

Why Do Farmers Participate?

- To protect and improve water in local lakes, rivers and streams
- Regulatory certainty
- Recognition for conservation stewardship
- Priority access to financial and technical assistance
- To ensure farm productivity for the next generation
- Greater stability to plan for and invest in conservation practices
- To be part of the solution



Tom and Lisa Hoekstra
Certified farmers from Plainview, MN



Henry Evers
Certified farm from Glasgow, MN



Hidden Stream Farm
Certified farm from Elgin, MN



Jerry Nordick, Certified Farmer from Rothsay, Minnesota is congratulated by MDA Commissioner David Frederickson.

"I've said for many years there are many farmers doing a good job, but don't get the recognition. This is an opportunity for us to communicate our water quality efforts."

Jerry Nordick, Certified Farmer

www.mda.state.mn.us/awqcp

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Background cover photo of Chisago County, MN by Kent Larson

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Minnesota Agricultural Water Quality Certification Program

Certifying that Minnesota's farms and waters can prosper together





“Conservation and agriculture work well together. The value of conservation is real and I hope people can see that.”

Chuck Uphoff
Certified Farmer
from New Munich, MN

About the Program

The Minnesota Agricultural Water Quality Certification Program (MAWQCP) is a voluntary opportunity for farmers and agricultural landowners to take the lead in implementing conservation practices that protect our water. Those who implement and maintain approved farm management practices will be certified and in turn obtain regulatory certainty for a period of ten years.

Through this program

certified farms receive:

- **Regulatory certainty:** certified producers are deemed to be in compliance with any new water quality rules or laws during the period of their certification
- **Recognition:** certified producers may use their status to promote their business as protective of water quality
- **Priority for technical and financial assistance:** producers seeking certification can obtain specially designated technical and financial assistance to implement practices that promote water quality

the public receives:

- Assurance that certified producers are using conservation practices to protect Minnesota’s lakes, rivers and streams

This program will help address concerns about changing regulatory requirements from multiple state and federal agencies. Certainty is a commitment provided by the Minnesota Department of Agriculture (MDA), the Minnesota Board of Water and Soil Resources (BWSR), the Minnesota Department of Natural Resources (DNR), and the Minnesota Pollution Control Agency (MPCA).

Become a Water Quality Certified Farm!

This program certifies farmers for managing the land within their operation in a way that protects water quality. Agricultural operations and landowners seeking certification will undergo a three step process. Local conservation professionals assist farmers through the certification process.

1. Application

The first step is self-verification by producers that they are meeting existing Minnesota laws and regulations regarding water quality. These existing regulations include shore land setbacks, feedlot permits and disposal of waste pesticides. If producers have questions, MAWQCP- licensed certifiers will connect them to the respective local authority. Producers must maintain compliance with existing regulations at the time of certification; certainty does not offer exemption from rules and regulations that currently exist.

2. Assessment

The next step in certification is an evaluation of each field within the operation using the assessment tool. The assessment tool is a computer model in which data inputs are made based on answers to questions related to how the field is managed. The output of the assessment tool is a unitless index score from 1-10 that aggregates a field’s potential risk to water quality. A score of 8.5 or greater is necessary for certification eligibility.

The assessment tool evaluates the following:

- Physical field characteristics
- Nutrient management factors
- Tillage management factors
- Pest management factors
- Irrigation and tile drainage management
- Conservation practices

Producers can expect to answer questions related to slope and soil type, fertility and tillage management, pest management and water-friendly conservation practices-- such as the use of grass waterways or sediment basins.

To view the online assessment tool, visit <https://mnwatercertify.mda.state.mn.us/wqcpapp/>

3. Verification

The last step in certification is an on-farm field verification with a MAWQCP-licensed certifier. This visit allows the producer and certifier to go through the operation on a field-by-field basis to identify and discuss any further water quality related issues.

If during the certification process, specific issues relating to water quality are identified, technical and financial assistance is available.

After completing the three-step certification process, producers and landowners have the opportunity to enter into a ten-year certification contract that ensures regulatory certainty from the State of Minnesota. Certified operations may also choose to be publicly recognized as a Minnesota Water Quality Certified Farm which includes field signs and use of the logo.

Certified operations can update their certification records at any time by contacting the local certifier when land is added or practices are changed so certification status may be maintained.

Producer-led Partnership

Four state agencies, USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS), Soil and Water Conservation Districts, County governments, and Watershed Districts have shared in the development and delivery of this program.

The partnership enables individual producers streamlined access to the suite of services each agency provides. This partnership has created an innovative delivery system to provide technical and financial assistance to agricultural producers and has been recognized by USDA-NRCS for a Regional Conservation Partnership Program (RCP) award to further develop and expand the MAWQCP as a demonstration project that any state in the nation may adopt.

In practice, participation in MAWQCP certification brings agricultural producers into a conversation with a MAWQCP-licensed conservation professional about their production goals and stewardship strategies. This process is deeply engaging for producers because it places control in their hands as the men and women who know the land they manage in greatest detail. And when risks are identified, the assessment process equally engages and empowers them in finding the most appropriate, efficient, economical, and effective response for mitigating that risk.



U.S. Secretary of Agriculture Tom Vilsack

“We’re stewards of the land. We want to pass this onto the next generation.”

Glen Haag, Certified Farmer
from Lewiston, MN

