Summer 2025

Sheboygan River Sentinel

the newsletter of Sheboygan River Progressive Farmers

srpfarmers.com

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A message from the President

Brody Stapel, SRPF president

Hello fellow farmers and supporters,

I hope everyone is having a safe and productive summer working in the fields and staying healthy during this busy season!

Recently, I was featured on the Dairy Stream podcast with Ricardo Costa of The Nature Conservancy, where I talked about our efforts as a group. The podcast gave me an opportunity to share more about why our group got started and why other farmer-led groups like us were created across the state. In talking with fellow board members who helped establish our group, they shared that SRPF initially started as a peer group, focused on education and sharing with others the sustainable farming practices we're using.

Since then, we've grown and progressed to a point where we have data to support our sustainable farming practices and show that they positively impact water quality, soil health and our local communities. Demonstrating how our farms and fields are improving and measuring our work has been powerful in educating other farmers and the public about our practices.

I'm proud to say we're leading by example. We continue to learn from each other and add value to our farms along our sustainability journey. Our progress and collaborative efforts with other partners like TNC and the Sand County Foundation are just beginning, and many more opportunities lie ahead.

We're also thrilled to have recently been awarded a Fund for Lake Michigan grant to expand our work and support other farmers in adopting new sustainable farming methods. Let's embrace the upcoming experiences ahead and continue to grow and learn together!

Kind regards,

Brody Stapel, SRPF board president

Governor Evers visits SRPF member farm

In early February, Governor Evers visited SRPF member Derek Sippel of Airy Point Dairy Farm. Derek and his family gave the Governor a tour, showcasing their conservation practices like cover cropping, no-till farming and planting green to protect soil and water. Derek also highlighted their agritourism efforts, such as U-pick flowers and a sunflower maze, all no-till planted to demonstrate soil health. The visit concluded with a discussion on SRPF's efforts to ensure clean water and healthy soil. SRPF is proud of the work its farmers are doing for the environment and community.

New Farmers for Sustainable Food team member: Christina Grendell

Christina Grendell, Sustainability project coordinator

Christina Grendell joined the Farmers for Sustainable Food team as the sustainability project coordinator in February. Her strong organizational skills are a valuable asset to the farmer-led groups FSF supports and the sustainability projects and services it provides.

Having previously managed a horse boarding facility, Christina has always been passionate about animals and agriculture. Her diverse background in product manufacturing, office management and leadership will be a benefit to all FSF members and partners. She has experience working in the consumer packaging goods industry and various parts of the supply chain, including manufacturing and retail. In her free time, she enjoys volunteering at a local horse rescue and spending time with her three grandsons.

"I'm happy to be a part of the FSF team, supporting farmers within sustainability projects and along their sustainability journeys," Christina said. "It's rewarding to contribute to an organization working to bring meaningful change to our communities and food system."

Introducing new SRPF board advisor: Andy Holschbach

Andy Holschbach, SRPF board advisor

Andy Holschbach, past director of the Ozaukee County Land and Water Management Department, has joined the board of directors for the Sheboygan River Progressive Farmers as an advisor. He brings extensive knowledge of soil health, from his 37 years as the director. Additionally, he has experience as a zoning administrator and holds a degree in watershed management and soil science from the University of Wisconsin-Stevens Point and grew up on a dairy farm in Manitowoc County.

Andy understands the importance and impact of farmer-led watershed groups throughout the state. He helped establish the Clean Farm Families farmer-led group in Ozaukee County and the Ozaukee County Demonstration Farms Network.

He currently promotes soil health in the Milwaukee River Watershed through the Milwaukee Metropolitan Sewerage District. His work in this watershed complements SRPF, as 25% of Sheboygan County falls within this district.

Having seen dramatic improvements in soil health over his career, Andy is sincerely dedicated to helping farmers meet their soil health goals.

"I'm excited to be able to work with the Sheboygan River Progressive Farmers," Andy said. "It's been excellent to meet with members and see how passionate they are about soil health."

Andy believes that soil health goes hand-in-hand with farm profitability and works hard to share this message with farmers and the community.

"If we can truly help farmers improve their soil health by keeping the soil covered, maximizing the presence of living roots, minimizing soil disturbance and having crop diversity, farmers are going to become more profitable," he said. "Additionally, the environment will continue to benefit with less runoff, less synthetic fertilizers and better soil drainage."

Please join us in welcoming Andy to the board.

Upcoming Deadlines

Cost-share program
Deadline Nov. 15

Member conservation practice survey
Deadline Nov. 15

Scan the code for more information on Sheboygan River Progessive Farmers or to see any upcoming events.

Thank you to our sponsors:

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Fund for Lake Michigan

Lakeshore Natural Resource Partnership

Nicolet National Bank

The Nature Conservancy

Expanding support for producer-led watershed groups

Emily Zimmerman, PhD, Director of Agricultural Strategies

Emily Zimmerman, TNC Director of Agricultural Strategies

At The Nature Conservancy, we value the vital role farmers play in protecting and managing the natural places and resources that are important in our state. In recognition of that, our work is focused on accelerating the adoption of regenerative agriculture as a path toward increased environmental and economic resiliency for farmers and communities across Wisconsin. To do that, we're investing in a variety of strategies, including empowering farmers and producer-led watershed groups. We are proud to provide long-term support to producer-led watershed groups that are leaders in adopting regenerative agriculture practices on their farms, including Sheboygan River Progressive Farmers.

Over the past two years, we've expanded our support of producer-led watershed groups by offering TNC Challenge Grants. TNC Challenge Grants are competitive grants of up to $10,000/producer-led watershed group, awarded each fall. The grants seek to support produce-led watershed groups that are interested in implementing innovative regenerative agriculture practices or techniques. In 2023, we awarded nine TNC Challenge Grants, and those awardees implemented more than 7,000 acres of innovative regenerative agriculture practices – including multi-species cover crops, agroforestry, prairie plantings, and improved pasture and rotational grazing. Last fall, we selected 11 TNC Challenge Grants applications for funding and are excited to support the implementation of their projects this year.

TNC and a coalition of partners, including Clean Wisconsin, the Dairy Business Association, and Wisconsin Land + Water, continue to work together as part of the Clean Water Initiative (CWI) to achieve clean water goals while supporting resilient farms. Our organizations came together purposefully five years ago, to find common ground and to advocate collectively to significantly accelerate improvements to protect both our water resources and our farms. Our organizations are driven by the shared understanding that we cannot address clean water or the future of farming in Wisconsin as standalone issues. They are challenges that must be met together if we are to have a future where our communities have both clean water and a healthy, long-lasting agriculture and food system.

This year, one of our primary priorities is seeking additional state funding for the Producer-Led Watershed Protection Grant Program to continue and expand the work of producer-led watershed groups to adopt and promote voluntary agricultural conservation that improve water quality and prevent runoff.

At TNC, we are proud to work with farmers and our conservation partners to maintain resilient farms and rural communities and protect our natural resources. We know that producer-led watershed groups are leaders in ensuring Wisconsin's lands and waters can continue to sustain communities for generations to come – and we're proud to continue and expand our support!

For more information on TNC's work in Wisconsin and worldwide, visit www.nature.org/wisconsin.

SRPF invests in the next generation with $2,500 in secondary education scholarships

Sheboygan River Progressive Farmers is committed to investing in the future of the next generation through its annual scholarship program. This year, the program awarded three scholarships to students pursuing higher education: two $1,000 scholarships and one $500 scholarship.

Each award recipient has shown a commitment to advancing the future of farming. They understand the importance of adopting sustainable practices to conserve and protect natural resources, which is essential for the long-term sustainability of farms and local communities. Their dedication aligns with the mission of the SRPF.

Each student has demonstrated outstanding leadership skills, participation in school and community activities, involvement in agricultural organizations and academic honors. Because the scholarship is designed to encourage young people to continue their education in agriculture, recipients must be pursuing an agriculture or environmental science-related degree.

SRPF is honored to present these scholarships to three exceptional students who recognize the value of sustainable farming and are continuing their education in the agricultural field.

This year's recipients include:

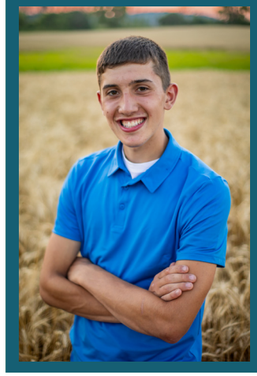
Campbell Booth of Plymouth, plans to attend the University of Minnesota Twin Cities to study agricultural food and business management and animal science. She hopes to become a dairy product sales manager after graduating.

William Huenink of Cedar Grove, plans to attend the University of Wisconsin-Madison to pursue a degree in biological systems engineering.

Kweku Korankye of Sheboygan, plans to study environmental engineering at the University of Wisconsin-Madison.

"As I pursue my career goal of becoming a dairy product sales manager, I'm excited about the impact I can have on Sheboygan County. By promoting dairy products, I can support local dairy farmers and agribusinesses."

-Campbell Booth



"As I look to the future, I desire to continue my education and one day have the opportunity to develop systems, practices and equipment to advance sustainability, production and profitability for farmers throughout the Badger State."

-William Huenink

"I plan to become an environmental engineer. I want to help make ecologically sustainable designs that positively impact our society."

-Kweku Korankye

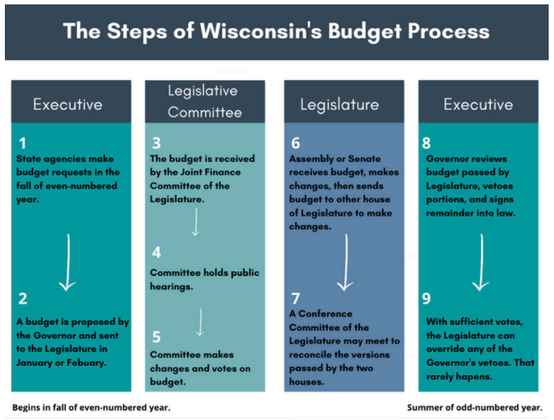
Reminders from DATCP

Dani Heisler, Producer-Led Watershed Protection Grant Manager, DATCP

As planning begins for our 2026 Producer-Led Watershed Protection Grant, please keep a few important dates in mind. We will release the grant's Request for Proposal (RFP) in early July, and the application deadline is September 12, 2026.

While the RFP remains largely unchanged, it does focus more attention to growth as a funding priority. Growth can be demonstrated in many different ways. Typically, we consider additional acres of practices and more members as traditional metrics, but we understand many groups have been so successful in their previous growth that there isn't much more to add. Other ways groups can demonstrate growth, would be to consider growing a more diverse membership, partnering with other organizations, such as lake groups or FFA, or growing your geographical footprint by adding more watersheds to the geography of the group. For more ideas or to discuss what fits well with the program, feel free to reach out to me at Dani.heisler@wisconsin.gov or 608-640-7270.

The award amount for 2026 is contingent on the current state budget process. The state budget for the 2025-2027 biennium continues to advance through the budget process. Governor Evers proposed increasing total funding for the PLWPG program to $1,250,000 annually; the Joint Finance Committee has maintained the proposed increased funding to date. We are currently in Step 5 of the budget process outlined below. The budget is typically completed in July, but the timeline can vary depending on negotiations.



Credit: tobwis.org/toolkits/policy-101-toolkit/

Sheboygan River Progressive Farmers amplifies efforts with Fund for Lake Michigan grant

The Sheboygan River Progressive Farmers has been awarded a grant from the Fund for Lake Michigan in recognition of their ongoing commitment to enhance and improve water quality in the Lake Michigan watershed. The funding supports initiatives to promote sustainable agricultural practices, reduce runoff and support water quality along the Lake Michigan shoreline and in its river systems.

SRPF plans to expand the work the group currently does with its cost-share program, which helps farmers adopt sustainable farming practices such as cover crops, no-till, reduced tillage and planting green. These practices enhance soil health and filtration while minimizing runoff into waterways. Expanding the program will increase farmer incentive payments and the group's geographical footprint.

Additionally, grant funding also includes website management to increase online traffic to the group's website, reaching a larger audience and promoting attendance for annual member meetings and outreach events.

The group looks forward to increasing the use of sustainable farming practices throughout its communities and making an even greater impact on water quality in eastern Wisconsin with the grant.

Sheboygan River Progressive Farmers spotlight regenerative farming at annual meeting

SRPF board members gather for annual meeting.

On February 14, the Sheboygan River Progressive Farmers gathered with fellow farmers, supporters and community members for their annual meeting to share ideas, discuss current research and hear from guest speaker Rick Clark, a regenerative farmer from Indiana.

Rick Clark is a fifth-generation farmer who uses regenerative farming practices, such as cover crops and no-till, and has over 5,000 acres of certified organic cropland. He shared his six principles of soil health and how he strives to balance his soils by thinking ahead and using strategic cover crop rotations for nutrient building.

"For our farm, yields don't drive our system," Clark said. "Soil health and human health are the drivers of our system."

Joe Ailts of Ailts Agronomy explained the Haney Test, which is used to assess soil health. He encouraged farmers to begin using these tests on some of their acres, noting that while the test provides a great deal of information, focusing on nitrogen rates and optimizing them is a good place to start.

Greg Olson from The Sand County Foundation shared an update about the Johnsonville Project, which involves local farmers. The analysis of last year's project results will conclude this winter.

"Farmers in the Johnsonville Project are continuing to reduce sediment loss and phosphorus run-off," Olson said.

Farmers for Sustainable Food sustainability project specialist Marti Viste provided an update on SRPF's 2024 Member Conservation Practice Survey. There were 39 members involved in the survey involving 22,909 acres of cropland, of which 9,552 acres had cover crops, 6,601 were no-till with cover crops and 4,132 were planted green.

The group's president, Brody Stapel of Double Dutch Dairy in Cedar Grove, shared his excitement for the year ahead, highlighting the group's potential for continued growth.

"2025 is looking like a page-turn year for our group, with a lot going on for us," Stapel said. "These regenerative ag practices are certainly not going away for the farming community and will continue to expand."

To close out the meeting, the group held board elections. Three board members were re-elected: Derek Sippel of Airy Point Dairy, secretary; Brian Huenink of Huenink's Seed and Dairy, treasurer; and Mark Breunig of A-OK Farms.

Other board members are Brody Stapel of Double Dutch Dairy, president; Mark Loehr of Loehr Dairy, vice president; Mike Mulder of Higher Ground Ranch; Ken Strack Jr. of Strack-View Farms; Chuck Born of Born Farm.

THE IMPACT

In 2024, through planting cover crops and using no-till or strip till, SRPF farmers:

Climate

Reduced CO_2 equivalents (greenhouse gas emissions) by **4,273 metric tons**. This equals the greenhouse gas emissions from **1,017 cars driven for a year.**

Soil health

Farm fields have reduced sediment loss by **32,368 tons**, equivalent to **3,237 dump trucks'** worth of soil.

Water quality

Phosphorus runoff was reduced by **43,949 pounds** of phosphorus, potentially preventing **22 million pounds** of algae growth in local water bodies.

Reductions are estimated using models. Actual reductions may be higher or lower.

W6431 State Road 67
Plymouth, WI 53073
srpfarmers.com

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