

Wisconsin Ag Coalition: Praises Senate passage of SB 247

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MADISON - The Wisconsin Ag Coalition applauds the action taken by the Wisconsin State Senate today after they voted unanimously to pass Senate Bill 247, authored by Senators Marklein (R-Spring Green) and Tomczyk (R-Mosinee) and Representatives Tranel (R-Cuba City) and VanderMeer (R-Tomah). The bill would create an Agricultural Road Improvement Program (ARIP) to provide grants for local governments to repair and rebuild crumbling roads and bridges that create problems for farmers.

“We appreciate the support of the members of the Senate in recognizing the problems that deteriorating and failing infrastructure cause for farmers and acting to do something about it,” said Sara Stelter, President of Wisconsin Soybean Association.

“The proposed ARIP program will provide much-needed relief to agricultural users and the local governments responsible for maintaining these crucial transportation facilities,” said Cooperative Network Director of Government Affairs Jennifer Wickman.

The bill establishes a grant program aimed at addressing the critical road conditions that hinder farmers’ daily operations. The program is designed to enhance local roads, eliminate posted routes and benefit all rural drivers, creating a mechanism to repair or replace structures under 20 feet in length which were not eligible for federal revenue for local bridges. These initiatives collectively aim to expedite the modernization of Wisconsin’s local transportation networks with a request of \$150 million.

“Farmers face substantial difficulties when it comes to getting crop inputs to the

farm and transporting their products to market. This legislation will give Wisconsin agriculture long needed infrastructure funding to reduce that obstacle” said Amy Winters, lobbyist for CropLife America.

“Good roads are the lifeline that connect our farms to processing facilities, feed suppliers, distribution centers, and ultimately, the consumers’ tables,” said Wisconsin Cheese Makers Association Senior Director of Programs and Policy Rebekah Sweeney. “Without reliable and efficient transportation routes, farmers risk delays, spoilage, and increased costs, all of which directly impact the quality and affordability of our beloved Wisconsin cheese.”

“Investing in rural road infrastructure is an investment in the economic growth, safety, and connectivity of our rural communities in Wisconsin. By prioritizing funding for rural roads, we will ensure that our farmers, businesses and residents have reliable and efficient transportation networks to thrive and contribute to the overall prosperity of our state,” said Dairy Business Association Director of Government Affairs Chad Zuleger.

Today’s Senate passage comes before the Joint Committee on Finance which is scheduled to deliberate on the Department of Transportation portion of the 2023-25 state budget tomorrow. The legislation directs \$150 million in GPR funding to finance these projects throughout rural Wisconsin. The inclusion of \$150 million into the state budget secures this funding for this vital program.

“The agriculture industry is in desperate need of infrastructure improvements,” said Wisconsin Farm Bureau Federation Executive Director of Government Relations Jason Mugnaini. “Including \$150 million in the 2023-25 state budget is paramount to the success of Wisconsin’s legacy agricultural industry, which contributes \$105 billion to our state’s economy. The entirety of rural Wisconsin awaits word tomorrow on the inclusion of this critical funding in the state budget.”

Wisconsin agriculture has been significantly impacted by supply chain issues in recent years, and poor rural road conditions place additional strain on the food supply chain. Consumers experience the effects of these challenges firsthand as they encounter rising prices and limited availability of food products in local grocery stores.

Legislative action in the State Assembly is also underway. The Assembly Committee on Transportation recently heard companion legislation, Assembly Bill 244, which

now awaits executive action by the Committee to recommend the bill for passage by the full State Assembly. At the hearing, the committee heard testimony in unanimous support from stakeholders.

“Creating this program will go a long way to support the agriculture industry and ensuring the smooth flow of goods to market,” said Wisconsin Corn Growers Association President Mark Hoffmann. “By investing in rural infrastructure, we can overcome the barriers that restrict the agricultural economy and strengthen the overall food supply chain for all Wisconsinites.”

“Wisconsin farmers, food processors and rural residents greatly appreciate the attention and focus that this program brings to a critical infrastructure need across the state,” said Tamas Houlihan, Executive Director of the Wisconsin Potato & Vegetable Growers Association. “We sincerely appreciate the support for preservation and strengthening Wisconsin’s food production supply chain.”

The Wisconsin Ag Coalition, a group of organizations representing agricultural interests in the state, has praised this action as a vital step towards revitalizing the agricultural economy.

The Wisconsin Ag Coalition includes: Cooperative Network, Compeer Financial, CropLife America, Dairy Business Association, Farm Credit Services of America, Growmark, Insight FS, Wisconsin Agri-Business Association, Wisconsin Association of Meat Processors, Wisconsin Association of Professional Agricultural Consultants, Wisconsin Biomass Energy Coalition, Wisconsin Biofuels Association, Wisconsin Cattlemen’s Association, Wisconsin Cheese Makers Association, Wisconsin Corn Growers Association, Wisconsin Farm Bureau Federation, Wisconsin Hemp Alliance, Wisconsin Horse Council, Wisconsin Potato and Vegetable Growers Association, Wisconsin Soybean Association, Wisconsin State Cranberry Growers Association, and Wisconsin Veterinary Medical Association.