



May 12, 2022

To: Members of the Agriculture, Housing, and Broadband Conference Committee

Re: Please support critical investments in Minnesota's agricultural and rural economy in Agriculture Appropriations, HF 4366

Dear Legislators,

Thank you for serving on this important committee. Minnesota's farmers, farmland and natural resources are faced with many challenges, including dealing with a changing climate. This conference committee has a significant opportunity to respond to these challenges and provide a better future for all Minnesotans and for our lands and waters.

We appreciate the bipartisan support for the many good provisions in both the House and Senate bills that will support farmers and protect Minnesotans by promoting healthy soil, water, and habitat. We urge you to support the greater investment in the House bill that will help meet the current challenges our state's resources and farmers face and build a bright future for farming in our state.

We strongly support and ask you to pass the following provisions into law:

### **Supporting Emerging Farmers**

(page R20 of Agriculture Appropriations the side-by-side)

This bill includes welcome investments targeted toward new and diverse emerging farmers, promoting both equity and sustainable land stewardship. According to Minnesota Statutes, section 17.055, subdivision 1, emerging farmers are defined as "farmers or aspiring farmers who are women, veterans, persons with disabilities, American Indian or Alaskan Natives, members of a community of color, young, and urban."

We are pleased to see language that supports emerging farmers in both the Senate and House bills.

- We urge you to support the level of investment in the House bill. This includes \$2.6 million for grants to organizations to provide technical and culturally appropriate services to emerging farmers and related businesses and to help emerging farmers pay for up to two years of coverage under the federal micro farm insurance program.

We ask you to support the following provisions by including the language and funding level recommended by the House:

- \$300,000 for farm business management tuition assistance with priority to specialty crop farmers, urban farmers, and farmers facing farmer - lender mediation, and support for new

urban and specialty crop instructor positions, including translation and outreach. (page R12 of Agriculture Appropriations side-by-side)

- \$1 million for urban youth agricultural education or urban agriculture community development. (page R12 and R13 of Agriculture Appropriations side-by-side)
- \$1 million for the city of South Saint Paul to provide financial assistance to multicultural meat processing businesses. (page R24 of Agriculture Appropriations side-by-side)

### **Forever Green Initiative Crop Research and Development**

(page R4 of Agriculture Appropriations side-by-side)

The University of Minnesota's Forever Green initiative is actively developing a variety of continuous living cover (CLC) cropping systems that take a variety of forms, offering farmers numerous options for growing profitable crops while improving the health of their soil and water resources. These can range from a focus on long-lived perennials such as Kernza grain, elderberries, or hybrid hazelnuts; to adding a winter annual crop (such as camelina oilseeds) into an existing rotation of corn and soybeans, thereby increasing and diversifying revenue streams. Businesses and farmers around the state are asking for these investments and making them now will position us to continue to lead this rapidly building movement and reap the economic and environmental benefits.

We appreciate the great language for this provision in both the House and Senate bills and ask you support the higher funding level recommended by the House of \$6.5 million in one-time dollars and ongoing base funding of \$1.5 million to advance the research and development activities of Forever Green, including much needed capital investments in laboratory and field equipment and other crucial infrastructure. We prefer the House language of setting a numerical cap on the capital infrastructure. This should be set based on the final number that is agreed upon for this purpose for FY 2023. Forever Green has a track record of leveraging state investment for a five-fold return in federal and private investment, introducing a growing portfolio of commercially viable CLC crops onto the agricultural landscape.

### **Continuous Living Cover Development Grants** (page R4 and R5 of Agriculture Appropriations side-by-side)

We appreciate the language from both the House and Senate to support Continuous Living Cover Development Grants. We ask you to support the higher funding level recommended by the House of \$9 million in grant funding (including a cap of \$750,000 per organization) to the Minnesota-based businesses and organizations that comprise the supply/value chain for continuous living cover (CLC) crops and products. The potential end uses for CLC crops include everything from specialty foods and forage to industrial polymers, diesel and aviation biofuels, helping to provide market friendly solutions to environmental and economic challenges. Consumers are eager to buy high performance farm products that are environmentally friendly, and this funding will help develop a major economic engine for Minnesota's economy.

### **Soil Health Financial Assistance Program**

(page R5 of Agriculture Appropriations side-by-side, page R6 of the Agriculture Statutory Changes)

We appreciate the soil health measures in the House and Senate bills to establish a program supporting soil health practices that mitigate climate change impacts, improve water quality, and provide related public benefits. We ask for your support of the Senate position to create a state-wide healthy soil management plan, including an assessment of current healthy soil management practices in Minnesota and the development of state-wide goals for healthy soil management. We ask you to support these soil health measures at the funding level recommended by the House of \$6.725 million. This support would include financial assistance to local governments, private sector

providers, or farmers to cover the costs of specialized equipment and technology necessary to implement and sustain soil health practices.

Minnesota's soil is one of our most vital - and vulnerable - resources, and assisting farmers and organizations in protecting it is a key part of protecting the future of our communities and our economy.

### **Grants to Meat, Poultry, Egg, and Milk Processing Facilities**

(page R11 of Agriculture Appropriations side-by-side)

We appreciate the language in the House and Senate bills to provide grants to meat, poultry, egg, and milk processing plants. We ask you to support the House recommendation to increase the funding for these grants by \$3 million. These funds will help improve badly-needed supply chain resiliency and support new businesses in these industries.

### **Financial Support for Small Meat Processors' Training Investments**

(page R22 of Agriculture Appropriations side-by-side)

We appreciate the provisions and language in both the House and Senate bills that provide financial assistance to smaller meat and poultry processors to reimburse food safety and business planning courses. We ask you to support the higher funding level recommended by the House of \$100,000. This will provide critical training and technical assistance to support developing sanitation standard operating procedures, hazard analysis and critical control points and business plans. This funding will help make Minnesota's meat processing industry safer and cleaner for small businesses and workers.

### **Conclusion**

As you proceed with negotiations over legislative investments this session, we ask that you approve these critical investments in Minnesota's agricultural and rural economy while also promoting sound conservation measures that will protect the health of our communities. We are approaching a tipping point in demand for these new crops and practices and putting Minnesota in the driver's seat will help sustain our role as a state that leads in both agriculture and protecting our land, water, and people.

Sincerely,



Steve Morse  
Executive Director

*Submitted on behalf of the organizations listed on the following page.*

Audubon Chapter of Minneapolis

Clean River Partners

Clean Water Action Minnesota

CURE (Clean Up the River Environment)

Friends of Minnesota Scientific and Natural Areas

Friends of the Mississippi River

Hastings Environmental Protectors

Land Stewardship Project

League of Women Voters Minnesota

Lutheran Advocacy Minnesota

Minnesota Center for Environmental Advocacy

Minnesota Ornithologists Union

MN350

Pollinator Friendly Alliance

Renewing the Countryside

Roots Return Heritage Farm LLC\*

St. Paul Audubon Society

Vote Climate

*\*denotes non-MEP member*