



June 8, 2017

**Public Testimony of State Representative Evan Goyke**

**Re: Assembly Bill 302 – The Wisconsin Veterans Farm Bill of 2017**

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Good morning Chairman Skowronski and fellow members of the Veterans and Military Affairs Committee. I'm grateful for the opportunity to testify today in support of Assembly Bill 302 and thank the many members of this committee who are co-sponsors.

I thank Senator Testin and Rep. Ed Brooks for their teamwork in helping craft this legislation and dedication to see it move forward. I would also like to thank the supportive state agencies, non-profits, veteran groups and agriculture stakeholders for their collaboration with our offices.

After months of work Senator Testin and I are proud to introduce Assembly Bill 302 - the Wisconsin Veterans Farm Bill of 2017. It is time Wisconsin further invests in the future and growth of our agricultural economy by providing greater workforce opportunities for veterans to transition from the battlefield to the farm field.

This legislation is pro-veteran, pro-agriculture, and pro-workforce. It will accomplish two changes in State law to benefit current and future veteran farmers – both rural and urban:

- 1.) *Creation of the Veteran Farmer Assistance and Outreach Program within DATCP*
  - This program will further help integrate veterans into the field of agriculture, and support veterans currently working in agriculture.
- 2.) *Creation of a logotype issued by the State for certified veteran-owned farms and products.*
  - Similar to what was passed last session by this committee for veteran-owned and disabled veteran-owned businesses, this logotype will provide to veteran farmers an opportunity to further promote themselves throughout Wisconsin, as well as making them more accessible and identifiable to consumers who wish to support farms owned by Wisconsin veterans.

Following changes to benefit veteran farmers in the federal 2014 Farm Bill, and initiatives in other states like West Virginia, the US Department of Agriculture has added a question about military veteran status to the 2017 Agriculture Census. This data will help DATCP target this specific population and track the effectiveness of veteran farmer focused programs.

In addition to the State agencies and agriculture groups mentioned by Senator Testin, this legislation is also supported by the West Virginia Agriculture Commissioner, Farmer Veteran Coalition, Veterans of Foreign Wars, Military Order of the Purple Heart, and the County Veteran Service Officer Association.

Thank you again for holding a public hearing on AB 302. I am happy to answer any questions.



## PATRICK TESTIN

### STATE SENATOR

DATE: June 8<sup>th</sup>, 2017  
RE: **Testimony on 2017 AB 302 and SB 224**  
TO: The Assembly Committee on Veterans and Military Affairs  
FROM: Senator Patrick Testin

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Chairman Skowronski and members of the committee, thank you for today's hearing and for allowing me to present testimony on behalf of Assembly Bill 302 (AB 302), the Wisconsin Veterans Farm Bill of 2017. This bill aims to bolster our agricultural workforce by establishing a program at the Department of Agriculture, Trade, and Consumer Protection (DATCP) to help military veterans transition into farming. Additionally, it requires the Department of Veterans Affairs (DVA) to work with DATCP to develop a logo for veteran produced agricultural goods, so that consumers can have the opportunity to support veterans with their purchases. It's worth noting that this legislation was developed in cooperation with DATCP, DVA, the Department of Military Affairs (DMA), and the Department of Administration (DOA). All four agencies have publicly supported AB 302.

Wisconsin has strong traditions in both military service and agricultural excellence. Farming generates more than 88 billion dollars in economic activity for our state; however the agricultural workforce is aging. The average age of a Wisconsin farmer is now in the upper fifties. This is a profession that needs an infusion of young, enthusiastic workers. Farming requires long hours of work, little time off, and a lot of dedication; the men and women who have served in the military are certainly fit for such challenges. Several other states have passed legislation similar to what we are proposing, and have had success in bolstering their workforce. Our legislation is modeled after a program that has been successfully implemented in West Virginia. Over the past three years, the program has helped more than 300 veterans become farmers, nearly all whom have also started their own businesses.

In addition to growing our agricultural workforce, AB 302 also seeks to assist veterans as they transition into civilian life. Despite the unique training that the military provides, some veterans still encounter difficulty in finding a job. Additionally, many veterans return from war with scars – some visible, others not. Studies have shown that rigorous physical work, like the type that farmers engage in on a day to day basis, can have a therapeutic effect for those suffering from Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD). Eight of the veterans involved in the model West Virginia program have publicly stated that their participation has kept them from committing suicide, which of course reinforces the Zero Veteran Suicide Initiative that DVA announced last October. Meaningful work on the farm can provide more than income; it can help veterans find a new purpose and save their lives.

The agricultural community has been very supportive of AB 302. The Wisconsin Farm Bureau Federation, Wisconsin Farmers Union, Cooperative Network, the Wisconsin Cattlemen's Association, the Wisconsin Corn Growers Association, the Wisconsin Pork Association, the Wisconsin Potato and Vegetable Growers Association, the Wisconsin Soybean Association, and the Wisconsin State Cranberry Growers Association have all registered in favor of this bill. The bill also has strong bi-partisan support. This bill has been a great opportunity for Rep. Ed Brooks and me to work with Rep. Goyke and Sen. Ringhand, and together, I believe we've created a bill that is good for veterans, their families, and the future of Wisconsin farming. Thank you again for your time and consideration.



# EDWARD BROOKS

STATE REPRESENTATIVE

## TESTIMONY IN SUPPORT OF 2017 AB 302 & SB 224

Mister Chairman and committee members, thank you for hearing this bill, the Wisconsin Veterans Farm Bill of 2017, today.

I'd like to focus on why this bill is good policy for Wisconsin. So, beyond the statutory text and the LRB analysis of the bill, let's take a look at some current challenges we have in Wisconsin and what solutions this bill offers.

First, in Wisconsin agriculture, our farmers are aging and want to plan their transition off the farm. The *Janesville Gazette* recently wrote an article on this issue that I've attached for your consideration.

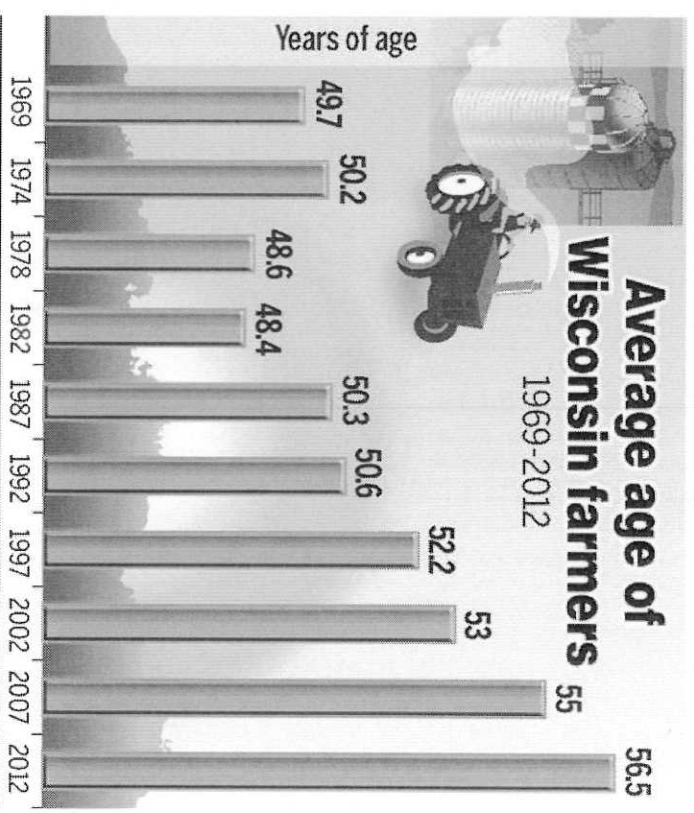
Next, the Wisconsin National Guard has deployed thousands of Soldiers (over 10,000 according to the DMA Public Affairs office) and Airmen (over 13,000 according to the DMA Public Affairs office) since 9/11, and we still have smaller groups going to and returning from deployments to all parts of the world. Successful reintegration into civilian life for returning service members is a concern that our military leaders take seriously. Job skills and employment is one aspect of reintegration, and an important one.

This bill will help Wisconsin meet the needs of those farmers who want to transition off the farm, and the needs of veterans who have an interest in transitioning to the farm, and current veteran farmers, via the outreach aspect of the bill, as well as help veterans market their products via a veteran farmer logotype.

Simply, it's good public policy and I respectfully request your vote in support of this bill.

# Average age of Wisconsin farmers

1969-2012



SOURCE: USDA Census of Agriculture Tony DiNicola/[tdinicola@gazettextra.com](mailto:tdinicola@gazettextra.com)

 URL:

[http://www.gazettextra.com/20170327/as\\_farmers\\_age\\_agriculture\\_industry\\_tries\\_to\\_recruit\\_retain\\_young\\_farmers](http://www.gazettextra.com/20170327/as_farmers_age_agriculture_industry_tries_to_recruit_retain_young_farmers)

## As farmers age, agriculture industry tries to recruit, retain young farmers

By Jim Dayton  
March 27, 2017

JANESVILLE—When Sheila Everhart enters an elementary classroom to talk to kids about agriculture, she often begins by asking three questions.

“How many of you live on a farm?” Sometimes, only one or two hands shoot up.

“How many of you know someone who lives on a farm?” A few more hands.

“How many of you have ever been to a farm?” More hands still.

Everhart, the Rock County coordinator for the Wisconsin Farm Bureau's Ag in the Classroom program, wants her lessons to appeal to all students, not just those with farming backgrounds. Her goal is to educate kids about where their food comes from and introduce them to career opportunities in agriculture, she said.

The message is more important than ever.

Over the past few decades, the average age of Wisconsin farmers has crept steadily upward. In 1982, a typical farmer was 48 years old; in the most recent U.S. Department of Agriculture Census in 2012, the average Wisconsin farmer was 56.

It must be noted that farming does not have a normal retirement age like most other industries. Some farmers might retire, in the sense they are no longer the farm's primary operator, but continue to work as long as their health allows.

But their average age is rising in one of the strongest agricultural states. And many non-farmers are so far removed from the fields that they wouldn't even consider the industry's many career options, often because they don't know the options.

Reversing those trends may be the key to preserving farming's next generation.

### EDUCATING STUDENTS

Vaughn Johnson, a cattle and beef farmer in Shopiere, sometimes works with Everhart during Ag in the Classroom events to teach kids about farming. Whether they understand his message usually depends on where the school is located, he said.

In rural areas, students are more familiar with agriculture, even if they don't live on a farm. But when he visits classrooms in Janesville or Beloit, engaging kids is much more difficult, he said.

Johnson isn't deterred from telling his story. Some tidbit from his own background might stick in a student's mind and make him or her consider going into agriculture, he said.

Arch Morton Jr., who grows crops on his town of La Prairie farm, shares the same philosophy. He is an advocate for agriculture education and youth outreach, and any time he can do both at the same time, it's a “win-win,” he said.

“We can teach kids about where food comes from or encourage them to grow up and maybe be a farmer or be involved in some type of agriculture,” Morton Jr. said. “Whatever we can do for the kids and agriculture is very important to us.”

While guest speakers such as Johnson or Morton Jr. can give students a real-life example of a longtime farmer, it's a fleeting presentation. High school agriculture classes can make education a consistent part of a student's schedule.

Elkhorn High School has one of the most prestigious agriculture programs in the country. Last year, it was one of six recipients of a national award from the National Association of Agricultural Educators.

David Kruse, Elkhorn's agricultural sciences instructor, said the program earned the award because it is so comprehensive. Its curriculum includes courses on animal science, food science and more, and the program encourages students to get involved in FFA.

It also requires students to do some sort of resume-building activity for at least eight hours each trimester, although many exceed the minimum requirement. This can be work-related experience, community service or extra research, Kruse said.

Farming has transformed in recent decades, with massive crop and dairy operations becoming the norm. As farms get larger and more productive, they will require employees who understand business, agronomy, engineering and other fields, Kruse said.

For students to understand agriculture's many career opportunities, they need to get outside the classroom and immerse themselves in the industry, he said.

“When students think of their career options, they're familiar with careers on TV or their parents' careers,” Kruse said. “We don't understand stuff if we're looking through windows or magazines.”

### **FINDING FELLOW FARMERS**

Some people are still fixated on working the land, even if there are many new career avenues within agriculture. Leo Ehlen, 16, is a sophomore in Kruse's agriculture classes and has spent much of his life helping on the family farm just north of Elkhorn.

Ehlen wants to take over the farm one day and gradually expand the operation. He's grown up around farming and knows what challenges come with the business, he said.

He has developed a strong interest in agriculture--from his home life to Kruse's classes to showing animals at the Walworth County Fair through 4-H. But his involvement in FFA and a trip to the FFA national convention gave him something he couldn't find in a textbook—a social network of other young farmers.

“There were tons of people (at the convention) interested in the same stuff. I can relate to some of the people,” Ehlen said. “Not everybody in 4-H is a farmer ... when I got to the FFA convention, they just all knew.”

The Wisconsin Farm Bureau recognizes that some young farmers might feel ostracized in an industry that continues to get older. It developed a program called Young Farmers and Agriculturists that helps those between the ages of 18 and 35 meet other people their age with similar career goals.

Emily Johnson, 23, is the program's co-chair in Rock County and still works on her family's farm in the town of Plymouth. But she never did 4-H or FFA while growing up, so she wasn't directly exposed to other farm kids, she said.

She joined Young Farmers and Agriculturists three years ago and said it was “refreshing” to know she wasn't the only person her age interested in agriculture. Johnson now helps coordinate social events for others, such as Jacob Bobolz, who feel like she once felt.

Bobolz, 24, does crop and livestock farming in the town of Bradford. When he joined Young Farmers and Agriculturists, he was surprised at the “strength in numbers” the program offered.

“I thought I was the only one who had to go through this. When I joined the YFA, it really brought hope that there was multiple people like me,” Bobolz said. “I got to meet more young farmers like myself. It just kind of gives you a whole different boost of confidence to keep pursuing your dreams.”

## **GETTING STARTED**

There could be more people joining the program's county chapters if a bill providing student loan relief to young farmers passes the state Legislature. Rep. Mark Spreitzer, D-Beloit, worked on the bill with Sen. Janis Ringhand, D-Evansville, to reduce financial barriers for those who want to get started in farming, Spreitzer said.

Land and machinery are costly investments for anyone trying to break into agriculture. Many young farmers have decided to attend college for more education as farming becomes more complex, creating a hurdle of capital costs and student loan debt, Spreitzer said.

The bill would provide up to \$30,000 in student loan relief for those committed to farming for at least five years. Spreitzer heard about the issue from Matthew Walthius, his classmate at Beloit College who is now the manager of The Wright Way organic produce farm near Beloit.

Walthius, 24, never envisioned a career in agriculture. He grew up outside Chicago and studied sociology, but he became fascinated with environmental sustainability and the local food movement while in college, he said.

While many would-be farmers get into the business through their families, Walthius saw opportunity in niche agriculture, such as organic produce. He has “two dozen” friends who would break further into small farming if they weren't battling startup costs and student loans, he said.

“I talk to other young people my age who are interested and can't make the initial jump into farming,” Walthius said. “A lot of my friends from college work on different farms, and a lot of us feel we won't be able to own our own farm within next decade.”

The Farm Bureau and many FFA alumni chapters offer college scholarships for those who want to study agriculture. But those resources are limited.

Despite the challenges, the interest is there. Many academic backgrounds can find jobs in agriculture-related fields, and for those still enamored with actual farming, the responsibilities beat working in an office.

“I really love working on the farm and working outside. I love growing food for people, healthy, delicious food,” Walthius said. “We offer them a really healthy diet that's healthy for them and healthy for the planet.

“That's a really gratifying feeling.”



**Assembly Committee on Veterans and Military Affairs  
June 8, 2017  
Written Testimony on Assembly Bill 302**

Chairman Skowronski and members of the committee –

My name is Rob Richard and I am Senior Director of Governmental Relations for the Wisconsin Farm Bureau Federation (WFBF). I am submitting WFBF's written testimony in support of Assembly Bill 302, a bill to establish a veteran farmer assistance and outreach program and to create a veteran farmer logotype.

We commend the authors of the bill, Rep. Evan Goyke, Rep. Ed Brooks, Sen. Patrick Testin and Sen. Janis Ringhand, for leading the effort in creating a program that better connects veterans to agricultural job opportunities, farming careers and the technical assistance needed to succeed.

It's no secret that many military veterans bring back with them to civilian life a discipline, drive and work ethic that is desirable for many employers in the general workforce, but this talent could be specifically tailored to help veterans succeed in farming. Farming isn't just a job, it's largely a lifestyle. It's a commitment to the farm 24/7, 365 days a year, and it's arguable that no group of people understand and appreciate commitment to a task better than veterans.

To those veterans who have suffered or witnessed the tragedies of war or armed conflict, farming can help bring them both a purpose and a sense of peace. A very quick search on most social media pages, blogs, Twitter feeds, etc. dedicated to getting veterans into farming will have very sincere and passionate testimonials on how agriculture and a devotion to land and animals can help provide fulfillment and a therapeutic calm to veterans who need it most.

There is also a very real economic need to get veterans into agricultural fields. There is no shortage of jobs and careers in the agriculture industry and those positions need to be filled by talented and devoted individuals. While the work at times can be very challenging, the pay can be rewarding.

The Wisconsin Farm Bureau Federation respectfully asks you to support this legislation to give veterans the help they need to start a career, or even renew a career, in agriculture. While there may be many assistance programs already in place at both the federal and state level to help them succeed, it can be a challenge navigating the bureaucracy and finding one's direction. This program would provide them that direction.

To those individuals who helped defend this country, we can't think of a better endeavor than to offer the assistance they might need to now help feed this country.



State of Wisconsin  
Governor Scott Walker

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**Department of Agriculture, Trade and Consumer Protection**  
Ben Brancel, Secretary

June 8, 2017

**Daniel Smith**  
Administrator, Division of Agricultural Development  
Wisconsin Department of Agriculture, Trade and Consumer Protection

**To: Assembly Veterans and Military Affairs Committee**  
**Re: Services and Programs of the Wisconsin Farm Center**

**Background:** The Wisconsin Farm Center serves the state's farmers and agribusinesses in sustaining and growing Wisconsin agricultural economy and rural communities. Started as the Farmers Assistance Program in 1984, the Wisconsin Farm Center provides trained professionals and resources that are offered at no cost to those requesting assistance.

**Primary Areas of Assistance:**

1. Financial consultation – WFC staff provide independent analysis of cash flow, credit agreements, profit and loss records, operating expenses and other financial matters involved in operating a farm or agribusiness.
2. Succession planning – Wisconsin farm and agribusiness owners and operators are an aging population. The WFC provides advice and consultation on how to successfully transfer a farm or business to the next generation or new ownership. Staff provides assistance with the financial, estate planning and emotional aspects of ownership transfers and retirement.
3. Non-traditional forms of agriculture – WFC staff provide specific business planning for those interested in pursuing such forms of agriculture as farm to table, organics, specialty crops (fruits, vegetables, nuts, etc.), grass-based livestock production, non-ruminant animals and other important sectors of the overall agricultural economy.
4. Minority and beginning farmer assistance – Many people express an interest in entering agriculture but lack the experience, resources and opportunity to do so. WFC staff provides assistance with business planning, available credit options, risk management and helps overcome language and cultural obstacles. WFC staff assist in linking those who wish to enter agriculture with opportunities to do so and can provide continued support as challenges arise.
5. Conflict mediation – WFC trained mediators provide dispute resolution with creditors, family members, neighbors or other agencies regarding any form of dispute that may occur.
6. Counseling services – WFC partners with mental health counselors across the state to provide low or no-cost counseling for farmers and their families.

**Availability:** The Wisconsin Farm Center can be reached weekdays from 7:45AM until 4:30PM at 1-800-942-2474 or at [farmcenter@wisconsin.gov](mailto:farmcenter@wisconsin.gov). WFC staff are available for on-farm visits anywhere in Wisconsin by appointment at no cost to the farmer.

*Agriculture generates \$88 billion for Wisconsin*

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DATE: June 8<sup>th</sup>, 2017  
RE: **Testimony on 2017 AB 302**  
TO: The Assembly Committee on Veterans and Military Affairs  
FROM: Tony Kurtz

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Chairman Skowronski and members of the committee, thank you for today's hearing and for allowing me to present testimony on behalf of Assembly Bill 302 (AB 302), the Wisconsin Veterans Farm Bill of 2017. As a 20 year Army Veteran and certified organic farmer I am excited to be here today in support of this legislation. Growing up I had two things I really wanted to do, the first was to be in the military and the second was to farm. After I served 20 years on active duty and retired in 2005, I bought my first piece of farm land in 2006 and started the organic transition. Today my farm is 220 acres and I rent another 55 acres. I believe farming is a natural fit for many Veterans. At least for me, and other Veterans that I know, we like to see results. And farming you definitely see results, some good and some not so well. It takes hard work and dedication to make it in agricultural in today's environment and I know Veterans have that dedication to succeed in this demanding profession.

Wisconsin has strong traditions in both military service and agricultural excellence. Farming generates more than 88 billion dollars in economic activity for our state; however the agricultural workforce is aging. According to the 2016 USDA/NASS State Agricultural in Wisconsin, the average age of a Wisconsin farmer is 56.5 years of age. To maintain our leadership in agricultural we need an infusion of young, enthusiastic workers. A dedicated program to promote Veterans to enter the Agricultural industry is a great step forward in helping our aging workforce. One interesting note that many folks do not know about our great state is that Wisconsin does not tax military retirement pay. This, in my humble opinion, is another recruitment tool to bring younger folks to our agricultural industry. Two states, West Virginia and Nebraska have a similar Veteran Farm Bills but they do not exempt military retirement pay from state tax.

I appreciate your time today and look forward to any questions that you may have. Thank you again for your time and consideration.



Thursday, June 08, 2017

Greetings members of the Hearing Committee:

I am honored to have been invited to testify today on behalf of the Wisconsin Veterans Farm Bill 2017. I'd like to share my background with members today to demonstrate how approval of the Wisconsin Veterans Farm Bill 2017 will help Wisconsin veterans.

I am a disabled combat veteran who served nearly a decade in the US Army Infantry, with one tour in Kosovo and two combat tours in Iraq in support of Operation Iraqi Freedom. When I returned to civilian life after my final tour, I found myself, like so many other veterans, void of direction.

Once discharged, veterans go from a structured, team-focused, purpose-centric lifestyle that is extremely organized to a wide-open, unstructured civilian world with little support. Some veterans enter the civilian life feeling it doesn't fully comprehend the challenges veterans face.

Military service changes a person in many ways. Transitioning back to a civilian life is an overwhelming and often shocking experience - not unlike entering boot camp for the first time. However, there is no such thing as a reverse boot camp. The military are experts at turning civilians into soldiers, but not at turning soldiers back into civilians. For me and my fellow veterans, we feel we are left to fend for ourselves, without that close camaraderie and support we experienced in the military. At times we are still coming to terms with what we experienced in the service, especially combat veterans, leaves us feeling overwhelmed, confused, and restless.

**MISSION**

Green Veterans are dedicated to helping our Nation's heroes learn about sustainable building and green living, while helping ease the hardship of military-to-civilian transition.

**VISION**

By empowering Veterans to become volunteer leaders in their communities, we nurture opportunities for continuing education, networking, employment, corporate engagement and green entrepreneurship.



We face this transition in addition to needing to develop a new identity and find our place in society. Yes, there are military benefits available to those who have served, but sifting through the paperwork and navigating through the bureaucracy only adds to the stress of reintegrating back into society. Like so many others, my initial post-tour employment experiences left me without a sense of purpose. I came from having the most important mission in the United States to facing jobs with no meaning. I floated between jobs and moved across the country looking for that motivation to succeed through meaningful work and greater mission.

In 2012, I finally took advantage of my military benefits and went back to school for a Bachelor's Degree in Alternative and Renewable Energy Management, which is what ultimately exposed me to Sustainability.

My experiences with sustainability in college led me to form the Green Veterans. It is through this group of veterans and civilians that I found a new mission, a new sense of purpose, a renewed commitment to service, and ultimately a passion for farming. You see, veterans are programmed by the U.S. Government and the best training operation in the world to complete a mission, to see it through to the end, no matter what. Yet, at least for me I left the military confused as to whether I accomplished that mission or not. Maybe that is the effect of a prolonged war. How much did my contribution matter? Did I make a difference? I can't say with certainty, but at least I have come to terms with my time in the service.

It is important to know that what I do matters. With sustainability and more specifically, urban farming technology, I am using my skills and knowledge to be a part of Growing Power's new farming paradigm that Mr. Will Allen has developed over the past few decades. With Farming, I can see the beginning and the end of a task completed. Through nature's technology I can see the result of my work and sacrifice, knowing that I'm serving my fellow man, woman and children. I feed people; I create healthy soil in a way that sustains nature. This is a mission I am dedicated to and with the collaboration of Growing Power and Mr. Will Allen; our vision is to make Growing Power the National Urban Farming Training Center for all Veterans who wants to learn and become an Urban Farmer.

As far back as WWI connecting soldiers with nature and farming has been used to treat the invisible wounds of war. Back then it was called shell shock. Today it's called PTSD. No matter what it's called, its effects are



the same and what was true then is true now. Veterans need help and help is what I am here to talk about.

The Wisconsin Veterans Farm Bill 2017 honors the service of our veterans and their family members, it helps! create opportunities for entrepreneurship, it helps! allocated resource to aspiring veteran farmers, it helps! educate and train veterans for a future in agriculture. It helps! Diversify existing farm businesses and it helps! farmers create businesses that not only support their families but could potentially employ others. It also helps

provide a path to sustainable rural communities, sustainable food sheds, and more importantly it helps! veterans provide for their health and safety and the health and safety of their community. Sometimes all a veteran needs is a little help. Your help, with this bill, will make it easier to engage veterans in a mission that matters: providing meaningful, family-supporting employment; growing LOCAL jobs; creating healthy, sustainable food even in under-served areas; and resolving the trauma of war while accelerating the reintegration of people who are hard-wired to serve their country. This is a mission veterans can rally around! The Green Veterans is a proof of that.

I would like to thank Senator Testin, Representative Goyke, Senator Ringhand, and Representative Brooks for their work in authoring Wisconsin Veterans Farm Bill 2017. Like other similar, successful programs in other states, this bill is an investment in Wisconsin's veterans that I strongly believe will pay dividends for generations to come. I would like to thank the members of this committee for inviting me to speak to with you today on this important piece of legislation.

Thank you,

Brian J. Sales  
Aquaponics/Assistant Facility Manager - Growing Power  
Co-Founder - Green Veterans Group  
(561) 351-0178 | brian.sales1@gmail.com  
*"Follow me and I will lead the way!"*

## Veterans Farm Bill Testimony

6/8/17

Good Morning everyone and thank you for your time. My name is Shea Zastrow, I am the Civilian Chair of Green Veterans Wisconsin, and I am honored to be here.

[PAUSE]

I am here today because I met and worked with two Veterans. We had agreed to meet and work on a service project at the Growing Power Headquarters on the morning of January 17th. This was a transformative day for me, for the first time in my life I witnessed how much Veterans get done with the time they have. Our mission was to provide maintenance to an aquaponics system in Greenhouse 5. Individual tasks were assigned to help each other towards finishing the job. And I quote Mr. Brian Sales "Alright, now you do this, you do this, and I'll do this. Let's come back in 10 minutes and see where we can improve." For chow it was the same system, "You get the dishes, you get the silverware, I'll get the food. We'll be eating in 4 minutes."

[PAUSE]

Veterans are hard wired to finish jobs. And Civilians will only realize this truth if they break a sweat and work with a Veteran. Since that fateful day, I've focused my efforts on the collaboration of Veterans and Civilians. I challenge Civilians to do more than simply Thank Veterans on Veterans Day and then think they're good for 364 days. I help popularize hashtags such as; get to know a Vet, let our Veterans know we support them, and it starts with one. I challenge Civilians to spend just one more day this year with a Vet than they did last year. This proposition enriches lives. Again, I want to thank everyone here for your time and your efforts.

# VETERANS OF FOREIGN WARS

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OF THE UNITED STATES



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DEPARTMENT OF WISCONSIN

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## Testimony in Support of Assembly Bill 302

Assembly Committee on Veterans and Military Affairs

*June 8, 2017*

Good morning. I am Mike "Gunner" Furgal, Legislative Chairman for the Veterans of Foreign Wars, Department of Wisconsin. On behalf of Commander Mike Eggleston and the nearly 40,000 VFW and auxiliary members located in every county in Wisconsin, I appreciate the opportunity to testify in support of Assembly Bill 302, which would establish a veteran farmer assistance and outreach program

This bill has broad bipartisan and bicameral support because it seeks to connect military veterans with careers in agriculture

The Wisconsin Veterans Farm Bill of 2017 calls for the establishment of a Veteran Farmer Assistance and Outreach Program.

This legislative proposal would require the Department of Agriculture, Trade and Consumer Protection to create the program in consultation with DVA, DMA, UW-Extension and the federal Department of Agriculture.

The bill's text says the mission of the program is designed to "integrate veterans into the field of agriculture and support veterans currently working in agriculture."

As proposed, the bill should not cost the state any additional money.

I don't know how a lawyer from Milwaukee could come up with this bill, but he did and I thank you, Representative Goyke.

Subject to your questions, that concludes my testimony.





Public Support of Assembly Bill 302  
June 8, 2017  
Madison, WI



As a Community Action Council Member for the Institute for Urban Agriculture and Nutrition (hereafter The Institute), I am speaking in favor of Assembly Bill 302.

The Institute seeks to foster real solutions to issues faced by those who work in local food systems; we support farmers, small businesses, healthy food access, and organic waste reclamation. Our mission is to advance the principles and practices of sustainable urban agriculture, healthy nutrition practices, and economic development through innovative collaboration. We are a collaboration between academic, public, non-profit, and private entities such as The University of Wisconsin, Milwaukee School of Engineering, Marquette University, Growing Power, Milwaukee Food Council, and many independent businesses, faith-based organizations, and non-profit agencies.

Personally, as both doctoral candidate in UW-Milwaukee's Urban Studies Program and a dietitian who teaches food systems, I'm quite familiar with the need for novel agricultural systems solutions in rural, peri-urban, and urban areas. Assembly Bill 302 has the potential to spur economic growth in the agricultural sector as well as address facts such as the most recent federal agricultural census reporting a decline of 28% of new & beginning farmers between 2007 and 2012. As someone who attempts to grow food, I know the empowering therapy that digging in the soil provides. I also know that farming is not for the faint of heart. Given the structure and discipline required of military service, veterans are uniquely suited to thrive in the complex cycle of risks, tests, failures, and solutions required of farming.

On behalf of the Institute for Urban Agriculture and Nutrition, we support Bill 302.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Renee

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Renee Scampini, MS, RD

University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee, Urban Studies Program, PhD Candidate

Kompost Kids, Member of the Board

Institute for Urban Agriculture and Nutrition, Community Action Council Member

[scampin2@uwm.edu](mailto:scampin2@uwm.edu)



## The Food Finance Institute (FFI)

Our mission at FFI is to make sophisticated financial technical assistance available to every growing food and value-added farm enterprise that needs it. In the past 3 years, FFI has directly helped more than 50 of these businesses optimize their business model for profitability and raise the capital they needed to grow. We are increasing the number of businesses we are able to serve by working with clients in conjunction with consultants who have participated our training and certification programs.



### FFI Director Tera Johnson

Tera Johnson is a former food company CEO and serial entrepreneur whose mission is to create the next generation of economically regenerative food and farming businesses. The founder of teraswhey®, Tera participated in the full arc of creating and selling a successful investor-financed food company. Now the founder and Director of FFI, Tera is a national speaker, teacher, and financial consultant to food and farming businesses, consultants, social venture funds and investors.

## Our Technical Assistance Model

FFI provides technical assistance to value-added farm and food clients in conjunction with a network of consultants who have participated in our consultant training. These individuals have a wide range of backgrounds and come from the private sector, state departments of agriculture like DATCP, Small Business Development Centers and NGOs. Our training is designed to help consultants more effectively improve their clients' food and farming business models. Then, we help them package their financing requests so their clients can raise the money they need to grow.

55 people recently completed our Level 1 and/or Level 2 training and 3 people are now FFI Certified Consultants because they worked specifically with Tera to successfully complete a project, like a successful fundraising request, for a food, beverage or value-added farm business.

## Edible-Alpha™



EDIBLE-ALPHA™

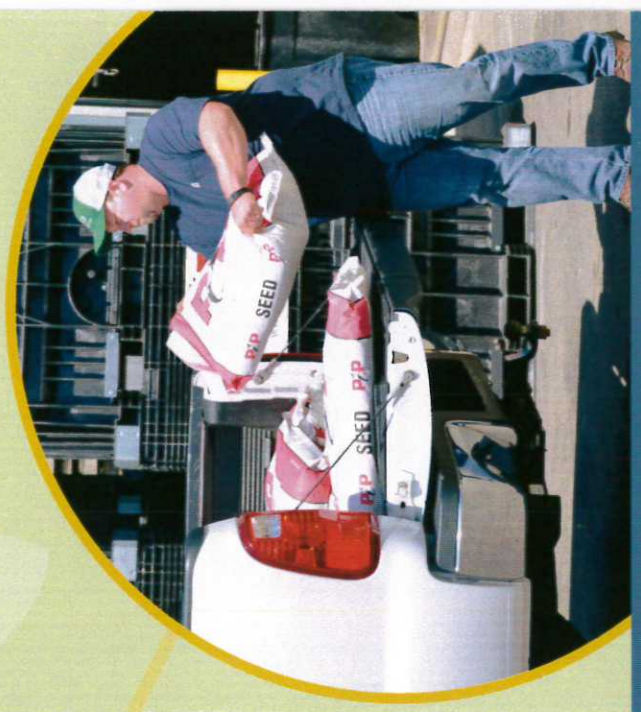
Right now there is a huge gap online in reliable, actionable resources to help food and farm entrepreneurs start and grow profitable food and farm businesses. We are currently filling this gap by inviting our stakeholders to subscribe to our free Edible-Alpha™ podcast and the free Edible-Alpha™ Insights newsletter.

Later this summer we will be launching the Edible-Alpha™ website, a digital resource hub and learning platform providing our collaborative network with resources, tools and digital training to help build profitable food, beverage and value-added farm businesses.

**To learn more:** Contact Zac, FFI Program Manager at 608-890-0780, [zacary.smuckerbryan@uwex.edu](mailto:zacary.smuckerbryan@uwex.edu) or visit FFI's website at <http://foodfinanceinstitute.org/>.

## What We Do

- Financial planning
- Farm ownership transitions
- Herd-based diagnostics
- Legal and financial mediation
- Assist beginning and minority farmers
- Assist with resolving rural energy issues



# Your Farm Your Choices

datcp.wi.gov  
farmcenter@wisconsin.gov  
1-800-942-2474



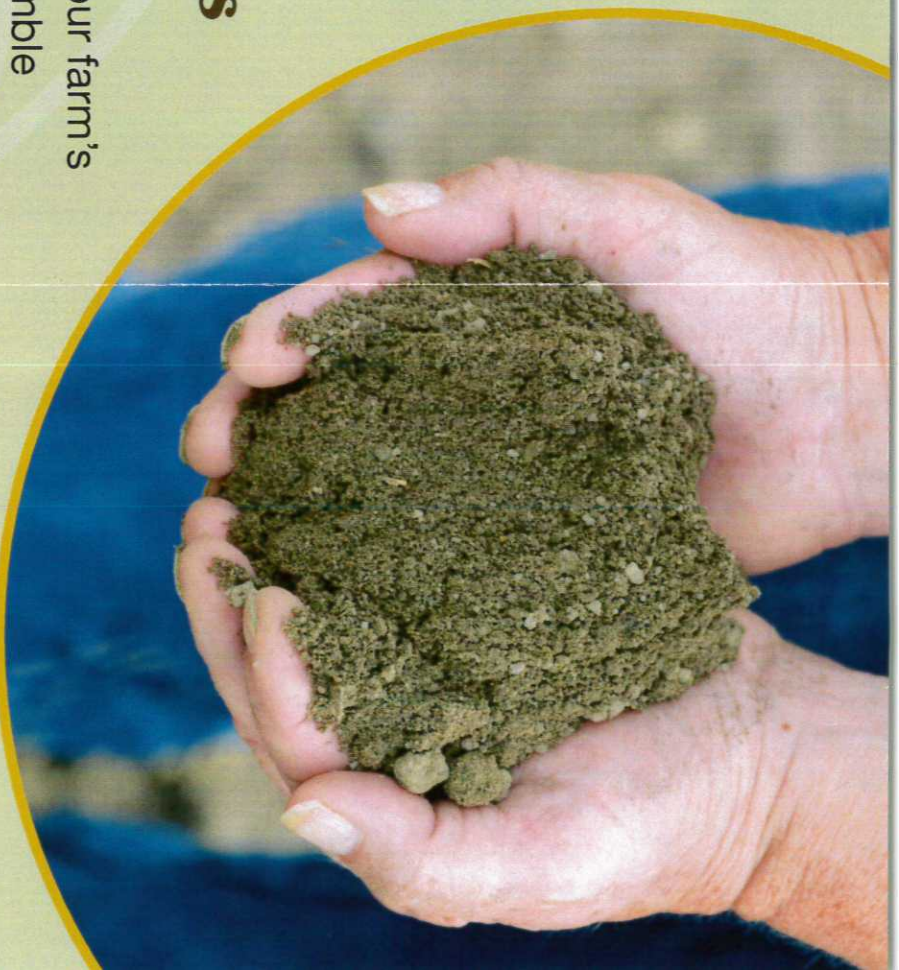


**When it comes to your farm, you're the expert.** But running your farm might not leave much time for comparing options.



## **Our experts**

can help no matter where you are in your farm's life cycle. From humble beginnings to proud legacies - and the hills and valleys in between - we will be there to help you find **resources** and **information**. We help you identify options so you can make informed decisions.



## **Contact Us:**

Wisconsin Farm Center  
1-800-942-2474  
farmcenter@wi.gov