



# 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



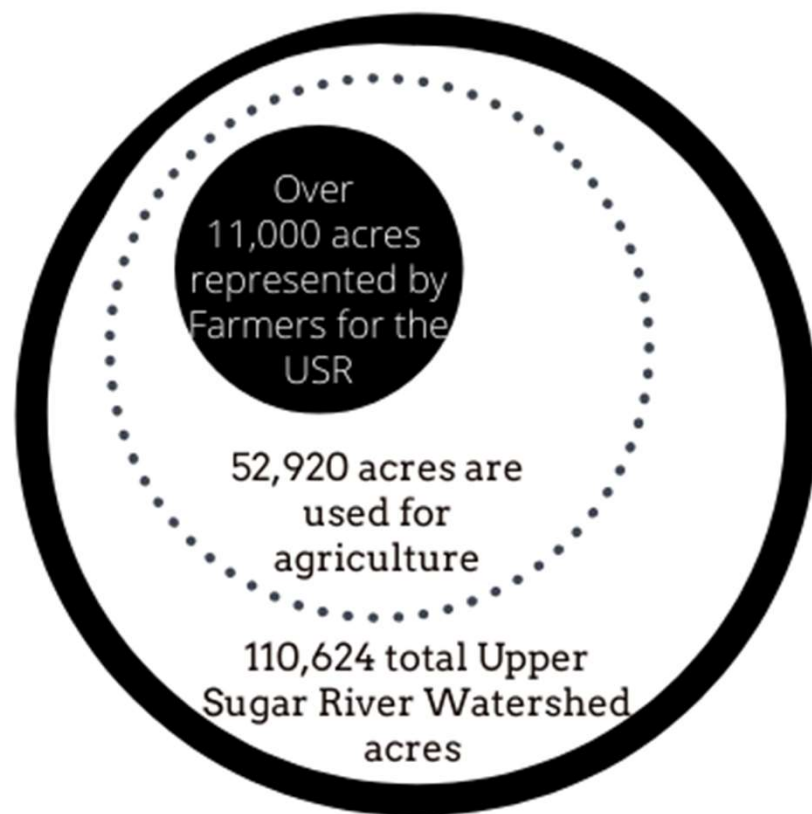
They own  
1,142 steers &  
2,976 milk cows



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!

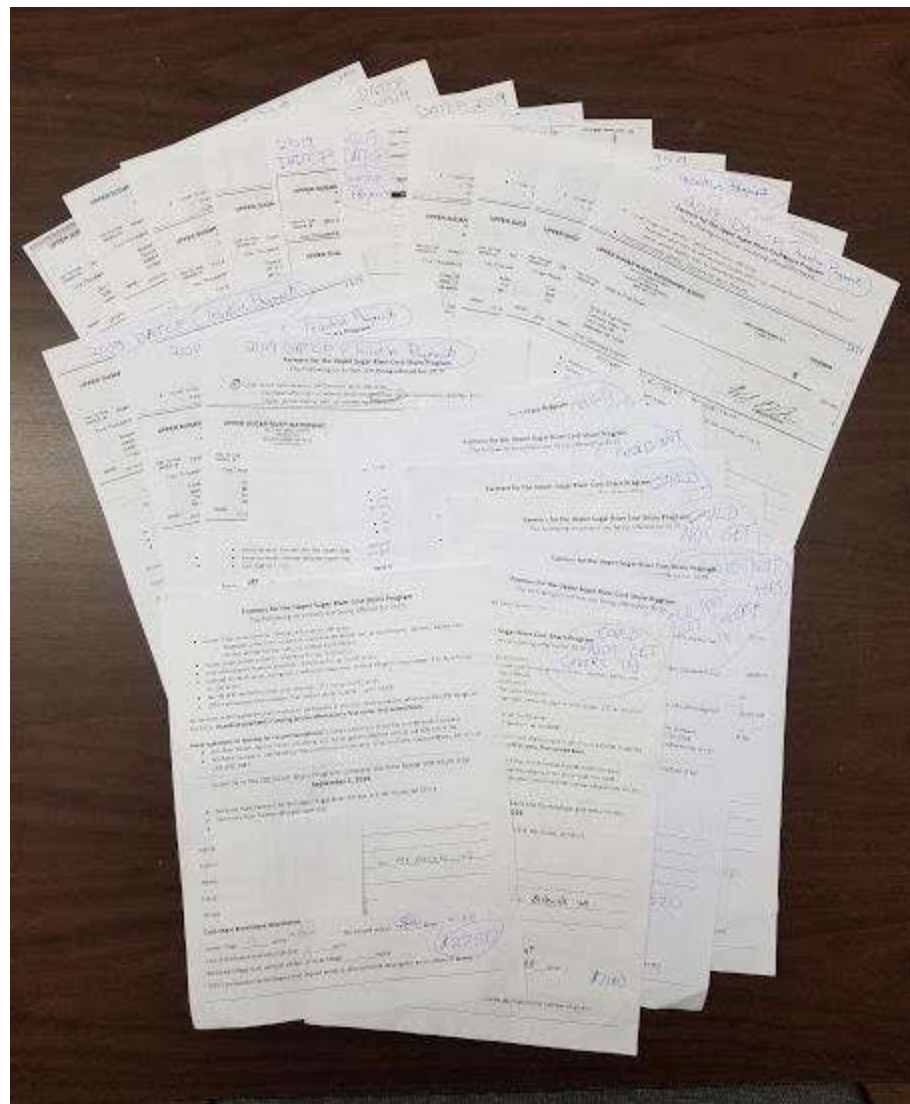


# Phosphorus monitoring for Baseline Data Adding Nitrogen monitoring in 2020



# 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**

**Farmers for the  
Upper Sugar River**  
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