



Re: H.F. 4098

March 20, 2024

My name is Erin Rupp, I'm the founder and ED of Pollinate Minnesota. My livelihood is from and with my honeybees. I am a beekeeper with 20 hives, the health of which I translate, not to direct pollination contracts or very large honey sales, but to experiential education, mostly with youth in beekeeping suits, working bees with me. I've taught over 40,000 people directly with live bees since starting this work. My bee losses annually are along state and national averages, which, in MN was 76% hive loss last year. I'm a white self-employed mom.

I'm writing to urge you not to replace the prioritization of "emerging farmers" with the prioritization of "limited-resource farmers" for The Good Acre's LEAFF Program, Beginning Farmer Equipment and Infrastructure Grants, the Down Payment Assistance Program, the Beginning Farmer Tax Credit, technical assistance grants, and others through H.F. 4098 (Vang) and S.F. 5049 (Putnam).

It is well documented that our insect and pollinator populations are in decline, that we rely on these critical animals for both the functioning of ecosystems and the healthy, nutritious parts of our diet, and that the reasons for insect decline are known, actionable things.

Regenerative farming helps pollinator health; the diverse floral resources for nectar and home and limited pesticide exposure embedded in regenerative agriculture are key solutions to helping our necessary insect populations. Emerging BIPOC farmers are these regenerative farmers our pollinators and ecosystems need, and investing in BIPOC farmers is a key solution to our pollinator crisis.

I share the concerns the Land Stewardship Project and allies who represent BIPOC and emerging farmers have significant concerns about this bill:

1. **The development of this legislation has happened without the meaningful consultation of those most impacted by these proposed changes.** LSP strongly values centering those most impacted by legislation in the legislative process — "nothing about us without us." Emerging and BIPOC farmer organizations, as well as organizations instrumental in creating these programs, were not consulted in the crafting of this legislation and have been given little time and few opportunities to provide feedback.
2. **The proposed definition of a "limited-resource farmer" needs additional development.** It currently only includes people farming under a lease or other rental arrangement of no more than three years in duration (when the person leasing or renting the land is not related to the lessee or renter by blood or marriage) and farmers whose majority of annual farm product sales are direct sales to the consumer. This leaves out many BIPOC and emerging farmers, including farmworkers and aspiring farmers who have not rented land before, farmers who primarily sell to institutions like schools, and established emerging farmers who still face significant barriers.
3. **We need a full menu of options to legislatively respond to this lawsuit before pushing a proposal through that significantly changes MDA and RFA programs.** The Land Stewardship Project allies are in the process of compiling how other states have

addressed lawsuits like this before, as well as consulting legal experts. We need time to determine the best path forward — not a quick fix that leaves people out of both the proposed legislation and the legislative process.

Supporting BIPOC farmers is necessary. Minnesotans of Color today and historically face and have faced incredible obstacles in obtaining the same quality of life that white Minnesotans enjoy, the quality of life we're nationally recognized for. This disparate access to opportunity, along with ongoing institutional and direct racism are well documented.

It's also well documented that "race neutral" -when race isn't defined specifically- doesn't translate to equity across race but a further concentration of resources in white communities, white hands, white bank accounts.

You all are brave. This legislature has demonstrated the ability and the courage to pass policy that protects and honors our full humanity as Minnesotans. **Thank you.** You know that this bravery is necessary, that NOW is the time for it. Please be brave on this issue too.

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Thank you.

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