

March 2, 2021

To: The Minnesota House of Representatives and Minnesota Senate

Re: The University of Minnesota Forever Green Initiative and the Forever Green Partnership

Dear Members,

We, the undersigned organizations, are writing to express our strong support for full state funding (\$10 million) of the University of Minnesota's Forever Green Initiative and the Forever Green Partnership in FY22-23.

The Forever Green Initiative

The University of Minnesota's Forever Green Initiative (FGI) is a nationally respected research effort designed to develop new, economically viable perennial crops and winter annual crops (cover crops).

Integrating perennial and winter annual crops into existing farming systems provides growers with new revenue streams and new marketing options that can bolster our agricultural economy through the development of high-value, commercially marketable food, feed and fuel products.

In addition, these crops can greatly help protect and enhance water quality, soil health, wildlife habitat and climate resiliency.

Specifically, Forever Green crops can:

- Foster new economic opportunities for Minnesota family farmers;
- Diversify crop rotations and farm income streams;
- Attract new investment and employment in emerging agricultural industries;
- Protect drinking water and improve public health;
- Improve water quality in surface waters and groundwater;
- Enhance soil health and climate resilience;
- Enhance habitat for wildlife and pollinators; and
- Attract high quality talent to the University of Minnesota to meet the future state workforce needs of the agriculture, food, energy and natural resource industries.

The Forever Green Partnership

Recognizing the need for a holistic approach to advancing these cropping systems, the Legislature funded the establishment of the Forever Green Partnership (FGP) in the last biennium.

This multi-sector partnership brings farmers, agribusinesses, supply chain companies, researchers, conservation organizations, state agencies and rural economic interests together to advance a real-world framework for successful deployment of Forever Green crops.

State support is vital to continuing this important emerging collaboration.

Why full funding?

Multiple FGI cropping systems have reached an inflection point, moving beyond field trials and into landscape production and market development. Maintaining and enhancing funding for this effort is critical to maintaining this momentum and scaling-up implementation.

Full funding for Forever Green is particularly important as it allows for the long-term planning and faculty hiring necessary for successful plant breeding.

In addition, state investment in Forever Green has historically been leveraged many times over in federal grants and other funding that supports this increasingly high profile effort.

When fully funded, the Forever Green Initiative will make Minnesota the unquestioned leader in developing sustainable, profitable and diversified cropping systems that improve habitat, water quality, climate and soil health while boosting farm prosperity and rural economic development.

We urge you to support full funding for Forever Green during the 2021 legislative session.

Sincerely,

Sierra Club North Star Chapter
Cannon River Watershed Partnership (CRWP)
The Plant Pathways Company
Savanna Institute
Environment Minnesota
Green Lands Blue Waters
Perennial Foods
Intertribal Agriculture Council
Rural Advantage
Minnesota Rural Water Association
Land Stewardship Project
WaterLegacy
U of M Regional Sustainable Development Partnerships
Kilimo Minnesota
Worthwhile Ventures LLC
Bang Brewing
Beth Dooley's Kitchen
Friends of the Mississippi River
MN350
Minnesota Environmental Partnership
AURI
Pipeline Foods LLC (Mpls based)

Upper Mississippi River Region of the League of Women Voters
University of Minnesota
Environmental Working Group
Sustainable Farming Association of Minnesota
Clean Water Action Minnesota
Minnesota Well Owners Organization
Lake Pepin Legacy Alliance
League of Women Voters Minnesota
Minnesota Center for Environmental Advocacy