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Chair Samantha Vang  
Vice Chair Kristi Pursell  
Representative Paul Anderson  
Members, House Agriculture Finance & Policy Committee

Dear Chair Vang and Members of the Committee,

I'm writing to express my strong support for both Vice Chair Pursell's bill establishing a Next Generation Farmer Development Program (HF 1747) as well as Chair Vang's bill appropriating funds for the Farm Down Payment Assistance Grants (HF 1057) .

I own and operate Medicine Creek Farm in Pine County. I raise grass fed beef and lamb and pastured pork, and I direct market all my products to over 500 customers around the state of Minnesota. I am also a member of the Emerging Farmers Working Group, advising the MDA on ways to improve equity and access for other farmers like me.

The Next Generation Farmer Development Program (HF 1747) is a momentous proposal to help emerging farmers gain on-farm training through meaningful employment that pays a living wage. When I was getting started in agriculture, to gain the needed 3 years of experience to qualify for a Farm Service Agency Microloan, I took a 9-month internship working 6 days a week for a small stipend, but on my one day off I had to work a higher paying job in order to pay my bills and student loans. Now in my 7th year of operating my own growing business, my biggest challenge is limited time and the potential for burnout, but I have held off on hiring an intern until I can pay what I feel is a living wage with today's cost of living and inflation.

The Next Generation Farmer Development Program is a win for both farm workers seeking training, education, and experience in how to start their own farms and emerging farmers in the beginning stages of their operation who need a helping hand to grow and scale their businesses. Other states such as Colorado and Pennsylvania have successfully implemented similar programs, and this bill would demonstrate that Minnesota is also

committed to launching a new generation of farmers with all the support they need to thrive.

Additionally, the number one issue emerging farmers face in our state is access to land. As reported to the Emerging Farmers Working Group in January, the first round of MDA's Down Payment Assistance Grants demonstrated the dire need for the program as interest was high and the requests quickly met the money allocated to the program. As land prices continue to increase, Minnesota's new farmers will continue to need assistance to get started, and the Down Payment Assistance Grant program will get more beginners on the land.

Please continue to back our emerging farmers and the future of Minnesota agriculture. I appreciate your consideration of these proposals and thank Chair Vang and Vice Chair Pursell for their leadership as well as the Committee's work on behalf of Minnesota's food producers.

Sincerely,



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Hannah K. Bernhardt