

Who Regulates Wisconsin Farms — and What They're Already Accountable For

Farmers in Wisconsin already follow some of the most comprehensive environmental and operational regulations in the country.

Before adding new layers of local ordinances, it's important to understand the agencies and programs that already hold farmers accountable for safety, sustainability, and community well-being.

Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources (DNR)

Primary Focus: Environmental Protection

Farm Oversight Includes:

- **Water Quality & Manure Management:**
 - Wisconsin Pollutant Discharge Elimination System (WPDES) permits for CAFOs.
 - Regular inspections, recordkeeping, and spill reporting.
 - Enforcement of manure storage, application, and runoff prevention standards.
- **Air Quality & Odor Management:**
 - Oversight of emissions, composting, and waste handling practices.
- **Wetlands & Habitat Protection:**
 - Regulation of land use near waterways and protected areas.

Wisconsin Department of Agriculture, Trade & Consumer Protection (DATCP)

Primary Focus: Agricultural Safety, Conservation & Consumer Protection

Farm Oversight Includes:

- **Livestock Facility Siting Law (ATCP 51):**
 - Sets uniform state standards for odor, manure management, and setback distances.
- **Nutrient Management Planning:**

- Requires certified plans to manage fertilizer and manure applications responsibly.
- **Conservation Programs:**
 - Oversees compliance with soil and water conservation standards in partnership with counties.
- **Animal Health & Food Safety:**
 - Regulates livestock disease control, milk safety, and farm product quality.

Wisconsin Department of Health Services (DHS)

Primary Focus: Public Health Protection

Farm Oversight Includes:

- **Private Well & Drinking Water Standards:** Ensures farm and rural water systems meet safety thresholds.
- **Zoonotic Disease Monitoring:** Coordinates with DATCP on livestock-related public health issues.

U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA)

Primary Focus: Federal Environmental Compliance

Farm Oversight Includes:

- **Clean Water Act (CWA):** Establishes CAFO permitting standards.
- **Clean Air Act (CAA):** Regulates air emissions and dust control for large operations.
- **Emergency Planning & Community Right-to-Know (EPCRA):**
 - Requires farms to report chemical or waste storage that could impact communities.

U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA)

Primary Focus: Conservation, Food Safety, and Farm Program Compliance

Farm Oversight Includes:

- **Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS):**
 - Enforces conservation and nutrient management practices for program participants.
- **Farm Service Agency (FSA):**
 - Oversees compliance with conservation and wetland protection requirements (Swampbuster/Sodbuster).
- **Food Safety and Inspection Service (FSIS):**
 - Ensures safe meat, poultry, and egg production and handling.

County Land & Water Conservation Departments

Primary Focus: Local Conservation Enforcement

Farm Oversight Includes:

- Administers state conservation standards and nutrient management plans.
- Investigates runoff or erosion complaints.
- Provides local conservation cost-share programs and technical guidance.

The Bottom Line

Wisconsin farmers are already regulated by **multiple agencies at the local, state, and federal levels**—each with its own reporting, permitting, inspection, and enforcement requirements.

Adding county-level “operational ordinances” only **duplicates existing oversight**, increases costs, and creates confusion — without offering measurable environmental or community benefits.

Document Source: Portage County, WI