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Daun to lead WFU's farmer-led watershed efforts

CHIPPEWA FALLS — Tara Daun has been hired as the Farmer-Led Watershed Council Coordinator for Wisconsin Farmers Union. In this role, Daun will work directly with farmer-led councils in Dunn, Pierce, Polk and St. Croix counties to increase farmer engagement, build council capacity, expand participation in incentive programs, coordinate water testing and programming, and foster conservation in the Mississippi River Watershed.

Daun lives near Spring Valley with her two daughters. In her free time, she helps her parents on their beef and horse farm, makes and mends her own clothes, gardens, and hikes. She previously worked with the USDA Natural Resource Conservation Service, assisting farmers through application and contract processes to provide them with financial assistance for conservation practices.

The granddaughter of Iowa and North Dakota beef and row crop farmers, Daun grew up on a horse farm near the Twin Cities. She graduated from the University of Minnesota-Morris in 2011 with a double major in Environmental Studies and Psychology. During her time in Morris, she also worked with the Center for Small Towns, which solidified her interest in working in rural communities. Since graduating, she has worked in rural development and conservation wearing several different hats, including running a small fleece-to-fiber farm with sheep and alpaca.

With the Farmer-Led Watershed Council, Daun hopes to continue and expand upon the groundwork already laid by the councils in the Hay River, Horse Creek, Dry Run, and South Kinnickinnic watersheds. These councils consist of farmers working alongside county staff to increase farmer engagement with water quality issues and adoption of conservation practices. Through the councils' work, educational networking events will be held on farms to showcase conservation practices such as no-till, strip tillage, cover crops, and grassed waterways.

Daun will also be working with local farmers running test plots and monitoring water quality in their watersheds. She also will network with multiple agencies that are concerned about water quality, including faculty and Extension staff, lake associations, agriculture organizations, elected officials, local tribes and environmental groups.

When asked about her goals, Daun said "My hope is that we can increase soil health, farmer profitability, and water quality all at the same time. That takes farmers learning from other farmers to perfect practices that can reduce inputs and time spent on the tractor while maintaining yields *and* protecting the soil and water."

"Working with farmers with the NRCS, I saw that successful cover crop and no-till systems are being done, but it takes equipment and specific adjustments to application schedules to be effective," she added. "Those changes are hard for full-till farmers to adopt without help. We have many examples of conservation success in the watersheds. As the coordinator, I get to help farmers connect with each other so that they can learn from their peers and have more trials with less errors when it comes to conservation practices on their own farms."

Daun began her duties May 17 and is taking the reins from Bill Hogseth, who has transitioned into a newly created position of Organizing Director.

"Tara has a strong background in conservation and a passion for helping farmers implement sustainable practices on their farms," said WFU Executive Director Julie Bomar. "With her interest in sustainability and rural communities, she's a great fit for this role and will be an asset on the Farmers Union team."

Daun will be based in the WFU State Office in Chippewa Falls and can be reached at tdaun@wisconsinfarmersunion.com or 715-492-0329.

Wisconsin Farmers Union, a member-driven organization, is committed to enhancing the quality of life for family farmers, rural communities, and all people through educational opportunities, cooperative endeavors, and civic engagement. Learn more at www.wisconsinfarmersunion.com.

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