



Food for today. Change for tomorrow.

March 20, 2023

Dear Members of the House Agriculture Committee,

The Food Group is writing to express our support to expand the Emerging Farmers Office at the Minnesota Department of Agriculture. The Food Group is a nonprofit working towards food justice and equity. Our mission is to fight hunger and nourish our community. For over 45 years, we have been providing nutritious and quality foods to people across 30+ counties. We believe that food for today is change for tomorrow.

Our Big River Farms program is an incubator farm near Marine on St. Croix where farmers, especially farmers of color, have access to land and education to build their businesses and grow sustainable, organic foods. We also host an annual conference for new and emerging growers and producers in partnership with many community organizations, including MDA's emerging farmers office. This Emerging Farmers Conference is for farmers, by farmers, and led by farmers. The conference has shown the wide diversity of emerging farmers in our state, with this year's conference being translated into 8 language. So many interested farmers are looking for support. The conference starts this process, but more is needed.

In all this work, we have collaborated closely with Lillian Otieno, the amazing Outreach and Engagement staff for the Emerging Farmers Office. She is a tremendous resource for farmers in our program and at the conference, however, one person cannot support all the emerging farmer needs statewide. We support the ask in the Governor's budget to expand the Emerging Farmers Office to 4 full time staff. This expansion would provide the relationship building, technical assistance, and attention that emerging farmers in our state need to thrive.

Thank you for considering this ask.

Sincerely,

Sophia Lenarz-Coy
Executive Director
slenarzcoy@thefoodgroupmn.org