



Senate Committee on Agriculture, Revenue, and Financial Institutions

*January 2020 Special Session Senate Bill 4
Funding for certain extension services at UW System
February 6, 2020*

Good morning Chairman Marklein and members of the Senate Committee on Agriculture, Revenue, and Financial Institutions. My name is Ben Van Pelt and I am the Assistant Director of State Relations for the University of Wisconsin-Madison. I am joined today by UW-Madison Division of Extension Dean, Karl Martin. Thank you for the opportunity to testify in support of January 2020 Special Session Bill 4 (SS SB 4), which provides additional funding for 20 agriculture agents at the UW-Madison Division of Extension for the important applied research and technical assistance these positions provide.

The University of Wisconsin-Madison appreciates efforts to highlight the importance of county-based agriculture agents and the work they do for the ag industry all across the state of Wisconsin.

Locally based agricultural Extension Educators (also known as ag agents) serve three important functions. First, ag agents provide critical, research-based information to farmers, agricultural consultants, agribusinesses, youth, and the general public. Second, they conduct on-the-ground applied research working closely with farmers in the communities where they live to test and demonstrate new scientific-based approaches to address challenges such as disease, drought, building design, farm management, water, etc. Last, they convey important information from Extension Specialists in UW-Madison CALS, UW-River Falls, UW-Platteville, UW-Stevens Point and other academic institutions across the country. Extension Educators represent UW-Madison's boots-on-the-ground addressing local priorities with science-based information in a trusted environment.

This new funding would be used to fund 17 county-based outreach specialists located across Wisconsin who would address regional priorities in support of rural economic development. These priorities include dairy, water, cranberries, potato and vegetables, farm management,

opioid abuse and forest economic development issues in northern rural communities. In addition, there would be 3 statewide outreach positions who would work locally to address priorities around beef, swine, and forage issues. These 20 positions would work directly with farmers, agribusiness and trade associations to address ongoing and emerging priorities that have been identified across rural Wisconsin by county governments, constituents, and elected officials.

Wisconsin's diverse agricultural industry contributes \$105B to Wisconsin's economy. The issues facing farmers, agribusinesses, and rural communities today are much more complicated than 35 years ago when I operated my parents' dairy farm in central Wisconsin. These 20 positions represent high priority needs for specialized, on-the-ground expertise to support our economies and communities that are the very fabric of rural Wisconsin. Recent Extension work including demonstration plots and information sessions led by Extension specialists and county-based educators around hemp are a great example of how Extension works with farmers, researchers, and agribusiness to support agriculture in Wisconsin. The future of agriculture and our rural economies in Wisconsin requires us to develop and implement the best available practices that maintain our competitive edge and these positions are designed to do that.

The University of Wisconsin-Madison appreciates the Governor and Legislature for recognizing this important work and the additional positions this proposal provides. On behalf of the UW-Madison and the Division of Extension we would like to thank you for your time and for allowing us to detail the work being done by county-based agents. At this time, we would be happy to try to answer any questions you may have.



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TO: Senate Committee on Agriculture, Revenue and Financial Institutions
FROM: Daniel Smith, President and CEO of Cooperative Network
DATE: February 6, 2020
RE: Special Session Senate Bill 4 – New county-based agriculture positions

Dear Chairman Marklein and members of the Committee,

The importance of agriculture to Wisconsin's economy, culture and heritage is well known. It has remained so despite decades of structural changes which continue to impact our farms and rural communities. Indeed, change is the only constant we can rely on in agriculture.

Over time, the Division of Extension of the University of Wisconsin-Madison has assisted Wisconsin farm families in adapting to these changes. Extension agents have worked closely with farmers to share innovative production practices, implement university research at the farm level, develop ways to overcome challenges and seize new opportunities. The success of Wisconsin agriculture is due in no small part to the partnership shared by farmers and county extension agents.

This partnership is more important today than ever given the challenges our farmers are facing. While our farm population has decreased in numbers, the complexities of technology, farm management and financial and personal stress have increased. Our farmers cannot be expected to stand alone in the face of constant change.

The Division of Extension has always stood shoulder to shoulder with our farmers. It is important that Wisconsin strengthens this partnership through the creation of these 20 county-based agricultural positions. I respectfully urge passage of Special Session Senate Bill 4 for the benefit of Wisconsin agriculture.

Thank you.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Daniel M. Smith". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

DANIEL SMITH | President & CEO