

## Yahara River Watershed Harvestable Buffer Program

In an effort to compliment the conservation practices installed by producers in the Yahara River Watershed and further reduce Phosphorous losses from cropland, the Dane County Land and Water Resources Department developed the Harvestable Grass Buffer Program available to producers in the Yahara River and the Badfish Creek Watersheds for land located in Dane County. This program will allow producers to establish a perennial grass cover which can be harvested and utilized while maintaining the environmental benefits of grass buffer strips.

Producers have the option of installing a buffer or a field border strip, which can be harvested, to cool-season or native prairie grass mix, for a contract period of five, ten or fifteen years. Payment will be based upon an annual rental rate of \$400/acre each year for a five year contract, \$425/acre for a ten year contract and \$450/acre for a fifteen year contract. The total contract payment will be made to the producer once the buffer is established.

### Harvestable Buffer Cost-share practice consists of the following:

- Eligible cropland includes:
  - Fields adjacent to perennial or intermittent streams.
  - End rows around cropped fields for access to buffers.
- A minimum buffer strip width of 30 feet with a maximum width determined based on phosphorus reductions and management needs. If the contracted area includes 66 percent or more of the field, the recipient has an option to enroll the whole field.
- Enrolled land must be inventoried; soils sampled, and have a PI value calculated as part of the Yahara River Watershed project.
- Producer is responsible for maintaining the grass cover for the five, ten or fifteen year contract period.
- Spreading of manure or other forms of phosphorous will not be allowed on the enrolled acres.
- If buffer is seeded prior to June 1<sup>st</sup>, the contract period will start with the current crop year. After June 1<sup>st</sup>, the contract period will begin the next crop year.

### Agreement Process:

- Staff assists producers to identify and run SNAP Plus on cropped fields that are eligible for the Buffer Program.
- Producer signs a cost share agreement for identified acres.
- Cost share agreement is approved by Land Conservation Committee.
- Producer seeds identified acres to an approved seed mix.
- Staff field verifies seeding establishment.
- Staff receives paid in full invoices for seeding establishment.
- Landowner receives a payment based upon rental rate, acres established, years of contract, and cost of vegetation establishment (seedbed preparation, seed, planting) not to exceed the annual established Dane County average costs.
- If payments exceed \$5,000.00, the maintenance agreement between Dane County and the landowner will be recorded on the deed for 5, 10 or 15 years (depending on contract length) following receipt of cost share payment.

Annual program implementation is contingent on funding availability.

Updated: October 2015