



# NANCY VANDERMEER

STATE REPRESENTATIVE • 70<sup>TH</sup> ASSEMBLY DISTRICT

TO: Honorable Members of the Senate Committee on Agriculture, Revenue and Financial Institutions

FROM: State Representative Nancy VanderMeer

DATE: February 6, 2020

SUBJECT: Testimony in Support of Senate Bill 568

Thank you Chairman Marklein and members of the Senate Committee on Agriculture, Revenue and Financial Institutions for holding a hearing on SB 568 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 from earlier this decade 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 568 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.



## PATRICK TESTIN

STATE SENATOR

DATE: February 6, 2020

RE: **Testimony on Senate Bill 568**

TO: The Senate Committee on Agriculture, Revenue, and Financial Institutions

FROM: Senator Patrick Testin

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Thank you Chairman Marklein and members of the committee for hearing my testimony on Senate Bill 568 (SB 568).

We all know that Wisconsin leads the country in cheese and cranberries – but our state’s dominance doesn’t end there. We are number three in the country in potato production, the bulk of which are grown in Central and Northern Wisconsin.

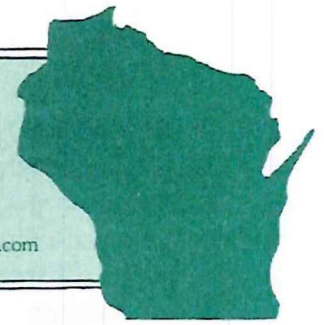
SB 568 provides \$500,000 to the Department of Agriculture, Trade, and Consumer Protection for the purpose of creating a grant for the potato marketing board. These funds will be used to assist with marketing, research, and educational programs for farmers. The board can then make investments in new product development, new markets, and innovative farming methods that will help our producers.

Farming isn’t just an occupation; it’s a way of life. There are approximately 68,500 farms in Wisconsin. Of these, 9,208 farms and homes are designated Century farms – properties owned and operated for more than 100 years. Wisconsin farmers have a unique connection with the land and with their communities. SB 568 will help potato growers continue to put healthy food on our plates, and to plan for the next century of being a national leader in potato production. Please join me in support of this bill.

# Wisconsin Potato & Vegetable Growers Association, Inc.

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February 6, 2020

To: Senate Committee on Agriculture, Revenue and Financial Institutions

From: Jordan Lamb, Legislative Counsel, WPVGA

Re: **Support SB 568, Potato Marketing Board Grant**

On behalf of the Wisconsin Potato & Vegetable Growers Association (WPVGA), I am here today to testify in **support for SB 568, authored by Senator Testin, 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.**

The potato marketing board, known as the Potato Industry Board, was started in 1989. This market order board has nine farmer members, serving three-year terms, who represent about 160 licensed potato producers. Its purpose is marketing, promotion, research, and education.

The board is responsible for managing an annual assessment of \$2 million. The assessment rate is eight cents per hundredweight of potatoes.

Wisconsin's potato growers produced 23 million hundredweight of potatoes in 2018, ranking it third in the United States. Potato production in Wisconsin is predominant in the central region of the state, although all 72 counties are represented on the potato industry board.

The potato marketing order is created under Wis. Statute Chapter 96 and Wis. Admin. Code s. ATCP 151. The marketing order establishes the collection of state check-off funds from farmers and directs the Board to secure and distribute funding for research, education and promotion of Wisconsin-grown potatoes.

In 2019, the research committee received requests for proposals totaling over \$500,000. They were able to approve \$375,000 in potato research funding for projects that range from weed management, seed certification, plant breeding, disease management, insect management, etc. In addition, the Board supports promotion and marketing activities to promote the sale of Wisconsin potatoes. These include the development and expansion of the Wisconsin Healthy Grown Potatoes program, which promotes whole-farm environmental stewardship practices by farmers, including ecosystem restoration; and the development of the Spudmobile, a customized RV which functions as a mobile trade show booth and traveling billboard, while featuring interactive educational exhibits on the interior—it travels to fairs, festivals, schools and sporting events throughout the Midwest.

The funding priorities of the Board are *farmers* directly supporting the research and promotion for Wisconsin products. SB 568 is a one-time grant of \$500,000 to the Board to further support the farmer contributions and support the research that provides critical support for Wisconsin's potato economy. There is a direct link between these ongoing research projects and the health of our potato economy.

Wisconsin potato growers distinctly appreciate the authors' recognition that in these challenging farm economic times. Additional support for potato research and promotion would be an enormous help for Wisconsin farmers.

**Accordingly, we respectfully request that you SUPPORT Wisconsin potato growers and support Senate Bill 568.**