



LEWISTON OFFICE
180 East Main St, Box 130
Lewiston, MN 55952
507-523-3366

MINNEAPOLIS OFFICE
821 East 35th St, #200
Minneapolis, MN 55407
612-722-6377

MONTEVIDEO OFFICE
117 South 1st St
Montevideo, MN 56265
320-269-2105

Rep. Samantha Vang, Chair
Rep. Kristi Pursell, Vice Chair
Rep. Paul Anderson, Minority Lead
Rep. John Burkel
Rep. Ethan Cha
Rep. Luke Frederick
Rep. Rick Hansen

Rep. Bobbie Harder
Rep. Steven Jacob
Rep. Nathan Nelson
Rep. Lucy Rehm
Rep. Samantha Sencer-Mura
Rep. Brad Tabke

Re: H.F. 4098

March 20, 2024

Members of the House Agriculture Finance & Policy Committee,

Land Stewardship Project's (LSP) core values are stewardship, justice, democracy, health, and community. We believe that our state and farm and food system are more resilient and just with a diversified farming population and more people on the land.

Like Chair Vang, we are concerned about the future of these programs considering the impending lawsuit. It's critical that we ensure these programs not only continue but grow.

Along with the creation of the Emerging Farmers Office and Emerging Farmers Working Group, these programs have been instrumental in the growth of the number of emerging farmers, particularly BIPOC farmers, between the 2017 and 2022 Agriculture Censuses. Minnesota has been a national leader in prioritizing programs and resources toward emerging farmers, beginning to address generations of the disenfranchisement of historically underserved populations, particularly Black, Indigenous, and people of color (BIPOC) engaged in our farm and food system.

We appreciate changes that have been made to the bill language, especially the inclusion of farmer incubatees. We also appreciate limiting prioritization to farmers who are not renting from a relative by blood or marriage. However, we still have some concerns with the proposed new definition of "emerging farmer", as it excludes some key folks who fall under the current definition of "emerging farmer". Specifically, we would like to continue to work with Chair Vang to ensure the following folks are not excluded from prioritization within the named Minnesota Department of Agriculture and Rural Finance Authority programs:

- Any aspiring or emerging farmer not currently renting land or within a lease under three years, including farmworkers. Expanding the definition here would ensure these programs get more farmers on the land, rented or owned.
- New and established specialty crop and livestock and poultry farmers who primarily sell to aggregators, food shelves, or institutions (i.e. schools, childcare centers).
- Established farmers who may face other barriers or challenges not addressed by the definition.

To the first point, in the last three years, 146 people have graduated from LSP's Farm Beginnings Program, which is a state and federal approved farm business management program. 35% of

graduates identify as BIPOC. **Under the proposed new definition of “emerging farmer” 49% of BIPOC Farm Beginnings graduates from the last three years would be excluded, as they do not currently own or lease land.** 14% of BIPOC graduates in the last three years currently rent land (26% overall) and an additional 14% own land (65% overall). This does not add up to 100% as this was a voluntary survey. **A potential solution to this could be the inclusion of those who have completed a qualified farm business management course under a certain income level.**

The federal definition of a “limited-resource farmer or rancher” is a participant:

- With direct or indirect gross farm sales not more than the current indexed value in each of the previous two years, and
- Who has a total household income at or below the national poverty level for a family of four, or less than 50 percent of county median household income in each of the previous two years.

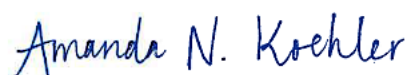
While LSP’s Land Access & Emerging Farmer Policy Working Group and our emerging farmer partner organizations are still looking at this definition, we believe it is worth digging into adding income and/or gross profit limits to the new definition of an “emerging farmer”. This could look like the those with no more than \$100,000 in annual gross farm product sales, and eligible applicants who are producers of industrial hemp, cannabis, specialty crops, or poultry or livestock for meat, fiber, and/or eggs. In the face of climate and water quality crises, it’s important to get more farmers on the land who are regeneratively raising poultry and livestock with perennial pasture and managed grazing.

Moreover, it is our understanding that education, outreach, and technical assistance can be prioritized to BIPOC farmers without equal protection concerns – we would like to ensure that continues. We are concerned that changing the definition of “emerging farmer” will impact this within the Emerging Farmers Office unless this is further clarified.

All of that said, if the definition is expanded and refined, we would like to see more MDA and RFA programs (and Board of Water & Soil Resources programs) prioritize emerging farmers in state statute, including soil health programs.

Finally, we believe that those most impacted by public policy should be deeply engaged in its development – “nothing about us without us”. We look forward to working with Chair Vang and our partners at Big River Farms, Latino Economic Development Center, Midwest Farmers of Color Collective, The Good Acre, and others over coming weeks to provide additional feedback and refine the bill language to ensure all historically underserved aspiring and beginning farmers, particularly BIPOC folks, are prioritized in these programs.

Sincerely,



Amanda N. Koehler
LSP Policy Manager

akoehler@landstewardshipproject.org

651-431-1117 (cell)