

*** American Farmland Trust * River Alliance of Wisconsin
* Sierra Club * Wisconsin's Environmental Decade *
WISPIRG * Wisconsin Wetlands Association ***

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**Conservation Groups, Elected Leaders Tour Clean Farm –
Release report calling for restoring conservation funds, strengthening
water standards**

Deforest, WI -- Wisconsin conservation groups today toured the Quamme farm to highlight their conservation practices - including buffer strips - that reduce water pollution, sprawl, flooding, and protect fish and wildlife habitat. They released a new report, "*Clean Water, Responsible Farming in WI*" which shows that farmers are waiting for help to protect and restore 285,000 acres of buffer strips, wetlands and other conservation measures in Wisconsin to clean up our water, and reduce sprawl. They also called on the DNR to pass effective measures to clean up polluted runoff from farm fields and city streets.

"Buffer strips are a great help to farmers and to cleaner water," said farmer Bert Quamme, Deforest farmer and Conservation Reserve Program Buffer participant. "I am not one of those farmers who plow fence line to fence line. If my land qualified, I'd re-enroll in the Conservation Reserve Program today."

The "Clean Water, Responsible Farming" report highlights the need for additional funding rather than eliminating farm conservation programs that protect clean water, reduce sprawl, and flooding. The backlog in Wisconsin farm programs includes Riparian Buffers, 71,462 acres; Grassed Waterways, 108,130 acres; Contoured Buffer Strips, 87,333 acres; Wetland Reserve Program, 8,000 acres, Conservation Reserve Program, one-fourth applications rejected; and the Conservation Reserve Enhancement Program, not yet approved by USDA. The proposed Bush budget eliminates the Farmland Protection, Forestry Incentives, and Wildlife Habitat Incentives Programs.

"This farm is an example of how good farming and good environmental practices can go together," said Ed Minihan, Director of Upper Midwest Field Office for American Farmland Trust. "These programs not only clean our water, they help protect family farmers in Dane County."

Dane County lost 5,300 acres of lands in farms in 1997, according to the Census of Agriculture, and statewide losses exceed more than 37,000 acres each year. USA Today listed Dane County as one of the most sprawl metro areas in America several weeks ago. New development is the worst polluter in Lake Mendota, accounting for more than 20% of the pollution, but only 0.3% of the land.

"Restoring and properly managing vegetative buffers along rivers, lakes and wetlands improves quality," said Dave Zaber, PhD, Water Quality Specialist with Wisconsin's Environmental Decade. "If we are

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looking for the most bang from our conservation dollars, restoring buffers is the way to go. We must ensure that proper funding is available for programs that utilize riparian buffers."

The State DNR will host a hearing in Madison next Wednesday on the Non-point Rules that will protect 20-35' buffers on all Wisconsin streams to reduce polluted runoff, which is responsible for 90% of the assessed pollution in WI streams, according to the DNR.

"The new rules addressing runoff pollution are a good way to protect Wisconsin's waterways and drinking water," said Kerry Schumann, WISPIRG Director. "The proposed clean water rules should not be weakened. In fact, they must be strengthened."

The groups called on the DNR to enact runoff rules that encourage conservation beyond the buffer strip, immediately implement nutrient management plans, and reduce pollution from new sprawl by 80%.

They also ask President Bush to support the Wetlands Reserve Program and other conservation programs his father put in the 1990 Farm Bill.

"The Wetlands Reserve Program has helped farmers restore more than 25,000 acres of wetlands and almost one million acres across the country," said Charlie Luthin, Executive Director of the Wisconsin Wetlands Association. "The Wetlands Reserve Program is good for the land, good for farmers, and good for fish and wildlife. It makes sense to pay farmers once to conserve the land rather than paying them often for crop losses from farming in former wetlands."

But progress on clean water is threatened by cuts in President Bush's proposed budget, which will cut more than \$1.5 billion or 9.2% from farm spending, including the whole WRP and WHIP programs.

"Streambank easement programs like this depend on leveraging money from federal programs, specifically CRP and others," said Caryl Terrell, legislative coordinator for the Wisconsin Sierra Club. "President Bush's plan to cut conservation funding hurts farmers here and could lead to worse water pollution here."

What you can do to protect clean water, family farms, and slow sprawl:

1. Call President Bush and tell him to restore spending for clean water conservation funding. Call the White House at 202-456-1414 and ask for the comment line.
2. Attend the hearing next Wednesday, March 14th, at the Fitchburg Community Center, 5520 Lacy Road, at 1 or 6 p.m. to stress your support for clean water.
3. Support state Senate Bill 37 to fill the wetlands loophole to protect Wisconsin's wetlands from development and drainage.

For more information on clean farming and the runoff public hearings, call 608-256-0565.

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