Local farmers plant new ideas for water quality

Those who live on Spring Lake and Upper Prior Lake are familiar with cloudy, green lake water and algae-ridden shorelines that periodically occur in their backyards. Spring and Upper Prior Lakes were identified on Minnesota's list of impaired waters due to an overabundance of nutrients, particularly phosphorus, entering the lakes and causing a boom in algae growth. The goal of the Prior Lake-Spring Lake Watershed District (PLSLWD) is to reduce nutrient loading from all sources to levels that meet or exceed state water quality standards.

To help them achieve this goal, PLSLWD has partnered with the Scott County Soil & Water Conservation District (SWCD) and local farm leaders to form and support a Farmer-Led Council (FLC) to help come up with some creative solutions. Agricultural lands make up the majority of the landscape in the Spring Lake and Upper Prior Lake watersheds; as such, farmers are the most important stewards of the watershed and their active input and participation is critical to achieving water quality goals.

The role of the FLC is to develop and guide the implementation of strategies that the PLSLWD will use to accomplish agriculture's share of the nutrient reduction goal. Specifically, the FLC will:

- Inform decision makers and the general public about practical issues and opportunities related to soil and water conservation on agricultural lands.
- Identify base-level and site-tailored practices that are available and needed.
- Define the approach for engaging with and assisting farmers to implement practices.
- Establish a schedule with reasonable milestones and timelines for progress.
- Identify potential barriers to implementation, along with tools and resources needed to overcome them.

![Farmers are critical to achieving water quality goals and are needed to serve on a Farmer-Led Council for the Prior Lake-Spring Lake Watershed District.](image)

If you are interested in joining the Farmer Led Council or would like more information, please contact Paul Kreuger, a current FLC member, at (952) 226-4416.

One of the key functions of the FLC is to provide new, innovative ideas that will help achieve water quality goals while achieving the operational goals of farmers and not hindering their bottom line. This year, the FLC is promoting two cost-share programs:

**Variable Rate Application:** Crops in Scott County are generally produced in fields known to have large variability in soil type, topography, soil moisture, and other factors that affect production. Variable rate application allows producers to effectively manage their fields to account for variability in their fields. This not only helps to avoid over-application which can affect the water quality of local waters, it can also help save farmers money.

**Water Quality Inlets:** Water Quality Inlets can replace standard inlets in farm fields, ditches, dry dams, and terraces. They resist plugging and improve water quality by filtering debris and sediments before it enters the drainage system.

For more information about FLC cost-share programs, contact Scott Schneider, Scott SWCD, at (952) 492-5417.