



Legislative Fiscal Bureau

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Joint Committee on Finance

Paper #759

UW-Extension Cooperative County Agriculture Agents (UW System)

[LFB 2019-21 Budget Summary: Page 439, #7]

CURRENT LAW

The UW-Madison Division of Extension provides educational programs related to agriculture, natural resources, geological and natural history, community and economic development, and other topics, through an office located in every county in the state. The agriculture and natural resources program uses University research and knowledge to address community agricultural and natural resources needs.

GOVERNOR

Provide \$1,500,000 GPR and 20.0 GPR positions beginning in 2019-20 and \$2,000,000 GPR in 2020-21 in the UW System's general operations appropriation. Require the Board of Regents to allocate \$1.5 million GPR in fiscal year 2019-20 and \$2 million GPR annually thereafter for extension county-based agriculture positions.

DISCUSSION POINTS

1. In November, 2017, the Board of Regents approved a proposal to restructure UW Colleges and UW-Extension. Divisions of the UW-Extension were divided up between 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.

2. 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 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 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.

3. Under 2015 Act 55, the UW System's GPR general program operations appropriation was reduced by \$125 million GPR annually, with \$100 million GPR of that reduction ongoing. Extension funding was reduced by \$4.6 million in 2015-16 compared to 2014-15.

4. In 2019-20, the Division of Extension's budget totals approximately \$74.6 million, with funding sources including state, federal, and local dollars, as well as gifts and grants. Of that amount, \$60.4 million is used for salary, wages, and fringe benefits for staff located on UW campuses and in local county offices.

5. The Division of Extension budgeted \$2.3 million for salaries for agriculture agents and educators in 2018-19, using a combination of state and federal funds. (Another \$7.8 million is allocated for agriculture-related integrated specialists, who are located on a UW campus and may conduct research and teaching in the area of agriculture, in addition to outreach applying that research directly to local communities.) Counties also provide a portion of the funding for county-based educators, equal to approximately 45% of total funding for educators.

6. As of May, 2019, 57.4 full-time equivalent (FTE) agricultural educators are working in 65 of Wisconsin's 72 counties. Some educators work part-time in more than one county; in those cases, the county portion of the funding is split between counties. Extension staff indicate that currently, there is not sufficient funding in the budget to provide an agricultural agent or educator in every county.

7. The bill would provide \$1.5 million GPR in 2019-20 and \$2 million GPR in 2020-21, and 20 new agriculture educator positions for the Division of Extension. The Executive Budget Book indicates that the purpose of the additional funding is to ensure that governments, farmers, and citizens have local access to agricultural expertise.

8. The Division of Extension has developed an expansion proposal based on input from local stakeholders and agricultural partners to identify local needs and priorities. The proposal includes regional, statewide, and state integrated specialists. Regional specialists focusing on agriculture could include individuals providing assistance in the areas of farm management, water quality, cranberry production, and commercial vegetable production, with each specialist serving an area including approximately seven to ten counties. The statewide outreach programming positions could include a horticulture diagnostics specialist and a grazing/beef cattle specialist. Other statewide positions could include experts on dairy cattle nutrition, milk quality, small fruits pathology, forage agronomy, field crops entomology, and farm financial management. Extension is also proposing additional position increases in areas other than agriculture, including regional specialists in

workforce development, rural health, affordable housing, and financial education, as well as statewide positions focusing on rural mental health, youth mental health, and incarceration. It is estimated that the cost of the additional positions would total \$3.75 million annually.

9. Extension has also proposed reducing the fee paid by counties for educators by \$10,000 for the first educator position in each county. Extension staff indicate that the fee reduction would especially benefit rural counties, which may experience difficulty securing sufficient funding for an Extension educator, and would help Extension continue to maintain an office in every county. The fee reduction would cost an estimated \$750,000 annually.

10. The funding under the bill would be used to implement a portion of the expansion proposal. Extension staff indicate that the number and types of positions would be scaled back in proportion to the available funding. However, the Committee may wish to fund the entire proposal. Under this approach, the Committee could provide \$3,375,000 GPR in 2019-20 and \$4,500,000 GPR in 2020-21 and 29.0 positions, an increase of \$1,875,000 GPR in 2019-20 and \$2,500,000 GPR in 2020-21 and 9.0 positions compared to the funding in the bill. [Alternative 2]

11. If the Committee wishes to provide some additional funding for county agriculture agents but at a reduced cost, the Committee could consider providing 10.0 positions and \$1,220,000 GPR in 2019-20 and \$1,375,000 GPR in 2020-21. This funding level is intended to provide full funding for the proposal to reduce the fee paid by counties, as well as approximately half of the funding provided by the Governor for positions. [Alternative 3]

ALTERNATIVES

1. Approve the Governor's recommendation to provide \$1,500,000 and 20.0 positions in 2019-20 and \$2,000,000 in 2020-21 in the UW System's general operations appropriation for UW-Extension county-based agriculture positions.

ALT 1	Change to Base		Change to Bill	
	Funding	Positions	Funding	Positions
GPR	\$3,500,000	20.00	\$0	0.00

2. Fully fund UW-Extension's expansion proposal by providing \$3,375,000 in 2019-20 and \$4,500,000 in 2020-21 and 29.0 positions.

ALT 2	Change to Base		Change to Bill	
	Funding	Positions	Funding	Positions
GPR	\$7,875,000	29.00	\$4,375,000	9.00

3. Provide \$1,220,000 GPR and 10.0 positions in 2019-20 and \$1,375,000 GPR in 2020-21.

ALT 3	Change to Base		Change to Bill	
	Funding	Positions	Funding	Positions
GPR	\$2,595,000	10.0	- \$905,000	- 10.0

4. Take no action.

ALT 4	Change to Base		Change to Bill	
	Funding	Positions	Funding	Positions
GPR	\$0	0.00	- \$3,500,000	- 20.00

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