FY 26-27
Clean Water Fund

DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE

MINNESOTA AGRICULTURAL WATER QUALITY CERTIFICATION PROGRAM

$7 million for FY26-27

The Minnesota Agricultural Water Quality Certification Program (MAWQCP) is a first of its kind, voluntary program. It supports the implementation of conservation practices on a field by field, whole farm basis. Through its innovative and nationally recognized process of identifying and mitigating agricultural risks to water quality, the MAWQCP delivers on-farm conservation that helps protect and restore Minnesota's lakes, rivers, streams, and groundwater. The certification program partners with the United States Department of Agriculture, Minnesota's soil and water conservation districts, Minnesota state agencies, and private industry leaders to deliver and promote the program.

Farmers and landowners who treat all risks to water quality on their operation are certified and are deemed to be in compliance with any new water quality laws or rules for ten years. Certification gives farmers and the public greater certainty about regulatory standards and assures the public Minnesota's farmers are doing their part to protect water quality. Additionally, according to five years of data from the Minnesota Farm Business Management Database, MAWQCP-certified farms have had higher profits than non-certified farms every year since 2019. The MAWQCP keeps tens of millions of pounds of soil and nutrient runoff from entering Minnesota's waters annually and reduces greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions by over 54,000 CO2-equivalent metric tons per year. Over 1.1 million acres have been water quality certified in Minnesota.

NITRATE IN GROUNDWATER

$6.2 million for FY26-27

Nitrate-nitrogen (nitrate) is one of the contaminants of greatest concern for groundwater in Minnesota. In some vulnerable areas of the state a significant percentage of private wells have nitrate levels which exceed the drinking water health risk limit. The Minnesota Department of Agriculture (MDA) has developed the Nitrogen Fertilizer Management Plan and Groundwater Protection Rule to address nitrate from fertilizer in groundwater. Funding is for activities that evaluate potential sources of nitrate contamination and promote practices to reduce nitrate in groundwater.

The MDA works with counties, soil and water conservation districts, agri-businesses, University of Minnesota researchers, and individual farmers on a variety of projects to reduce nitrate in groundwater and drinking water. Activities include:

- Working with local farmers in vulnerable areas and Drinking Water Supply Management Areas around public wells to reduce nitrate losses to groundwater
- Regional efforts with University of Minnesota Extension and local governments to promote nitrogen fertilizer best management practices (BMPs), vegetative cover, precision nitrogen management, and other practices to reduce nitrate levels in vulnerable areas
- Groundwater monitoring in vulnerable areas to determine nitrate trends and the effectiveness of nitrate reduction efforts
- The refinement and use of computer modeling tools to quantify the potential benefits to groundwater quality for a wide range of agricultural practices
- Demonstration sites validating nitrogen fertilizer recommendations and water quality impacts under irrigated agriculture
- Nutrient management surveys to evaluate on-farm adoption of BMPs and other recommended practices
- Local farmers and agronomists on local advisory teams advise and consult with the MDA regarding appropriate response activities for the area and to support implementation of these activities.

IRRIGATION WATER QUALITY PROTECTION

$310,000 for FY26-27

Nitrate losses from the irrigation of nitrogen demanding crops (such as corn, potatoes, and edible beans) is a potential source of nitrate in groundwater, especially in areas with sandy soils. This funding supports an irrigation water quality specialist position through a contract with the University of Minnesota Extension. The water quality specialist develops guidance and provides education on irrigation and nitrogen BMPs for groundwater protection. Farmers use the increased education, training, and direct support information for conserving irrigation water and nitrogen or adopting new irrigation technology.

AgBMP LOAN PROGRAM

$4.0 million for FY26-27

The AgBMP Loan Program provides low interest loans to individuals for BMPs that restore or protect water quality. The goal of the AgBMP Loan Program is to implement recognized management practices with proven environmental benefits.

Loans are used to fund practices that prevent, reduce, or eliminate a nonpoint source water pollution problem in rural Minnesota, whether on a farm, a residence or business, an unsewered community, or a lakeside cabin. Funded projects typically include manure management, feedlot improvements, septic system upgrades, purchase of conservation tillage equipment, erosion control structures, and the repair or relocation of some wells. Several types of projects or practices funded through this program can also benefit soil health, greenhouse gas reduction, and carbon reduction methods.

The program is administered by local governments, has very low transaction costs, and repayments fund additional projects. Additional funding would allow for more practices that help reduce, eliminate, or prevent water pollution to be funded each year as the local demand for Ag BMP loans greatly exceeds available funding.

PESTICIDE MONITORING AND ASSESSMENT

$740,000 for FY26-27

The MDA has monitored the state's groundwater and surface water resources for agricultural chemicals for more than 30 years. The purpose of the MDA's monitoring activities is to determine the presence and concentration of pesticides in Minnesota's groundwater and surface water. The MDA's water quality data is used to provide detailed information about potential pesticides of concern and water quality trends, and to evaluate the need for and effectiveness of protective actions for groundwater and surface water in Minnesota.

These funds go to the MDA Laboratory and have resulted in an increase in capability and capacity. It has allowed the MDA to increase the number of detectable pesticides in water from 44 in 2009 to 186 in 2024, increase the sensitivity of detection of certain pesticides, and increase the overall number of samples that can be analyzed each year. The increased laboratory capacity has allowed the MDA to provide cooperative pesticide monitoring and assessment with other state agencies (Minnesota Department of Health and Minnesota Pollution Control Agency) and tribal partners on lakes, wetlands, and public water supply systems.

TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE AND ON-FARM DEMONSTRATIONS

$3.2 million for FY26-27

The MDA's technical assistance helps to ensure accurate scientific information is available and used to address water quality concerns in agricultural areas of Minnesota. This funding is used to evaluate conservation practices, share information about research and new technologies, and enhance outreach and education to the agricultural community and local government partners.

Technical assistance also fills an important need for field demonstration and validation of practices. The MDA uses on-farm, edge-of-field monitoring to assess sediment and nutrient loss at the field-scale and to evaluate the effectiveness of conservation practices.

The MDA works with many partners including universities, crop consultants, soil and water conservation districts, farmers, and other state agencies. Activities include:

- Discovery Farms Minnesota
- Root River Field to Stream Partnership
- Nutrient Management Initiative
- Red River Valley Drainage Water Management Project
- Providing support to the Impaired Waters Process
- Participate in and support the One Watershed One Plan

FOREVER GREEN

$5 million for FY26-27

The Forever Green Initiative (FGI) brings researchers together from multiple disciplines (plant breeding, agronomy, food science and economics) to develop new, high-value perennial and winter annual crops that preserve and enhance water quality, to support implementation of these new crops in targeted, critical areas of the landscape, and to build multi-sector relationships to develop new production systems for these crops. Funding will support the FGI in areas related to crop research, implementation and supply chain development, and partnerships.

Perennial crops provide continuous cover on the land, while winter annual cover crops grow between the time when annual crops are harvested in the fall and a new planting is established in the spring. This is the time when fields are bare and most vulnerable to erosion and nutrient loss. More vegetative cover throughout the year slows runoff and soil erosion and reduces nutrient losses providing a direct benefit to surface water and groundwater.

The MDA administers the distribution of funds and coordinates reporting on progress, results, and outcomes. Funding directly supports the University of Minnesota Forever Green Initiative. Additional information is available at: **www.forevergreen.umn.edu**.

RESEARCH INVENTORY DATABASE

$100,000 for FY26-27

The Minnesota Water Research Digital Library (MNWRL) is a user-friendly, searchable inventory of water research relevant to Minnesota. It includes both peer reviewed articles as well as white papers and reports. The library provides one-stop access to all types of water research.

The MNWRL is available online and includes over 3,500 diverse research articles and scientific reports. Clean Water funds are used to enhance and manage the database in partnership with other agencies. Access MNWRL at: **www.mn.gov/wrl**.

SOIL HEALTH FINANCIAL ASSISTANCE PROGRAM

$3.5 million for FY26-27

The Soil Health Financial Assistance Program (SHFAP) grant provides cost-share for the purchase and retrofit of soil health equipment. The program aims to close a key gap in soil health practice implementation: access to the equipment necessary to implement soil health practices. The SHFAP is one of the first public funding opportunities for equipment purchases. The SHFAP provides up to 50% cost-share for the purchase of new or used soil health equipment. The maximum award is $45,000. Individuals, producer groups, and local government units are all eligible to apply, although equipment must be used on Minnesota farmland. Examples of eligible equipment include no-till drills, parts to retrofit planters for no-till planting, strip tillage equipment, cover crop seeding equipment, and more. Since the pilot year in 2023, the program has helped over 90 producers purchase soil health equipment that is used to implement soil health practices on over 170,000 acres across Minnesota annually.

PESTICIDE TESTING OF PRIVATE WELLS

$1 million for FY26-27

The primary goal of the Private Well Pesticide Sampling (PWPS) Project is to provide information to homeowners and the public related to the presence of pesticides in private drinking water wells located in geologically vulnerable areas with row crop agriculture. Over the last eight years, the PWPS project has collected over 7,700 pesticide samples from individual private drinking water wells from counties across the state. Ongoing sampling will focus on the herbicides cyanazine and atrazine, the fungicide chlorothalonil, and their degradates, as well as nitrate in vulnerable aquifers. Previous monitoring data has indicated these agricultural chemicals and nitrate represent the greatest risk to homeowners with private drinking water wells in certain settings of the state.

EXPANSION OF MN AG WEATHER NETWORK

$2.5 million for FY26-27

This funding will be used to further expand the existing state weather station and soil monitoring network to provide accurate local weather data across the farming areas of Minnesota.

Accurate and timely weather data will help optimize the timing of irrigation, fertilizer and pesticide applications, and other inputs and help reduce the risk from adopting new environmentally friendly practices to promote soil health and vegetative cover. This will result in improved surface water and groundwater quality and provide a robust soil and weather data set to evaluate changes in Minnesota's long-term climate.

The stations will also provide useful local information in rural areas of the state with limited current weather and soil monitoring. This assists local, state, and federal agencies with duties including weather forecasting, drought monitoring, and coordinating emergency and flood response.

View the existing Minnesota Ag Weather Network at:
www.mda.state.mn.us/MAWN

FOR MORE INFORMATION CONTACT

Michelle Medina, Director of Government Relations
Michelle.Medina@state.mn.us
651-201-6480

Margaret Wagner, Fertilizer Nonpoint Section Manager
Pesticide and Fertilizer Management Division
Margaret.Wagner@state.mn.us
651-201-6488