

# Food • Land • & Water

Toward a Sustainable Wisconsin



## Food, Land and Water: Moving Forward

### Final Report of the *Wisconsin Food, Land and Water Project*

#### Overview

Over the past 2 years, the *Wisconsin Food, Land and Water* project has brought Wisconsin civic leaders together for a serious, in-depth discussion about the future of Wisconsin's food, land and water. The project included workgroups on 4 key topics:

- Surface Water Quality
- Groundwater Quality
- Groundwater Quantity (Central Sands)
- The Future of Wisconsin's Working Lands

The workgroups included a wide range of stakeholders, including representatives from agriculture, business, local communities, civic and environmental groups, government and academia. Federal and state government representatives participated as advisors to their workgroups, recognizing that they could not endorse specific policy changes. Nonetheless, their clarifications of existing public policy were very helpful, and improved the reports.

Each workgroup met 4 times. The discussion was lively, but respectful. In the end, the workgroups reached a surprising degree of consensus, and developed some very impressive recommendations. The Workgroup recommendations represent the general consensus of each workgroup. While not every workgroup participant agreed with every recommendation, fundamental disagreement was rare.

Workgroup recommendations are briefly summarized below. Complete workgroup reports, including background information, goals, objectives, and specific strategies, are attached. We hope that you will find this to be compelling reading.

## ***Surface Water Workgroup***

The Surface Water Workgroup would like to see clear and sustained improvement in Wisconsin surface water quality, particularly in watersheds that are currently impaired by high P concentrations. Real improvement will require substantial reductions in farm P runoff, as part of a cost-effective statewide strategy to reduce P loading from *all* sources. The Surface Water Quality Workgroup report entitled *Surface Water Quality: Moving Forward* provides a detailed discussion and strategies to advance the Goals and Objectives summarized below:

### ***Goals***

The Surface Water Workgroup aspires to the following goals:

1. Reduce statewide farm P runoff by at least 30% by 2035 (reductions may vary between watersheds), and make steady interim progress toward that goal.
2. Meet all watershed TMDL targets (combined P loading from farm *and nonfarm* sources) within 20 years, or within 20 years of TMDL approval, whichever date is later, and make steady interim progress toward those targets.
3. Meet P concentration standards for P-impaired waters, so as to remove 90% of all P-impaired waters from the Wisconsin P-impaired waters list by 2050.

We believe that, by achieving these goals, we will meet U.S. *Gulf Hypoxia and Wisconsin Nutrient Reduction Framework* targets, and dramatically improve water quality in Wisconsin's lakes, rivers, and streams.

### ***Objectives***

In order to achieve the above goals, the Surface Water Workgroup proposes the following objectives:

1. Meet current state agricultural performance standards on all farms in P-impaired watersheds by 2027, and on all Wisconsin farms by 2035.
2. Design and implement clear strategies to meet TMDL targets in P-impaired watersheds.
3. Create strong farm conservation incentives, and provide enough resources to get the job done.
4. Address acute local manure and bio-solids management challenges.
5. Improve data collection and monitoring.
6. Work together as a community.

## ***Groundwater Quality Workgroup***

Wisconsin residents value the state's historically potable groundwater. But population growth and more intensive human activities of all kinds (not just agriculture) are degrading our groundwater resource.

The Groundwater Quality Workgroup aspires to limit degradation of groundwater; to restore compliance with groundwater standards where exceeded; and to ensure safe drinking water for all Wisconsin residents. In particular, the Workgroup proposes to address nitrate and pathogen contamination from agricultural sources (as part of a larger effort to address contamination from *all* sources). The Groundwater Quality Workgroup report entitled *Agriculture and Groundwater Quality: Moving Forward* provides a detailed discussion and strategies to advance the Goals and Objectives summarized below.

### **Goals**

The Groundwater Quality Workgroup aspires to the following goals:

1. Ensure safe drinking water for all Wisconsin residents.
2. Reduce nitrate and pathogen contamination of groundwater.
3. Maintain compliance with state groundwater standards where those standards are currently being met, and accelerate efforts to restore compliance where the standards are not being met.
4. Keep Wisconsin agriculture and rural communities vibrant and economically sustainable, while achieving our groundwater quality goals.

### **Objectives**

To advance these goals, Groundwater Quality Workgroup proposes the following objectives:

1. Increase groundwater monitoring and research.
2. Meet current state nutrient management standards on all Wisconsin farms, but especially in key areas of concern.
3. Address acute regional nitrate contamination problems.
4. Address acute regional pathogen contamination problems.
5. Expand assistance to well owners affected by groundwater contamination.
6. Understand the connection between land use practices and groundwater quality.
7. Find the will and resources to get the job done.

## ***Groundwater Quantity Workgroup***

The Central Sands groundwater pumping issue is complex and highly charged. There are many stakeholders, and many valid questions and concerns on all sides. At this time, the Groundwater Quantity Workgroup is not in a position to recommend detailed final “solutions” to this dynamic issue. The challenge will become more acute as use demands continue to grow so it is important to move forward now, in whatever ways we can. We believe that progress can beget progress, that trust can beget trust, and that sustainable solutions can ultimately be found.

The Groundwater Quantity Workgroup report entitled *Central Sands Groundwater: Moving Forward* provides a detailed discussion and strategies to advance the Goals and Objectives summarized below:

### **Goals**

The Groundwater Quantity Workgroup aspires to the following goals:

1. Ensure that “public rights” in Central Sands waters of the state, including, but not limited to reasonable base stream flows and lake levels, are not impaired by groundwater pumping.
2. Accommodate, to the extent feasible, the reasonable use of Central Sands groundwater by agriculture, industry, communities, and other users – consistent with the protection of “public rights” in waters of the state.
3. Ensure reasonably fair and reliable access to groundwater among competing users, both now and in the future.
4. Provide reasonable continuity of access to existing groundwater users, and reasonable opportunity for access to new users.
5. Encourage water conservation by all, for the benefit of all.
6. Act on the basis of sound information.

### **Objectives**

To help achieve the above goals, the Groundwater Quantity Workgroup proposes the following objectives:

1. Continue to expand our current knowledge.
2. Clarify “public rights” in Central Sands waters of the state.
3. Support voluntary cooperative efforts and appropriate public mechanisms to ensure that “public rights” in Central Sands waters of the state are not impaired by groundwater pumping.
4. Improve education and communications.

## ***Future of Working Lands Workgroup***

Wisconsin, one of the top food-producing states in the nation, is facing a quiet crisis: We are steadily losing our farmland base – the indispensable foundation of our food system. If current trends continue, we could undermine our farm and food economy, our quality of life, and our hopes for a sustainable future. The Working Lands Workgroup is considering the future of Wisconsin’s working lands, primarily agricultural land. This Workgroup is examining key land use trends and conflicts that will affect working lands in the years ahead and will work toward strategic consensus. The Working Lands Workgroup report entitled *Working Lands: Moving Forward* provides a detailed discussion and strategies to advance the Goals and Enabling Conditions (or Objectives) summarized below.

### **Goal and Enabling Conditions**

The overall goal of the Working Lands Workgroup is to maintain economically and environmentally resilient working landscapes. The workgroup defined the following enabling conditions that are necessary to achieve this goal:

- **Vibrant rural and urban communities.** A stable rural community with sound agricultural infrastructure can support and encourage continued agricultural activity while a compact, livable, and well-planned urban community can both attract non-farming residents and accommodate population growth without destroying important farmland. A critical component to achieving vibrant rural and urban communities is helping the non-farming public understand the connection between food, land, water, economic prosperity, and quality of life. The education component can foster rural and urban support for the strategies that will ultimately help preserve working lands.
- **Strong agricultural economies.** A strong and diverse Wisconsin agricultural economy can sustain Wisconsin farm families and make it possible for them to keep land in agricultural use.
- **Enduring land access and affordability.** Durable and diverse family farm operations that have access to affordable land can ensure land remains available for continued agricultural use. Farm ownership increases pride and responsibility,

### ***Strategies***

The Working Lands Workgroup offers the following strategies, as part of a broad civic effort to achieve the above goal and enabling conditions:

1. Increase public awareness.
2. Encourage compact, livable urban communities (Infill).
3. Utilize conservation easements and other preservation tools.
4. Take a regional approach to farmland protection.
5. Support profitable, diverse family farms, and the next generation of farmers.

## **Next Steps in the Food, Land and Water Project**

This report will be reviewed by the *Food, Land and Water* Steering Committee at their August 23rd, 2017 meeting. They will offer comments and suggestions for the advancement of the report at the *Food, Land and Water Conference* on October 16 and 17, 2017 at the Osthoff Conference Center in Elkhart Lake. The conference will provide a forum for participants to react to the report, but more importantly, to suggest the mechanisms to implement strategies to achieve the larger vision of a food, land and water system that is sustainable in Wisconsin. WI Land+Water commits to implement that vision on the ground, and will continue to need the input all stakeholders. The report and recommendations coming from the conference will steer WI Land+Water's future direction.

## **Acknowledgements**

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