

March 2, 2021

Representative David Murphy, Chair
Committee on Colleges and Universities
Room 318 North, State Capitol
PO Box 8953
Madison, WI 53708

RE: 2021 ASSEMBLY BILL 64

Dear Chairman Murphy and Committee Members:

My name is Dona Goede and I am an instructor for Western Technical College. I write to you today in support of Assembly Bill 64. For over 7 years, I have worked as a Farm Business and Production Management (FBPM) instructor in Wisconsin and have experienced first-hand how needed a program like this is, especially for new and prospective farmers.

The statistics of the age of our farmers and the need for the next generation to take over is well known. Time and time again, I have worked with young farmers that know about the hard work needed, they know how to raise crops and livestock, but they do not know the business side of farming. Our financial institutions want to see balance sheets, cash flows, and return on investment before financing businesses and these are not things that are taught in the barn or around the kitchen table. Wisconsin has a group of individuals that teach these concepts to the next generation, the FBPM instructors in the Wisconsin Technical College System.

As a FBPM instructor, one of the hardest but most important parts of our jobs is telling someone that financially, this doesn't work. Recently, one farm that I worked with for 6 years was forced into bankruptcy just prior to the next generation taking over. The son and daughter-in-law are extremely grateful that we went over the financial picture in detail and they chose not to take on large amounts of debt to keep the operation going as it was. This decision to pivot and head a different direction will keep the farm in the family for many years to come.

We can all agree that financial training is important but this bill also recognizes that when the need is the greatest, the finances are likely at their least. As in my prior example, it may be when a farm is struggling or in many cases, it is when a younger farmer has just graduated from school, be it college or high school. This grant program also shows the next generation of farmers that our legislators want them to succeed and will do what they can to make that happen.

Thank you for recognizing the incredible resource that is the Farm Business and Production Management Program. I hope this grant program can be created to increase the number of new and prospective farmers utilizing the program.

Sincerely,



Dona Goede
313 Broadway Street
Cashton, WI 54619
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March 2, 2021

Representative David Murphy, Chair
Committee on Colleges and Universities
Room 318 North, State Capitol
PO Box 8953
Madison, WI 53708

RE: 2021 ASSEMBLY BILL 64

Anthony Seelow

E4798 Stafslie Ln.

Chaseburg, WI 54621

About Anthony from Instructor Dona G.:

Anthony Seelow and his parents have a small organic dairy farm outside of Chaseburg, WI. In 2017, Anthony completed the University of Wisconsin's Farm and Industry Short Course with hopes of taking over the family farm. Anthony's father has been a student of the Farm Business and Production Management program at Western Technical College since 2010 and has completed a full financial analysis of the farm each year. The family is currently working on a plan to transition the farm to the next generation but the process has been slow because of all of the details that need to be worked out before the actual transition. The extensive knowledge of the farm's financial picture over the past 10 years has helped this farm narrow down the transition options and select the ones that are best for both the parents and the children.

Committee on Colleges & Universities

Support of Technical college farmer tuition assistance grants (WI AB64)

I am writing this letter in support of Technical college farmer tuition assistance grants. This bill would be helpful in offsetting the cost associated with Technical school classes for farmers. I am currently enrolled in Western Technical College's Farm and Business management class. This class has been a huge help to our operation. Some of the benefits from it have been: in class learning about farm topics, networking with other farmers, use of a soil testing ATV, help with farm financials, and getting us information that can help us improve our operation. Through this course we also got in touch with some professionals to help us with our farm transition. I believe that this bill would help get more farmers to look into technical school programs and give them another tool in the toolbox to survive and thrive in these challenging times. I hope that you vote in support of this bill.

Sincerely,

Anthony Seelow

March 2, 2021

Hello,

I am a farmer and current student at Western Technical College's Farm and Business Production Management Program. My husband and I are first generation farmers and when we obtained loans through the Farm Service Agency, we were required to enroll in this program. We are also required to pay the tuition for the program.

This program is not conventional because there is minimal classroom time. Most of the program is the instructor coming to our farm to help with the business side of farming. We have been able to take advantage of more opportunities because we had our financials organized. This is thanks to our instructor.

This program has been especially helpful in the last few years. We were one of the hundreds of family farms that sold their cows in 2018. There was a lot of business to work through when selling out, and our instructor was incredibly supportive throughout the entire process.

As a student of Western Tech, I was connected with the Farm Center, which offers free support to farmers for a wide variety of things. I also was connected with Western's campus counselor. Dispersing the herd was an incredibly emotional process, and over a year later we were still dealing with the repercussions. To have the support and resources of this program has made the process manageable.

This has obviously been helpful as a farmer. However, there are all of us families that worked our whole lives to be a farmer, and now must find something different because farming did not work out. Personally, I had started college fourteen years ago, but did not finish due to the demands of family and farming. Once we were not farming, my options without a degree were limited. It has not been good on our morale to have worked so hard for so long, only to have to start at the bottom again. I have since enrolled in the Marketing Management program at Western as well.

It has been over two years since we sold our cows, and it has taught us a lot. Farming is way more than animal husbandry and crop management. Those are the things that most people refer to as the hard work, but it is what makes it fun for people like us. So that is what we always focused on. We have learned the hard way that the fun does not happen without the real work, and that is putting pencil to paper and having the business organized.

About Abby from Instructor Dona G.:

Abbie Wiedmeyer and her husband are first generation dairy farmers near Norwalk, Wisconsin. The family took advantage of Farm Service Agency farm loans to purchase their farm, cows and equipment but like many, the downturn in milk price forced them to sell the cows in 2018. Although the FSA loans do not pay for tuition in the Farm Business and Production Management program, the program meets the education requirement that the borrowers must meet. With the help of their FBPM instructor, Aimee Schomburg and much financial planning plus 2 years of both Abbie and her husband working off-farm jobs, they have been able to start milking again. The farm has also diversified by raising and selling beef and pork to increase income and keep the farm profitable.

With the guidance of our instructor and the Farm Business Program, we have been able to restructure things and resume milking again. The young stock that we kept back have calved in and we were able to bring some cows from our former herd back home as well. All the paper pushing was worth it when we brought our nine-year-old daughter's favorite cow home. To bring those animals back to our farm felt like my soul returning to its body.

I cannot stress enough how significant the instructors of this program have been to my family. I wish more people had access to them, and that they could expand their resources. Every farmer should have a Farm Business instructor on their team. I am forever grateful for the impact of this program on my family's life.

Sincerely,

Abigail Wiedmeyer

About Western's Farm Business Management Program:

Farm Business & Production Management

Technical Diploma

Program Number: 300901 | **Credits: 15.00** |
Not Financial Aid Eligible | **Typical Start: Fall**

APPLY NOW



Technological advances, crop and livestock production, government regulations, commodity prices, and environmental concerns all affect the farmer's bottom line.

The Farm Business and Production Management program is designed for people involved in farming who want to incorporate new and best practices. Instruction includes classroom, workshops, and on-farm experiences and activities. One major topic is emphasized each year with a five-year rotation of classes. Graduates who wish to continue after the first five years are encouraged to enroll in advanced courses. Students may join at any point during the cycle. Classroom sessions are usually held November through March with workshops and on-farm instruction taking place throughout the calendar year. All classes in the Farm Business and Production Management program include instruction on financial analysis and management of the farming operation.



LOREN OLDENBURG

STATE REPRESENTATIVE • 96th ASSEMBLY DISTRICT

Assembly Bill 64

Relating to: farmer tuition assistance grants and making an appropriation

Assembly Committee on Colleges and Universities

March 3, 2021

Good afternoon, Chairman Murphy and committee members. I want to thank you for your willingness to hear Assembly Bill 64.

Last session it was my honor to serve as a member of the Speaker's Task Force on Suicide Prevention. I enjoyed my learning experiences while traveling across Wisconsin to hear more about how suicide has affected people from all across the state, and discussing what we can do in the Legislature to help. A main priority of mine throughout the work of the task force was focusing on my community, the farming community.

It's no secret that the farming community has been having a tough time. It's as important as ever to recruit young farmers so that we can keep Wisconsin, America's Dairyland. I've said for a long time, if you're a farmer, you're not just a farmer; you are an entrepreneur, accountant, CEO, manager, maintenance worker and so much more. Wearing all these hats, and still running a successful farming operation is a lot to take on, and that's why it is so important that we educate young people who are interested in becoming farmers.

Assembly Bill 64 will allow scholarships to be administered by the Wisconsin Technical College System to current and prospective farmers. These scholarships will give farmers the opportunity to have all or part of their tuition covered for courses at a technical college. These courses will provide them with invaluable knowledge on topics like farm, business, and production management. Having access to training like this can help farmers have a better understanding of farm practices as a whole. Not only is this education important, but students will create a support system of other farmers while taking these courses. This will continue to be a benefit to these farmers for years to come.

Last session this bill passed the Assembly unanimously, and also unanimously passed the Senate Committee on Agriculture, Revenue and Financial Institutions. Thank you again for hearing Assembly Bill 64, a bill that will help educate and prepare farmers to run a successful farm and allow them to be equipped to deal with all aspects of the farming business.



JOAN BALLWEG

STATE SENATOR · 14TH SENATE DISTRICT

Assembly Bill 64: Technical College Farmer Tuition Assistance Grants
Assembly Committee on Colleges and Universities
Testimony of Senator Joan Ballweg
March 4, 2021

Good afternoon, members of the committee. Thank you for hearing this important piece of legislation.

Suicide prevention is something I trust you have heard more about over the past twelve months. Due to the pandemic, and subsequent isolation as people try to socially distance, individuals across Wisconsin and our country find themselves separated from support systems and losing hope.

In September of 2020, Prevent Suicide Wisconsin released its latest Suicide in Wisconsin report. 887 Wisconsin residents died by suicide in 2018, ranking Wisconsin second highest for suicide deaths among our neighboring Midwestern states. Between 2013 and 2017, suicide rates in Wisconsin were higher in rural counties than urban counties. The overwhelming majority of suicide deaths during that same time were male.

When you think of a rural, male population, it is not hard to draw the correlation to our farming communities. In fact, suicide among farmers has been a significant concern of mine for several years.

Last session, I chaired a special task force on suicide prevention. Assembly Bill 64 was one of the proposals that came out of this bipartisan committee, which passed the full Assembly and the Senate Committee on Agriculture, Revenue and Financial Institutions. This session, the Senate Committee on Agriculture and Tourism has already unanimously passed the senate companion bill. AB 64 recreates a grant program, previously administered by the Department of Agriculture, Trade and Consumer Protection, which will provide funds to farmers to take farm management courses through the Wisconsin Technical College System.

Over the course of my work with the task force, we heard from farmers and agricultural professionals who shared experiences working with individuals who felt they were at their wits end. We heard that farm finances are often a significant contributor to stress and could lead to suicidal ideation. We cannot control many of the aspects that cause farmers' stress, but we can help connect farmers with professionals at our technical colleges that teach strong farm management skills and provide support to an increasingly isolated workforce.

Thank you for your consideration of AB 64.