

# Sen. Cowles, Rep. Kitchens: Bipartisan bill expands successful clean water program

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MADISON – A bipartisan bill to help farmers work together to keep Wisconsin waters cleaner is headed to the Governor’s desk. This week, both the State Assembly and State Senate unanimously approved [Assembly Bill 65](#), which builds on an already successful program by expanding eligibility for producer-led groups. 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.

“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 intent a reality. Assembly Bill 65 is a great step to help Wisconsin’s farmers with this work. I hope to see Governor Evers’ signature on this effort very soon.”

Currently, only producer-led groups of farmers in one watershed are eligible. Assembly Bill 65 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. The legislation 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 program will mean more farmers will learn new and better ways to farm and protect 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.”

Assembly Bill 65 now heads to Governor Evers for final approval.