



3/20/23

Dear Chair Vang and Members of the Committee:

My name is Aaron Blyth and I am the Director of Agriculture at the Latino Economic Development Center. I am writing to request your support for additional funding to support the vital services provided by the MDA's Emerging Farmers Office to the Emerging Farmers Working Group. The department added this office in response to the need to provide essential services to the farmers operating in the local food landscape. As you are aware, the office needs additional staffing to provide the variety of services which will help farmers navigate effectively in the local economy. Increasing the investment in this program to hire additional staff will permit the department to offer services to the wonderful farmers who are growing food for our communities, the popular farm- to-school programs, businesses, food shelves, and direct markets.

Over the last 10 years, Latino Economic Development Center (LEDC) has developed multiple ways to help Latino farmers in Minnesota both start and grow their farm businesses. We provide technical assistance, business development, access to capital and markets, as well as specialize in Organic and GAP certification education and technical assistance. All these services provide the farmers that we work with the best possibility of long-term success. LEDC has been a CDFI for over 10 years and we have distributed over \$1.25 million of loans and grants to over 50 BIPOC producers in Minnesota. LEDC is a certified lender for Minnesota's Rural Finance Authority's Farm Micro-Lending program and has a proven ability to connect small-scale BIPOC farmers with direct financing for their operations.

Our work has greatly benefitted from the leadership and vision of Lillian Otieno and the Emerging Farmers Working Group. However, they clearly need more funding and more staff to do all the work that is needed to support Minnesota's Emerging Farmers. I am grateful for the MDA's leadership for Emerging Farmers. Please increase the department's budget in the final Agriculture Omnibus Bill for additional staffing to provide essential services to emerging farmers.

We appreciate your consideration of this request and ask you to support the Emerging Farmers Office request for funding and include them in the final Agriculture Budget.

Sincerely,

Aaron Blyth
Agricultural Director
Latino Economic Development Center