

Roots Return Heritage Farm LLC



E-Mail: rootsreturn@gmail.com

Date: February 27, 2024

To: MN House of Representatives Members of Agriculture Finance and Policy Committee, Chair Vang, Vice-Chair Pursell (via email)

RE: Oppose [HF 4044 \(Jacob\)](#)

Greetings Representatives:

Representative Jacob's bill proposing a \$5/acre MN Property Tax Credit for agricultural producers 'certified' under MDA's MN Agricultural Water Quality Certification Program ([MAWQCP](#)) is misguided. Proposing a credit will not provide any more clean water outcomes, nor during the last 10 years of the program's existence. I have served the last 6 yrs on the advisory board and am proud to help provide more conservation practices on MN acers. However, **there are no measurements the program uses to claim improved water quality outcomes. If you place a rubber membrane underneath, and walls around ag parcels emitting pollution, you will improve water quality.** Since that isn't realistic, anyone should be able to **state with ease how practice A will provide 'assurance' of water quality outcome B.** Modeling doesn't explain outcomes achieved, measurements do as we see in agency monitoring reports. This credit could provide Representative Jacob's 108 acre parcel a **\$540 credit on \$3,068 property tax.** Ag organizations supporting see another offer of taxpayer subsidy.

Perennial use of synthetic nitrogen, oversupply of manure, neonic coated seeds, chemical sprays, tillage, drain tile does not 'assure' water quality. All practices are producer choice. There are amazing producers implementing amazing conservation practices on their lands. They've stopped using polluting practices and methods, but there simply aren't enough of them. Especially true in areas where agricultural land use should not have occurred. Per the [2022 USDA Ag Census](#), the majority of acres still implement no conservation practices.

I asked MDA to review with our advisory board agricultural pollution and water quality reports provided by them, MPCA, DNR, MDH to help guide the program's efforts where its most needed. My request was met with anger and refusal to review the very data needed to make quantified decisions. Because of no measuring in-field, edge-of-field, or drain tile discharge, **hard data of the program's efficacy are missing.** Number of acres and farmers enrolled does not equal improved water quality. I live in a [DWSMA](#) area of Carver County, and see no restrictions being upheld by any MDA oversight for 'groundwater protection'.

Most producers the program targets already receive USDA/FSA subsidies for their crops, crop insurance, as do manufacturers. State ag grants are at an all-time high. This very program's existence relies on Clean Water Funds which cost taxpayers \$54M+ to date. [Agricultural parcels pay the least amount of property taxes of any zoned land use in MN and have additional tax deferment programs.](#) I know, I own two. Taxpayers also currently [pay to clean up and mitigate ag pollution](#) issues through no fault of their own. What if you couldn't drink your well water? Who is responsible?

Without utilizing agency reports on agricultural pollution or water impairments, the only statistics this program delivers are estimations from the program's certification tool. **The tool provides statistics, not measurements or accountability** required by the Clean Water Fund. **SE MN and other regions report nitrates and agricultural chemicals in surface water and groundwater** for decades.

Program claims to 'remove' agricultural pollution risks to water quality are unsubstantiated. NRCS-MN **stated it next to impossible to make 'guarantees' to a specific water quality outcome due a multitude of**

factors: soil types, depth to bedrock, weather, floods/droughts, climate projections, producer education, familiarity, equipment, drainage, irrigation, consistency of practice, etc.

The program makes contradictory claims: 1) A risk assessment tool only, not a water quality outcomes tool. 2) Provides 'assurance' and 'guarantee' of improved water quality outcomes. Which is true, and why?

Your opposition to this bill will keep conversation honest that degraded water quality from agricultural sources needs more help than just the MAWQCP program existing, and that **measurable, accountable clean water outcomes** are what we all need. I thank you for voting to oppose.

Sincerely,

Lori D. Cox, Owner - Roots Return Heritage Farm LLC

2016 MAWQCP certified farm using no synthetic nitrogen, pesticides, or animal manure; continual no-till cover crops, fallow field; perennial fruits and rotated annuals on highly erodible soils.