliance with NR 151.075.”

WDA and VDC will continue to monitor the work of this position and will advocate at every turn to ensure the work of this position is aimed at assisting farmers to comply with nitrate standards, and not at empowering anti-farm activists.