



PATRICK TESTIN

STATE SENATOR

DATE: May 5, 2021

RE: **Testimony on Senate Bills 154 and 155**

TO: The Senate Committee on Agriculture and Tourism

FROM: Senator Patrick Testin

Thank you Senator Ballweg and to members of the committee for hearing my testimony on Senate Bills 154 (SB 154) and 155 (SB 155).

Wisconsin is known as America's Dairyland, but our state's farmers are leaders in many forms of agricultural production. Wisconsin's potato crop is the third largest in the country, trailing only Idaho and Washington. When it comes to cranberries, we are the clear national leader. Sixty percent of the nation's cranberries come from twenty Wisconsin counties. I'm proud to represent five of the top ten cranberry producing counties – including the top three, Wood, Jackson, and Monroe.

Combined, potatoes and cranberries account for nearly \$1.5 billion in annual economic activity and provide our constituents with thousands of jobs.

Modern farming is a technologically advanced endeavor. SBs 154 and 155 will help Wisconsin remain a leading agricultural producer by investing in applied agricultural research. This research helps growers increase yields, improve environmental outcomes, and become more efficient. SB 154 provides \$250,000 per year to the Cranberry Marketing Board while SB 155 \$250,000 per year to the Wisconsin Potato Industry Board.

There are approximately 64,800 farms in Wisconsin. Of these, more than 9,200 farms and homes are designated Century farms – properties owned and operated for more than 100 years. Farming isn't just an occupation; it's a way of life. Wisconsin farmers have a unique connection with the land and with their communities. SBs 154 and 155 invests in the future of thousands of men and women in Central and Northern Wisconsin who take pride in producing excellent crops that helps feed the world. Please join me in supporting these investments.



NANCY VANDERMEER

STATE REPRESENTATIVE • 70TH ASSEMBLY DISTRICT

TO: Honorable Members of the Senate Committee on Agriculture and Tourism

FROM: State Representative Nancy VanderMeer

DATE: May 5, 2021

SUBJECT: Testimony in Support of Senate Bill 155

Thank you Chairman Ballweg and members of the Senate Committee on Agriculture and Tourism for holding a hearing on SB 155 today.

Wisconsin is America's Dairyland, but our state's farmers are also national leaders in potato and vegetable production. Wisconsin ranks #1 in snap bean (green bean) production, #3 in sweet corn, and #3 in potatoes. In fact, a UW-Whitewater study a few years ago found that potatoes contributed over \$522 million to Wisconsin's economy annually.

Agricultural productivity, and its enormous economic impact are tied to solid agricultural research. Our state's potato and vegetable farmers rely on the new technologies and practices developed by researchers to improve water quality, pest management, and farming practices throughout the state. Unfortunately, funding for applied agricultural research has been steadily declining since 1993, and vacant positions have had a direct negative effect on potato growers and vegetable producers.

Farmers, who are already facing a challenging economy, have had their work exacerbated by this decline. SB 155 seeks to reverse that trend to give Wisconsin agriculture, our farmers, and conservation efforts a boost.

This proposal requires the Department of Agriculture, Trade and Consumer Protection to provide \$500,000 in funding to the potato (and vegetable) marketing board for the purpose of funding vital research. The applied research investment will provide practical and applicable utility to potato and vegetable growers, and will help sustain this important industry in our state, by supplementing the private investments in research provided by the farmers.

An example of this applied research in action can be found at the research station at Hancock, Wisconsin, where farmers and researchers are deeply involved in trying new growing methods to ensure better product quality, decrease crop inputs, and enhance the economic vitality of the Wisconsin farmer. Scientists at the Hancock Research Station are recognized internationally as leaders in potato research, and Wisconsin farmers rely on their work every growing season. This legislation will help Wisconsin growers continue to fund the research projects that will sustain our potato & vegetable economy.

Again, thank you for the opportunity to be here today and the opportunity for a public hearing on this legislation.

Wisconsin Potato & Vegetable Growers Association, Inc.

P.O. Box 327 • Antigo, Wisconsin 54409-0327

Telephone: 715/623-7683 • Fax: 715/623-3176 • e-mail: wpvga@wisconsinpotatoes.com • web: www.wisconsinpotatoes.com



TO: Members of the Senate Committee on Agriculture and Tourism
FROM: Steve Diercks, Co-Chair, WPVGA Government Affairs Committee
DATE: May 5, 2021
RE: **Support for Senate Bill 155, Funding for Potato Research**

The WPVGA urges you to **support Senate Bill 155**, authored by Senator Testin and Representative VanderMeer, which would provide \$500,000 to the Department of Agriculture, Trade and Consumer Protection (DATCP) for the purpose of providing a grant to the potato marketing board to support potato research in Wisconsin.

Wisconsin Leads in Potato and Vegetable Production. Wisconsin is a national leader in potato and vegetable production. Wisconsin ranks *first* in U.S. production for snap beans (green beans), beets for canning and cabbage for kraut. Wisconsin ranks *second* in peas and carrots for processing and *third in the nation* for potatoes and sweet corn.

The Wisconsin Potato & Vegetable Growers Association (WPVGA) represents 110 Wisconsin potato and vegetable growers who strive to grow food sustainably and who are committed to providing families across America with high quality healthy food. In Wisconsin, we grow 65,000 acres of potatoes; 66,000 acres of snap beans; 56,400 acres of sweet corn; 23,300 acres of peas; 5,100 acres of cucumbers; 5,000 acres of beets; 4,000 acres of carrots; 3,700 acres of pumpkins; 3,300 acres of cabbage; and 1,900 acres of onions.

Potato Industry Board – Farmer Directed Research Projects. The Wisconsin potato marketing board, known as the Wisconsin Potato Industry Board (WPIB), was created in 1989 under a statutory marketing order. The WPIB is created under Wis. Statute, Chapter 96 and Wis. Admin. Code s. ATCP 151. The board has nine *farmer* members, serving three-year terms, who represent about 110 licensed potato producers. The purpose of the Board is to support the industry through its mission of marketing, promotion, research and education. The WPIB is responsible for managing an annual assessment of about \$2 million (*i.e.*, collected through a checkoff assessment of 8¢ per hundredweight of potatoes).

Wisconsin Growers are Committed to Research. Research is the watchword for the entire Wisconsin potato and vegetable industry. The WPIB spends upwards of \$850,000 annually on research, with a strong emphasis on environmental concerns. As noted above, the total budget of the WPIB is just over \$2 million annually, therefore research represents over 40% of the spending.

If you look at agricultural statistics, you will notice there are fewer acres of potatoes grown in Wisconsin than in the past and this is due in part to increased yields from improved varieties as well as proper water and nutrient management. To supply the ever-growing population with a consistent food supply, growers need to increase yields while lowering the inputs used. This can only be accomplished through research.

Research Continues to Fine-Tune Integrated Pest Management (IPM) Programs Which Enable Growers to Control Pests in an Environmentally Sound Manner. Research-based IPM programs encourage non-chemical pest control practices and a more judicious use of crop protection products. By closely monitoring environmental conditions, insect, weed and disease management programs help growers predict when conditions favor pest outbreaks. With this information, growers apply chemicals only when they're needed.

In the 1970s, the Wisconsin Irrigation Scheduling Program was developed to promote efficient irrigation, prevent the leaching of fertilizer and chemicals into the groundwater, and reduce energy use. Through applied research, soil scientists have fine-tuned plant nutrition analysis techniques allowing them to adjust fertilizer recommendations to meet the needs of the plants and avoid over-fertilization.

Water Task Force Fuels Need for More Research. In increasing our understanding of the hydrology of the Central Sands, the WPVGA's Water Task Force has initiated a program to measure groundwater depths in privately owned irrigation wells across space and time; we have purchased and installed equipment to continuously monitor groundwater in four areas designated as high risk for surface water impacts. The Water Task Force has also continually funded software maintenance to keep the Wisconsin Irrigation Scheduling Program and the Agricultural Weather Data Service operational.

In irrigation technology, we have developed and implemented new irrigation scheduling software to match water use to crop need; conducted on-farm research with drip irrigation, deficit irrigation and site-specific, precision irrigation; and we are currently conducting multiple on-farm trials in an effort to further reduce nitrate leaching.

To understand and address water loss, we have conducted field research on year-round evapotranspiration from crops and natural vegetation and developed digital maps of all vegetation types in Central Sands watersheds to aid in designing landscapes that require less water and increase recharge.

The Water Task Force also funded research looking at nitrate and chloride concentration in irrigation water applied as well as total loads during the growing season in the Central Sands. The research results provide important information for studies investigating nitrogen use efficiency, developing improved nutrient management programs, or those investigating leaching losses to groundwater. More work is needed in all of these areas.

Farmers are True Environmentalists. Most Wisconsin potato and vegetable farms are family-run operations that have been in the family for several generations. Growers live, work and raise their families on their land. They have a deep, abiding love for their land and they know they have a responsibility to maintain it and use their resources wisely. Over the past 50 years, through funding and through applying the results of field research, growers have adopted many practices of precision farming including grid soil sampling, grid fertilization, variable rate irrigation and other environmentally friendly practices that reduce pollution, reduce runoff, reduce costs and increase quality and yields.

We urge you to support additional funding for continued potato research and support Senate Bill 155. Thank you for your consideration.