



NANCY VANDERMEER

STATE REPRESENTATIVE • 70TH ASSEMBLY DISTRICT

TO: Honorable Members of the Assembly Committee on Agriculture

FROM: State Representative Nancy VanderMeer

DATE: February 11, 2020

SUBJECT: Testimony in Support of Assembly Bill 627

Thank you Chairman Tauchen and members of the Assembly Committee on Agriculture for holding a hearing on AB 627 today. Those of us that are actively and regularly engaged with agriculture stakeholders know that there are a number of ways that we as a legislative body can help farmers and producers themselves, and help maintain and grow our agriculture economy. I think it's important to note - and I want to especially point this out today based on larger discussions and related proposals that are circulating currently in the capitol - that one of the best things that we can do is stay the heck out of their way. I want to point out that *not* subjecting farmers and producers to onerous rules and regulations and excessively taxing them and their businesses is one of the most effective things we can do to help farmers. That said, as we're all aware, a certain degree of regulation is needed at the local, state, and federal level, but the primary premise aforementioned holds true.

In addition, it's necessary for the state to partner with farmers and producers in various ways, including, but not limited to, offering resources, especially in the form of leveraging our university system as we're trying to do here, and making available certain funding in the form of grants and incentives for the industry to flourish. One of the most effective ways to keep Wisconsin's \$104.8 billion agriculture industry strong is to support the work of UW-Extension research faculty, especially state integrated specialists. These specialists conduct applied agricultural research and provide practical and tangible expertise to directly assist farmers and producers. Housed at the College of Agriculture and Life Sciences (CALs) at UW-Madison, their peer-reviewed research addresses some of the most pressing questions facing Wisconsin farmers today. Their research and teaching directly lead to improved farm practices across Wisconsin.

Currently, state integrated specialists are researching important topics such as water quality, pest management, and farm economics. Unfortunately, since 1993, funding has been cut by almost \$1 million. As a result, less research is being conducted and in turn, less information is being shared with our farmers.

To reinvest in these state integrated specialists, AB 627 provides \$1 million each year to fund state specialist positions in the field of applied agricultural research at CALs at UW-Madison. With input from the agriculture community and taking into account the current needs of the industry, AB 627 gives UW-Extension the ability to determine which areas these reinstated positions would research. For example, some potential research areas may include beef production, forage, and farmstead planning.



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This legislation is supported by the Wisconsin Farm Bureau Federation, the Wisconsin State Cranberry Growers Association, the Wisconsin Potato & Vegetable Growers Association, the Wisconsin Cattlemen's Association, the Wisconsin Pork Association, the Wisconsin Soybean Association, the Wisconsin Corn Growers Association and the Dairy Business Association.

Again, thank you for the opportunity to be here today and the opportunity for a public hearing on this legislation.



HOWARD MARKLEIN

STATE SENATOR • 17TH SENATE DISTRICT

February 11, 2020 Assembly Committee on Agriculture Testimony on Assembly Bill 627

Thank you committee members for hearing Assembly Bill 627 (AB 627), which increases funding by \$1 million annually to support the work of state integrated specialists who conduct applied agricultural research. Thank you to Rep. VanderMeer for coauthoring this legislation and to Rep. Edming, Rep. Mursau, Rep. Tranel, Rep. Considine, and Rep. Spreitzer for cosponsoring this bipartisan proposal.

One way to keep Wisconsin's \$104.8 billion agricultural industry strong is to support the work of state integrated specialists at UW-Madison's Division of Extension. These state specialists **conduct** applied agricultural research and **provide** practical and tangible expertise to directly assist farmers and producers by conducting research on important topics such as water quality, pest management, and farm economics. They then share their knowledge and answer tough questions. They also spend time traveling to farms and disseminating valuable information directly to farmers.

Housed at the College of Agricultural and Life Sciences (CALs) at UW-Madison with joint Division of Extension appointments, their peer-reviewed research addresses some of the most pressing questions facing Wisconsin farmers today. Their research and teaching lead directly to improved farm practices across Wisconsin and around the country. With the recent investment in the *Dairy Innovation Hub*, the work of these state integrated specialists will become even more important.

Unfortunately, since 1993 the number of CALs state specialists has fallen 45% and funding has been reduced by nearly \$1 million. Less research is being conducted and in turn, less information is being shared with our farmers.

After receiving input directly from farmers and the agricultural industry, Rep. VanderMeer and I drafted AB 627 which provides \$1 million each year to fund state specialist positions in the field of applied agricultural research in CALs at UW-Madison Division of Extension.

AB 627 gives the Division of Extension the flexibility to determine which positions it would fill. In its fiscal note, the UW-System indicates it will be able to fill at least six positions with the funding. As stated, the filled positions would include those related to dairy economics, farm facilities design and environmental management, and food product safety, among others. These are all positions that have been vacated and left unfilled due to a lack of resources.

We heard that this is the most important investment that the state can make in the Division of Extension. This funding will have a major positive impact on agriculture across the state and keep Wisconsin on the cutting edge of agricultural innovation.

SB 563, the Senate Companion to AB 627, received a Public Hearing in the Senate Committee on Agriculture, Revenue, and Financial Institutions on February 6, 2020

AB 627 is supported by numerous farm and agriculture-related organizations including the Farm Bureau Federation, Wisconsin Independent Businesses, Inc., and the Dairy Business Association. Thank you again to the committee for hearing this proposal, and your timely action on the bill.



WISCONSIN
UNIVERSITY OF WISCONSIN-MADISON

Assembly Committee on Agriculture

2019 Assembly Bill 627

Funding for certain extension services at UW System

February 11, 2020

Good morning Chairman Tauchen and members of the Assembly Committee on Agriculture. My name is Ben Van Pelt and I am the Assistant Director of State Relations for the University of Wisconsin-Madison. Today I am joined by Heidi Zoerb who is the Associate Dean for External Relations for the College of Agricultural and Life Sciences at UW-Madison. I am also joined by Doug Reinemann, who is the Associate Dean for Outreach and Extension in the College of Agricultural and Life Sciences (CALs) at UW-Madison. He is also a professor and Extension Specialist in the Biological Systems Engineering Department in CALs. Thank you for the opportunity to testify in support of the current version of Assembly Bill 627 (AB 627), which provides additional funding for the crucial work being done in the field of applied agriculture by CALs faculty.

The University of Wisconsin-Madison appreciates the authors' intent to highlight and fund the importance of state specialists in CALs that focus on applied agriculture and their impact on the future of agriculture in Wisconsin. CALs Extension faculty perform the research that is extended to the agricultural community to help agriculture remain a profitable and sustainable contributor to rural communities and the state's economy. The cutting-edge research to support agriculture is becoming more and more important as agriculture is becoming an increasingly competitive, technological and data-driven enterprise.

Extension faculty identify research topics through dialogue with farmers and their service providers. These CALs faculty then identify sources of funding to perform research. Research funding comes from the USDA and other federal agencies, national and/or state-based commodity groups, state agencies and private companies. An important role of CALs Extension faculty is to stay apprised of the latest technology advancements and, in many cases, create new technologies for agriculture. More often than not, the process of developing new technology is a result of the unique creative partnership between CALs Extension faculty and agricultural producers in Wisconsin who are looking for innovative ways to farm.

This work manifests in many ways across the state. For instance, as you may have already heard, faculty from our Department of Horticulture have worked to coordinate the Network for Environment and Weather Applications in the state. This is a network of weather stations across Wisconsin that help cranberry growers adjust production practices based on their local weather conditions.

Similarly, faculty and staff have also developed new tools and technologies in these roles. A faculty member from our Department of Plant Pathology helped create and release the “Sporecaster” application, which assists farmers in making management decisions for white mold in soybean crops. This mobile app combines site-specific data with research-based models to predict the best timing for white mold treatment in that specific field. It has been downloaded more than 1,600 times and averages more than 250 users a day during “white mold season,” which is July and August.

There are many other examples of this work all across the state of Wisconsin that touch on everything from nitrogen management to developing new varieties of fruits and vegetables, and everything in-between. This extension work done by faculty at UW-Madison is wide in its breadth and vital for many across the state. It is also worth noting that this work is not exclusive to the field of agriculture.

In 1990 there were about 70 extension faculty in the College of Agriculture. This has been reduced to approximately 40 today, or a reduction of about 30 extension faculty over the past 3 decades. This is the result of steady reductions in Extension funding in the UW System budget. AB 627 would allow CALS to reverse this trend and invest in this important work.

The University of Wisconsin-Madison appreciates the bill authors recognizing this important work and the additional, much-needed funding the current form of this proposal provides. On behalf of the UW-Madison, CALS, 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 extension specialists. At this time, we would be happy to try to answer any questions you may have.

Date: February 11, 2020

To: Assembly Committee on Agriculture

From: Wisconsin Farm Bureau Federation
by Debi Towns, Sr. Director for Government Relations

Re: Support AB 627, Funding for UW Integrated State Specialists

These comments are submitted on behalf of the Wisconsin Farm Bureau (WFBB) in support of AB 627, which requires the UW Board of Regents to allocate \$2,000,000 (\$1,000,000 annually) in funding for UW State Specialists in the field of Applied Agricultural Research.

These are joint appointments between the College of Agricultural and Life Sciences (CAL S) at UW-Madison and the Division of Extension. These individuals are using their research to find innovative answers to issues facing Wisconsin producers. Their research and teaching lead directly to implementing improved farm practices across Wisconsin.

The Division of Extension at UW-Madison also has a cooperative agreement with counties to partially fund county-based extension agents. These agents serve a different role than the state specialists described in this bill. Their job is to help disseminate relevant research and innovative practices to producers. On a local level, they are passing on the work of the state specialists.

Since 1993, there has been a significant decrease in funding for the state specialist positions. Many have been left vacant. The open positions have included: Dairy Markets, in the Department of Agricultural and Applied Economics; Forage, in the Department of Agronomy; Farm Finance, in the Department of Dairy Science; Milk Quality, also in the Department of Dairy Science; Beef Production and Swine Production, in the Department of Animal Science; Insect Pest Management, in the Department of Entomology; Ruminant Nutrition, in the Department of Dairy Science; and Farmstead Planning and Storage, in the Biological Systems Engineering Program.

These positions have not been left vacant because they are unimportant. To the contrary, they are critical to the economic health of Wisconsin's farm economy. They are open because they were not funding priorities within UW. This legislation recognizes their importance to Wisconsin agriculture economy and will ensure that these critical positions can be filled.

We ask you to support AB 627 and pass it during this session of the Legislature.



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February 11, 2020

To: Assembly Committee on Agriculture

From: Keri Retallick, Executive Vice President of the Wisconsin Pork Association and the WPA Board of Directors

Re: **Support SB 627, Funding for UW Integrated State Specialists**

These comments are submitted on behalf of the Wisconsin Pork Association (WPA) to express our **support for AB 627, which would require the UW Board of Regents to allocate \$2,000,000 (\$1,000,000 annually) in funding for UW state specialists in the field of applied agricultural research.**

From the latest economic impact study conducted in 2016, Wisconsin has a total of 2,270 farms generating approximately \$100 million in hogs marketed. There are over 10,000 jobs related to pork production and approximately \$376 million dollars of personal income recorded. The gross state product is valued at over \$587 million dollars.

Last week, we held our annual two-day Wisconsin Pork Expo, which features educational presentations from UW/UWEX faculty and staff. This program along with our Badger Swine Symposium held in November are our two largest educational program each year.

For other state associations, these sessions are taught by integrated state specialists. These researchers bring the latest research and best management practices to our farmers regularly. Our association must rely on county agricultural agents that are interested in the swine industry to assist with important programs such as Pork Quality Assurance, Transport Quality Assurance and Economic Impact Studies. The most recent economic impact study referred to above was conducted by professors from Iowa State University as our resources are very limited in Wisconsin for these efforts.

Unfortunately, there are only 4 county agricultural agents in the state that have their primary focus listed as livestock which includes much more than swine. Integrated State Specialists are vital to the health of not only Wisconsin pork production, but also to all of farming in Wisconsin. As technology and growing practices change, we need the latest scientifically sound information for our farmers to maintain their commitment to sustainable hog production and farming practices. These researchers are a critical link that supports Wisconsin's farm economy.

"Leading Our Industry's Future Success"

However, in recent years, many of these positions have been left vacant. The open positions have included: dairy markets, in the department of agricultural and applied economics; forage, in the department of agronomy; farm finance, in the department of dairy science; milk quality, in the department of dairy science; beef production and **swine production, in the department of animal science**; insect pest management, in the department of entomology; ruminant nutrition, in the department of dairy science; farmstead planning and storage, in the biological systems engineering program. These positions have not been left vacant because they are unimportant. To the contrary, they are critical to the economic health of Wisconsin's farm economy. They are open because they were not funding priorities within UW. This legislation recognizes their importance to Wisconsin farmers and will ensure that these critical agricultural state specialists' positions can be filled.

We ask you to support AB 627 and pass it during this session of the Legislature.