



Legislative Fiscal Bureau

One East Main, Suite 301 • Madison, WI 53703 • (608) 266-3847 • Fax: (608) 267-6873
Email: fiscal.bureau@legis.wisconsin.gov • Website: <http://legis.wisconsin.gov/lfb>

February 1, 2022

TO: Members
Joint Committee on Finance

FROM: Bob Lang, Director

SUBJECT: University of Wisconsin System: Section 13.10 Request for Release of Funding for UW-Extension Cooperative County Agriculture Agents -- Agenda Item IX

REQUEST

On November 16, 2021, the UW System submitted a request under s. 13.10 of the statutes for release of \$1,000,000 GPR in 2021-22 and \$1,000,000 GPR in 2022-23 for UW-Extension cooperative county specialists and agriculture-related faculty.

BACKGROUND

Under 2021 Act 58, \$1,000,000 GPR in 2021-22 and \$1,000,000 GPR in 2022-23 is provided in the Joint Committee on Finance supplemental appropriation for release to the UW System upon request and approval by the Committee for UW-Extension cooperative county specialists. On November 4, 2021, the Board of Regents approved the UW System proposal for use of \$4.25 million in 2021-22 and \$4 million in 2022-23 set aside in the JFC supplemental appropriation for UW System items, including the \$1 million annually for the UW-Extension cooperative specialists and faculty.

The Governor's 2021-23 budget bill would have provided \$500,000 GPR in 2021-22 and \$1,500,000 in 2022-23 in the UW System's general operations appropriation. Under the Governor's proposal, the Board of Regents would have been required to provide funding from that appropriation for 20.0 agriculture-focused positions at UW-Madison, including 15.0 county-based agriculture cooperative agent positions, 3.0 research positions focusing on applied agriculture research, and 2.0 positions focusing on agriculture and climate change.

In November, 2017, the Board of Regents approved a proposal to restructure UW Colleges and UW-Extension. Divisions of the UW-Extension were allocated to UW-Madison and the UW System. The Division formerly known as Cooperative Extension, which provides direct outreach to

local communities, became part of UW-Madison's newly-created Division of Extension, effective July 1, 2018. As a result, funding for the Division of Extension from the University's single GPR appropriation is part of the UW System's internal budget allocation for UW-Madison.

The Division of Extension provides outreach from the University to local citizens and communities, with institutes focusing on agriculture, community development, health and well-being, human development and relationships, natural resources, and positive youth development. As part of the agriculture institute, educators/outreach specialists work in local communities through activities such as working directly with farmers and other agricultural producers, speaking to civic groups and county boards, facilitating meetings, and providing information publicly through newspapers, radio, or television programs. Educators/outreach specialists provide information on topics including safe and healthy agricultural practices, farm profitability, farm succession and planning, using resources in a sustainable way, and best practices for growing various crops.

ANALYSIS

Under the request, UW System would utilize the \$1 million in annual funding to hire eight additional UW-Extension statewide county outreach specialists and three additional extension faculty specialist positions in the UW-Madison College of Agricultural and Life Sciences (CALs). After consultation with agriculture coalition partners, Division of Extension identified the most needed specialties to invest outreach staff resources. The eight outreach specialist positions would include: beef, grazing, swine, commercial vegetable, farm management (one position focused on farm labor and one on business development and management), and water quality (two positions). These outreach specialists would work across Wisconsin to develop, implement, and evaluate research-based educational programs in their respective subject areas. For example, the beef outreach specialist would focus on beef production, beef management, nutrition, reproduction, genetics, and animal health and welfare; while the commercial vegetable specialist would focus on pest, nutrient, and irrigation management, disease management, and the adoption of production practices to improve water quality.

According to the Division of Extension Director, Extension developed an agriculture staffing strategy in 2020 based on feedback and input from community partners including agriculture industry members, and began implementing the strategy in 2021. The agriculture staffing strategy includes a combination of multi-county dairy educators and multi-county crops educators, discipline-specific regional outreach specialists, and statewide outreach specialists. As of January, 2022, 47.95 full-time equivalent (FTE) agricultural educators are working in 51 of Wisconsin's 72 counties. Educators are funded through a combination of Extension (from state or federal) and county funds with counties providing 41% of total funding. Some educators work part-time in more than one county; in those cases, the county portion of the funding is split between counties. For statewide or regional positions the positions are funded by Extension or a combination of Extension, county, and partner funding (such as agriculture industry associations). In addition, another 15.67 FTE provide statewide support for programming related to dairy, crops, farm management, horticulture, water quality, and livestock. Extension is also currently in the process of recruiting an additional 3.0 FTE of agriculture educators covering an additional five counties and 2.0 FTE additional statewide positions working on Master Gardener and Horticulture support.

Further, Extension also provides 40.62 FTE Integrated Specialists faculty (approximately 60 co-funded Integrated Specialists within the University of Wisconsin-Madison College of Agricultural & Life Sciences, UW-River Falls, and UW-Platteville) who conduct the applied research which underpins Extension outreach programming. Upon Committee approval, the Division of Extension and CALS would begin evaluating proposals for the three additional Extension CALS faculty specialist positions. Hiring proposals are developed by CALS academic departments based on research and community engagement needs. Priority hiring decisions are then made by Extension and CALS leadership based on current programming gaps. For example, Extension and CALS are currently in the process of recruiting the following three Extension faculty positions in CALS: (1) Biological Systems Facility and Environmental Control Engineer; (2) Forage Systems Agroecologist; and (3) Precision Pest Ecologist.

According to the Division of Extension Director, it would take approximately three months to recruit employees to fill these positions. While this process is underway, the Director indicates that Extension could utilize funds to immediately move forward with high priority research developed in collaboration with Extension coalition partners and CALS. This could include short-term or one-time investments such as graduate student and post-doctoral student research support and research-related equipment purchases. However, given that these positions would not likely be filled until closer to fiscal year 2022-23, the Committee could consider providing less funding in the first year of the biennium (perhaps \$500,000) or not providing funding until the second year of the biennium.

ALTERNATIVES

1. Approve the request and transfer \$1,000,000 GPR annually held in reserve for this purpose from the Committee's 20.865(4)(a) appropriation to the UW System's s. 20.285(1)(a) appropriation for Extension agriculture-related staff. Specify that the \$1,000,000 GPR in 2022-23 is ongoing.
2. Approve the request. However, transfer \$500,000 GPR in 2021-22 and \$1,000,000 GPR in 2022-23. Specify that the \$1,000,000 GPR in 2022-23 is ongoing.
3. Approve the request. However, transfer \$1,000,000 GPR in 2022-23. Specify that the \$1,000,000 GPR in 2022-23 is ongoing.
4. Deny the request.

Prepared by: Erin Probst