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May 4, 2021

Senator Torrey Westrom
 Senator Gene Dornink
 Senator Mike Goggin
 Senator Bruce Anderson
 Senator Erin Murphy

Representative Mike Sundin
 Representative Samantha Vang
 Representative Gene Pelowski
 Representative Todd Lippert
 Representative Nathan Nelson

Dear Omnibus Agriculture Finance Bill Conferees:

As the Conference Committee convenes to consider differences in the House and Senate versions of the Omnibus Agriculture Bill (S.F. 958), we wanted you to know Land Stewardship Project’s priorities.

SUPPORT House Position: Bolster the Farm-to-School Market

(Side by Side Page R9, House Lines 10.1 to 10.10)

Farm-to-school is a critical market pathway that creates opportunities for beginning farmers and allows existing farmers to expand their markets. In 2019, Minnesota established a reimbursement grant program, similar to ones that have been working in other states. Scaling up and bolstering this program would benefit our kids, farmers, and communities. Both the House and Senate increase this funding, but the House language includes more funding than the Senate language.

SUPPORT House Position: Provide Critical Support for Farmers in Crisis

(Side by Side Page R14, House Lines 13.3-13.4)

Family farmers across Minnesota, particularly dairy farmers, are in crisis after several consecutive years of low prices. The Farm Advocates program is a critical resource for farmers in crisis and they need increased funding to provide resources and one-on-one counsel to farmers. For years, the program has been significantly underfunded. Advocates are working overtime with no pay—and demand for their services is much higher than what they are staffed to provide. Both the House and Senate increase their funding, but the House language includes more funding than the Senate language.

SUPPORT House Position: Extend Farmer-Lender Mediation

(Side by Side Pages R49-R52, House Lines 41.26 to 45.26)

Farmer-Lender Mediation is a key protection for farmers experiencing crisis and helps keep families on the land. Since it was started during the farm crisis of the 80’s, this program has given farmers time before they are foreclosed on. Time to get through harvest, to consolidate options, and to find an outcome that allows them to keep farming. Most farmers and creditors that enter this mediation process end with a favorable result for both the creditor and the farmer. The House language reauthorizes the critical protection and extends the timelines for mediation by 30 days so farmers can have the time they need when facing crisis.

SUPPORT House & Senate Positions: Invest in Emerging and Beginning Farmers

(Side by Side Page R6-R7, House Lines 7.4 to 8.2. Side by Side Page R22-R23, House Lines 19.3 to 20.32. Side by Side Page R12, Senate Lines 11.18 to 11.20.)

A shortage of new farmers threatens the future of agriculture: 400 million acres of American farmland will transition in the next 10 years. While there are people who want to farm, new generations of farmers must overcome significant barriers to start and succeed in farming, particularly for those who cannot inherit or afford land, assets, training, and other resources. Investing in beginning and emerging farmers means we will have more people stewarding the land, increasingly populated rural communities, stronger local economies, and a resilient future for our state and agricultural system. The Senate has proposed \$1 million for grants for beginning farmers and the House proposed establishing an emerging farmer account with \$20,000, creating an emerging farmer office, hiring a full-time emerging farmer coordinator, and establishing a pilot project to create farmland access teams. All of these tools will work together to facilitate strong transitions to new farmers and advance economic, racial, gender, and disability justice.

SUPPORT House & Senate Position: Funding for Additional Meat and Poultry Inspection Services

(Side by Side Page R3, House Lines 4.3 to 4.5, Senate Lines 4.7 to 4.9)

Minnesota has seen a significant increase in demand for local meat options and for local meat and poultry processing. Because of this, increasing the funding for meat and poultry inspection services is important for Minnesota's independent meat processors, which are a critical part of a healthy and safe local foods system. This is particularly important for small-and-medium-sized livestock farmers who sell direct. The funding level that is in both the house and the senate level must stay intact.

SUPPORT House Position: Support Sustainable Agriculture

(Side by Side Page R9, House Lines 10.21-10.22 and 10.28-10.29. Side by Side Page R3, House Lines 4.10 to 4.16.)

Sustainable agriculture cultivates thriving and resilient land that soaks up rain and nutrients while fostering healthy ecosystems with clean water and a sustainable climate for microorganisms, wildlife, and people. These practices also boost farm income and viability. Yet, Minnesota's farmers are facing compounding challenges of extreme weather, financial crisis, and degrading topsoil. Sufficiently funding Sustainable Agriculture Demonstration Grants and Best Management Practices Loans, as well as adding a climate-smart farming endorsement to the Ag Water Quality Certification Program, help financially support and recognize farmers who want to integrate practices like cover cropping and managed rotational grazing.

SUPPORT House Position: Invest in the Good Food Access program

(Side by Side Page R9, House Lines 10.14 to 10.17)

One of the largest barriers between people and healthy, fresh food is the ability of grocery stores and other sellers to be able to keep that food fresh and store it. Minnesota's Good Food Access program provides grants to increase the availability of and access to affordable, nutritious, and culturally appropriate food for underserved communities in low- and moderate-income areas. Both the House and Senate proposals allocate funds for the Good Food Access Program, but the House language provides more funding for this important program.

SUPPORT House Position: Support Farmer Cooperatives

(Side by Side Pages R22 and R23, House Lines 19.24 to 20.18)

Farmer-led agricultural cooperatives were built to provide a local access to needed farm services and to help keep farm dollars within the local community. From providing a local option for meat and dairy processing, to providing needed farm services like repair and propane, farmer cooperatives give farmers the opportunity to provide their own services and help keep our meat and food processing system

diversified and strong. The House language gives MDA the authority to provide grants to new farm cooperatives that may start.

SUPPORT House Position: Invest in Urban Agriculture

(Side by Side Page R9, House Lines 10.11 to 10.14)

Agriculture, from the food we eat to the land we work, effects everybody in Minnesota. Giving opportunities to those in urban areas of our state to work the land and educate young people on agriculture and where their food comes from is something that brings a community together and can provide an opportunity for those who want to farm to learn how to do so. The house language includes funding for both urban youth agricultural education and urban agricultural community development.

SUPPORT House Position: Protect the Pollinators Farmers Rely On

(Side by Side Pages R25-R29, House Lines 22.17 to 26.17)

Our farm and food system depend on our pollinator populations. Pollinating insects are needed to produce seeds for forage crops like alfalfa, meaning our livestock farmers are particularly vulnerable to dwindling pollinator populations. Farmers will be unable to feed our communities or provide economic benefit to our state without stewarding the health of our pollinators. Neonicotinoids, commonly found in pesticides, pose a threat to Minnesota's pollinators. The House proposals includes language that would protect our pollinators and water, while investing in crucial research.

OPPOSE Senate Position: Serving Corporate Interests at the Expense of Farmers & Rural Minnesotans *(Side by Side Pages R44-R47, Senate Lines 29.3 to 32.18.)*

The Senate version of the bill eliminates and limits restrictions for spreading manure from factory farms. This proposal serves a handful of large operations and their wealthy investors, at the expense of small and mid-sized farmers and rural Minnesotans. They uplift a corporate industry that is running small and mid-sized farms out of business, depopulating rural communities, and forcing rural communities to foot the bill to clean up detrimental impacts on human health and the environment.

Thank you for your consideration.

On behalf of the LSP members across Minnesota,



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CC:

The Honorable Tim Walz, Governor of Minnesota
The Honorable Peggy Flanagan, Lieutenant Governor of Minnesota
Senator Paul Gazelka, Majority Leader of the Senate
Representative Melissa Hortman, Speaker of the House
Commissioner Thom Petersen, Minnesota Department of Agriculture