



Guiding Policy Principles for Clean Water and Thriving Farms

Ensuring clean drinking water

It was good to see a renewed emphasis on this topic during the last legislative session. While the recommendations of the Speaker's Task Force on Water Quality were a good start, we need to see a much bigger investment in clean drinking water to ensure people can trust the water coming from their tap. We need to expand well testing and funding for well replacement and treatment. We also need more groundwater mapping to help understand the sources of contamination, which include both agriculture and septic systems. This effort will require a significant financial investment, but some of it could be offset by revenue from higher well, septic and other permits.

Reimagining the CAFO program

Wisconsin needs a more effective farm permitting system. To realize a future where all farms are successful while also meeting conservation standards, the program needs more resources to handle permitting, provide assistance to farmers and ensure compliance. For the good of farms and the environment, we would benefit from bringing more farms into the CAFO permitting process, but that will require the program to be much more efficient. This means making systemic changes to how the current program operates and expecting improved engagement from both the regulators and the regulated community.

Supporting current conservation efforts and fostering innovation

Many farmers and outside groups are already engaged in worthwhile conservation efforts. We should support these efforts, such as the current farmer-led watershed model. At the same time, we need to do more to measure these groups' success and hold them accountable for the public resources they receive. There are also innovative thinkers with new ideas to improve agriculture's environmental impact. To foster innovation, we need to ensure regulatory clarity to allow for experimentation. We can also help by funding relevant research into these technologies and differing farm techniques.

Improving Wisconsin's non-point program

Almost 20 years ago, Wisconsin created its current program for addressing non-point pollution from agricultural sources, but those rules have still never been fully implemented and the program has never been properly funded. Wisconsin should move toward holding all farms accountable for these standards regardless of size, type and availability of cost-share money. This makes sense for the environment, but it is also fairer for farms. This change may need to be phased in over time or be associated with certain incentives, but we need to move in that direction now. To help with this change, it is even more important that county land and water efforts are properly funded. That includes more money for staffing and cost share as non-compliant farms adapt.

Vision:
Clean water and resilient farms for Wisconsin