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## **Testimony to the Senate Committee on Agriculture, Revenue and Financial Institutions in Support of SB 563, Providing \$1 Million Per Year in Funding During the Current Biennium for Extension Services in Applied Agricultural Research**

**February 6, 2020**

Good morning. I am Professor Steve Ventura, a faculty member in the College of Agricultural and Life Sciences (CALs) at UW-Madison and a member of the University Committee, the elected executive committee of the Faculty Senate. I also serve as a board member of PROFS, the Public Representation Organization of the Faculty Senate, which represents the interest of the UW-Madison faculty. I do not have an Extension appointment, but throughout my 30+ years as a professor, I have had the pleasure of working with numerous state specialists at UW-Madison and county faculty and staff around the state. I was chair of the faculty committees that guided the return of Cooperative Extension back to Madison, assuring the transfer of tenure and creating an appropriate organizational structure.

Even before the "Wisconsin Idea" was articulated and in the ensuing centuries, UW has worked to improve health, quality of life, the environment, and agriculture for all citizens of Wisconsin and beyond. It is worth noting that UW-Madison is fairly unique in that it includes both a traditional campus -- offering instruction and basic research in the arts, humanities, and sciences -- as well as its land-grant mission focused on applied research and development in agriculture and the "mechanical arts," i.e., engineering. Extension has been and still is a critical component of that research, development, and technology transfer.

Without going into a long litany of accomplishments, it is clear that UW-Madison has a particularly strong history in supporting Wisconsin's agricultural community. UW-Madison faculty and staff have both supported Extension colleagues around the state and been proud to work alongside Wisconsin farmers to keep our rural economy vibrant and strong. More specifically, CALs has long been linked to UW Extension, with many faculty and staff holding joint appointments in CALs and Extension. This connection has been re-energized in recent years as Extension has again become part of UW-Madison.

I am grateful that you are considering additional funding for agriculture specialists. To be clear, "state specialists" in the College of Agricultural and Life Sciences -- the target of this bill -- are faculty in UW-Madison departments with an extension appointment as part of their position. They are expected to do applied agricultural research and education/outreach for agricultural professionals. Putting more money into state extension specialists means they will be able to do more research on pressing problems for Wisconsin farmers.

Much remains to be accomplished in terms of the research to support Wisconsin's agriculture through a difficult period of transition. As you know, we are in the midst of a crisis in Wisconsin's dairy industry. Innovations in production and marketing are clearly needed. Wisconsin's farmers are also facing unprecedented challenges from a changing climate; we need to understand the impacts of more severe storms and changing growing conditions, and work with county Extension staff to help farmers adapt. From my own department, Soil Science, we know that healthy soil is critical to protecting our groundwater resources and

sequestering CO<sub>2</sub> while still producing ample yields necessary for economically viable agriculture.

I understand that other legislation will support the work of *county* Extension, which is also a necessary part of understanding issues and delivering innovations to Wisconsin farmers. So, on behalf of PROFS, I would like to thank Senators Marklein, Olsen, Ringhand, Taylor, and Testin, along with the Assembly sponsors, for introducing this important piece of legislation and any other support you can provide for Extension.

We look forward to continuing to work with legislators to ensure a bright and prosperous future for our state's agricultural economy.