

Forward Farmer

The official newsletter of Yahara Pride Farms

Volume 6, Issue 1



Martye Griffin, director of ecosystems at Madison Metropolitan Sewerage District, gave an update on behalf of Yahara WINS at the recent YPF Watershed Conference. Photo by Nicole Hoffman for YPF

Community partnership strives for clean water

By Mary Hookham for Yahara Pride Farms

The Yahara Watershed Improvement Network, known as Yahara WINS, is an initiative to achieve clean water goals for the Yahara watershed. In its third year of full implementation, community partners are working together to push forward with their clean water goals.

“Improving water quality is the key goal; sustainable agriculture is another,” said Yahara WINS Executive Committee President Martye Griffin. “This project has brought money and research to the area to help solve some of these complex challenges. Finding out how we can work together is amazing – and this will create additional ripple effects of value.”

At this year’s Yahara Pride Farms annual Watershed Conference, held in DeForest, Wis., Griffin reiterated the group’s goal of reducing phosphorus runoff when he mentioned Dane County’s Suck the Muck program, a similar effort aimed at

improving water quality while causing significant improvement in the area’s habitat and biology along waterways.

Yahara WINS is made up of about 30 community partners who are working on a strategy called adaptive management in which all sources of phosphorus in a watershed work together to reduce runoff. This effort began in 2012 as a pilot project, and, in 2017, became a full-scale project, Griffin said.

The 20-year adaptive management project will meet permit requirements and regional Clean Water Act goals identified through the Rock River Total Maximum Daily Load, he said. In order to accomplish these goals, the group builds partnerships in the community, conducts outreach, combines resources to fund phosphorus-reducing practices in the watershed, analyzes stream samples and works with the Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources to

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UPCOMING EVENTS:

June 8

Dane County
Breakfast on the Farm
Klondike Farms, Brooklyn

August

YPF Twilight meetings

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The conference audience listens intently. Photo by Nicole Hoffman for YPF

address regulatory needs for the project. Griffin said as the project moves forward, progress each year will vary due to a changing combination of new practices and existing practices that continue to hold back phosphorus. Water quality data acquired through monitoring and volunteer sampling activities may be affected by changing precipitation patterns and runoff intensity, he said. "Over time, however, the Yahara

WINS project is designed to produce real results," Griffin said.

According to the annual reports from 2016 and 2017, phosphorus reductions in 2016 exceeded the target of 15,000 pounds for the year. The group saved 29,000 pounds of phosphorus from entering the watershed. In 2017, the group saved just over 40,000 pounds from going into the watershed.

The group continues to obtain more partnerships in the community, and implement new programs, practices and technology. Along with these tasks come challenges such as the variables of climate change, varying precipitation patterns and runoff intensity.

"Also - 20 years is a long time," Griffin said. "Climate change, land use changes and a growing population may all affect runoff quantities and pollutant concentrations. Our goal is to improve

in-stream water quality, which has many compounding variables."

Key Dane County accomplishments in 2017 include a total reduction of 18,015 pounds of phosphorus from conservation practices implemented in previous years that are still in place as well as new practices; phosphorus-reducing practices and environmental compliance from 268 landowners and others in the Yahara watershed; and the implementation and tracking of 450 conservation practices and systems that reduce phosphorus delivery to nearby surface waters.

"We really helped implement successful, on-the-ground practices," Griffin said. "If we can find market-based solutions, protect the environment and prevent phosphorus runoff, we have a win-win situation."

2017 By the numbers

35
FARMS CERTIFIED
13,150
ACRES OF CONSERVATION
18,900 lbs
PREDICTED PHOSPHORUS
REDUCTION

9,281 lbs
PREDICTED PHOSPHORUS
REDUCTION
from COVER CROPS alone
THAT'S
7,500 ADDITIONAL lbs
IN 2017, COMPARED TO 2016

Yahara Pride Farms compiles data annually on the impact of the conservation practices implemented by farmers. The 2019 annual report featuring 2018 data will be available this summer. Since 2012, farmers in YPF programs have documented nearly 46,000 pounds of phosphorus that have remained on farm fields and out of rivers and streams by embracing farming practices promoted by the group.

YPF Announcements



Farm Signs

To get a Yahara Pride Farms sign after completing the certification program, please contact us at (608) 824-3250 or email info@yaharapridefarms.org.

Thank you YPF partners!

Alliant Energy
Aqua Innovations
Clean Lakes Alliance
Compeer Financial
Dane County
Dairy Business Association
Dairy Farmers of Wisconsin
Dupont
Edge Dairy Farmer Cooperative
Endres Insurance Agency, Inc.
Fund for Lake Michigan
Grande Cheese

The Growmark Foundation
Madison Community Foundation
Monona Bank
MSA Professional Services
National Fish and Wildlife Foundation
The Nature Conservancy
SARE
Wisconsin Department of Agriculture,
Trade and Consumer Protection
Vita Plus
Yahara WINs

YPF at Breakfast on the Farm - June 8

The “Farmers for Water Quality” tent will again be at Dane County Breakfast on the Farm! We will feature a “build your own plant” activity and booths from several partner groups. Stop by and see us - better yet, **contact us to volunteer** for a 2-hour shift in the tent. (608) 577-4345 or communications@yaharapridefarms.org.



DETAILS:

Saturday, June 8, 7 – 11:30 am
Klondike Farms, 4562 Highway 92
Brooklyn, Wis. 53521

Save the Date! YPF Twilight Meetings - August

Plans are underway for another series of Twilight meetings this coming August. These evening gatherings include a meal, tour and conversation with area farmers about the important conservation happening in the watershed. Watch your email, social media and mail for more details and the full agenda.

Registration opens in July. These events are FREE thanks to support from our partners above. **Dates and location information coming soon!**

Leadership Message

By Jeff Endres, YPF chairman



After reflecting on the recent March watershed conference, I can't help but congratulate the farmers for keeping conservation top of mind through these difficult economic times. We had a great turnout at the meeting, and many farmers expressed interest in participating in future programs.

Since 2012, we have worked hard to create programs that balance environmental stewardship with farm sustainability and profitability. We have created a mechanism to recognize conservation on the farm, reward farmers for good stewardship, track collective progress and demonstrate improvement. We have engaged the public, and will continue to earn the trust of farmers and citizens in our watershed. Finally, YPF is a recognizable brand.

We have made progress towards our goals. But just like farms must continuously improve, so should our organization. It's time for new leaders to get involved with our efforts. Serving on the board is one way, and there are other ways too. Participate in our programs, host an event on your farm, allow us to interview you for our social media channels. The list goes on. I am very focused on the sustainability of YPF. Without new ideas from new people, our momentum is limited.

As we all do our best to streamline costs and improve efficiencies, I encourage you to continue to find ways that you can implement conservation practices on your farm. Our cost-share program is one way to reduce your financial risk. We also have several pieces of equipment for rent that allow farmers to try conservation techniques like low-disturbance manure injection or strip till without having to own or lease it yourself.

Sincerely, *Jeff*

YPF shares hope for the future

By YPF communications // Photos by Nicole Hoffman for YPF



Farmers, community members and agribusiness professionals gathered together at YPF's Annual Watershed Conference.

Hope for the future brought more than 130 farmers, community members and agribusiness professionals together recently to discuss results from the latest research conducted on participating farms and how urban and rural citizens are impacting the Yahara watershed.

Future goals and aspirations formed the core of the Yahara Pride Farms Watershed-wide Conference on March 7 in DeForest. Yahara Pride Farms (YPF) is a farmer-led non-profit organization working to improve soil and water quality. The group strives to help advance new ideas and technology that balance water quality improvement with farm sustainability and profitability.

"We're going to look into the future today," said Bob Uphoff, a hog farmer from Madison and vice-chairman of Yahara Pride Farms. "Why? We're farmers. We have to. We put that seed in the ground and hope we harvest a crop. We breed that cow or that sow and we hope we get something back."

Uphoff expressed pride for farmers statewide who are working to improve water quality and the environment despite having another tough financial and weather year on their farms. He acknowledged the necessity of YPF being able to adapt to various economic

climates in order to best work with participating farmers.

"As I look at the farmers, not only here in the Yahara watershed, but all the farmers that are involved in the other watershed projects across the state of Wisconsin, I look at those folks as the ones who are really the positive people," Uphoff said. "They're the ones that are trying to get things done; they're taking a look at the problems within their unique area and they're trying to address them, and that, folks, is why we started Yahara Pride in 2012."

Chris Lenzendorf, former president of AQUA Innovations, a Wisconsin-based manufacturer of nutrient concentration systems, provided a brief overview of how his company handles manure. AQUA Innovation's primary goals include separating manure using heat instead of chemicals, maintaining minimum touch time for dairy operators and remaining economically viable. Another goal is to keep their equipment designs scalable so that a wide variety of farm sizes can use the technology.

Dennis Frame, resource manager for YPF and owner of Timber Ridge Consulting, presented several farming system scenarios where a variety of conservation practices are being

implemented. Frame shared insight into the expected nutrient reductions that farmers can expect with each scenario. He also encouraged farmers to minimize soil loss, incorporate nutrients into the soil, assess good timing on planting and harvesting, and use proper seeding rates and placement.

"We'd like farmers to be innovative and creative and to lead themselves," Frame said.

Madison Metropolitan Sewerage District Director of Ecosystem Services Martye Griffin and Dane County Executive Joe Parisi gave short partner updates during lunch.

"If we can find market-based solutions, protect the environment and prevent phosphorus runoff, we have a win-win situation," Griffin said.

Yahara Pride Farms Conservation Planner Pat Murphy shared his observations and the benefits of winter composting. He said site selection is critical for easy access so farmers don't forget to turn the stack regularly, a critical best management practice when composting.

Frame worked with Jeff Endres, chairman of Yahara Pride Farms, to present information on current and upcoming water quality protection programs for YPF. Endres said 75 percent of Wisconsin's growth is in Dane County, and he hopes YPF will continue to search for environmental stewardship solutions that balance the area's rich agriculture heritage with an ever-growing population.

"We have to interact with nature," he said. "We really only have one water."



Bob Uphoff served as the emcee for the conference.

Technology can be transformative

By Martin Griffin, Madison Metropolitan Sewerage District



The streams, rivers and lakes of the Yahara Watershed flow around farm fields, run through urban areas and provide recreational opportunities for

everyone.

The Yahara Watershed Improvement Network recognizes that we all play a role in keeping these waters clean. The Yahara WINS partnership uses a state-approved adaptive management plan to bring urban, agricultural and other community partners together to reduce all sources of phosphorus in the Yahara River watershed over the next 20 years.

A four-year pilot project in one area of the watershed completed in 2016 proved that this holistic watershed approach to addressing water quality could work. In 2019, as the Yahara WINS partnership begins its third full year of implementation across the watershed, there is much to celebrate.

Hundreds of innovative projects and proven technologies including low disturbance manure injection, aerial seeding of cover crops, strip tillage

and urban leaf management have been implemented by Yahara WINS partners or funded through Yahara WINS grants. These projects are preventing some 40,000 pounds of phosphorus from reaching area surface waters each year – a total that represents more than 40 percent of the approved total annual goal.

None of this could have been accomplished without strong partnerships, especially with the agricultural communities. We thank Yahara Pride Farms; Dane, Columbia and Rock Counties, Clean Lakes Alliance and others, for helping fund and implement successful practices on the ground intended to keep nutrients and soil in the fields and out of our waterways.

Beyond the actual phosphorus reductions achieved to date, the early results have taught us that the more we collaborate, the more success we will have into the future.

As we travel on this 20-year journey, we aim to increase collaboration through new alliances that expand our potential to discover solutions that work for the environment and today's farm economy.

Identifying affordable, scalable technology opens up opportunities to

achieve benefits for farms of all sizes. Meanwhile, lessons learned from success on the farm may inspire action among urban communities.

A recent example of the benefits of collaboration involves Dane County's investment in a nutrient concentration system, which works in concert with a regional digester to separate phosphorus from other nutrient streams. The system facilitates more strategic application of nutrients and also produces clean water for return to nature. While the capital investment needed for the system would make it impractical for most individual farms, the partnership between the county and the agricultural community is creating benefits for everyone in the watershed.

Yahara WINS can help make technology affordable while its partners can provide expertise to accelerate and scale technology to keep up with the challenges we face. Let us know if you'd like to become involved and we welcome questions about how Yahara WINS can support innovation on your farm or in your municipality. 📧

Email Martye Griffin at marting@madsewer.org.

Applications for Dane County 'continuous cover' program due May 31

By Dane County Land & Water Resources Department

The Continuous Cover Program provides \$750,000 of funding to help farmers and landowners maintain a continuous plant cover on agricultural lands. Maintaining continuous cover helps to increase water infiltration, reduce soil erosion, improve water quality, enhance wildlife habitat practices and diversify production practices.

This program will allow farmers and landowners to convert land that is currently in an annual crop into a perennial cool-season grass mix, native prairie mix, or grazing mix. The cover must be maintained through mowing, burning and reseeding during the 15-

year contract period. Lands that are currently planted in perennial cover may also be eligible for this program to help landowners keep this cover in place. This program also allows for harvesting and grazing of the cover, providing an added economic and usage benefit for farmers. Farmers and landowners interested in this program will work with Land & Water Resources Department staff to determine the best strategy for their unique farm operation.

For more information call (608) 224-3730 or email landcon@countyofdane.com. You can also Google "Dane County Continuous Cover program". 📧



Payment information

- **Upfront payment of \$1,650 - \$2,500 / acre.**
- Est. payment based on cover (**\$150/acre for cool season, \$250/acre for native cover**).
- Payment based on annual rental rate of \$100-\$150/acre (with \$25/year for maintenance).

YPF represented at ag committee hearing

By Maria Woldt, Dairy Business Association for YPF // Photos by Dairy Business Association



Jeff Endres testified at a joint ag committee hearing on April 23.

As an organization, Yahara Pride Farms (YPF) has four main goals:

1. **Create a mechanism to recognize farmer-led environmental sustainability, reward farmers for good stewardship, track collective progress in conservation and demonstrate watershed advancement.**
2. **Inform farmers of new water quality rules, laws and issues.**
3. **Earn the trust and respect of farmers, private citizens and government through engaging them in our projects and educational programs that demonstrate our commitment to doing our fair share.**
4. **Promote the Yahara Pride brand among both urban and rural communities.**

Since the beginning, YPF has focused on doing the work of conservation, measuring results and amplifying the data to the greater Yahara Watershed community. The third goal – “Earn the

trust and respect of farmers, private citizens and government through engaging them in our projects...” can be realized in a variety of ways.

One way to engage government and private citizens is by participating in opportunities to inform lawmakers through public committee hearings. While it can be daunting to speak in this setting, this valuable informational testimony allows lawmakers to gain input from the very people their decisions impact.

Jeff Endres, YPF chairman, testified at an Ag Committee hearing on April 23 in Madison.

The hearing was joint between the Assembly Committee on Agriculture and the Senate Committee on Agriculture, Revenue and Financial Institutions. The topic, broadly, was about the dairy crisis and other issues. The hearing was public, but the committee heard from invited guests only.

Jeff, along with fellow farmer-leader Jim Winn, from the Lafayette Ag Stewardship Alliance in Southwest Wisconsin, was invited to speak about the farmer-led conservation movement that has gained momentum in Wisconsin.

This momentum, is due in part, to the Producer-led Watershed Protection Grant Program at the Wisconsin Department of Agriculture, Trade and Consumer Protection. This program currently offers \$750,000 per year in the form of grants to farmer-led groups across the state.

The rise in popularity of the farmer-led conservation movement is also tied directly to YPF. Founded in 2012, YPF was one of the first groups of its kind in the state, and has served as a model for engaging farmers and community partners.

During the hearing, Jeff spoke about the larger idea of farmers needing the space to innovate for continuous improvement.

“Through many of our pilot projects with farmers in the Yahara Watershed, we have been able to find creative solutions to our challenges,” Jeff said “In some instances, our findings have been informative to regulatory agencies, too. And our work is all voluntary with the farmers.”

The mission of YPF is to help advance new ideas and technology that balance water quality improvement with farm sustainability and profitability.

An important key to advancing these new ideas is by educating lawmakers about what the group is doing currently, the resulting data and where the group would like to go in the future.

To watch Jeff and Jim’s testimony from the hearing, go to wiseye.org and search Joint Committee on Agriculture, Revenue and Financial Institutions.



Rep. Gary Tauchen (R-Bonduel) chairs the Assembly Ag Committee. He is also a dairy farmer.

Dane County and YPF working in partnership

By Joe Parisi, Dane County Executive

Thank you Yahara Pride Farms for your leadership in implementing groundbreaking programs to improve soil and water quality. Dane County farms are our best partners in our community's lake clean-up and farmland preservation efforts.

Because of your continued efforts as a true partner, we are making real progress. As stewards of over 500,000 acres, or 66 percent of the county's land, YPF's state-of-the-art conservation practices such as cover crops, low-disturbance manure injection and composting are a model for farms throughout the state.

Agriculture works hard for Dane County 365 days a year and provides over 17,000 jobs and \$3.4 billion in economic activity. You contribute \$1.3 billion to the county's total income and pay over \$80 million in taxes, not including property taxes supporting our local schools.

As one of the top 25 agricultural producing counties in the entire nation, our farms and the thousands of jobs they create are key to maintaining our quality of life.

I appreciate all your hard work under some very difficult circumstances. If poor milk and grain prices weren't bad enough, the floods damaging your crops this past summer were a gut punch you did not deserve, but you endured nonetheless.

While well-managed farmland is good for our local economy, let's not forget that farmland also helps control flooding. As our cities and villages continue to grow and create more and more acres of impervious surfaces, your successful efforts to preserve farmland are key to adapting to ever increasing rains and flooding in our communities.

But not everyone held on—as of this past January, Dane County has 59 fewer dairy herds than we did 5 years ago, and we lost 18 in 2018. Thank you for your continued work and partnership in these difficult times.

While challenges continue, there are



Last July, Dane County announced plans to jointly fund low-disturbance manure injection equipment for farmers in the Yahara Watershed working with YPF.

Photo from Dane County

good reasons for hope as well.

Last fall, Dane County completed the first phase of our innovative multi-year effort to rid waterways that flow into our lakes of decades' old muck. "Suck the Muck" removed 11,000 tons of century old, phosphorus soaked sediment from the bottom of a nearly 3-mile stretch of Dorn Creek between Waunakee and Middleton. It contained 75,000 pounds of phosphorus, a major contributor to algae growth in area lakes. Left untouched, this sludge would have continued seeping algae growing phosphorus into our lakes on a daily basis.

"Suck the Muck" is a 4-year, \$12 million initiative, I introduced as part of my 2017 County budget to clean up 33 total miles of streams that feed into the lakes. The sediment found in these streams is estimated to be up to 125 years old and contains 870,000 pounds of phosphorus, making it a greater contributor to the challenges faced by area lakes than originally thought. Without addressing the build-up, it would take another 66

years to achieve our goals.

In addition, working with three farms participating in the Gundersen Health-owned Middleton digester, construction began on a nutrient concentration system this past winter. The county's purchase of this \$1.6 million manure treatment system from Aqua Innovations will begin operating this summer.

This game-changing manure treatment filtration technology reduces the volume of manure in half while creating clean potable water. Clean water manure treatment systems deliver cost-saving technology to our farms and offer the opportunity to better manage volumes of nutrients.

YPF's commitment and leadership for the past eight years as our partner in our lakes cleanup work has resulted in real progress. I look forward to continuing our partnership and working together to achieve results. 🙌

Email Joe Parisi at parisi@countyofdane.com



Yahara Pride Farms
229 Douglas Dr.
Brooklyn, WI 53521

yaharapridefarms.org

Rent the YPF tractor, manure tanker and toolbar!

Surface applications of manure can increase nitrogen and phosphorus runoff to rivers and streams. Injection places manure below the surface where it doesn't interact with runoff water during storms. However, on steep slopes, injection of manure can erode soil.

Low-disturbance manure injection (LDMI) is a farming system that incorporates manure into the soil with minimal soil disturbance. This equipment also works well with no-till farming systems and allows farmers to experiment with new methods of preserving nitrogen, phosphorus and potassium to save on fertilizer costs.

In addition to providing cost-share to farmers who implement LDMI on their farms, YPF has a Case IH MX 240 CVT tractor, 5,300 gallon Houle manure

tanker and Bazooka toolbar available for rent. The rental fee is \$500/day for a short haul or \$600/day for a long haul. Contact Pat Murphy at murphpa58@gmail.com or (608) 772-2602



Thanks to Dane County, Yahara WINs, the Clean Lakes Alliance for the tanker and toolbar and Farmers Implement for supplying the tractor.

Dates to Remember:

- **May 31 - Dane County Continuous cover applications due (see p.5)**
- **June 8 - Dane County Breakfast on the farm**
- **July 23-25 - Farm Technology Days, Jefferson, Wis.**
- **August (date to be announced) - YPF Twilight Meetings**

More info at
yaharapridefarms.org