

Monday, March 25, 2024

Chair Hawj and committee members,

The undersigned organizations support **SF 3527** and ask for your votes to advance this legislation, which creates a grant program to enhance groundwater protection and reduce greenhouse gasses associated with agriculture in vulnerable groundwater areas.

This legislation is a proactive step to address nitrate groundwater contamination and fish kills in southeastern Minnesota. The grant program, administered by the Board of Water and Soil Resources (BWSR), would provide cost share assistance for manure management and storage facilities for feedlots in vulnerable groundwater areas with less than 1,000 animal units. Feedlots with more than 1,000 animal units are already required to have nine months of manure storage as a condition of their permits. However, the majority of the more than 2,600 feedlots in southeastern Minnesota fall below this size threshold. This grant program would help smaller and midsize operations with the up-front capital costs to build the manure storage infrastructure they need in order to implement state recommendations on when and in what quantity to apply manure to cropland.

This bill directly responds to the need for increased manure storage capacity in the karst region, which was a priority recommendation of the Minnesota Pollution Control Agency in the January 2024 fish kill prevention report. Importantly, this grant program prioritizes feedlots that commit to follow the manure land application requirements that apply to larger permitted feedlots in Minnesota. Unlike other current programs that provide cost share for manure management, this ties access to financial resources to real changes in land application practices that address the risks of groundwater contamination and surface runoff.

Other eligible funded activities include projects that limit the agricultural use of vulnerable land, such as karst feature buffers and conservation easements. These practices are critical because they limit the land application of manure and fertilizer near features like sinkholes that are direct conduits to groundwater, or near springs that feed the prized trout streams of southeastern Minnesota.

The state funds made available through this bill could be leveraged to apply for a federal match through the Regional Conservation Partnership Program (RCPP), which would further support dry manure storage practices like compost bedded pack barns that qualify as Climate-Smart Practices under the Inflation Reduction Act.

The signatory organizations thank you, Chair Hawj, for hearing this important bill, and ask for the support of this committee to advance SF 3527.

Sincerely,

Minnesota Center for Environmental Advocacy
Alliance for Sustainability
Land Stewardship Project

Minnesota Trout Unlimited
Minnesota Well Owners Organization

