

Ag bills pass Assembly

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The state Assembly signed off on a package of bills designed to help Wisconsin's farmers through tax breaks and other measures.

The effort began in earnest after Gov. Tony Evers called in his State of the State last month for a series of measures to help the ag industry and rural Wisconsin. Republicans then expanded the scope of the effort and the price tag after Evers first called for an \$8.5 million package.

GOP Rep. Travis Tranel, who co-authored part of the package and dairy farms with his family, challenged Evers to be an advocate for the industry going forward. He said that includes pushing for the bills, which would have to pass the Senate before going to his desk.

"We have to do something to show farmers that we understand the struggles that they are going through," said Tranel, R-Cuba City.

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Evers spokeswoman Melissa Baldauff told WisPolitics.com Tranel praised the gov for his leadership when the bills cleared committee.

"Clearly they and others recognize what real leadership looks like because thanks to Gov. Evers' advocacy, Republicans are finally taking up legislation to help our farmers and rural communities," she said.

The most expensive piece of the package developed by Assembly Republicans is an income tax credit for farmers that amounts to \$27.3 million a year.

The credit, which passed unanimously, would be based on the property taxes that farmers pay on agricultural buildings and would apply to 2020-21 through 2022-23 before sunseting.

The package also features a \$9.5 million-per-year plan to allow those who are self-employed to subtract health insurance costs from their income taxes. About \$2.5 million of that would go to farmers, while the rest would go to other sold proprietors.

Other pieces of the package include:

*AB 875, a measure that would require the UW System Board of Regents to review current agriculture programs.

*AB 627/SB 563

a proposal introduced last year that would give the Board of Regents \$1 million to fill currently vacant state specialist positions at the UW-Madison College of Agricultural and Life Sciences. Bill author Sen. Howard Marklein warned that he had heard rumblings that some lawmakers were looking to strip the funding from the proposal and vowed to vote against his own bill if that were to happen.

*a bill that would require UW-Madison to conduct an internal review on the viability of creating a new ag-related degree from courses already on offer.

Majority Leader Scott Fitzgerald said yesterday the Senate will be “picking and choosing” aspects of the package it can support to bring to the floor.

They all passed the assembly unanimously or by voice vote.