



PATRICK TESTIN

STATE SENATOR

DATE: June 28th, 2017
RE: **Testimony on 2017 SB 224 and AB 302**
TO: The Senate Committee on Agriculture, Small Business, and Tourism
FROM: Senator Patrick Testin

Chairman Moulton and members of the committee, thank you for today's hearing and for allowing me to present testimony on behalf of Senate Bill 224 (SB 224), the Wisconsin Veterans Farm Bill of 2017. This bill aims to bolster our agricultural workforce by establishing a program at the Department of Agriculture, Trade, and Consumer Protection (DATCP) to help military veterans transition into farming. Additionally, it requires the Department of Veterans Affairs (DVA) to work with DATCP to develop a logo for veteran produced agricultural goods, so that consumers can have the opportunity to support veterans with their purchases. It's worth noting that this legislation was developed in cooperation with DATCP, DVA, the Department of Military Affairs (DMA), and the Department of Administration (DOA). All four agencies have publicly supported SB 224.

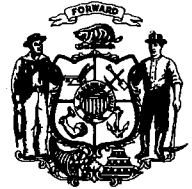
Wisconsin has strong traditions in both military service and agricultural excellence. Farming generates more than 88 billion dollars in economic activity for our state; however the agricultural workforce is aging. The average age of a Wisconsin farmer is now in the upper fifties. This is a profession that needs an infusion of young, enthusiastic workers. Farming requires long hours of work, little time off, and a lot of dedication; the men and women who have served in the military are certainly fit for such challenges. Several other states have passed legislation similar to what we are proposing, and have had success in bolstering their workforce. Our legislation is modeled after a program that has been successfully implemented in West Virginia. Over the past three years, the program has helped more than 300 veterans become farmers, nearly all whom have also started their own businesses.

In addition to growing our agricultural workforce, SB 224 also seeks to assist veterans as they transition into civilian life. Despite the unique training that the military provides, some veterans still encounter difficulty in finding a job. Additionally, many veterans return from war with scars – some visible, others not. Studies have shown that rigorous physical work, like the type that farmers engage in on a day to day basis, can have a therapeutic effect for those suffering from Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD). Eight of the veterans involved in the model West Virginia program have publicly stated that their participation has kept them from committing suicide, which of course reinforces the Zero Veteran Suicide Initiative that DVA announced last October. Meaningful work on the farm can provide more than income; it can help veterans find a new purpose and save their lives.

The agricultural community has been very supportive of SB 224. The Wisconsin Farm Bureau Federation, Wisconsin Farmers Union, Cooperative Network, the Wisconsin Cattlemen's Association, the Wisconsin Corn Growers Association, the Wisconsin Pork Association, the Wisconsin Potato and Vegetable Growers Association, the Wisconsin Soybean Association, and the Wisconsin State Cranberry Growers Association have all registered in favor of this bill. The bill also has strong bi-partisan support. This bill has been a great opportunity for Rep. Ed Brooks and me to work with Rep. Goyke and Sen. Ringhand, and together, I believe we've created a bill that is good for veterans, their families, and the future of Wisconsin farming. Thank you again for your time and consideration.



STATE REPRESENTATIVE
18th ASSEMBLY DISTRICT



June 28, 2017

Public Testimony of State Representative Evan Goyke

Re: Senate Bill 224 – The Wisconsin Veterans Farm Bill of 2017

Good morning Chairman Moulton and members of the Agriculture, Small Business and Tourism Committee. I'm grateful for the opportunity to testify today in support of Senate Bill 224 and thank the members of this committee who are co-sponsors.

I thank Senator Testin and Rep. Ed Brooks for their teamwork in helping craft this legislation and dedication to see it move forward. I would also like to thank the supportive state agencies, non-profits, veteran groups and agriculture stakeholders for their collaboration with our offices.

After months of work Senator Testin and I are proud to introduce Senate Bill 224- the Wisconsin Veterans Farm Bill of 2017. It is time Wisconsin further invests in the future and growth of our agricultural economy by providing greater workforce opportunities for veterans to transition from the battlefield to the farm field.

This legislation also received a public hearing in the Assembly Veterans and Military Affairs Committee on June 8th and was unanimously approved by the committee on June 22nd.

This legislation is pro-veteran, pro-agriculture, and pro-workforce. It will accomplish two changes in State law to benefit current and future veteran farmers – both rural and urban:

- 1.) *Creation of the Veteran Farmer Assistance and Outreach Program within DATCP*
 - This program will further help integrate veterans into the field of agriculture, and support veterans currently working in agriculture.
- 2.) *Creation of a logotype issued by the State for certified veteran-owned farms and products.*
 - Similar to what was passed last session by this committee for veteran-owned and disabled veteran-owned businesses, this logotype will provide to veteran farmers an opportunity to further promote themselves throughout Wisconsin, as well as making them more accessible and identifiable to consumers who wish to support farms owned by Wisconsin veterans.

Following changes to benefit veteran farmers in the federal 2014 Farm Bill, and initiatives in other states like West Virginia, the US Department of Agriculture has added a question about military veteran status to the 2017 Agriculture Census. This data will help DATCP target this specific population and track the effectiveness of veteran farmer focused programs.

In addition to the State agencies and agriculture groups mentioned by Senator Testin, this legislation is also supported by the West Virginia Agriculture Commissioner, Farmer Veteran Coalition, Veterans of Foreign Wars, Military Order of the Purple Heart, and the County Veteran Service Officer Association.

Thank you again for holding a public hearing on SB 224. I am happy to answer any questions.





EDWARD BROOKS

STATE REPRESENTATIVE

TESTIMONY IN SUPPORT OF 2017 SB 224 & AB 302

Mister Chairman and committee members, thank you for hearing this bill, the Wisconsin Veterans Farm Bill of 2017, today.

I'd like to focus on why this bill is good policy for Wisconsin. So, beyond the statutory text and the LRB analysis of the bill, let's take a look at some current challenges we have in Wisconsin and what solutions this bill offers.

First, in Wisconsin agriculture, our farmers are aging and want to plan their transition off the farm. The *Janesville Gazette* recently wrote an article on this issue that I've attached for your consideration.

Next, the Wisconsin National Guard has deployed thousands of Soldiers (over 10,000 according to the DMA Public Affairs office) and Airmen (over 13,000 according to the DMA Public Affairs office) since 9/11, and we still have smaller groups going to and returning from deployments to all parts of the world. Successful reintegration into civilian life for returning service members is a concern that our military leaders take seriously. Job skills and employment is one aspect of reintegration, and an important one.

This bill will help Wisconsin meet the needs of those farmers who want to transition off the farm, and the needs of veterans who have an interest in transitioning to the farm, and current veteran farmers, via the outreach aspect of the bill, as well as help veterans market their products via a veteran farmer logotype.

Simply, it's good public policy and I respectfully request your vote in support of this bill.



State of Wisconsin
Governor Scott Walker

Department of Agriculture, Trade and Consumer Protection
Ben Brancel, Secretary

June 28, 2017

Daniel Smith
Administrator, Division of Agricultural Development
Wisconsin Department of Agriculture, Trade and Consumer Protection

To: Senate Agriculture, Small Business and Tourism Committee
Re: Services and Programs of the Wisconsin Farm Center

Background: The Wisconsin Farm Center serves the state's farmers and agribusinesses in sustaining and growing Wisconsin agricultural economy and rural communities. Started as the Farmers Assistance Program in 1984, the Wisconsin Farm Center provides trained professionals and resources that are offered at no cost to those requesting assistance.

Primary Areas of Assistance:

1. Financial consultation – WFC staff provide independent analysis of cash flow, credit agreements, profit and loss records, operating expenses and other financial matters involved in operating a farm or agribusiness.
2. Succession planning – Wisconsin farm and agribusiness owners and operators are an aging population. The WFC provides advice and consultation on how to successfully transfer a farm or business to the next generation or new ownership. Staff provides assistance with the financial, estate planning and emotional aspects of ownership transfers and retirement.
3. Non-traditional forms of agriculture – WFC staff provide specific business planning for those interested in pursuing such forms of agriculture as farm to table, organics, specialty crops (fruits, vegetables, nuts, etc.), grass-based livestock production, non-ruminant animals and other important sectors of the overall agricultural economy.
4. Minority and beginning farmer assistance – Many people express an interest in entering agriculture but lack the experience, resources and opportunity to do so. WFC staff provides assistance with business planning, available credit options, risk management and helps overcome language and cultural obstacles. WFC staff assist in linking those who wish to enter agriculture with opportunities to do so and can provide continued support as challenges arise.
5. Conflict mediation – WFC trained mediators provide dispute resolution with creditors, family members, neighbors or other agencies regarding any form of dispute that may occur.
6. Counseling services – WFC partners with mental health counselors across the state to provide low or no-cost counseling for farmers and their families.

Agriculture generates \$88 billion for Wisconsin

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An equal opportunity employer

Support and Assistance for Veterans:

1. The Farm Center programs detailed above are available and may be beneficial to veterans interested in agricultural careers.
2. Beyond farming, opportunities exist in associated agricultural careers such as precision farming technologies, field application and data collection and analysis. Veterans may be uniquely qualified to transition the skills learned from military training to these new areas of employment. The Farm Center can provide outreach to veterans on these opportunities.
3. The Farm Center works directly with farmers and agribusinesses on ownership succession plans and means of addressing manpower shortages. The Farm Center is positioned to serve as a liaison between the agricultural industry and veterans seeking career opportunities.

Availability: The Wisconsin Farm Center can be reached weekdays from 7:45AM until 4:30PM at 1-800-942-2474 or at farmcenter@wisconsin.gov. WFC staff are available for on-farm visits anywhere in Wisconsin by appointment at no cost to the farmer.

DATE: June 28th, 2017
RE: **Testimony on 2017 SB 224 and AB 302**
TO: The Senate Committee on Agriculture, Small Business, and Tourism
FROM: Tony Kurtz

Chairman Moulton and members of the committee, thank you for today's hearing and for allowing me to present testimony on behalf of Senate Bill 224 (SB 224), the Wisconsin Veterans Farm Bill of 2017. As a 20 year Army Veteran and certified organic farmer, I am excited to be here today in support of this legislation. Growing up I had two things I really wanted to do; the first was to be in the military and the second was to farm. After I served 20 years on active duty, I retired in 2005, I bought my first piece of farm land in 2006, and started the organic transition. Today my farm is 220 acres and I rent another 55 acres. I believe farming is a natural fit for many veterans. At least for me, and other veterans that I know, we like to see results - and in farming you definitely see results, some good and some not so good. It takes hard work and dedication to make it in agriculture in today's environment and I know that veterans have that dedication to succeed in this demanding profession.

Wisconsin has strong traditions in both military service and agricultural achievement. Farming generates more than 88 billion dollars in economic activity for our state; however the agricultural workforce is aging. According to the 2016 USDA/NASS State Agricultural in Wisconsin, the average age of a Wisconsin farmer is 56.5 years of age. To maintain our leadership in agriculture, we need an infusion of young, enthusiastic workers. A dedicated program to promote veterans entry into the agricultural industry is a great step forward in helping our aging workforce. One interesting note that many folks do not know about our great state is that Wisconsin does not tax military retirement pay. This, in my humble opinion, is another recruitment tool to bring younger folks to our agricultural industry. Two states, West Virginia and Nebraska have a similar Veteran Farm Bills but they do not exempt military retirement pay from state tax.

I appreciate your time today and look forward to any questions that you may have. Thank you again for your time and consideration.



Wednesday June 28, 2017

Greetings members of the Hearing Committee:

I am honored to have been invited to testify today on behalf of the Wisconsin Veterans Farm Bill 2017. I'd like to share my background with members today to demonstrate how approval of the Wisconsin Veterans Farm Bill 2017 will help Wisconsin veterans.

My name is Brian Sales and I am a proud disabled combat veteran who served nearly a decade in the US Army Infantry, with one tour in Kosovo and two combat tours in Iraq in support of Operation Iraqi Freedom. When I returned to civilian life after my final tour, I found myself, like so many other veterans, void of direction.

Once discharged, veterans go from a structured, team-focused, purpose-centric lifestyle that is extremely organized to a wide-open, unstructured civilian world with little support. Some veterans enter the civilian life feeling it doesn't fully comprehend the challenges veterans face.

Military service changes a person in many ways. Transitioning back to a civilian life is an overwhelming and often shocking experience - not unlike entering boot camp for the first time. However, there is no such thing as a reverse boot camp. The military are experts at turning civilians into soldiers, but not at turning soldiers back into civilians. For me and my fellow veterans, we feel we are left to fend for ourselves, without that close camaraderie and support we experienced in the military. At times we are still coming to terms with what we experienced in the service, especially combat veterans, leaves us feeling overwhelmed, confused, and restless.

MISSION

Green Veterans are dedicated to helping our Nation's heroes learn about sustainable building and green living, while helping ease the hardship of military-to-civilian transition.

VISION

By empowering Veterans to become volunteer leaders in their communities, we nurture opportunities for continuing education, networking, employment, corporate engagement and green entrepreneurship.



We face this transition in addition to needing to develop a new identity and find our place in society. Yes, there are military benefits available to those who have served, but sifting through the paperwork and navigating through the bureaucracy only adds to the stress of reintegrating back into society. Like so many others, my initial post-tour employment experiences left me without a sense of purpose. I came from having the most important mission in the United States to facing jobs with no meaning. I floated between jobs and moved across the country looking for that motivation to succeed through meaningful work and greater mission.

In 2012, I finally took advantage of my military benefits and went back to school for a Bachelor's Degree in Alternative and Renewable Energy Management, which is what ultimately exposed me to Sustainability.

My experiences with sustainability in college led me to form the Green Veterans. It is through this group of veterans and civilians that I found a new mission, a new sense of purpose, a renewed commitment to service, and ultimately a passion for farming. You see, veterans are programmed by the U.S. Government and the best training operation in the world to complete a mission, to see it through to the end, no matter what. Yet, at least for me I left the military confused as to whether I accomplished that mission or not. Maybe that is the effect of a prolonged war. How much did my contribution matter? Did I make a difference? I can't say with certainty, but at least I have come to terms with my time in the service.

It is important to know that what I do matters. With sustainability and more specifically, urban farming technology, I am using my skills and knowledge to be a part of Growing Power's new farming paradigm that Mr. Will Allen has developed over the past few decades. With Farming, I can see the beginning and the end of a task completed. Through nature's technology I can see the result of my work and sacrifice, knowing that I'm serving my fellow man, woman and children. I feed people; I create healthy soil in a way that sustains nature. This is a mission I am dedicated to and with the collaboration of Growing Power and Mr. Will Allen; our vision is to make Growing Power the National Urban Farming Training Center for all Veterans who wants to learn and become an Urban Farmer.

As far back as WWI connecting soldiers with nature and farming has been used to treat the invisible wounds of war. Back then it was called shell shock. Today it's called PTSD. No matter what it's called, its effects are



the same and what was true then is true now. Veterans need help and help is what I am here to talk about. The Wisconsin Veterans Farm Bill 2017 honors the service of our veterans and their family members, it helps! create opportunities for entrepreneurship, it helps! allocated resource to aspiring veteran farmers, it helps! educate and train veterans for a future in agriculture. It helps! Diversify existing farm businesses and it helps! farmers create businesses that not only support their families but could potentially employ others. It also helps provide a path to sustainable rural communities, sustainable food sheds, and more importantly it helps! veterans provide for their health and safety and the health and safety of their community. Sometimes all a veteran needs is a little help. Your help, with this bill, will make it easier to engage veterans in a mission that matters: providing meaningful, family-supporting employment; growing LOCAL jobs; creating healthy, sustainable food even in under-served areas; and resolving the trauma of war while accelerating the reintegration of people who are hard-wired to serve their country. This is a mission veterans can rally around! The Green Veterans is a proof of that.

I would like to thank Senator Testin, Representative Goyke, Senator Ringhand, and Representative Brooks for their work in authoring Wisconsin Veterans Farm Bill 2017. Like other similar, successful programs in other states, this bill is an investment in Wisconsin's veterans that I strongly believe will pay dividends for generations to come. I would like to thank the members of this committee for inviting me to speak to with you today on this important piece of legislation.

Thank you,

Brian J. Sales
 Aquaculture/Assistant Facilities Manager - Growing Power
 Co-Founder - Green Veterans Group
 (561) 351-0178 | brian.sales1@gmail.com
"Follow me and I will lead the way!"

Veterans Farm Bill Testimony

6/28/17

Good Morning Senators and thank you for your time. My name is Shea Zastrow, I am the Civilian Chair of Green Veterans Wisconsin, and I am honored to be here.

[PAUSE]

I am here today because I met and worked with two Veterans. We had agreed to meet and work on a service project at the Growing Power Headquarters on the morning of January 17th. This was a transformative day for me, for the first time in my life I witnessed how much Veterans get done with the time they have. Our mission was to provide maintenance to an aquaponics system in Greenhouse 5. Individual tasks were assigned to help each other towards finishing the job. And I quote Mr. Brian Sales "Alright, now you do this, you do this, and I'll do this. Let's come back in 10 minutes and see where we can improve." For chow it was the same system, "You get the dishes, you get the silverware, I'll get the food. We'll be eating in 4 minutes."

[PAUSE]

Veterans are hard wired to finish jobs. And Civilians will only realize this truth if they break a sweat and work with a Veteran. Since that fateful day, I've focused my efforts on the collaboration of Veterans and Civilians. I challenge Civilians to do more than simply Thank Veterans on Veterans Day and then think they're good for 364 days. I help popularize hashtags such as; get to know a Vet, let our Veterans know we support them, and it starts with one. I challenge Civilians to spend just one more day this year with a Vet than they did last year. To all the Civilians that can hear me, instead of thanking a Veteran when you see one, I challenge you to do one better and get a Veteran to thank you. This proposition enriches lives. Again, thank you Senators for your time and your efforts.



Military Order of the Purple Heart

Department of Wisconsin



June 28, 2017

Chairperson Moulton and Members of the Senate Committee on Agriculture, Small Business and Tourism:

The Military Order of the Purple Heart-Department of Wisconsin gladly expresses its SUPPORT for SB 244 relating to-establishing a veteran farmer assistance and outreach program and creating a veteran farmer logotype.

Wisconsin has a proud history of its citizens serving in our nation's military from the Civil War until now. It's reputation for its military history and excellent treatment of our veterans is paralleled by its proud history of agricultural greatness. SB 224 combines these two proud traditions and is an outstanding idea. We thank Senator Testin and Representative-Goyke as well as all co-sponsors for bringing this legislation forth.

The MOPH of WI encourages each member of this committee to vote for passage of SB 224 and we look forward to seeing it signed in to law!

Jason E. Johns

State Legislative Director
MOPH Department of WI



1-844-WIS-CVSO (947-2876)

June 2, 2017

Representative Skowronski
Chairman of the Assembly Committee on Veterans and Military Affairs
Room 209
State Capital
P.O. Box 8953
Madison, WI 53708

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Jim Young, Vernon, NACVSO Delegate
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Charlene Cobb, Sheboygan, Treasurer

RE: Support of AB 302

Chairman Skowronski,

The County Veterans Service Officers Association of Wisconsin would like to go on record in support of Assembly Bill 302. This bill relating to establishing a veteran farmer assistance and outreach program and creating a veteran farmer logotype has been reviewed and endorsed by our association's executive committee. We hope this bill will bring assistance and awareness to veterans interested in or already working in the farming industry.

Regretfully we are unable to attend the June 8, 2017 hearing to express our support in person. Please have this letter of support entered into the record.

Sincerely,

Rock A. Larson

Rock Larson
Legislative Committee Chairman.



**FARMER VETERAN
COALITION**

President: Gary Matteson
VP Beginning, Small Farmer Programs,
Farm Credit Council
Washington, DC

Vice President: Charles Kruse
Brigadier General ANG (retired)
Past Pres., Missouri Farm Bureau
Dexter, MO

Secretary: Larry Jacobs,
Co-CEO, Jacobs Farm/Del Cabo
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Bill Field, EdD,
Director, National AgrAbility Project,
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West Lafayette, IN

Ambassador Stan Flemming,
Brig. General US Army (retired)
MD Family & Adolescent Medicine
Fort Lewis, WA

Tasha Hargrove, PhD,
Assistant to Dean for Outreach
Tuskegee University
Tuskegee, AL

Ian Northrop
Chief Financial Officer
JNHA, INC.
Alexandria, VA

Terrell Spencer
Across the Creek Farm
West Fort, AR

Donn Teske,
Vice President,
National Farmers Union
Wheaton, KS

Alex Woods
Vice President, Division Operations
Kubota Tractor Corporation
Grapevine, TX

May 18, 2017

State Representative Evan Goyke
Room 322 West
State Capitol
PO Box 8952
Madison, WI 53708

Dear Representative Goyke:

The mission of the Farmer Veteran Coalition (FVC) is mobilizing veterans to feed America. We believe that veterans possess the unique skills and character needed to strengthen rural communities and create sustainable food systems. We believe that agriculture offers purpose, opportunity, and physical and psychological benefits.

Our organization has more than 9,000 veteran members nationwide who are farming, working in agriculture, or aspiring to do so; 204 of these members are in Wisconsin. We have seven chartered state chapters nationwide and are working with a group of veterans who are eager to form one in Wisconsin.

Our **Farmer Veteran Fellowship Fund** has awarded \$1.4 million in small grants to beginning farmers. Our **Homegrown By Heroes** label is used by 970 veteran farmers and ranchers from all 50 states. The combined annual sales of participants in this program surpass \$50 million. **We hope Wisconsin considers adopting the Homegrown By Heroes label that dozens of Wisconsin veterans already use.**

We do not do this important work alone. We have forged strong partnerships with the nation's leading farm organizations and have received important support from Wisconsin Farm Bureau, Wisconsin Farmers Union, Badgerland Credit, MOSES (Midwest Organic Sustainable Education Service), the Grass Fed Beef Association, the National Farm Medicine Center out of Marshfield, WI, and our good friends at Growing Power in Milwaukee. Our roots are deep in the farm community of Wisconsin.

FVC is eager to support **2017 Assembly Bill 302**, establishing a veteran farmer assistance and outreach program and creating a veteran farmer logotype. Wisconsin has great opportunities for veterans who want to continue their service through farming and we think this bill can give them the support that can help their dream to farm become a reality.

Sincerely,

Michael P. O'Gorman

Michael O'Gorman
Executive Director
Farmer Veteran Coalition



West Virginia Department of Agriculture

1900 Kanawha Blvd. E., Charleston, WV 25305
304-558-3550

Kent A. Leonhardt
Commissioner

May 10, 2017

Honorable Evan Goyke
Wisconsin State Representative
Room 322 West
State Capitol
Madison, WI 53708

Dear Representative Goyke:

I am writing you today to voice my support for Assembly Bill 302. As the West Virginia Commissioner of Agriculture and a retired Lt. Colonel of the United States Marine Corps, I can say with full confidence agriculture can help our nation's veterans. From transitioning to civilian life to healing the unseen wounds of combat, veterans to agriculture programs have proven their success. In West Virginia, a state with one of the highest per capita populations of veterans, we have made it a priority to serve those who have given, sometimes everything, for our country. To date, eight of my veterans have told me that without agriculture, they would not be standing here today. Point blank, veterans to agriculture programs saves lives.

Besides benefits for our veterans, veterans to agriculture programs are crucial to the stability of our food systems. Every year, the average age of our farmers' rises, creating a larger age gap in the agriculture workforce. Veterans are the perfect fit to help fill this gap as most desire hands-on jobs working in the fields versus working in an office setting. We, as a nation, must train the next generation of farmers. Food accessibility and safety depends on it.

Agriculture is not the silver bullet to fixing all the problems that face our veterans today, but it is one of the most crucial tools we have. I hope my letter does not fall on deaf ears and you all do not let this great opportunity go by the wayside.

If you need any assistance, please do not hesitate to reach out to myself or our Veterans and Warriors to Agriculture Director James McCormick (304-558-3550, jmccormick@wvda.us)

Semper Fi,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Kent A. Leonhardt".

Kent A. Leonhardt
Commissioner



Public Support of Senate Bill 224
June 28, 2017 Madison, WI

To: Senator Terry Moulton
Chair of the Committee on Agriculture, Small Business and Tourism

Dear Chairman Moulton and Esteemed Committee Members,

As a Community Action Council Member for the Institute for Urban Agriculture and Nutrition (hereafter The Institute), I am sending public support in favor of Senate Bill 224.

The Institute seeks to foster real solutions to issues faced by those who work in local food systems; we support farmers, small businesses, healthy food access, and organic waste reclamation. Our mission is to advance the principles and practices of sustainable urban agriculture, healthy nutrition practices, and economic development through innovative collaboration. We are a collaboration between academic, public, non-profit, and private entities such as The University of Wisconsin, Milwaukee School of Engineering, Marquette University, Growing Power, Milwaukee Food Council, and many independent businesses, faith-based organizations, and non-profit agencies.

Personally, as both doctoral candidate in UW-Milwaukee's Urban Studies Program and a dietitian who teaches food systems, I'm quite familiar with the need for novel agricultural systems solutions in rural, peri-urban, and urban areas. Senate Bill 224 has the potential to spur economic growth in the agricultural sector as well as address facts such as the most recent federal agricultural census reporting a decline of 28% of new & beginning farmers between 2007 and 2012. As someone who attempts to grow food, I know the empowering therapy that digging in the soil provides. I also know that farming is not for the faint of heart. Given the structure and discipline required of military service, veterans are uniquely suited to thrive in the complex cycle of risks, tests, failures, and solutions required of farming.

On behalf of the Institute for Urban Agriculture and Nutrition, we support Senate Bill 224.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,
Renee

Renee Scampini, MS, RD
University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee, Urban Studies Program, PhD Candidate
Kompost Kids, Member of the Board
Institute for Urban Agriculture and Nutrition, Community Action Council Member
scampin2@uwm.edu

VETERANS OF FOREIGN WARS

OF THE UNITED STATES



DEPARTMENT OF WISCONSIN

Testimony in Support of Senate Bill 224

Senate Committee on Agriculture, Small Business and Tourism

June 28, 2017

Good morning. I am Mike "Gunner" Furgal, Legislative Chairman for the Veterans of Foreign Wars, Department of Wisconsin. On behalf of Commander John Schultz and the nearly 40,000 VFW and auxiliary members located in every county in Wisconsin, I appreciate the opportunity to testify in support of Senate Bill 224, which would establish a veteran farmer assistance and outreach program

This bill has broad bipartisan and bicameral support because it fills a need to connect military veterans with careers in agriculture.

The Wisconsin Veterans Farm Bill of 2017 calls for the establishment of a Veteran Farmer Assistance and Outreach Program.

This legislative proposal would require the Department of Agriculture, Trade and Consumer Protection to create the program in consultation with DVA, DMA, UW-Extension and the federal Department of Agriculture.

The bill's text says the mission of the program is designed to "integrate veterans into the field of agriculture and support veterans currently working in agriculture."

As proposed, the bill should not cost the state any additional tax dollars..

Subject to your questions, that concludes my testimony.

Date: June 28th, 2017

Re: **Testimony on 2017 SB 224 302 and AB 302**

To: The Senate Committee on Agriculture, Small Business, and Tourism

From: Chris Holman, Farmer-Veteran (Nami Moon Farms, Custer, WI)

Chairman Moulton and members of the committee, thank you for today's hearing. I apologize for not being able to be there in person to deliver my testimony, but the farming season thus far has been slow-to-start, I am behind on planting, and I'll be making the proverbial hay since the Sun is finally shining. My apologies extend to Senator Testin as well, who I have been happy to work with on this issue.

As a farmer-veteran, I wish to express my support for establishing a program at the Department of Agriculture, Trade, and Consumer Protection (DATCP) to help military veterans who choose to pursue agriculture at some point in their lives. There are numerous programs around the country that have done a lot of great work over the last several years to help veterans of all eras, and it is exciting to see that Wisconsin is looking to join them.

I have direct experience with many of these programs, and my life as a farmer and as a veteran would not be the same without them. The organization I've worked with the most has been the Farmer Veteran Coalition (FVC). Through them, I have been able to network with other veterans, attend conferences, present to veterans about our farm, and I use the "Homegrown By Heroes" label that FVC helped to develop and which has been expanding its reach across the country.

Though I have learned a great deal from these organizations, one of the most beneficial aspects to each of them has been the community of veterans that has grown along with their work. This cannot be understated, as the set of experiences, shared vocabulary, and camaraderie among the veteran community are unlike anything in the civilian world. I have no doubt that if Wisconsin moves ahead with establishing this program, we will see our own community of farmer-veterans grow, and that puts veterans on better ground. Given the dearth of farmers in agriculture today and the incredible need for more farmers now and into the future, this bill will also provide veterans with another way to serve their country and community.

I was in the room when fellow veterans explained to the Secretary of Agriculture in Washington, D.C. how farming saved their lives. I have seen stoic veterans who exude strength and confidence begin to cry as they try to relate how helping things to grow helps to heal their soul. I know farmer-veterans who have found strength to push through adversity and still fail, but their community picked them up. The good that can be done here is incredibly powerful, and that is why so many people and organizations who might disagree and argue about many other issues find themselves together on this one. In that light, I hope that you, too, will find yourselves in support of this bill. Thank you for your time and consideration.

Assembly Bill 302 : Wisconsin Veterans Farm Bill Testimony

Thank you Mr. Chairman and members of this committee for holding this public hearing on Assembly Bill 302. My name is Steve Acheson. Some of you know who I am already, but for those that don't, here's a little bit of my background. I grew up on a 5th generation family-owned dairy farm near Campbellsport, WI, where milking cows twice a day, showing calves at the county fair, and wrestling were part of normal life. I was to be part of the sixth generation of farmers to work the land, until the mid 90s happened and the little guy couldn't make enough to support their family anymore by milking cows alone. Fast forward a few years, and the terrorist attacks on 9/11 led to me joining the Army as a Forward Observer and deploying with the 3rd Infantry Division to Sadr City, Iraq in 2005. Without going into the details, I returned from my deployment much different than I left. "The things we carry", as its sometimes referred to, - Post Traumatic Stress and a broken back that required two surgeries led to my Honorable Discharge in 2008. I began using my GI Bill to attend college, and graduated with honors with a Civil/Structural Engineering degree in 2013. But upon graduating, I still felt like something was missing. Rather than taking an engineering job, I decided to instead pursue my interest in farming. I wanted to do something productive, instead of destructive like I felt like I had been during my time in the service. I wanted to "continue to serve" my local community in a meaningful way - which I believe is a trait that is symptomatic of most veterans who leave the military and enter civilian life again. To that end, my partner Steph and I began the first-ever veteran-led, certified organic "Community Supported Agriculture (or CSA) farm" in Wisconsin just outside of Madison with a mission of hiring and training other veterans how to grow healthy, local, organic food for their communities.

My decision to enter farming as a veteran was very timely. Around this same time, the VA had conducted published a study which concluded that nature-based forms of therapy like fishing, animal training, equine therapy, gardening, and farming can be as, if not more, effective at reducing the symptoms of Post Traumatic Stress as more traditional forms of clinical treatments like cognitive behavioral and processing therapies. I can personally attest and affirm this study's findings, as I too have experienced tremendous mental health benefits from reconnecting with the soil. Not only that, but I've seen how a number of veterans have benefitted from working on the farm over the years as well.

Did you know that the USDA estimates that we need around 1 million new farmers over the next decade in this country to replace those who will be retiring? The average age of the American Farmer is something like 58. Legislators in DC had that rare moment of clarity where they saw a way to kill two birds with one stone - first, help heal veterans heal from the traumas of war by introducing them to farming, and second, solve the national farmer shortage. So, in 2014, a number of programs aimed at training veterans to farm were included in the Farm Bill. In fact, our farm established the first ever USDA-Funded training program specifically for veterans interested in Certified Organic production.

I also worked with a number of other state programs and non-profits to source grants for equipment, infrastructure, and research-based projects. However, the reality is that farming, especially starting a farm from scratch or inheriting an existing farm, takes a lot of initial start-up capital. More so than most other small businesses. If we truly want farms and farming to be both a healing and economically viable career option for the next generation of veterans, then I think Assembly Bill 302 will

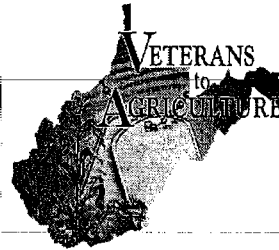
go a long way to providing a necessary and efficient government service to help Wisconsin veterans achieve that goal. The establishment of a Veteran-farmer Assistance and Outreach Coordinator position within DATCP will help connect new and existing veterans with programs and services – decreasing the amount of time the farmers themselves need to spend doing the legwork so they can focus on actually farming. The creation of a website specifically for veteran-farmers will also serve to streamline and consolidate resources.

AB 302 also calls for DATCP and DVA to design a logotype. There is already precedent for this logotype in other states. In fact, 16 other states have generated veteran farmer-specific logotypes to help veterans distinguish their product in the marketplace. Most states have decided to partner with the non-profit “Farmer Veteran Coalition’s” nationally recognized Homegrown by Heroes Label, while others have opted to create their own. I’ve brought a few examples of logos from other states, as well as a concept of what could work in Wisconsin by utilizing a combination of the Homegrown By Heroes Label with the “Something Special From Wisconsin” label. I do not have the rights to either of these images, but just wanted to show this committee what the advocates working on this issue were thinking in terms of design.

In closing, the past few years of farming for me have been absolutely transformative. However, as you can see I’m carrying a little extra hardware with me than I used to. Unfortunately, that old injury I suffered while deployed in 05 has come back with a vengeance, and, at least for the time being, has halted my farming pursuits. But I am hopeful that the 2017 Wisconsin Veterans Farming Bill will help other Wisconsin veterans find farming as a healing and fulfilling as I have.

Please vote yes on AB 302, thanks for your time. I’d be happy to answer any questions.

Steve Acheson
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TO: Senate Committee on Agriculture, Small Business, and Tourism

DATE: June 28, 2017

RE: Testimony on Senate Bill 224 Relating to: establishing a veteran farmer assistance and outreach program and creating a veteran farmer logotype.

FROM: Nick Levendofsky, WFU Government Relations Associate

Good morning, and thank you, Chairman Moulton and other members of the committee for allowing me to speak on SB224 today. My name is Nick Levendofsky, and I represent the Wisconsin Farmers Union, a member-driven organization, committed to enhancing the quality of life for family farmers, rural communities, and all people through educational opportunities, cooperative endeavors, and civic engagement.

Our member-driven, grassroots policy recognizes the average age of the U.S. farmer is getting closer to 60, and a majority of the nation's farmland will change hands in the coming years. The ability of the next generation of family farmers to continue to produce food, fiber, and fuel is critical to the economy, health, and security of our nation and local communities.

In order to address this critical concern, the necessary programs must be in place and funded in order to meet the unique needs and barriers facing beginning farmers and ranchers, with special emphasis on returning military veterans, and ensure they can enter and sustain farming and ranching as a viable livelihood. We also encourage the state to work with local, state, and national organizations that support veterans who wish to enter into agriculture.

I'd like to conclude with this quote from former Secretary of Agriculture Tom Vilsack, "Rural America represents 16% of America's populations, but nearly 40% of the men and women in uniform today come from rural America. Why do a disproportionate number of people from rural America go into the military? Because they're raised in a farm community and they're surrounded by people who understand something very basic about the land: you can't keep taking from it. There's not a farmer in this audience who could stay in business very long if they didn't give something back to the land they farm. They replenish it, they re-nourish it. And when they do, the land keeps producing for them. They understand that it's a bargain, it's a give-and-take. And when you grow up surrounded by that value system, you understand a country is no different. You can't keep taking from it. You've got to give something back."

Wisconsin Farmers Union wholeheartedly supports passage of SB224. Thank you for allowing me to speak on this matter today.

Nick Levendofsky

Government Relations Associate

Wisconsin Farmers Union

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**Senate Committee on Agriculture, Small Business and Tourism
June 28, 2017
Written Testimony on Senate Bill 224**

Chairman Moulton and members of the committee –

My name is Rob Richard and I am Senior Director of Governmental Relations for the Wisconsin Farm Bureau Federation (WFBF). I am submitting WFBF's written testimony in support of Senate Bill 224, a bill to establish a veteran farmer assistance and outreach program and to create a veteran farmer logotype.

We commend the authors of the bill, Rep. Evan Goyke, Rep. Ed Brooks, Sen. Patrick Testin and Sen. Janis Ringhand, for leading the effort in creating a program that better connects veterans to agricultural job opportunities, farming careers and the technical assistance needed to succeed.

It's no secret that many military veterans bring back with them to civilian life a discipline, drive and work ethic that is desirable for many employers in the general workforce, but this talent could be specifically tailored to help veterans succeed in farming. Farming isn't just a job, it's largely a lifestyle. It's a commitment to the farm 24/7, 365 days a year, and it's arguable that no group of people understand and appreciate commitment to a task better than veterans.

To those veterans who have suffered or witnessed the tragedies of war or armed conflict, farming can help bring them both a purpose and a sense of peace. A very quick search on most social media pages, blogs, Twitter feeds, etc. dedicated to getting veterans into farming will have very sincere and passionate testimonials on how agriculture and a devotion to land and animals can help provide fulfillment and a therapeutic calm to veterans who need it most.

There is also a very real economic need to get veterans into agricultural fields. There is no shortage of jobs and careers in the agriculture industry and those positions need to be filled by talented and devoted individuals. While the work at times can be very challenging, the pay can be rewarding.

The Wisconsin Farm Bureau Federation respectfully asks you to support this legislation to give veterans the help they need to start a career, or even renew a career, in agriculture. While there may be many assistance programs already in place at both the federal and state level to help them succeed, it can be a challenge navigating the bureaucracy and finding one's direction. This program would provide them that direction.

To those individuals who helped defend this country, we can't think of a better endeavor than to offer the assistance they might need to now help feed this country.