WISCONSIN LEGISLATURE

P. O. Box 7882 Madison, WI 53707-7882

Assembly Bill 717 and Senate Bill 571

Testimony from Representative Keith Ripp and Senator Jerry Petrowski

January 28, 2016

Good morning Chairman and members of the committee and thank you for the opportunity to testify on Assembly Bill 717.

This bill provides narrow flexibility to allow UW College of Agricultural and Life Sciences (CALS) and UW-Madison to react in a timely manner to a rapidly changing agricultural real estate landscape by selling or exchanging properties in urban areas and re-investing in land that becomes available near other existing research stations in more rural locations.

Under current law, CALS and UW-Madison are required to bring any sale, lease, purchase, or exchange of agricultural land before the State Building Commission for approval. Because of this, agricultural lands that become available for sale may be sold before the university can make it through the approval process with the commission. This proposal provides limited authority to the University of Wisconsin Board of Regents to buy, sell, lease, and exchange agricultural land used by UW-Madison without the approval of the Building Commission.

The properties involved in the sale, purchase, lease, or exchange must serve the purpose of agricultural instruction and research. It is important to note that new construction projects on those lands would still be subject to current State Building Commission protocols and approvals.

Additionally, net proceeds from the sale, purchase, lease, or exchange of agricultural land would be placed in a non-lapsable fund. Those funds would be available for future purchase of agricultural land or for the erection of facilities for research and instruction in animal husbandry, agricultural engineering, and agricultural and life sciences at UW-Madison. However, the funds used for the erection of facilities would still need the approval of the State Building Commission.

This consolidation effort is a vital part of CALS' infrastructure reinvestment plan. Several eminent land opportunities provide a unique opportunity to address a long-term development problem and secure vital research assets for the future.

Thank you again for the opportunity to testify this morning and we would be happy to answer any questions.

College of
Agricultural & Life Sciences
UNIVERSITY OF WISCONSIN-MADISON

The Case for Reinvestment of Agricultural Land Sales
Testimony before the Assembly Committee on Colleges and Universities on AB 717
Richard Straub, Senior Associate Dean and Heidi Zoerb, Associate Dean,
College of Agricultural and Life Sciences, UW-Madison
January 28, 2016

On behalf of University of Wisconsin-Madison's College of Agricultural and Life Sciences, I am here in support of AB 717. This legislation would allow for reinvestment of proceeds from the sale of our agricultural research lands back into research infrastructure to support Wisconsin agriculture.

This ability to reinvest is critical for the college to continue to support the changing agricultural landscape and the economic and technical development needed to insure the strength of this vital Wisconsin industry.

Our 11 stations across the state are a laboratory for scientists to study biological and economic problems of food and agriculture. History has shown that the stations have played pivotally important roles in developing solutions to these problems.

At these station locations, farmers and producers can observe new technologies in practice and also learn how to deploy those technologies at their own operations.

Stations serve as living classrooms, training the next generation of agricultural professionals who are enrolled as students in our undergraduate, graduate and short course programs. As our population becomes less rural, they also offer many students their first hands-on experience with production agriculture.

Much of the research and instruction done at a research stations cannot be done in any other location. For example, evaluations of treatments for a pest or pathogen require multiple test plots, with a guaranteed loss in some. This risk is too great for farmers to undertake on their own, but research stations provide a perfect environment for the long-term, controlled conditions that will lead to the best possible solution for Wisconsin farmers to protect and grow their businesses.

Sufficient research land must be available to inoculate fields with pathogens, develop weed populations, and maintain low fertility fields which allow for disease, weed and fertility trials. Larger fields must be available for equipment and feeding trials. And sufficient land must be available to allow recovery of fields following research trials.

We are already facing critical challenges due to a lack of appropriate research land. As an example: At the Arlington station, there is an insufficient land base to support the increased

demand for crop research and land to support the forage needs of our 500-cow dairy research facility. And due to a lack of land for distributing manure, the dairy operation is able to milk only twice per day. Most successful Wisconsin dairy herds are milking three times per day. Consequently, our research herd is out of step with the trend in the Wisconsin dairy industry. At Arlington, our current footprint includes 150 acres we currently rent, but the family that rents to us has indicated an interest in selling it. We face similar challenges as Marshfield, where 100 acres we currently rent may also soon be on the market. Without the funds to purchase this land, which we could generate from sales at the West Madison Station, both stations will shrink.

Additionally, we can already see growing urban pressures in some areas that may necessitate relocating or reducing the size of a station.

Many of the large grants our researchers receive would not be possible without land and support services provided by our stations. Without an appropriate land base, tens of millions of dollars in grant funding will either go to researchers in other states, or our Wisconsin researchers will have to redirect funds from the grant to sub-contracts with other states.

Appropriate land is necessary to support research in emerging agricultural sectors to help these sectors expand. A timely example is organic crop research – suitable land is needed to provide both field trials and pest and pathogen research critical to growing this rapidly expanding industry in the state.

Without the ability to purchase lands in key locations, our critical capacity will be reduced.

For more than a century, UW-Madison research stations have been the birth place of innovation in crop and animal science. The flexibilities included in this legislation will give us the tools to continue this important research and development work into the future, and allow the college to continue to help grow Wisconsin's $88 billion agricultural industry.

Thank you