



Legislative Fiscal Bureau

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Joint Committee on Finance

Paper #641

UW-Extension Cooperative County Agriculture Agents (UW System)

[LFB 2021-23 Budget Summary: Page 609, #13]

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.

DISCUSSION POINTS

1. The Governor's proposal would provide \$500,000 GPR in 2021-22 and \$1,500,000 GPR in 2022-23 in the UW System's general operations appropriation. The Board of Regents would be required to provide funding from that appropriation for 20.0 agriculture-focused positions at UW-Madison, including 15.0 county-based agriculture agent positions, 3.0 research positions focusing on applied agriculture research, and 2.0 positions focusing on agriculture and climate change. These positions would be required to be filled using existing authorized positions that are currently vacant in a manner that reflects an increase in the total number of agricultural agent positions and agriculture-related research positions at UW-Madison. Specify that the Chancellor of UW-Madison may not abolish these positions under current law authorizing the creation and deletion of positions.

2. 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.

3. 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.

4. 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. During the 2019-21 biennium, UW System required Division of Extension to contribute \$1.7 million GPR for the Department of Administration's required \$86 million UW System lapses.

5. In 2021-22, the Division of Extension's budget totals approximately \$63.2 million, with funding sources including state, federal, and local dollars, as well as gifts and grants. Of that amount, \$53 million is used for salary, wages, and fringe benefits for staff located on UW campuses and in local county offices.

6. The Division of Extension budgeted \$3.5 million for salaries for agriculture agents and educators in 2020-21, using a combination of state and federal funds. (Another \$6.7 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 41% of total funding for educators.

7. As of April, 2021, 52.14 full-time equivalent (FTE) agricultural educators are working in 56 of Wisconsin's 72 counties. The Division of Extension director noted that there has been a hiring freeze for the past year due to the COVID-19 pandemic. 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.

8. Of the 20 required reallocated vacant positions, 15 would be county agriculture educator positions, and the remaining five would be research positions. The UW Extension Director indicates the five researchers would be located at UW-Madison and would conduct research, direct programming to constituents, and support county educators and their programming across the state. Three of the positions would be integrated extension faculty specialists in the College of Agricultural and Life Sciences and two would be statewide specialists in the Division of Extension. According to the Division of Extension Director, it would take at least six months to recruit employees to fill these positions and Extension would plan to reallocate some federal funding under the Smith Lever Act to make up for any shortfalls in funding for the positions.

9. The Governor's proposal would create a number of statutory requirements for the Board

of Regents and UW-Madison Chancellor. If the goal is to ensure this funding is used for the Division of Extension, creating a separate GPR appropriation for this purpose and transferring 20.0 vacant GPR positions from the UW System's general program operations appropriation would provide a clear way to track this funding.

ALTERNATIVES

1. Provide \$500,000 in 2021-22 and \$1,500,000 in 2022-23 in the UW System's general operations appropriation. Require the Board of Regents to provide funding from that appropriation for 20.0 agriculture-focused positions at UW-Madison, including 15.0 county-based agriculture agent positions, 3.0 research positions focusing on applied agriculture research, and 2.0 positions focusing on agriculture and climate change. These positions would be required to be filled using existing authorized positions that are currently vacant in a manner that reflects an increase in the total number of agricultural agent positions and agriculture-related research positions at UW-Madison. Specify that the Chancellor of UW-Madison may not abolish these positions under current law authorizing the creation and deletion of positions.

ALT 1	Change to Base
GPR	\$2,000,000

2. Provide \$500,000 in 2021-22 and \$1,500,000 in 2022-23 in a new biennial appropriation for agriculture-focused positions in the Division of Extension at UW Madison and transfer 20.0 positions from the UW System's general program operations appropriation to this new appropriation.

ALT 2	Change to Base
GPR	\$2,000,000

3. Take no action.

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