



JOAN BALLWEG

STATE SENATOR • 14TH SENATE DISTRICT

**Assembly Bill 372: Funding for the Farm and Industry Short Course
Program at the University of Wisconsin-River Falls
Assembly Committee on Colleges and Universities
Testimony of Senator Joan Ballweg
October 4, 2023**

Good morning, Chairman Murphy and members of the committee. Thank you for hearing this important legislation to support the Farm and Industry Short Course.

For over 136 years, the Farm and Industry Short Course offered by UW-Madison has helped develop the agricultural workforce by offering applied, hands-on education to farmers. This 16-week course allows farmers during the winter off-season to network and learn about new practices and cutting edge research so they can apply it to future growing seasons. Last session, UW-Madison announced changes to the format of this program. The senate and assembly agriculture committees held a joint informational hearing to learn about the future of the program after hearing from UW-Madison and industry stakeholders.

Earlier this year, after ongoing conversations with stakeholders, the university announced that the program will be hosted on the UW-River Falls' campus with collaboration between the other agriculture programs at UW-Madison and UW-Platteville. This transition will ensure that there is a residential component to the program. UW-River Falls is nationally renowned for their agricultural programming, and I believe the collaboration with the other UW schools of agriculture will further build on the partnership developed by the successful Dairy Innovation Hub. This program is crucial to our agriculture industry to develop the workforce for the next generation of agricultural leaders and entrepreneurs.

This legislation will provide \$147,850 in fiscal year 2023-2024 and \$225,130 in fiscal year 2024-2025 to support the transition of the program to UW-River Falls and its ongoing operating costs. The senate companion, Senate Bill 370, was unanimously voted out of the Senate Committee on Agriculture and Tourism on August 30, 2023.

This bill is supported by the Wisconsin Farm Bureau Federation, Wisconsin Dairy Products Association, Dairy Business Association, and the University of Wisconsin-River Falls.

Thank you for your consideration, and I am happy to answer any questions.



Warren Petryk

State Representative • 93rd Assembly District

TO: Assembly Committee on Colleges and Universities
FROM: Representative Warren Petryk
DATE: October 3, 2023
SUBJECT: Assembly Bill 372

Thank you Chairman Murphy, Vice-Chair Nedweski, and members of the Assembly Committee on Colleges and Universities for allowing me to submit testimony in enthusiastic support of Assembly Bill 372.

The Farm and Industry Short Course program in Wisconsin has been training the next generation of farm owners, managers, and service providers. Following a decision by UW-Madison, the program will no longer be provided due to a change of direction by the UW-Madison Agriculture Department. The program was last offered at UW-Madison in 2021-22.

For more than a century, our state has relied on this program to help prepare the needed workforce for agriculture. The program would continue under this proposal, but it would be moved to other universities that could meet this need. This is a natural fit for the program because, since its beginning, the Universities at River Falls (UW-RF) and Platteville have extended their agriculture programs to fulfill the requirements of our rural farm communities.

For instance, The College of Agriculture, Food and Environmental Science (CAFES) at UW-RF is renowned across the Nation for providing excellent instruction in a wide variety of agricultural subjects. CAFES already has more than 1,200 pupils enrolled. Dairy science, animal science, plant science, earth science, agricultural business, farm engineering, and food science are all fields in which expert faculty reside. UW-RF also has a contemporary dairy farm, a refurbished dairy production facility, and a herd of high-yielding dairy cattle, all of which can facilitate the necessary hands-on learning required in the program.

Since the majority of the education will take place in person at UW-RF, the University will bear the majority of the costs associated with instruction. During FISC 2.0's initial stages, UW-RF's current faculty and teaching staff will be utilized. To ensure the program's long-term success, this bill is needed to provide the foundation for the faculty and administration to keep this program going strong.

By approving this legislation, we can make sure that our farmers have access to the education to advance Wisconsin's agriculture workforce. Once again, thank you for your time and for supporting Assembly Bill 372. I look forward to responding to any queries you might have.

DATE: October 4, 2023

TO: Members of the Assembly Committee on Colleges and Universities

FROM: Wisconsin Farm Bureau Federation

RE: **Support for Assembly Bill 372: funding for the Farm and Industry Short Course program at the University of Wisconsin-River Falls**

Chair Murphy and committee members, thank you for the opportunity to testify in support of Assembly Bill 372 providing funding for the Farm and Industry Short Course (FISC) reconstituted at the University of Wisconsin-River Falls.

We appreciate Representative Petryk and Senator Ballweg for their leadership in bringing this bill forward. This 16-week course, first offered at UW-Madison in 1885, has provided hands on instruction to generations of Wisconsin farmers. With the sudden need for a new home, , the University of Wisconsin-River Falls has announced that they are willing to continue the program and host it on the UW-River Falls campus, along with collaboration between agriculture programs at UW-Madison and UW-Platteville.

The bill before you would provide \$147,850 in 2023-24 and \$225,130 in 2024-25 and as a base going forward to the UW System for operating costs for FISC at UW-River Falls.

This program is crucial to our agriculture industry in Wisconsin and has been for over a century. The classes are timed to take place in between growing seasons and to provide essential knowledge and experience in agri-business, equipment, and farm management. At a time when agriculture faces growing challenges in workforce development, it's that much more important to keep this program going strong to provide the kind of hands-on learning that it has made available.

On behalf of our members, I would ask for your support in moving this forward as quickly as possible and I would be happy to answer any questions.



Assembly Committee on Colleges and Universities, October 4, 2023

UW-River Falls (UWRF) Testimony – Assembly Bill 372

Relating to the Farm and Industry Short Course program at the University of Wisconsin-River Falls

Thank you, Chair Murphy and members for holding a hearing on AB 372 today. I'd also like to thank our local Rep. Petryk for authoring this draft legislation in the Assembly.

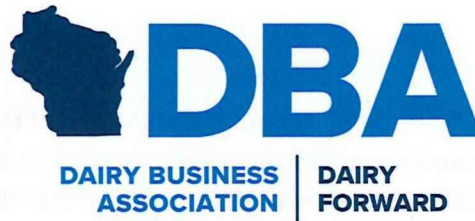
I am Steve Kelm, Chair of Animal and Food Science and UWRF Farm and Industry Short Course director at UW-River Falls. UW-River Falls is a long-standing leader in ag programs and a significant partner of Wisconsin's agricultural industry. We are known nationally for outstanding education in dairy science, animal science, plant and earth sciences, ag business, ag engineering, and food science. UWRF offers several applied research programs, providing students experiential learning opportunities with two laboratory farms, as well as on-campus meat and dairy processing plants, serving as hands-on classrooms. This program will also benefit from the productive research partnership offered by the Dairy Innovation Hub, funded by the state legislature.

After UW-Madison decided to change its programming in 2021-22 to offer different flexible training options in agriculture and not host the residential Farm and Industry Short Course, or FISC, numerous industry partners and alumni reached out to us. Demand for the 137-year-old residential, on campus Farm and Industry Short Course remains strong. The state of Wisconsin is suffering widespread workforce shortages in the agriculture industry; today's farms and agriculture businesses need workforce trained in the latest technologies taught by faculty who are also agricultural scientists well-versed in state-of-the-art research and discoveries.

UW-River Falls is well positioned in the UW System to offer the type of world-class, hands-on, faculty-supported learning experience that the next generation of farm and ag business owners and operators want and need. Farm and Industry Short Course students need courses that are university credit bearing, if they decide one day to pursue a college degree. They also need the network of professional relationships and friendships they can develop by living and learning on-campus with their four-year student peers.

Over the past several months, UW-River Falls has met with industry stakeholders and faculty to design the 16-week program, now scheduled to begin Oct. 30 and run through March 15, the typical winter "down time" for many agricultural workers. Enrollment in the class will be limited to 24 students, who will live together in one of the newly renovated residence halls at UW-River Falls. The focus of FISC will be on dairy farming, specifically the fundamentals of managing cows and calves, with additional education on topics such as nutrition, dairy techniques, mastitis and milk quality and dairy recordkeeping. Students will earn 18-20 credits during their first year, credits that can be applied to a degree at UWRF or elsewhere.

We had originally requested funding to transition the program in the Governor's biennial budget, so we are extremely grateful that this legislation has been introduced to provide critical funding to support our operational and instructional costs. It is worth noting that UWRF faculty are primarily on 100% teaching contracts, and we already have a full schedule for our 4-year students; the funding proposed is a reasonable calculation allowing us to add instructional hours for FISC during these first two years. We hope that you will support AB 372 and in doing so, support the contribution of UW-River Falls to Wisconsin's agricultural industry.



October 4, 2023

Assembly Committee on Colleges and Universities
Testimony in support of Assembly Bill 372

Good morning, Chairman Murphy, Ranking Member, Emerson and committee members. My name is Chad Zuleger and I serve as the director of government affairs with the Dairy Business Association (DBA).

DBA is a nonprofit organization of Wisconsin dairy farmers, milk processors and business partners working together to boost the state's dairy community. Our members include farms of all sizes as well as processors, animal health companies, lenders, feed and seed operations, insurance providers and more.

Thank you for the opportunity to speak today in support of Assembly Bill 372, which will provide essential funding for the Farm and Industry Short Course (FISC) at UW-River Falls. This historic program plays a vital role in developing the agricultural workforce that sustains our state's dairy industry.

For more than 136 years, FISC has been a source of applied, hands-on education, providing farmers with invaluable knowledge and skills during "off-season" on the farm. This 16-week course has proven instrumental in enabling dairy farmers to learn about new practices, cutting-edge research and emerging technologies. Graduates of the program are better equipped to tackle challenges and embrace opportunities in their own future operations.

The recent announcement that FISC would be hosted on the campus of UW-River Falls, in collaboration with other agriculture programs at UW-Madison and UW-Platteville, has energized our community. This collaboration builds upon the success of the Dairy Innovation Hub, which has already demonstrated its potential to drive progress and innovation within the dairy sector. By uniting these educational institutions, we create a dynamic learning environment fostering cross-disciplinary understanding spurring collaboration and providing access to world-leading dairy research.

Wisconsin dairy is not just an economic powerhouse, but a cornerstone of our cultural identity. It sustains thousands of jobs, fuels local economies and provides consumers with high-quality, nutrient-rich dairy products. To continue thriving in an ever-evolving global landscape, we must ensure that our dairy farmers have access to the latest techniques and technologies. The Farm and Industry Short Course has long been a reliable source of such education, and its continuation is essential for the continued success and competitiveness of our dairy community.

Assembly Bill 372's proposed funding allocation of \$147,850 in fiscal year 2023-2024 and \$225,130 in fiscal year 2024-2025 represents a practical investment in not only dairy's future but our state's. This funding will support the seamless transition of the program to the UW-River Falls campus and secure its ongoing operating costs. By providing this financial backing you will demonstrate our state's commitment to fostering growth and resilience in the dairy workforce, which, in turn, will strengthen our agricultural economy.

The Dairy Business Association is proud to support the transition of the Farm and Industry Short Course to UW-River Falls and urges committee members to support AB 372. By investing in FISC, you will invest in the prosperity and sustainability of Wisconsin dairy and the countless families it supports. We are grateful for your dedication to our state's agricultural future and remain available to provide any additional information or assistance as needed.

Thank you for your time and consideration of Assembly Bill 372.



**College of
Agricultural & Life Sciences**
UNIVERSITY OF WISCONSIN-MADISON

Assembly Committee on Colleges & Universities
2023 Assembly Bill 372

Relating to funding for the Farm & Industry Short Course Program at the University of Wisconsin-River Falls and making an appropriation

October 4, 2023

Chairman Murphy and members of the Assembly Committee on Colleges & Universities:

Thank you for the opportunity to submit testimony on Senate Bill 370 for information only, relating to funding for the Farm & industry Short Course (FISC) program at the University of Wisconsin-River Falls and making an appropriation.

The “FISC” or “Short Course” program is the oldest agricultural educational program at the University of Wisconsin. The first of its kind, FISC began on the UW-Madison campus in 1886 and enrolled thousands of farmers through the decades who went on to develop thriving businesses across the state.

Sharing the latest university research with farmers who can apply what is learned from research to improve their operations is a critical role for our College of Agricultural and Life Sciences and one we are deeply committed to continuing in partnership with the state, the agriculture industry, and now, other University of Wisconsin System schools. Our founders wanted to meet farmers where they were, and we continue that tradition. Our experience in the past decade has demonstrated that the best way to reach farmers have been changing—just as agriculture in Wisconsin continues to change. The original program established in 1886 should not be the program we have today.

When UW-Madison College of Agricultural & Life Sciences (CALs) appeared before a joint hearing of the agriculture committees, we conveyed the challenges we have seen in the program, particularly the number of FISC applicants and enrollment, which has driven key decisions on curriculum and delivery, has been declining. We took seriously the feedback from committee members about more intentionally engaging those in the agriculture industry. We have met regularly with members of the coalition of agriculture organizations and will continue to meet regularly into the future. Feedback from the agriculture industry confirmed the need for a training program that is hands-on, credit-bearing, taught by world-class faculty and driven by discoveries made by Wisconsin’s agricultural scientists.

Office of the Dean and Director

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In March of this year, FISC announced a return and restructure of the program to include the 16-week residential program hosted by UW-River Falls on their campus in collaboration with UW-Madison and UW-Platteville. UW-Madison will continue farmer education, now offering an expanded array of flexible training options to meet the needs of today's agricultural industry.

All three campuses currently offer active agricultural education and applied research programs, with multiple experimental farms serving as living laboratories and hands-on classrooms. The FISC program at UW-River Falls is designed to include educational opportunities for these students at both at UW-Platteville and UW-Madison.

We appreciate the committee's interest in this program and our shared goal to foster the success of Wisconsin agriculture. As mentioned, in the future, our offerings will continue to share UW-Madison research so that farms and businesses can incorporate those findings into the success of their operations. UW-Madison CALS is committed to the FISC program and its success.

Thank you for the opportunity to submit written testimony on the impact that the legislation would have on UW-Madison. Questions can be directed to UW-Madison Senior Director of State Relations Crystal Potts (crystal.potts@wisc.edu; 608-265-4105).



Office of Government Relations

Van Hise Hall
1220 Linden Drive
Madison, WI 53706
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DATE: October 4, 2023

TO: Members of the Assembly Committee on Colleges and Universities

FROM: UW System Office of Government Relations

RE: Testimony in Support of Assembly Bill 372

Thank you, Chair Murphy and committee members, for providing the UW System (UWS) an opportunity to submit testimony in favor of Assembly Bill 372 (AB 372). This legislation provides funding to reinstate the residential Farm and Industry Short Course (FISC), to be hosted by the University of Wisconsin-River Falls (UWRF), in collaboration with UW-Madison and UW-Platteville.

The Farm and Industry Short Course program had been offered at UW-Madison for over a century. This program offers hands-on agricultural experience and is vital for our state's farmers and agriculture industry partners. The program trains the next generation of farmers, helps current farmers expand their knowledge of the latest technologies and practices, and ensures Wisconsin's agriculture workforce remains at the forefront of the industry.

The residential FISC program was last offered at UW-Madison during the 2021-2022 academic year. While the residential program was not held, UW-Madison continued its commitment to farmer education by providing new, flexible short-course offerings, including online instruction and shorter in-person badge offerings. This allowed individuals who could not leave the farm for an extended period to participate in coursework. UW-Madison continues to offer these coursework options.

Yet, there was still an interest from farmers, FISC alumni, and the agriculture industry to have a residential program in Wisconsin. Therefore, it was announced last spring that the FISC program would be offered by UWRF starting in the 2023-2024 academic year, in collaboration with UW-Madison and UW-Platteville.

The funding provided in this legislation supports the program costs associated with offering the residential program at UWRF. As currently designed, the program will be a 16-week program starting on October 25, 2023. Students will take courses at UWRF in the Fall and Spring semesters and there are plans to collaborate over Winterim with UW-Madison and UW-Platteville to provide coursework. In the first year, the program will allow for 24 participants. These participants will be able to earn 18-20 credits in the first year that can be applied to a degree at UWRF or elsewhere.

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The return of the residential FISC program hosted by UWRF has been a collaboration by our universities, farmers, and the agricultural industry to meet the needs of Wisconsin's workforce. This legislation will help ensure we can provide the quality of education and experience that our industry partners have requested and deserve. Wisconsin must remain an international hub of agriculture innovation and investing in the continuation of FISC is one way to continue to see Wisconsin's agriculture industry thrive.

Thank you again to the authors for bringing this proposal forward and for the opportunity to *provide testimony in favor of this legislation.*



ROB STAFSHOLT

STATE SENATOR • 10th SENATE DISTRICT

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TO: Assembly Committee on Colleges and Universities
FROM: Senator Rob Stafsholt
DATE: October 4, 2023
SUBJECT: Testimony in Favor of Assembly Bill 372

Thank you, Chairman Murphy and members of the Assembly Committee on Colleges and Universities, for allowing me to submit testimony in favor of Assembly Bill 372.

For over 100 years, the Farm and Industry Short Course (FISC) offered by UW-Madison has helped develop the agricultural workforce by offering applied, hands-on education to farmers. The 16-week residential on-campus program allowed farmers during the winter off-season to network, learn new practices and review cutting edge research so they can apply it to future growing seasons.

The FISC program in Wisconsin has been training the next generation of farm owners, managers and service providers. Following a decision by UW-Madison, the residential on-campus program will no longer be provided due to a change of direction by the UW-Madison Agriculture Department. The lack of adequate on-campus housing was cited as one of the reasons for the decision.

That decision was met with disappointment from many in Wisconsin's agricultural sectors. I have heard from many agricultural organizations and short-course alumni about their concerns with those changes. Since the decision, there have been many discussions with stakeholders and from those talks it was determined that UW-River Falls would be a good place to host the residential program. Following those discussions, leaders at UW-River Falls have determined they could take over hosting the FISC.

Assembly Bill 372 provides funding to help support the transition of the program and its ongoing operating costs at UW-River Falls. The university has built an agriculture program that meets the needs of our rural farm communities, which makes this a perfect fit for the program. This will be crucial to our agriculture industry and I am proud to introduce legislation that will ensure the program continues to develop the workforce for the next generation.

This legislation will provide \$147,850 in fiscal year 2023-2024 and \$225,130 in fiscal year 2024-2025 to support the transition of the program and its ongoing operating costs. The program will be hosted on the UW-River Falls campus with collaboration between the other agriculture programs at UW-Madison and UW-Platteville, further building on the partnership developed by the successful Dairy Innovation Hub.

Thank you, members. I ask for your support and would be happy to discuss this bill at any time