Position Statement – WSCGA Board of Directors – New Badger Partnership
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The Board of Directors of the Wisconsin State Cranberry Growers Association (WSCGA) supports the objectives of the proposed New Badger Partnership proposed by Governor Walker as part of his 2011-2013 Biennial Budget. The WSCGA was formed in 1887 to represent Wisconsin’s cranberry industry and to provide educational programs for growers and the general public on the state’s largest fruit crop. Today WSCGA has 162 member growers who represent about 85% of the state’s planted acreage.

Cranberries are the state’s largest fruit crop and Wisconsin leads the nation in cranberry production. In 2010 Wisconsin growers harvested 394,700,000 pounds of cranberries from about 18,000 acres. This accounted for about 58% of the nation’s crop. UW Extension estimates the economic impact of the Wisconsin cranberry industry at $300,000,000, providing 3,400 jobs for state residents. Cranberries constitute 85% of the fruit production in the state.

Regardless whether one supports or opposes the structure proposed by the New Badger Partnership, the WSCGA believes that all thoughtful citizens of our state should agree on the merit of its objectives.

Maintaining UW Madison as a world class research university that provides superior, undergraduate and graduate school opportunities to our citizens, and enhances the quality of all other universities within the UW System assures our children of having exceptional and affordable undergraduate educational opportunities.

Wisconsin’s cranberry growers have had a long relationship with the University of Wisconsin System, UW Extension and UW Madison College of Agricultural Life Sciences (CALS). We rely heavily on UW Madison CALS for research to develop sustainable cranberry production practices and UW Extension for programs to transfer that information to our growers. Cranberry growers also fund research at UW Madison on the health benefits of cranberries. Having a world class research institution such as UW Madison and the intellectual capacity it provides is a tremendous resource for the industry. Developing and transferring that technology and information to the growers is one of the competitive advantages that our growers have over other growing areas and is a major contributor to Wisconsin’s status as the world leader in cranberry production.

Wisconsin’s cranberry growers have invested in these research and extension programs at UW. Through the state cranberry marketing order the industry has provided an average of $175,000 per year in support of research and extension activities in Wisconsin. WSCGA also secured USDA Agricultural Research Service funding of $833,000 on an annual basis to support cranberry research on the Madison Campus. One of our grower member families provided support to endow a faculty chair at UW Madison CALS. Others have created funds to support graduate students and WSCGA has endowed scholarship funds for undergraduate students enrolled at UW Madison CALS, UIW LaCrosse, UW River Falls and UW Stevens Point. Since
Wisconsin does not have a research station for cranberries, all field research takes place on sites that our grower members provide to faculty to conduct research at no cost to UW.

This demonstrates the commitment of the cranberry industry to the UW System and our need for a world class research institution that is UW Madison and CALS. We are concerned about UW Madison CALS ability to continue to maintain its status as a top tier research institution under its current structure.

As the Legislature considers the Governor’s budget we would ask it to make flexibility for UW Madison as top priority. As we understand the situation the best and preferred way to achieve this is through the creation of public authority status for UW Madison. We ask the Legislature to take steps to insure that there are safeguards in place to protect CALS from negative impacts and rather use the process to help CALS and UW Madison grow in their ability to meet the needs of Wisconsin agriculture as well as those of agriculture around the world.

Our second area of concern is strengthening and maintaining the relationship between UW Extension and the UW Madison. UW Extension operates as a separate campus in the current UW System. Many of the UW Madison CALS Faculty who work with the cranberry industry have joint appointments with both UW Extension and CALS. Through these arrangements faculty who conduct needed research also are then in a position through Extension activities to be involved directly in the transfer of new information across the state. They have developed a close network with our growers as well as our crop consultants who rely on faculty for this critical information. We encourage the legislature to construct the public authority in such a way that these relationships are maintained and improved.

We commend Governor Walker and UW Madison Chancellor Martin for recognizing that the UW Madison must be made more competitive and stronger in the 21st century. Maintaining UW Madison as a top tier University not only is important to Wisconsin’s cranberry growers but all of the citizens of the state. We believe that as state support continues to decline the UW Madison would be positioned to manage these reductions while at the same time competing for resources worldwide. The New Badger Partnership proposal had provided the catalyst for a thorough legislative discussion of this extremely important issue.