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Chair Samantha Vang
Vice Chair Kristi Pursell
Representative Paul Anderson
Members, House Agriculture Finance & Policy Committee

Dear Chair Vang and Members of the Committee,

I'm writing to express my strong support for Vice Chair Pursell's bill establishing a Next Generation Farmer Development Program (HF 1747).

My name is Kelsey Zaavedra and I run Heirloomista farm in Chisago County, Minnesota. I raise heirloom vegetables, seed and pastured chicken on my farm and have been in operation for five years. I am a Land Access Fellow with the National Young Farmers Coalition, President of the Chisago County Farmers Union and also a member of the Emerging Farmers Working Group with the Minnesota Department of Agriculture. Being involved with these organizations gives me the opportunity to work with many young farmers and share knowledge of our specific needs.

The Next Generation Farmer Development Program (HF 1747) is an exciting proposal to help young and beginning farmers gain on-farm training through meaningful employment that pays a living wage. During my college I spent summers as an intern on farms. We rarely had any formal pay and had to find unique ways to make it through. As a farmer now, I understand why it was so challenging to hire help, as margins are small. Although my time spent as an intern was valuable, it is unreasonable to expect people to work for free. By having a fair wage I could have started investing in my own farm much earlier.

The Next Generation Farmer Development Program is also incredibly helpful to emerging farmers in the beginning stages of their operation who need labor to grow their businesses. As a beginning farmer, we are building our farming business from the ground up with whatever resources we have. Having the ability to hire interns and offer a fair wage would greatly impact my production scale and also share the knowledge and skillset many young farmers are looking for.

This bill will launch a new generation of farmers in Minnesota with the support they need to succeed. Please continue to support farmers and the future of Minnesota agriculture. I appreciate your consideration of these proposals and thank Chair Vang and Vice Chair Pursell for their leadership as well as the Committee's work on behalf of Minnesota's farmers.

Sincerely,

Kelsey Love Zaavedra