

Minnesota Agricultural Water Quality Certification Program (MAWQCP)

Program Evaluation
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Key Findings

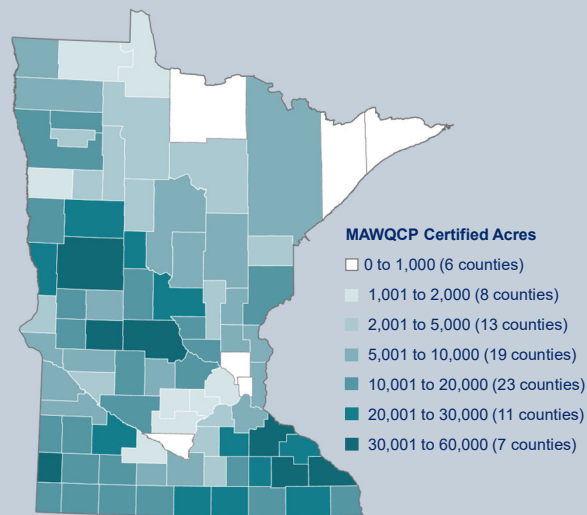
- Program certifiers regularly certify producers to whom they have provided technical assistance, despite the law prohibiting it.
- MDA certifies producers that have not met the program's standards.
- MAWQCP's effect on water quality is not clear.

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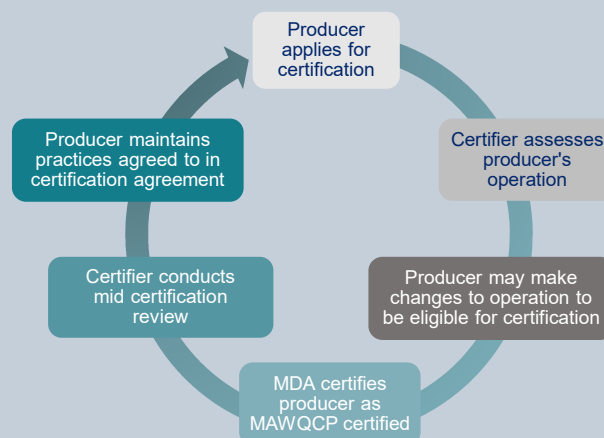
State of Minnesota
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Background

- Established in 2013 as a pilot program
- Expanded statewide in 2015
- Administered by MDA
- More than 1,600 producers and 1.1 million acres certified (p. 10)
- \$3.5 million appropriated to program for Fiscal Year 2025



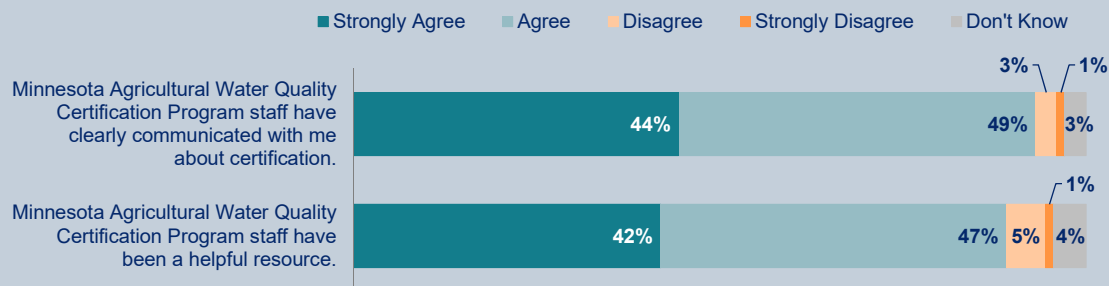
Certification Process (p. 7)



Program Benefits

- Public recognition
- Access to financial and technical assistance
- Regulatory certainty

Producers' Opinions of Certifiers (p. 17)



Certifier Technical Assistance to Producers

- Program certifiers regularly certify producers to whom they have provided technical assistance, despite the law prohibiting it.
- This prohibition may not be practical.



Technical Assistance

means professional, advisory, or cost-share assistance provided to individuals in order to achieve certification.

— *Minnesota Statutes 2025*,
17.9892, subd. 7

Recommendation

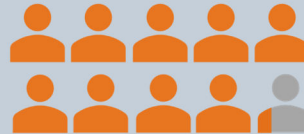
The Legislature should update MAWQCP's authorizing statutes, including:

- Language prohibiting certifiers from providing producers with technical assistance.
- Language related to MAWQCP's pilot phase.

Use of Contingencies (pp. 29–30)

- MDA certifies producers that have not met the program's standards.
- "Contingencies" allow producers to meet standards at a later time.

Over 90 percent of producer certifications from 2019 listed one or more contingencies.



Contingency Implementation at Mid-Certification Review (pp. 31–32)

Implementation Status	Percentage of Producers
Implemented all contingencies	52%
Implemented some contingencies	26%
Implemented no contingencies	3%
Unclear	19%

Recommendation

MDA should discontinue the use of contingencies in MAWQCP certification agreements.

Program Purpose

- MAWQCP's statutory purpose is unclear.
- As a result, identifying appropriate outcome measures is challenging.

Program Outcomes (pp. 47–48)

- MAWQCP's effect on water quality is not clear.
- Reported outcomes do not capture impacts on water quality.



Reported Outcomes

- Certified producers
- Certified acres
- New conservation practices
- Estimated reduction of certain pollutants

Pollution Reduction Estimates

MDA reports pollution reduction estimates of conservation practices. However,

- Estimates capture projected impacts, rather than the actual impact.
- MDA's data have significant limitations.

Water Quality Monitoring

- MDA does not collect data to measure MAWQCP's actual impact on water quality.
- However, measuring MAWQCP's impact on Minnesota's waters may not be feasible.

Recommendations

The Legislature should clarify MAWQCP's purpose and identify intended outcomes.

MDA should:

- Address limitations in the agency's data.
- Consider ways to incorporate water quality monitoring for a selection of certified producers.

Minnesota Agricultural Water Quality Certification Program

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