

Wisconsin ag groups: Say Senate bill would encourage improved water quality

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Ag supporters say investment is a small but important step forward

Eleven Wisconsin agricultural groups praised Senate action to approve a bill that would invest money into rural water quality improvements around the state.

The state Senate voted unanimously today to increase access to existing loan funds for private well testing and remediation. Senate Bill 678 (SB 678) passed unanimously in the Senate Agriculture and Tourism Committee last month.

The bill's authors, Rep. Joel Kitchens, R-Sturgeon Bay, and Sen. Rob Cowles, R-Green Bay, worked in a bipartisan fashion with Rep. Katrina Shankland, D-Stevens Point, and others to gain wide support for their effort. Besides increased access to well-testing and remediation funds, the bill makes several technical changes that will improve access to farmer-led conservation groups that might span adjacent watersheds. The full proposal can be read [here](#).

"While there is still a lot to do, passing this bill keeps us moving toward the expansion of well compensation grants and additional opportunities for farmer-led conservation groups," the groups said in a joint statement. "Farmers know that water quality is important to their families, farms and communities in which they live and serve, but there is more work ahead. We are committed to working with all stakeholders to advance common-sense proposals that improve our natural resources and build an environment for future generations of farmers to thrive."

The state Assembly will have to schedule and pass the bill before Gov. Tony Evers

would have a chance to sign the legislation into law.

AT A GLANCE

The bill would:

- Change the well compensation grant program, allowing more flexibility for recipients.
- Expansion of eligibility criteria for drinking water contaminants to address rural well issues.
- Allow grants to be awarded to farmer-led groups that are made up of farmers located in adjacent watersheds rather than those in one watershed as current law does.
- Make farmer-led conservation groups eligible to receive lake and river protection grants provided by the Department of Natural Resources, expanding eligible groups.
- Add considerations when the Department of Agriculture, Trade and Consumer Protection prepares its annual allocation plan for soil and water resource conservation grants.

GROUPS SUPPORTING THE BILL

Cooperative Network, Dairy Business Association, Wisconsin Agri-Business Association, Wisconsin Association of Professional Agriculture Consultants, Wisconsin Cattlemen's Association, Wisconsin Corn Growers Association, Wisconsin Farm Bureau Federation, Wisconsin Pork Association, Wisconsin Potato and Vegetable Growers, Wisconsin Soybean Association, Wisconsin State Cranberry Growers Association