



WISCONSIN LEGISLATURE

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

January 23, 2020
Assembly Committee on Colleges and Universities
Assembly Bill 556
Sen. Howard Marklein and Rep. Amy Loudbeck

Thank you Chairman Murphy and committee members for hearing Assembly Bill 556 (AB 556) which requires the University of Wisconsin System Board of Regents to recognize as “teaching hours” the time spent by state specialists teaching graduate students and Wisconsin farmers. Thank you Rep. Tranel, Rep. Ballweg and Rep. Wittke for co-authoring this legislation.

State integrated specialists are University of Wisconsin campus-based faculty and staff who have joint Cooperative Extension appointments. They provide expertise on a wide range of topics related to agriculture and natural resources.

In addition to conducting research projects, these researchers teach farmers at association-sponsored summer and winter meetings, hold on-farm mini clinics, field days, and workshops and provide other direct instruction to Wisconsin farmers on a daily basis. With the investment in the Dairy Innovation Hub, the time spent on farms by these state integrated specialists will only increase as they convey the results of research to farmers across the state.

Their value to the agricultural economy as teachers is well-documented, but their work teaching Wisconsin farmers does **not** count under the statutory definition of “teaching hours”, which must be reported for the purposes of reporting on the accountability dashboard.

This situation is a result of a provision in the 2017-2019 biennial budget bill which required the UW-System Board of Regents to develop a policy to monitor and reward faculty based on “the number of hours spent teaching”. The policy, which was adopted in 2017, interpreted “teaching hours” to mean hours “teaching undergraduate students”. This policy may work for faculty and staff in other departments, but it has a very limiting effect on state specialists because of their role teaching graduate students and farmers outside of the traditional teaching of undergraduates in the classroom. In fact, on the accountability dashboard, the “teaching hours” for these specialists may read “zero”, even though they are effective and valuable members of the faculty team who spend most of their hours disseminating valuable information to Wisconsin’s farmers.

To alleviate this concern, AB 556 will require the Board of Regents to recognize as “teaching hours” on the accountability dashboard the time spent by state integrated specialists teaching graduate students and Wisconsin farmers. This will apply to state specialists who provide extension services in the field of applied agricultural research at UW-Platteville, UW-River Falls, UW-Stevens Point, or UW-Madison College of Agricultural and Life Sciences.

We believe the hours spent by state specialists teaching our farmers and conveying the most innovative farm practices to our growers should fulfill the teaching requirement established by

the Board of Regents for UW-Madison and UW-System faculty, as it is invaluable to our \$104.8 billion agricultural economy in Wisconsin.

In addition, in consultation with the UW-System and stakeholders, we have a substitute amendment to AB 556 which will ensure this bill will work in practice. To alleviate concerns about the current statutory limitation of the definition of “teaching hours”, the words “teaching hours” in the bill will be changed to “extension and outreach hours”. In addition, the amendment will make a technical correction to adjust where this change will be placed in statute. This amendment will not functionally change anything about the bill.

AB 556 is supported by numerous agriculture groups including, but not limited to, the Dairy Business Association, the Wisconsin Cattlemen’s Association, the Wisconsin Farm Bureau Federation, the Wisconsin Farmers Union, the Wisconsin Potato and Vegetable Growers Association and the Wisconsin Soybean Association.

Thank you for your kind attention to our testimony and we would be happy to answer questions at this time.



WISCONSIN
UNIVERSITY OF WISCONSIN-MADISON

Assembly Committee on Colleges and Universities

2019 Assembly Bill 556

Recognizing Certain Extension Services of the University of Wisconsin System

January 23, 2020

Good morning Chairman Murphy and members of the Assembly Committee on Colleges and Universities. 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. Thank you for the opportunity to testify for informational purposes today on Assembly Bill 556 (AB 556), which deals with the recognition of work done by “state specialists” in the field of applied agriculture.

The University of Wisconsin-Madison appreciates the authors’ intent to highlight the important work being done all across the state by “state specialists,” extension educators, and other faculty and staff. Earlier this year we were pleased to welcome cooperative extension services back to the UW-Madison campus following the UW System restructuring of the former UW Extension/UW Colleges. This extension and outreach service work is a core function of the university and makes a significant impact for a number of residents, stakeholders, and industries including, but not limited to agriculture.

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, Extension specialists in our Department of Soil Science dedicate their time to present on the topic of best practices in nitrogen management for corn and wheat fields. In one year, a faculty member presented to more than 1,400 people on best practices related to application rate, timing, source, and placement to reduce nitrogen loss to protect the environment and improve farm profitability.

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.

Recently, we also had an Extension specialist from our Horticulture Department release a new red potato variety that better meets customer expectations for color and shape. The new variety should translate into improved marketability and economic return for farmers.

As you can see, the extension and outreach work done by faculty at the University of Wisconsin-Madison is wide in its breadth and vital for many across the state. It is also worth noting, again, that this work is not exclusive to the field of agriculture. Faculty and staff focused on health, education, law, and the arts, to name just a few, provide important extension and outreach services to individuals, communities, and stakeholders throughout Wisconsin.

While we agree that it is valuable to recognize this work being done, we feel obligated to point out that there is apprehension over some of the terminology utilized in the original version AB 556 and concerns that additional reporting requirements could detract from direct service to constituents. With that said, we have been working with the bill’s authors and stakeholder groups on the substitute amendment that has been introduced. These changes will alleviate most of our concerns while also keeping intact the foundation of their intent, which is to report the service these extension specialists and other staff provide. We really appreciate both authors’ willingness to work with us on these requested changes.

On behalf of the University of Wisconsin-Madison we would like to thank you for your time and for allowing us to detail how important this extension and outreach work is to our campus and across the entire state. At this time, we would be happy to try to answer any questions you may have.



January 23, 2020

To: Assembly Committee on Colleges and Universities

From: WSCGA Board of Directors

Re: Support AB 556

These comments are submitted on behalf of the Wisconsin State Cranberry Growers Association (WSCGA) to express our strong support for AB 556, which would provide recognition and, hopefully, a metric to account for time spent by faculty with joint UW and UWEX appointments engaging in extension activities with the public.

WSCGA was formed in 1887 to represent Wisconsin's cranberry growers. We represent about 85% of the annual production in the state. Cranberries are the state's largest fruit crop and Wisconsin annually grows in excess of 60% of the US Crop. The most recent estimates are that cranberry growing contributes over \$1 billion to the state's economy and provides over 4,000 jobs for state residents.

We apologize that we could not participate in the hearing in person today. Ironically, we are wrapping up the second day of our two-day Wisconsin Cranberry School that features educational presentations from more than ten (10) UW/UWEX faculty and staff. It is our largest educational program and we anticipate in excess of 325 participants in the educational sessions.

When the Legislature required the Board of regents to develop a process to document the time faculty spent teaching, it did not account for those specialized agricultural faculty who have roles in conducting research and extension programs. These Integrated State Specialists are vital to the health of not only Wisconsin cranberry growing, but also all of farming in Wisconsin. As technology and growing practices change, we need the latest scientifically sound information for our growers to maintain their commitment to sustainable cranberry growing.

Faculty who spend their time conducting applied research and teaching farmers are implementing the Wisconsin Idea. They should be given credit for spending time in the field with farmers.

We understand the importance of undergraduate education in the UW System. We also want to ask the legislature to recognize that research institutions have roles in addition to undergraduate education. In addition to undergraduate education, faculty at UW Madison conduct world class research, train graduate students and provide extension programming for the citizens of the state. These activities spawn millions, if not billions, of dollars in economic benefits to the citizens of the state. To evaluate faculty performance based solely on time spent in classrooms fails to recognize the important activities and mission of research institutions.

In closing we would ask you to support AB 556 and pass it during this session of the Legislature.