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**Groundwater Quality Workgroup  
Summary of 1<sup>st</sup> Workgroup Meeting, August 23, 2016**

**Attendance**

**Committee Co-Chairs:**

- Chuck Wagner, private well owner, Kewaunee County
- Kevin Masarik, Groundwater Education Specialist, UW Stevens Point

**Facilitator:** Ed Odgers, State Conservation Engineer, Retired WI DATCP

**Recorder:** Scott Hennelly, Communications Specialist, WI Land+Water

**Committee Members:**

- Dale Konkol, County Conservationist, Door County Soil and Water Conservation
- Davina Bonness, County Conservationist, Kewaunee County Land and Water Conservation
- Don Niles, Co-Owner Dairy Dreams, Kewaunee County
- Eric Allness, Management Analyst, NRCS
- John Pagel, Farmer and LCC Chair, Kewaunee County LCC
- Keith Foye, Bureau Director, Land and Water Resources, DATCP
- Madeline Gotkowitz, Hydrogeologist Professor, Wisconsin Geological & Natural History Survey
- Mark Borchardt, Microbiologist, U.S. Dairy Forage Research Center
- Maureen Muldoon, Hydrogeologist, UW Oshkosh
- Russ Brown, Waushara Co. farmer, WI Farmers Union
- John Holevoet, Director of Government Affairs, Dairy Business Association, FLW Steering Committee member
- Absent:
  - Al Sweeney, Vice Chair, Rock County LCC
  - Kevin Erb, Conservation Professional Development and Training Coordinator, UWEX
  - Mark Garthwaite, Executive Director, Wisconsin Brewers Guild
  - Sara Walling, Nutrient Management and Water Quality Section Chief, DATCP

## **Fears and Hopes**

**Madeline Gotkowitz:** Hydrogeologist, WI Geological & Natural History Survey

Fear - "That nitrate contamination has penetrated so deep into our primary aquifers in Wisconsin, the deep sandstone aquifer, that the timescale for recovering the water quality in the deep system is beyond the generation of my children. Essentially my greatest fear is the legacy of what we have now."

Hope - "Through more collaborative partnerships I can come to a better understanding of the production aspects of agriculture and that in the same way the research will benefit from that by leading to a collaborative solution that's positive for both producers and for those who are charged with thinking about groundwater quality."

**Eric Allness:** Management Program Analyst & Assistant State Conservationist, USDA-NRCS

Fear - "My concern with groundwater quality is of course agriculture's impacts and contributions. Also receiving news of spills or rain events that cause adverse impacts and issues that arise with drinking water, which certainly have become more frequent than in the past."

Hope - "Collaboration and new technologies. Working together and new ways of addressing groundwater contamination."

**Russ Brown:** small organic farmer in Poloma, Democratic candidate for assembly in the 72<sup>nd</sup> district

Fear - "That we don't come up with collaboration. That we don't figure out what we're doing to our water here and that we don't come up with a plan that addresses that. I think a lot of our choices for agriculture lead into these problems. What we choose to grow causes these problems."

Hope - "That we come together and work towards something long term."

**John Pagel:** dairy farmer, County Board in Kewaunee County, Chairman of Land + Water Committee

Fear - "My fear is the communication of our efforts in this group and any other that works on water quality issues. That we fail to communicate to the public and to the people in the rest of the state on the efforts of this group and that we don't do a good enough job on displaying that information."

Hope - "To see measurable improvement on groundwater and surface water. That we can identify the different things we're doing and measure the changes we're making."

**Don Niles:** dairy farmer, Kewaunee Co., President of Peninsula Pride Farms

Fear – “We’re not going to leave the agricultural opportunities to our next generation that were there for us. We need to find ways to maintain our social license or “welcome” from the community to be there as we are now.”

Hope – “That Kewaunee County can have a vibrant dairy industry and safe, clean, healthy water. Absolutely committed to that.”

**Maureen Muldoon:** Hydrogeologist, Professor at UW-Oshkosh

Fear – “I’m afraid we don’t have the political will to actually do anything meaningful to move forward.”

Hope – “That we actually do move forward.”

**Davina Bonness:** County Conservationist, Kewaunee Co.

Fear – “That I come into work one morning and I have a message that a child is sick from groundwater. That I have a blinking red light that says a child has been sick from drinking groundwater.”

Hope – “That we can have clean water through the aquifer. That someone can turn their tap on and drink clean water and that we can have sustainable agriculture. With the amount of cows and farms in Kewaunee Co, I think we can balance the two. We can have clean water and good farming.”

**Mark Borchardt:** Microbiologist, USDA Agricultural Research Service

Fear – “My greatest fear is the same as Davina. I’ve dealt with families who have lost children to waterborne infectious diseases. It would be absolutely horrific if one child or one person died of groundwater borne infection in Wisconsin. The thing I’ve noted is that death is one thing, but the decay and collapse of the social fabric underlying the community is even worse. There’s divorces, friendships lost, businesses that fail. It’s a bad situation.”

Hope – “A lot of the problem here is the public’s lack of understanding of groundwater. My aspiration is to change the ethic and have people understand that it’s a shared resource.”

**Keith Foye:** Director of the Bureau for Land and Water Resources, DATCP (stand in for Sara Walling)

Fear – “There have been a lot of water quality initiatives over the years. My fear is that there will be a lot of effort and discussion here, but then nothing happens.”

Hope – “The ability to follow through. There should be some way to measure and document what the next steps are and how we proceed.”

**John Holevoet:** Director of Government Affairs, Dairy Business Association

Fear – “My fear is that we continue to talk past each other instead of talking “to” each other.”

Hope – “Technology and innovation. What you can see now as far as land management and manure management, we’ve moved a long way. There are some things that we can still be doing, but it gives me great hope to know we can accomplish those things too.”

**Dale Konkol:** County Conservationist, Door County

Fear – “Not really a fear, but sure makes me wonder what’s going on....We had a well contamination at a restaurant and the samples showed caffeine. Made me wonder what’s going through the sanitary systems at restaurants and what’s ending up in the groundwater. Made me ask myself, ‘What are we doing and how are we contaminating the water?’.”

Hope – “The general public will team up with the agricultural industries and step to the plate with administrators that are running the state and say we have to work together on this issue, whether it’s the quality or quantity. It’s all of our resource and we all have to together and we have to get the leadership on board.

**Kevin Masarik:** Groundwater Education Specialist, UW Stevens Point

Fear – “In our office we have library of old books. We got to the point where we needed to clean it out so we got a dumpster and threw out the books that were out-dated. As I pulled those books off, I kept seeing ‘Nitrogen in Groundwater’, ‘Agricultural Practices & Nitrogen in Groundwater’. Some of the dates were 1977 and 1982. We’ve known about these issues for years. My fear is that 30 years from now, when I’m done with my career, that we’re passing those issues on to someone else.”

Hope – “That our work here leads to good conversation and progress on these issues. I also hope that people realize that people like Don Niles are good farmers but bear the brunt of criticism and publicity, whereas there might be someone farming in another part of the state that isn’t as good as a farmer, that’s not as respectful to the environment, but is able to continue farming. Since they are in a less susceptible area, they aren’t under the same scrutiny. I think we need to understand that Wisconsin is not created equal, risks are greater in some parts of the state compared to others, and it’s up to us to figure out how to spread those risks out equally not only among the farm community but those of us that rely on groundwater as well.”

**Chuck Wagner:** County Board, Kewaunee County

Fear – “That we can’t make a good connection between all this research, all these studies, all this work and the public. Can we get them to understand.”

Hope – “That the communication happens.”

### **Suggested Additions to Workgroup**

- Row crop producer (*Al Sweeney?*)
- Someone from Southwest Wisconsin.
- Industrial Application Company Representative. (*Suggested by Wagner. Talk with Dana Cook for suggestions*)
- Communications Experts (*Dominique Brossard and Dietram Scheufele from the Life Sciences Communications Department at UW-Madison suggested by Borchardt*)
- Public Health Representative (*Suggested by Foye*)
- DNR Representatives (*Suggested by Muldoon*)
- Someone who rents out land to understand their motivations and challenges (*Suggested by Masarik*)
- Expert on liability and insurance (*Suggested by Wagner*)
- Representative from public water supply (*Rural Water Suggested by Borchardt*)
- Water Utility Operator in a contaminated area (*Suggested by Gotkowitz*)
- Jeff Polenski, Certified Crop Advisor, will not be joining the group. He was invited, but declined participation. Seek substitute.

### **Review of Questions/Questions to Add**

- Change "drinking water" goals to "groundwater quality" goals.
- What are our human health goals? Ecological goals?
- How does Northeast Wisconsin compare to other regions of the state?
- Want more questions related to technologies and the improvement of technology.
- What do other countries do? Example: Denmark

### **Major Themes to Discuss**

1. Education/Communication
2. Regionality

### **Agenda for Next Meeting**

- Want a more detailed agenda. More documents and reminders in advance.
- Discuss incentives: why do people act the way there do? What motivates people?
- Discuss goals: what measurements and numbers are acceptable?
  - Goals should not be simply reduction. Need to address water quality explicitly.
- Voluntary cooperation vs. Regulatory. Which is better?
  - Why are 25% of farmers not interested in the stuff Don and John are doing?
- Discuss nutrient management plans.
  - Who is not doing them and why? DATCP has those figures.

### **Review of Background Documents**

- Share PowerPoint with everyone.
- Need clarification on “90% of nitrate in groundwater is from ag sources”
- Who bears the cost to treat municipal wells? Do some cities pay more than others?
- Take out second bullet point in slide 9.
- Notes:
  - Deepness of wells doesn’t matter.
  - Microbial contamination is not area-specific.