



NANCY VANDERMEER

STATE REPRESENTATIVE • 70th ASSEMBLY DISTRICT

TO: Honorable Members of the Assembly Committee on Agriculture

FROM: State Representative Nancy VanderMeer

DATE: April 7, 2021

SUBJECT: Testimony in Support of Assembly Bill 77

Thank you Chairman Tauchen and members of the Assembly Committee on Agriculture for holding a hearing on AB 77 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.

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 77 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 77 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.

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, the Dairy Business Association, the Wisconsin Agri-Business Association, the Wisconsin Association of Professional Agricultural Consultants, and others.

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

April 7, 2021

Assembly Committee on Agriculture Testimony on Assembly Bill 77

Thank you Chair Tauchen and committee members for hearing Assembly Bill 77 (AB 77), which increases funding by \$1 million annually to support the work of state integrated specialists who conduct applied agricultural research. Thank you Chair Tauchen, Vice-Chair Oldenburg, Rep. Moses and Rep. Tranel for co-sponsoring this bipartisan legislation.

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.

In addition to state integrated specialists, the Division of Extension at UW-Madison partially funds county-based extension educators. In contrast to the state specialists, the county-based extension educators **transmit** the relevant educational programming that was researched and developed by the state integrated specialists by answering questions from farmers. These county-based extension educators act as an intermediary, or middle-man, between farmers and scientists.

Unfortunately, since 1993 the number of CALs state specialists has fallen 53% 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 agriculture groups, **I heard that funding for the state integrated specialists is the most important investment the state can make in the Division of Extension.** To reinvest in these important state specialists, AB 77 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.

After receiving input from the agriculture industry, AB 77 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 increase in 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.

This funding will have a major positive impact on agriculture across the state and keep Wisconsin on the cutting edge of agricultural innovation.

AB 77 is supported by numerous farm and agriculture-related organizations including the Wisconsin Farm Bureau Federation, Wisconsin Association of Professional Agricultural Consultants, and the Dairy Business Association. Thank you again to the committee for hearing this proposal, and your timely action on the bill.

Assembly Committee on Agriculture

2021 Assembly Bill 77

Funding for certain extension services at UW System

April 7, 2021

Good morning Chairman Tauchen and members of the Assembly Committee on Agriculture. The University of Wisconsin-Madison thanks the committee for the opportunity to be able to provide written testimony in support of Assembly Bill 77 (AB 77), which provides additional funding for the crucial work being done in the field of applied agriculture by CALS and Extension faculty.

UW-Madison appreciates the intent of the authors to support state Extension specialists in the College of Agricultural and Life Sciences (CALS) who focus on applied agriculture and their impact on the future of agriculture in Wisconsin. We also appreciate the introduced amendment which adds the flexibility to fund Extension outreach specialist positions.

Researchers within CALS develop world-class research, working closely with Extension outreach positions and with input from farm owners, practitioners, and trade groups. This research forms the basis for guidance and solutions. The Extension faculty specialists integrated into CALS conduct basic and applied research that is extramurally funded, reviewed by peer scientists from around the world and informs Extension programming. They may deliver their findings directly to user groups or partner with Division of Extension programs on dissemination. They also train graduate and undergraduate students. In 2019-20, USDA funded \$30.1 million of research conducted by faculty in CALS.

An important role of Extension faculty in CALS is to stay apprised of the latest technology advancements and, in many cases, create new technologies for agriculture in collaboration with the graduate students they train. More often than not, the process of developing new technology is a result of the unique partnership between 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, 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

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“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 across the state of Wisconsin such as dairy pricing and marketability, nitrogen management, and developing different produce varieties. 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.

Extension outreach specialists in the Division of Extension provide outreach programming in a specialized topic across several counties or the entire state. These specialists also collaborate with faculty in academic departments on field-based research and disseminate research findings and other relevant information. The positions leverage the latest university research to create regional solutions coordinated with local agencies and trade groups to move industry and rural prosperity issues forward. This model builds off successful private-public partnerships to connect and apply university research with those who can benefit from it the most.

Just this past year Extension has supported 250 cranberry growers across the state in this manner. Cranberries are Wisconsin’s largest fruit industry, valued at \$1 billion and employing nearly 4,000 people. In fact, Wisconsin produces more cranberries than any other state, making up more than 60 percent of the country’s production. Extension worked with the Wisconsin State Cranberry Growers Association and others to create a cranberry outreach specialist position working with growers in 20 central and northern counties. The specialist takes the latest research from Extension and CALS and provides growers with a resource for timely cranberry production questions and information to optimize Wisconsin cranberry yield and quality – and, therefore, cranberry farm profitability.

In 1990 there were about 70 Extension-funded faculty in the College of Agricultural and Life Sciences. 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. Similar position reductions have been experienced within the Division of Extension. SB 80 would allow CALS and Extension to reverse this trend and invest in this important work.

As was referenced before, AB 77 was recently amended to ensure funding could be directed both at CALS and the Division of Extension. With this additional flexibility we can fund these complimentary roles that are important to the agricultural industry. We also support the addition in the Governor’s Executive budget proposal that includes a much-needed investment for both Extension educators and CALS research positions.

UW-Madison appreciates the bill authors recognizing this important work and the additional, much-needed funding this proposal provides. On behalf of the UW-Madison, CALS, and the Division of Extension we would like to thank you for the opportunity to submit this testimony and describe the type of impact that could be realized through additional funding. If you have any questions, please reach out to UW-Madison Director of State Relations Crystal Potts at crystal.potts@wisc.edu or (608) 658-6761.



*Representing UW-Madison Faculty.
Strengthening Wisconsin.*

Testimony to the Assembly Committee on Agriculture in Support of Assembly Bill 77, Providing Funding for Extension Services

April 7, 2021

PROFS, the Public Representation Organization of the (UW-Madison) Faculty Senate, represents the interests of the UW-Madison faculty. PROFS is pleased to lend its support to Assembly Bill 77, which will provide much-needed funding for extension services at the UW-Madison College of Agricultural and Life Sciences (CALs) in the field of applied agricultural research.

UW's Cooperative Extension was recently brought back under the umbrella of UW-Madison. While the faculty are very happy with this development, the connection between UW-Madison and Extension was always strong. Even when Extension was officially a separate entity, many CALs faculty received funding for their services from Extension. These faculty and others from both Extension and CALs were working collaboratively and seamlessly to address the challenges confronting the state.

The collaboration on agricultural issues is the essence of the Wisconsin Idea. It has yielded many positive outcomes for our state's agricultural community and all of us who depend on its success. The one million dollars per year in new funding in AB 77 will be an important step in ensuring that this vital work continues into the future.

PROFS also commends Governor Evers for including a similar financial commitment in his 2021-23 state budget proposal for agriculture-focused extension positions. The Governor goes a step further and requires the creation of 20 new positions. And he would require UW-Madison to submit a report to the Governor and the Joint Finance Committee by January 1, 2023 specifying the dates of hires for each person hired for these positions and their responsibilities. The report would be required to highlight how each agent has communicated climate change issues to farmers and the metrics used for tracking agricultural practice changes relating to climate change.

The UW-Madison faculty look forward to continuing to work with legislators to ensure that the Wisconsin Idea remains vibrant for generations to come.



April 7, 2021

To: Assembly Committee on Agriculture

From: Wisconsin State Cranberry Growers Association, Wisconsin Potato & Vegetable Growers Association, Wisconsin Pork Association, Wisconsin Cattlemen's Association, Wisconsin Association of Professional Agricultural Consultants, Wisconsin Soybean Association and Wisconsin Farm Bureau Federation

Re: **Support AB 77 - Funding for UW State Specialists Providing Extension Services**

The Wisconsin State Cranberry Growers Association, Wisconsin Potato & Vegetable Growers Association, Wisconsin Pork Association, Wisconsin Cattlemen's Association, Wisconsin Association of Professional Agricultural Consultants, Wisconsin Soybean Association and the Wisconsin Farm Bureau Federation **support AB 77, which would require the UW Board of Regents to allocate \$2,000,000 (\$1,000,000 annually) in funding for UW state specialists providing extension services at UW-Madison College of Agricultural and Life Sciences in the field of applied agricultural research.**

UW-Madison state specialists who provide extension services are researchers who bring the latest research and farming practices to farmers across the State of Wisconsin. These individuals present update in cropping practices, conservation, use of fertilizers, pest management, animal health and a variety of other topics at our commodity organizations' summer and winter meetings. They hold on-farm mini clinics, field days, workshops and provide other direct connections to Wisconsin farmers on a daily basis. This past year, these individuals presented at countless virtual meetings and programs for farmers to continue their dissemination of research and updates throughout the pandemic.

These State Specialists are vital to the *economic* health of farming in Wisconsin. As technology and growing practices change, farmers need the latest scientifically sound information to maintain their commitment to sustainable farming while also preserving their businesses through increasing challenging economic times. These researchers provide that link between research and *applying* updated practices in the field.

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. They were open because there was not sufficient funding within UW-Madison CALS to support them. This legislation recognizes the importance of these specialists to Wisconsin farmers and will ensure that these critical agricultural state specialists positions can be filled.

We respectfully request that you support Wisconsin farmers and pass AB 77 this session.