

Rep. Kitchens, Sen. Cowles: New bipartisan law from Kitchens/Cowles promotes better farming and cleaner water

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MADISON – A bi-partisan bill to help farmers work together to keep Wisconsin waters cleaner has now been signed into law. Following unanimous approvals last month in the State Assembly and State Senate to build on the already successful program by expanding eligibility for producer-led groups, the Governor signed [Assembly Bill 65](#) into law yesterday as 2023 Wisconsin Act 5. Producer-led watershed groups allow farmers to voluntarily work together, share information and try innovative practices that allow them to remain profitable while protecting our water. Representative Kitchens says the program is already making an impact in the state.

“In my area, I have witnessed the tremendous positive impact these groups can have,” Kitchens said, “Eight years ago, Kewaunee County was seen as the poster child for groundwater contamination from manure spreading. Now, the most recent well testing shows that the groundwater in Door and Kewaunee Counties is substantially cleaner than the state average, in spite of having the shallowest soil in the state.”

Prior to Act 5, only producer-led groups of farmers in one watershed were eligible. This new law expands eligibility to farmers in adjacent watersheds, making it easier to find the five farmers needed to create a new group and allowing for additional members to join existing groups. Act 5 also allows producer-led groups to access competitive state funding through the Department of Natural Resources’ Surface Water Grant Programs. These programs are funded at around \$2.5 million annually.

The expansion of the producer-led program will mean more farmers will learn new and better ways to farm and protect our water.

“Wisconsin is already home to 34 producer-led groups with 807 farmer members covering 526,000 acres of cropland,” Senator Cowles said. “Farmers are some of the state’s best land and water stewards, and a small bit of state assistance can make their best intentions a reality. Act 5 is a great step to help Wisconsin’s farmers with this work. I want to thank all the co-authors and stakeholders involved with this legislation, along with thanking the Governor for signing this common-sense proposal.”