



April 19, 2023

Members of the Minnesota House of Representatives

Re: SF1955 House Version

Dear Representative,

Thank you for your service to the people of Minnesota, and for the opportunity to provide comments on the Omnibus Agriculture, Broadband and Rural Development appropriations bill - SF1955 House Version. As a major agricultural state, Minnesota is uniquely poised to lead the nation in investment in our farmers, food systems, natural resources, and rural economies, providing a healthy future for all Minnesotans and our lands and waters. This economy is driven by farmers, farmworkers, food makers, processors, and entrepreneurs, who are vital to stewarding our soil and water, nourishing our communities, and are the bedrock of many of our rural communities.

On behalf of the Minnesota Environmental Partnership and the undersigned organizations, we are writing in support of the House Agriculture Omnibus Bill SF1955 House Version and the important policy provisions that will protect Minnesotans from pollution, support farmers and promote healthy soil, water, and habitat. We recognize the budget target for this bill is low and should more funds become available during the legislative process, we hope to see more funding in these key programs.

We would like to highlight some of the many beneficial provisions of this bill:

Emerging Farmers Office

Reduces barriers and challenges for emerging farmers by growing the Emerging Farmers Office and support new programming. Art. 2, Sec. 5, Subd. 2a

Climate Implementation Coordinator Position

This bill includes \$150,000 to establish a new position in the MN Department of Agriculture (MDA) to (a) coordinate the department to make measurable progress on the Climate Action Plan, (b) coordinate efforts to seek federal funds for climate-related initiatives, and (c) develop strategic partnerships. Art. 1, Sec. 2, Subd. 2

Forever Green Initiative Crop Research and Development

We appreciate that this bill provides additional one-time funding of \$1,120,000 for the Forever Green Initiative research and to purchase related equipment. The University of Minnesota's Forever Green Initiative is actively developing a wide variety of continuous living cover (CLC) cropping systems, offering farmers numerous options for growing profitable crops while improving habitat and soil and water health. 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. In turn, local businesses – millers, processors, marketers, and more – can help connect those farmers to the new markets that are already hungry for supply. Art.1, Sec.2, Subd 4

Continuous Living Cover Grants

An exciting and complementary component of the agriculture omnibus bill would provide \$1 million in grant funding 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, all 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 will help develop a major economic engine for Minnesota's economy. Art. 1, Sec. 2, Subd. 2

Soil Health Financial Assistance Program

There is \$500,000 in one time funding to reduce barriers to adopting soil health practices by growing the Soil Health Financial Assistance Program. Art. 1, Sec. 2, Subd. 2

Farmland Down Payment Assistance Grant Program

There is \$1.5 million in funding for the Farmland Down Payment Assistance Grant Program. We urge you to reduce barriers to accessing this program and prioritize emerging farmers in awarding grants.

Art. 1, Sec. 5, Subd. 5

Financial Support for Small Meat Processor Training Grants

This bill includes up to \$10,000 tuition reimbursement at Minnesota state colleges and universities, sign-on bonuses, relocation assistance, retention incentives, child care stipends, and other related expenses for new employees at small meat processors. Art. 1, Sec. 6, Subd. 2

Meat Processing Liaison

This bill includes \$150,000 in base funding to support a meat processing liaison position to assist new or existing meat and poultry processing operations in getting started, expanding, growing, or transitioning into new business models. Art. 1 Sec. 2 Subd. 2

Farm to School Funding + Coordinator

We are pleased to see ongoing funding of \$1 million per year for farm to school funding, including a coordinator. Art. 1, Sec. 2, Subd. 4

Regulate pesticides containing PFAS

There is vitally needed funding of \$1,126,000 in FY24 and \$562,000 in FY25 to identify and regulate pesticides containing PFAS. This is an issue that has impacted too many Minnesotans already. According to the Minnesota Department of Agriculture testimony, there are currently over 2,000 registered pesticide products in Minnesota that contain the “forever chemicals” known as PFAS. This number does not include non-ag use or inert ingredients. We all need to work together to eliminate this threat. A first step is to stop using PFAS agricultural chemicals. Art. 1, Sec. 2, Subd. 2

Systemic pesticide-treated seed program

The bill would add the regulation of pesticide-treated seeds by the Department of Agriculture. This is a good first step on the path to adequately address the damaging impacts from pesticide treated seeds. It provides \$100,000 and has new language to address concerns first brought forward by the Department of Agriculture in 2016 in their Special Registration Review of Neonicotinoids. This bill calls for MDA to: determine the impact of pesticide-treated seed on the environment, including on surface water and groundwater; collaborate with the University of Minnesota to identify research

needs; and develop science-based best management practices for the distribution, storage, handling, use, and disposal of pesticide treated seeds. Art. 1, Sec. 2, Subd. 2; Art 2, Sec 14,15,16,17, & 20

We thank you for your leadership and for your consideration. Please proudly support this historic legislation.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Steve Morse". The signature is written in black ink on a light-colored background.

Steve Morse
Executive Director

Submitted on behalf of the following organizations:

Clean Water Action Minnesota

CURE (Clean Up the River Environment)

Friends of the Mississippi River

Lakeville Friends of the Environment*

Land Stewardship Project

MN350

Minnesota Well Owners Organization

Pollinate Minnesota

Prairie Horizons Farm LLC*

Roots Return Heritage Farm LLC*

**denotes non-MEP member*