



Farmers for the Upper Sugar River



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Farmers for the Upper Sugar River

- For farmers, by farmers
- Mutually beneficial solutions for the environment and farmers
- **Mission:** “Ensuring the future of agriculture by being responsible stewards of the lands and water quality in the Upper Sugar River Watershed”
- Assistance from Chelsea Ziegler (Dane County), Michelle Scarpace (UW-Extension) and Eric Birschbach (Ag Site Crop Consulting LLC)
- Upper Sugar River’s role: Fiscal sponsor. Provide admin support, organize events, write grants, help implement the farmers’ goals, manage funds

FARMERS FOR THE UPPER SUGAR RIVER STATS



47 total farmers in our group



36 farms represented by members



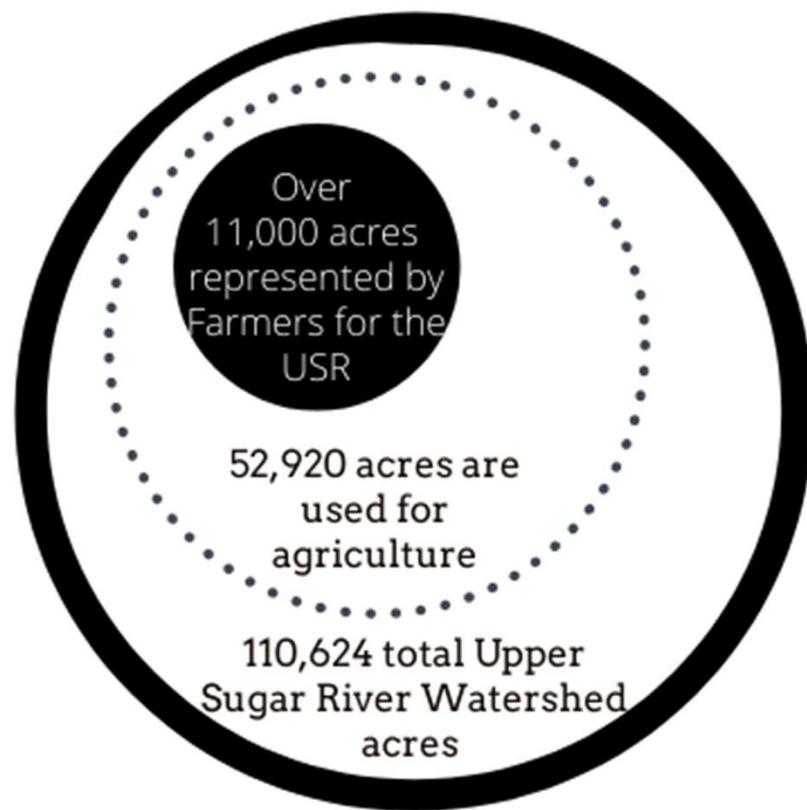
They own 1,142 steers & 2,976 milk cows



Since 2016, FUSR has raised \$130,000 to fund cost-share programs for members, host field days, and increase education



In 2019, 13 farmers received money as part of the FUSR cost-share program totaling \$37,000



Farmers for the USR Timeline

- **March-October 2015:** Found a watershed farmer, Brian Brown, who was a known supporter of protecting water resources. Held numerous meetings over beer talking about challenges for both sides and how to best engage farmers
- **November 2015-January 2016:** Identified ~7 farmers in the watershed who were relatively like-minded and potentially interested in creating a coalition
- **February 2016:** Held a meeting with interested farmers about creating a coalition
- **April 2016:** Submitted an application to DATCP's "Producer-Led Watershed Protection Grant"



Farmers for the USR Timeline

- **May-June 2016:** Brainstormed goals, became familiar with each other
- **July-August 2016:** Developed a mission, finalized goals, created a name, discussed cover crop strategies, enrolled farmers in cover crop pilots
- **September-October 2016:** Created farmer mailing list, produced a letter, planned for a “Lunch & Learn”
- **November 2016:** Host a “Lunch & Learn” to introduce the group to farmers and recruit more into the group



Field Day, April 2019: Soil pit and cover crop comparison at Brian Brown's Sunburst Dairy



Field day, August 2019: Rainfall simulator, soil impaction lesson, and no-till planting demo at Donald Park in Mt. Vernon



Annual Meeting, February 2020
33 total attendees, including 27 FUSR farmers
Deer Creek Sports & Conservation Club, Mt. Vernon



Educational monthly planning meetings Outgrowing USRWA's office space!

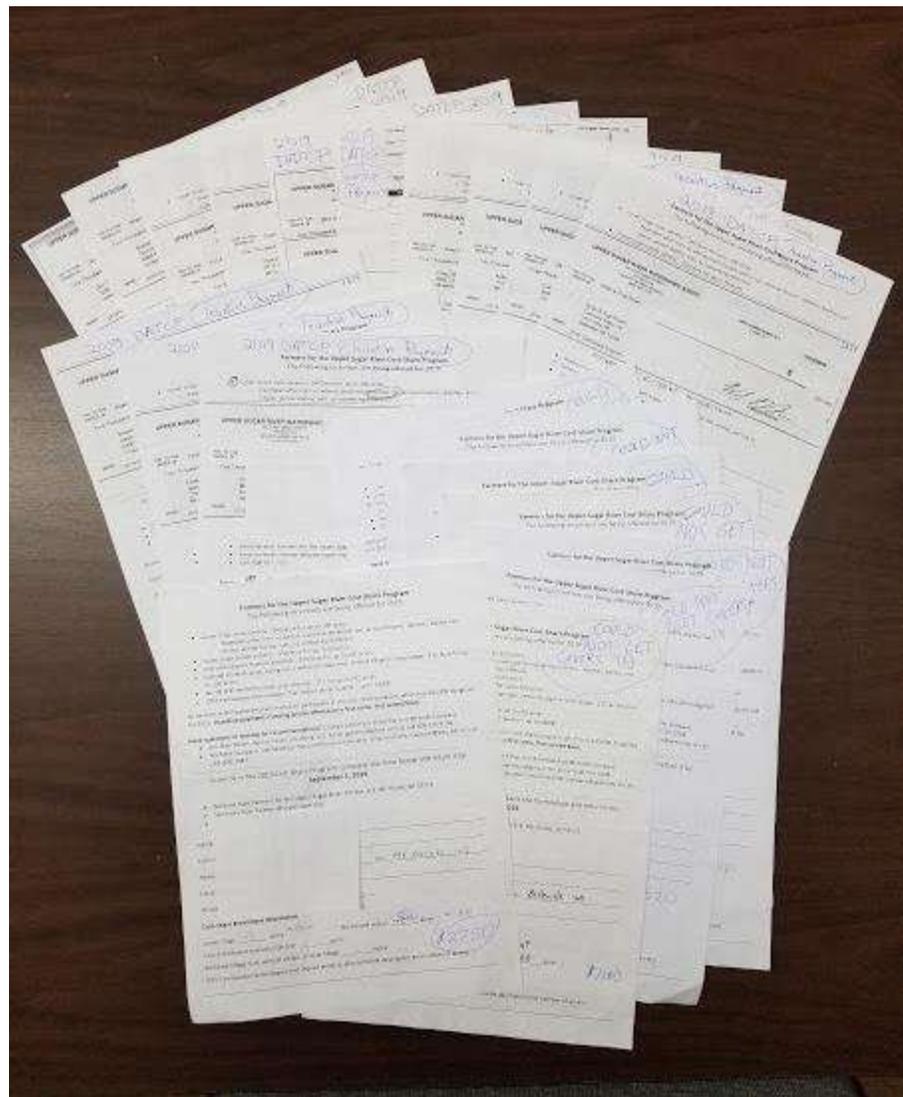


Phosphorus monitoring for Baseline Data Adding Nitrogen monitoring in 2020



Cost-share Program

- Offer funding for farmers to try new conservation practices, like no-till planting or cover crops
- 2018: 10 applicants, 5 first-timers. \$15,075 distributed.
- **2019: 21 applicants, 13 first-timers. \$36,900 distributed.**
- Conditions in 2018 & 2019 made cover crop planting difficult



Keys to Getting Started

- Find your farmer and a translator
 - Farmer: well respected, willing to stick their neck out for you
 - Translator: able to graciously answer questions from non-farmers, intimately understand challenges from the water quality side and agricultural side
- Most important: Always keep the group farmer led
- Allow farmers to decide who is in the room
 - Be protective of having high percentages of farmers at events and meetings
- Be aware that your group may not be best equipped to assist a farmer-led coalition *today*
- Patience

Keys to Maintaining Success

- Most important: Always keep the group farmer led
- Help farmers be as visible as possible at all events
- Use small group meetings to reset when needed
- Understand the power of gossip
- Stay fresh
 - What's next for the group?
 - Provide as many “yes” opportunities as possible
- Go at the speed of trust

What FUSR Could Do Better

- Create a better mechanism for farmers to attract other farmers to the group
- More phone calls and texts
- More personal touch
- Chart progress and success from the beginning

Contact Info

Brian Brown, Chair

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Upper Sugar River**
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