

UW-Madison: Erin Silva named UW Endowed Chair in Organic Agriculture and Outreach

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MADISON — Erin Silva, associate professor and extension specialist in the UW-Madison Department of Plant Pathology, has been selected as the first recipient of the Clif Bar Endowed Chair in Organic Agriculture and Outreach.

The new chair, established through a \$1 million endowment from Clif Bar & Company, was created to support the advancement of organic agriculture through dedicated research and outreach programs. The endowment leverages a Morgridge Match opportunity at the university, doubling the gift to \$2 million. This matching started in 2014, when UW-Madison alumni John and Tashia Morgridge promised \$100 million to match new gifts toward endowed professorships at the university.

Silva's selection as chair recognizes her leading-edge work in organic agriculture. Her research and outreach efforts focus on improving organic and sustainable cropping systems, with a special emphasis on organic no-till production and cover crops. Silva co-founded and directs the university's Organic Grain Resource and Information Network, a comprehensive program to provide educational support to new, transitioning and experienced organic grain farmers. She also led the establishment of the UW Organic Collaborative group and certificate in organic agriculture for undergraduates.

This appointment will allow for the creation and long-term support of a multi-state network of researchers to guide organic farmers in becoming successful suppliers of quality organic small grains and seeds, and leaders of thriving rural communities.

“Public/private collaborations are critical to drive innovation in agriculture. Funding

from Clif Bar provides the flexibility for a talented, creative professor like Dr. Silva to extend her work to larger audiences,” says Kate VandenBosch, dean of the UW–Madison College of Agricultural and Life Sciences. “This generous gift will allow Erin to increase the number of farmers she works with and grow the number of current students who can learn more deeply about organic agriculture.”

This is the second endowed chair at UW–Madison created by Clif Bar & Company. The first, established in 2015 in partnership with Organic Valley, focuses on plant breeding for organic crops.

These investments are part of Clif Bar’s commitment to create endowed chairs at land-grant universities, with this being the fourth. According to Clif Bar, since 2003 the company has purchased more than 1 billion pounds of organic products, and today nearly 80 percent of ingredients in Clif Bar products are organic or certified sustainable.

“Clif Bar has been committed to investing in organic for nearly 20 years because we recognize the benefits for people, communities and the planet,” says Sarah Beaubien, senior director of sustainability impact at Clif Bar & Company. “With agricultural research receiving less than one percent of public funding, this endowment program is intended to fund the best and brightest minds to help drive the organics industry forward and meet the growing consumer demand for organic food.”