



WISCONSIN LEGISLATURE

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

March 3, 2021

**Senate Committee on Agriculture and Tourism
Joint Testimony on Senate Bill (SB) 79
Sen. Howard Marklein and Rep. Amy Loudenbeck**

Thank you Chair Ballweg and committee members for hearing Senate Bill 79 (SB 79), which requires the University of Wisconsin System Board of Regents to recognize and track the time spent by state specialists teaching graduate students and Wisconsin farmers. Thank you Chair Ballweg, Senators Petrowski and Testin for co-authoring this legislation.

State integrated specialists are University of Wisconsin campus-based faculty and staff who are funded by the Division of Extension at UW-Madison. 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. In addition, the UW-System must reward those who teach more than the standard academic load.

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, SB 79 will require the Board of Regents to recognize and track “extension and outreach hours” on the accountability dashboard for 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. Furthermore, this change will allow the UW-System to reward state specialists who teach more than the standard academic load.

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.

SB 79 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.



Senate Committee on Agriculture and Tourism

2021 Senate Bill 79

*Recognizing Certain Extension Services of the University of Wisconsin System
March 3rd, 2021*

Good morning Chairwoman Ballweg and members of the Senate Committee on Agriculture and Tourism. The University of Wisconsin-Madison thanks the committee for the opportunity to be able to provide written testimony for informational purposes on Senate Bill 79 (SB 79), which deals with the recognition of work done by “state specialists” in the field of applied agriculture.

UW-Madison appreciates the intent of the authors to highlight the important work being done all across the state by Extension-funded “state specialists,” extension educators, and other faculty and staff. As you know, cooperative extension services returned to the UW-Madison campus in 2019 as part of the UW System restructure. 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, Wisconsin 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.

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. This important work is not exclusive to 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 want to be clear that additional reporting requirements could detract from direct service to constituents; however, we are confident that we can find a way to publicly report on our Extension efforts around the state. Additionally, we want to thank the authors for working with us on necessary changes to this proposal from last session.

On behalf of the University of Wisconsin-Madison we would like to thank you for the opportunity to submit this testimony and detail how important this extension and outreach work is to our campus and across the state. If you have any questions, please reach out to UW-Madison’s Assistant Director of State Relations, Ben Van Pelt, at bmvanpelt@wisc.edu or (815) 474-3973.



March 3, 2021

To: Senate Committee on Agriculture and Tourism

From: Wisconsin Farm Bureau Federation, Wisconsin State Cranberry Growers Association, Wisconsin Potato & Vegetable Growers Association, Wisconsin Pork Association, Wisconsin Cattlemen's Association, Wisconsin Soybean Association, Wisconsin Association of Professional Agricultural Consultants

Re: **Support 2021 SB 79, Extension and Outreach Hours of UW System Faculty**

These comments are submitted jointly on behalf of the groups listed above to express our strong support for SB 79, which would provide recognition and a metric to account for time spent by faculty known as "state specialists," who are faculty or academic staff at UW-Platteville, UW-River Falls, UW-Stevens Point, or UW-Madison College of Agricultural and Life Sciences with appointments partially or fully funded through the Division of Extension at UW-Madison in the field of applied agricultural research. These faculty engage in extension activities with the public and, importantly, Wisconsin farmers.

When the Legislature required the Board of regents to develop a process to document the time that UW-System faculty spends teaching, it did not account for these specialized agricultural faculty who have roles in conducting research and extension programs. These State Specialists are vital to the health of all of Wisconsin farming. As technology and growing practices change, we need the latest scientifically sound information for our farmers to maintain their commitment to sustainable farming. These faculty develop and transfer that knowledge from the university to Wisconsin farmers.

Faculty who spend their time conducting applied research and teaching farmers are implementing the Wisconsin Idea. We believe that these hours should be tracked and credited just like other teaching hours. These researchers are providing critical support and education in the field with our farmers. Examples of these outreach activities include: the annual Wisconsin Cranberry School; UW-Madison Division of Extension and WPVGA's annual Grower Education Conference; the annual Corn / Soy / Pork Expo; and countless on-farm meetings and field days.

We understand the importance of undergraduate education in the UW System. We also ask the legislature to recognize that research institutions have roles in addition to undergraduate education. Faculty at UW-Madison and UW-System schools conduct world class research, train graduate students and provide extension programming for the citizens of the state. These activities spur 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. Accordingly, we would ask you support SB 79 and support Wisconsin agricultural research faculty.

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**Senate Committee on Agriculture and Tourism
March 3, 2021**

Testimony in Favor of Senate Bill 79 – State Integrated Specialists, Extension and Outreach Hours

Good morning, my name is Chad Zuleger and I am the associate director of government affairs for the Dairy Business Association. Thank you, Chairman Ballweg, Ranking Member Pfaff and the rest of this committee for allowing me to speak today in support of Senate Bill 79. We appreciate Sen. Marklein and Rep. Loudenbeck for authoring the bill.

DBA represents all aspects of the dairy community. Our membership includes dairy farmers, dairy processors, and a variety of other businesses that help to make farmers and processors successful in our state. We support SB 79 because it records and accounts for the time state integrated specialists engage on-site with instruction/education for farmers.

State integrated specialists help drive innovation to farms and fields across the state. They are partners in the nearly \$45 billion/yr dairy economy in Wisconsin. Yet the vision of their role within both the UW System and the ag community has yet to be fully implemented. This legislation is a great step to that end. It accounts for hours performed conducting applied agricultural research, engaging in collaborative efforts with farmers, conducting educational field clinics and workshops and, working to improve water quality. The work done by these specialists *is* teaching and it is proper to account for those hours as such. Changes made in SB 79 will foster continued and greater collaboration. Those changes will also continue to benefit UW research, Wisconsin's farmers and farm communities.

Additionally, the newly established Dairy Innovation Hub on three UW ag campuses attracts post-doctoral students and ag researchers that might provide a natural synergy between the two entities. The ag community always welcomes energized and passionate people on the farm who can share knowledge and help get things done.