Dept. of Agriculture, Trade and Consumer Protection: Announces 2026 Commercial Nitrogen Optimization Pilot Program grant recipients

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MADISON, Wis. – The Wisconsin Department of Agriculture, Trade and Consumer Protection (DATCP) announced that 18 projects are receiving grant funding for the 2026 Commercial Nitrogen Optimization Pilot Program (NOPP). Funded by 2025-2027 biennial budget which was signed by Governor Evers, these grants aim to refine and enhance the understanding of new methods that optimize commercial nitrogen applied to agricultural fields, helping to protect vital soil and water resources.

“Our farmers and producers are critical partners in our work to improve and protect water quality statewide, and as governor, I’ve been proud to support them in their efforts to find new, innovative ways to foster conservation,” said Gov. Evers. “Improving water quality is as much of an environmental and conservation issue as it is a public health and economic issue for our state. Thanks to our bipartisan state budget I signed last summer, this critical funding will help us continue building upon our efforts to support our farmers and their families and protect the essential water and land resources Wisconsinites and our state’s largest industries rely on every day.”

The NOPP was designed to encourage agricultural producers to develop innovative approaches to optimize the application of commercial nitrogen for a duration of at least two growing seasons. The selected producers must collaborate with a

University of Wisconsin (UW) System institution, which will monitor the grant project on-site and conduct commercial nitrogen optimization field studies.

“Wisconsin farmers are resourceful, innovative, and know how to care for our state’s soil and water resources,” said DATCP Secretary Randy Romanski. “Through this program, research can be conducted to further refine on-farm nitrogen application, helping farmers develop new, effective methods for growing crops while also implementing good conservation practices.”

The NOPP grant structure allowed agricultural producers to work together and apply under a single application, with each individual producer eligible to receive a maximum award of up to $40,000. In addition, the UW System will receive up to 20% of the total amount awarded to producers for monitoring and research assistance. The application period for the program closed on January 15, 2026.

DATCP received 18 funding applications with 24 producers involved. The grant recipients and their planned projects, totaling $764,300, are:

Alsum Farms | $40,000
Optimize sidedress nitrogen applications for Russet Reveille potatoes.
Number of producers on project: 1

Augustian Farms | $5,000
Determine nitrogen optimization rate for forage Italian ryegrass.
Number of producers on project: 1

Coloma Farms | $40,000
Test slow release nitrogen products to decrease nitrate leaching in season in potatoes.
Number of producers on project: 1

Chippewa Valley Forage Council | $37,788
Evaluate corn yield with nitrogen rates after manure injection with cover crops.
Number of producers on project: 1

Creamery Creek Dairy | $25,019
Conduct a corn nitrogen rate trial on light soils applied with precision technology.
Number of producers on project: 1

Farmers on the Rock | $123,335

Adjust and fine-tune nitrogen use in grain production in Rock County.
Number of producers on project: 4

Langlade County Research Station | $39,983
Optimize potato nitrogen application rates under reduced phosphorus rates.
Number of producers on project: 1

Green County Land and Water Conservation Department | $66,084
Conduct optimum nitrogen rate trials in Green County.
Number of producers on project: 3

Kenneth Kayhart | $34,144
Research impacts of cover crop termination strategy on nitrogen availability to corn.
Number of producers on project: 1

Nick and Amanda Klieber | $19,820
Determine economical nitrogen rate on no-till corn in Sheboygan County.
Number of producers on project: 1

Kent McClurg | $15,743
Study oat response to nitrogen in terms of yield, profit, lodging, and grain quality.
Number of producers on project: 1

Michael Fields Agricultural Institute | $39,685
Evaluate the rotation effect of Kernza perennial grain to corn.
Number of producers on project: 1

Muddy Bottom Farmers | $39,998
Determine how corn is affected when nitrogen is applied at termination of cover crop.
Number of producers on project: 1

Chris Salzwedel | $40,000
Establish frequency of spoon-fed fertilizer applications in cranberry production.
Number of producers on project: 1

James Stute | $39,972
Discover how a cereal rye cover crop changes the optimum nitrogen rate in corn.
Number of producers on project: 1

Dean Weichmann | $40,000
Assess Nitrogen crediting from timed termination of alfalfa cover crop.
Number of producers on project: 1

Jody Wilhelm | $37,461
Measure winter wheat response to nitrogen following full-season legume mix instead of soybeans.
Number of producers on project: 1

Wysocki Farms and Plover River Farms | $80,000
Implement management strategies for improving potato nitrogen use efficiency, yield, and quality.
Number of producers on project: 2

Additional information on the Commercial Nitrogen Optimization Pilot Grant Program is available on DATCP's website at https://datcp.wi.gov/Pages/CommercialNitrogenOptimizationPilotGrantProgram.aspx.