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Joint Committee on Finance

Paper #140

Wisconsin Farm-to-School Program (Agriculture, Trade and Consumer Protection)

[LFB 2017-19 Budget Summary: Page 65, #8]

CURRENT LAW

The Department of Agriculture, Trade and Consumer Protection's (DATCP) farm-to-school program was established in 2010. It seeks to connect schools and local farms to provide students with locally sourced fruit, vegetables, and dairy products, while also supporting local agriculture and providing nutrition education in schools. The program is housed in DATCP's Division of Agricultural Development and is authorized 1.0 program coordinator supported by general purpose revenues (GPR).

The farm-to-school program is supported by the Wisconsin Farm-to-School Advisory Council, which is charged with providing DATCP guidance and consultation on implementation of the program. Its members include representatives from the Department of Public Instruction (DPI), Department of Health Services, UW Athletics, UW-Extension, UW Children's Hospital, Milwaukee Public Schools, Wisconsin Association of School Boards, Wisconsin Council on Children and Families, and DATCP, as well as a local farmer and a representative from a commercial food distributor.

GOVERNOR

Delete \$66,400 GPR annually and 1.0 position associated with administration of the farm-to-school program. The bill would repeal two appropriations supporting the farm-to-school program: (a) an annual appropriation for program staff and operations; and (b) an annual appropriation for farm-to-school grants. (The grant appropriation has never been authorized funding.) Further, eliminate the Wisconsin Farm-to-School Advisory Council.

DISCUSSION POINTS

1. Farm-to-school is a nationwide initiative involving entities such as the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA), nonprofit organizations, school districts, and state and local agencies. USDA supports farm-to-school efforts with a variety of grants and programs. Additionally, the National Farm-to-School Network (NFSN) provides support, advocacy, and networking for farm-to-school programs across the country, including Wisconsin's. Starting in 2010, farm-to-school in Wisconsin has been organized by DATCP with the intention of bringing together a variety of stakeholders in Wisconsin, such as school districts, farmers, distributors, and nutrition experts to coordinate development of food networks and to increase engagement in Wisconsin, with support from the USDA program.

2. Other groups dedicated to farm-to-school activities include, among others: (a) DPI, which provides support to school districts; (b) the UW-Madison Center for Integrated Agricultural Systems (CIAS), which provides producers and schools with toolkits and technical assistance, and conducts outreach activities; and (c) regional support groups such as the Madison-area REAP Food Group, which provides local farm-to-school support, and Community Groundworks, Inc., which oversees the Wisconsin School Garden Network to provide garden-based education, and provides education and coordination to increase involvement between the community and local food sources.

3. Alongside the Advisory Council are the farm-to-school Steering Committee and Leadership Group. The Steering Committee consists of representatives from DATCP, CIAS, DPI, and Community Groundworks, and seeks to strengthen partnerships and coordination between these groups. Further, the Steering Committee provides information and guidance to the Advisory Council. The Leadership Group consists of more than fifty community practitioners, state and local government officials, and nonprofit representatives that meet monthly via teleconference to support and coordinate local farm-to-school activities.

4. In 2015, USDA conducted a survey of farm-to-school participation across the U.S. Results from the survey show that during the 2013-14 school year, \$9.2 million was spent on local food by participating Wisconsin schools, including \$7 million in milk. Further, farm-to-school food purchases constituted 9.5% of all food purchases by schools in 2013-14. By the 2014-15 school year, 1,401 schools and approximately 565,000 students in Wisconsin participated in the farm-to-school program. The survey received responses from 248 Wisconsin school districts, 175 of which indicated participation in the farm-to-school program during the 2013-14 school year. Wisconsin has 422 school districts, suggesting at least 41% of school districts participate.

5. The farm-to-school coordinator at DATCP is responsible for: (a) coordinating with stakeholder groups; (b) organizing and providing support to the Advisory Council; (c) providing technical assistance; (d) referring school districts, farmers, and distributors to one another; and (e) seeking and managing federal grants. In a typical year, DATCP reports the coordinator has 70 contacts with farmers and 50 contacts with school districts. Contacts with school districts usually involve referral to DPI staff working on food service, nutrition education, or school garden programs, or by connecting them to Wisconsin farmers' products through distributors. Assistance provided to farmers includes education on food safety, including information on Good Agricultural Practices certification, and assistance working with food distributors. The coordinator also lends

assistance to food distributors by providing case studies that demonstrate operations that move local or regional products into schools. The coordinator is also responsible for supporting and organizing the Wisconsin Farm-to-School Advisory Council. Further, the coordinator served as the state lead for the NFSN, providing itself as the main point of contact for Wisconsin farm-to-school issues (the NFSN now refers contacts to Community Groundworks). DATCP reports the coordinator position has been vacant since May, 2016.

6. DATCP reports it currently administers two USDA grants, secured by the coordinator, for DATCP farm-to-school activities: (a) \$19,490 for seven regional trainings; and (b) \$56,855 for implementation of a statewide procurement strategy for farm-to-school sales, in partnership with CIAS. These grants are supported by a limited-term employee (LTE) due to the vacancy in the coordinator position. The coordinator also assisted in attracting three grants from the W. K. Kellogg Foundation for projects in Wisconsin that total \$800,000 during 2016-18. These grants seek to expand the scope of farm-to-school to include early care and education programs for children up to age five by providing support, training, and best practices to partner organizations. Additionally, the coordinator attracted the national Farm to Cafeteria Conference to Madison in 2016.

7. The AmeriCorps farm-to-school program was founded in 2008 and consists of AmeriCorps volunteers who provide nutrition education to students through in-class demonstrations, farm field trips, school gardens, and wellness plans. The program receives funding through a grant of \$191,925 awarded by Serve Wisconsin but funded by the federal AmeriCorps program. In 2015-16, it provided education to approximately 8,200 students, with approximately 1,500 volunteers serving 2,600 hours. The program has 16 sites across Wisconsin including school districts, county health departments, and local nonprofits. DATCP administered the grant with 0.8 FED project position that expired in September, 2016, and now administers it with a FED-supported LTE. Currently, the Department reports it is in the process of transitioning administration of the AmeriCorps grant to DPI, since it sees DPI as better suited to provide nutrition education.

8. DPI reports it has applied for a competitive federal grant of \$204,700 for continuation of the AmeriCorps farm-to-school program in Wisconsin. Awards are expected in early June, but have not been announced as of the publishing of this paper. If awarded, DPI would be provided three years of funding, and would be responsible for overseeing the program, including designation and coordination of host sites. DPI notes that any grant awarded will require an equal match by the state.

9. DPI reports it typically contacts the DATCP farm-to-school coordinator to help schools find local farmers for schools to partner with, and to request technical assistance related to food safety issues, such as using fresh eggs that a school chicken produced. DPI expresses concerns that schools and districts will lose interest in farm-to-school if they are unable to easily access information and technical assistance typically provided by the DATCP coordinator. Further, DPI reports it has received comments from several school districts expressing concerns related to the elimination of the DATCP program. In the absence of a farm-to-school coordinator at DATCP, DPI argues statewide coordination has been lacking, as partner organizations have been unable to fully accommodate the vacancy. Although DPI has two staff members spending approximately 10% of their time on farm-to-school issues, it reports it has not had resources to accommodate increased

requests for information or assistance related to farm-to-school during the DATCP vacancy.

10. One may argue current nonprofit, government, school, and industry participants would continue to further farm-to-school efforts if the state program were repealed. DATCP argues that farm-to-school in Wisconsin has grown significantly since implementation of the DATCP program in 2010, which was created to increase involvement in Wisconsin. DATCP notes that although it currently receives USDA grants, community groups are also eligible to apply for USDA funding. Further, it notes that although the Advisory Council would be eliminated, other groups such as the Leadership Group and Steering Committee will continue to meet and collaborate on farm-to-school issues. However, as these groups work closely with the Advisory Council and receive support from the coordinator, it is unclear to what extent they would continue to meet in its absence. The Department reports it intends to continue to provide assistance to producers and distributors through its local foods coordinator as part of its more general agricultural development operations. It should be noted that the Governor's budget proposal would eliminate 1.5 GPR positions in the agricultural development program, consisting of 1.0 agricultural program specialist and 0.5 economic development consultant. As a result, it remains unclear to what extent provision of technical assistance to distributors, producers and processors for farm-to-school activities will continue if the coordinator position is eliminated.

11. Advocates argue DATCP's farm-to-school program and coordinator have served as a model to other states that have created similar programs. As of 2015, 19 states have full-time coordinators, and 13 have part-time coordinators. Advocates argue the position provides significant returns relative to its cost. In recent years, the coordinator has attracted over \$1 million in grants and a major national conference, as well as provided technical assistance to develop current levels of annual farm-to-school sales.

12. Given that DPI is assuming administration of the AmeriCorps farm-to-school program, consideration could be given to transferring statutory authority for the state farm-to-school program to DPI. One could argue that complementary programs are best housed in the same agency. However, the programs are sufficiently different as to merit placement in separate departments. Specifically, the AmeriCorps farm-to-school program is based on nutrition education at the local level, while the DATCP program coordinator is responsible for assisting in the development of purchasing networks and compliance with food safety and distribution standards.

13. Given the variety of state and nonprofit partners in Wisconsin involved in farm-to-school, which could take over activities previously carried out by the farm-to-school coordinator at DATCP, the Committee could consider adopting the Governor's proposal to eliminate the program [Alternative 1]. Conversely, given the complexity of farm-to-school in Wisconsin and opportunities for future growth, the Committee could consider maintaining the program [Alternative 2].

ALTERNATIVES

1. Adopt the Governor's recommendation to eliminate the farm-to-school program in DATCP, including the farm-to-school coordinator position and Wisconsin Farm-to-School Advisory Council and their related statutes.

ALT 1	Change to Base		Change to Bill	
	Funding	Positions	Funding	Positions
GPR	- \$132,800	- 1.00	\$0	0.00

2. Delete the Governor's recommendation. (This would restore the farm-to-school program in DATCP, including the farm-to-school coordinator position and Wisconsin Farm-to-School Advisory Council and their related statutes.)

ALT 3	Change to Base		Change to Bill	
	Funding	Positions	Funding	Positions
GPR	\$0	0.00	\$132,800	1.00

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