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February 28, 2023

Dear Chair Vang and Members of the House Agriculture and Policy Committee,

Today, I am writing on behalf of Land Stewardship Project's (LSP's) 4,500 member households made up of farmers, rural, urban, and suburban members, and particularly on behalf of LSP's State Policy Steering Committee and members engaged in our regional food systems work.

Before the committee today there are a number of bills that will strengthen our farm and food system, invest in small and midsize farmers, and beginning and emerging farmers while ensuring more Minnesotans have access to fresh, healthy and local food. It is critical to invest in programs that support our farming communities across the state, from urban to rural, to ensure we can keep farmers on the land and growing nutritious food for our communities.

HF 2043 (Pursell) Expanding the Farm to School Grant Program and Establishing Regional Local Food Coordinators:

- The Farm to School program supports hundreds of LSP farmer members across the state and is a critical program to ensuring a sustainable, profitable market for farmers and investing, especially, in our rural communities. I personally have worked with farmers who have children in public school to work with their school district to apply for these funds so that their children can have healthy, local food for lunch and support area growers and have heard first-hand how impactful this program is. Last year, with a \$4.25 million federal grant for the Farm to School program, the Department of Agriculture was still not able to keep up with demand and fully fund all projects. Increasing this funding is critical to supporting a long-term market for farmers, for farmers to be secure investing in their operation (with equipment purchases such as carrot harvester) to sell at wholesale levels and allow schools to serve local, healthy food.
- In talking with hundreds of our members across the state leading up to the legislative session, the need for investment in our regional food systems is clear. Establishing regional local food coordinators will support farmers accessing new markets, having a point person to ask food safety and handling questions to, build relationships with new buyers and act as a connector within their community.

HF 1744 (Sencer-Mura) Good Acre's Local Emergency Assistance Farmer Fund

- By investing in the LEAFF program, more fresh produce grown by emerging farmers in Minnesota will make it to local food shelves. Communniteis of color are more than twice as likely to be facing hunger in our state. Supporting farmers of color to be part of the solution to providing healthy and culturally specific crops for Minnesota's food shelves is an incredible program and opportunity to support food access and equity.

HF 1981 (Rehm) Good Food Access Program

- The funds from this program support communities in low- and moderate-income areas including both in the metro and in our rural communities. Physical improvements to an operation can be cost prohibitive and grants help many small retailers and grocers provide affordable, nutritious food to their communities.

HF 1637 Urban Agriculture Grant Funding Provided

- As land access continues to be a barrier for beginning and emerging farmers, urban farming has become a key way that farmers can grow their operation and skills. This grant program also provides opportunities for youth to participate in agricultural education and have a connection to stewarding our lands and feeding our communities. Program such as Urban Roots in Saint Paul, provide incredible opportunities for youth to get outside and engage in farming.

All of these bills represent an investment in a more equitable farm and food system in Minnesota. These investments build us toward a system where our small and med-size producers are supported, Minnesotans at all ages and income levels have access to fresh, healthy food and make Minnesota a leader in supporting our farmers and communities.

I urge the committee to support these bills and take advantage of our historic surplus to support these innovative and critical programs.

Sincerely,

Laura Schreiber

Policy Organizer

Land Stewardship Project

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