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3/3/2025

Chairman Paul Anderson
Minnesota House Agriculture Finance and Policy Committee
State Office Building
St. Paul, MN 55155

Dear Chair Anderson and Members of the Committee,

On behalf of the Minnesota Turkey Growers Association (MTGA), I write to support HF1702, legislation that provides funding for mental health resources for farmers and rural communities. As the nation's leading turkey-producing state, Minnesota raises over 40 million turkeys annually, supporting more than fifty thousand jobs and contributing significantly to Minnesota's economy while also supporting rural communities. However, the challenges facing our farmers are greater than ever, making the provisions in HF1702 critically important.

Minnesota's turkey farmers have endured compounding hardships over the past several years. Highly Pathogenic Avian Influenza (HPAI) continues to negatively impact Minnesota's turkey industry, causing significant financial losses. Additionally, turkey farmers are battling Avian Metapneumovirus (aMPV), another respiratory disease that affects bird health and farm productivity. Since April of 2024, aMPV has had a larger impact on Minnesota's turkey industry than HPAI in the same timeframe, causing further financial and emotional strain.

These challenges, coupled with rising input costs and market instability, have created immense stress for our members. Studies show that farmers already experience higher suicide rates than the general population due to financial pressure, unpredictable weather, and the emotional toll of livestock losses. HF1702 addresses this crisis by increasing funding for mental health services tailored to agricultural communities. Access to counseling, crisis support, and peer networks can make a critical difference in preventing tragedies and ensuring our farmers receive the care they need.

As an example of need, MTGA has provided links to Minnesota Department of Agriculture Farm Stress resources in every edition of our WingTips e-newsletter since the beginning of the current HPAI outbreak in 2022. While members clicked on that content in every edition of WingTips, those click rates began ramping up last fall. To put that in perspective, MTGA saw a greater than 300% increase in utilization of Farm Stress information in less than 90 days.

HF1702 recognizes the mental health needs of those who work tirelessly to feed our state and nation. The Minnesota Turkey Growers Association urges your support for HF1702. Ensuring access to mental health resources will help protect the well-being of Minnesota's farm families and the long-term sustainability of our agricultural industry.

Thank you for your time and consideration. Please do not hesitate to reach out if you have any questions.
Sincerely,

Ashley Kohls

Executive Director
Minnesota Turkey Growers Association

MinnesotaTurkey.com



Minnesota State Cattlemen's Association
PO Box 12
Maple Plain, MN
55359

March 4, 2025

House Agriculture Finance and Policy Committee
Chair Paul Anderson
Minnesota House of Representatives
2nd Floor Centennial Office Building
Saint Paul, MN 55155

Dear Chair Anderson and members of the committee,

The Minnesota State Cattlemen's Association (MSCA), representing around 1,000 members, is submitting this written testimony in support of HF 1702. We know the importance of mental health and the impact it has on farmers and ranchers, and we feel that it is crucial that we support the mental well-being and safety of farmers and ranchers.

According to the National Rural Health Association, farmers are 3.5 times more likely to die by suicide than the general population. Our industry is struggling, and farmers and ranchers need assistance. We must unite in this industry to prevent feelings of isolation and hopelessness.

The MSCA supports mental health being a top priority and normalizing the discussion around it.

Thank you for the opportunity to submit written testimony. If you or your staff have any questions, please feel free to reach out to MSCA's Executive Director Kaitleyn Root at 763-479-1011 or at kaitleyn@msca.org.

Sincerely,

Jake Thompson

President
Minnesota State Cattlemen's Association



MINNESOTA STATE
Southern Agricultural Center of Excellence

1920 Lee Boulevard
North Mankato, MN 56003

March 3, 2025

The Honorable Paul Anderson
Minnesota House of Representatives
Centennial Office Building, 2nd Floor
658 Cedar St.
St. Paul, MN 55155

RE: HF1702

Dear Chair Anderson and the Members of the House Agriculture Finance and Policy Committee,

On behalf of the Minnesota State Southern Agricultural Center of Excellence, I am writing to express our strong support for the proposed legislation in HF1702 appropriating funds for mental health outreach and support, as well as farm safety grant and outreach programs. This initiative is a critical investment in the well-being of Minnesota's agricultural community, providing much-needed resources for mental health support and farm safety measures.

Agriculture is the backbone of our state's economy and rural communities, but the challenges faced by farmers, ranchers, and agribusiness professionals continue to grow. Financial pressures, unpredictable weather, and increasing operational demands contribute to significant stress, impacting mental health and overall well-being.

Additionally, farm safety outreach programs are vital in preventing injuries and fatalities on farms. Agriculture remains one of the most hazardous industries, and proactive education and grant programs can significantly reduce risks for farm families and workers. Supporting these initiatives will not only save lives but also sustain the future of farming in Minnesota.

The Minnesota State Southern Agricultural Center of Excellence is committed to advancing agricultural education, workforce development, and rural prosperity. We recognize the importance of these programs in safeguarding both the mental and physical health of our agricultural community. We urge your support of this critical funding to enhance resources for mental health assistance and farm safety, ultimately strengthening the resilience of Minnesota's farmers and agricultural professionals.

Thank you for your leadership and dedication to Minnesota's agricultural industry. We appreciate your consideration of this important legislation and look forward to continued collaboration in supporting the well-being of our rural communities.

Sincerely,

Tina LeBrun
Executive Director
Minnesota State Southern Agricultural Center of Excellence



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March 4, 2025

Chair Paul Anderson

Minnesota House Agriculture Finance and Policy Committee
2nd Floor Centennial Office Building
658 Cedar Street
St. Paul, MN 55155

Chair Anderson and members of the committee,

I write in support of House File 1702, which appropriates funds for farm safety grants and outreach to farmers, ranchers, and others in the agricultural community. This legislation would continue crucial funding efforts that support the health and wellbeing of members of Minnesota's agricultural industry.

University of Minnesota Extension's mission is to support all Minnesotans, and our Farm Safety and Health Team supports efforts to keep Minnesota farmers safe and healthy. Extension supports farm safety through several programs and partnerships, including our work on the Minnesota Farm Safety Working Group.

Unfortunately, Minnesota consistently ranks among the top three states in the nation for agricultural confined space incidents. Additional funding that provides support to farmers for safety equipment is an important resource to implement our collective farm safety efforts.

There is an ongoing need for both mental health and farm safety support in the state. The rural mental health outreach supported by this bill will assist with the recently reported 650 rural mental health calls fielded by Minnesota rural mental health specialists. These critical resources on rural mental health have saved lives.

Thank you for your attention to farm safety and mental health through House File 1702. These resources will help extend the farm safety and health work of Extension and our partners.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Beverly R. Durgan'.

Beverly R. Durgan, Dean
University of Minnesota Extension

Dear Chair Anderson,

On behalf of the Upper Midwest Agricultural Safety and Health Center (UMASH), I am writing in support of HF1702. This bill's investment in farm safety and mental health outreach is critical for the well-being of Minnesota's agricultural communities. Protecting the workers who feed, fuel, and clothe our society is more important than ever, especially with a rapidly aging farming population.

Farmers and farmworkers face unique occupational hazards, and access to safety resources and mental health support can make a significant difference in preventing injuries and improving overall health. HF1702 provides much-needed funding to strengthen these efforts, ensuring that those who feed our communities have the support they need.

Thank you for your leadership on this important issue.

Sincerely,

Megan Schossow, MS

Outreach Director

Upper Midwest Agricultural Safety and Health Center (UMASH)

Megan M. Schossow, MS

Outreach Director and Center Coordinator

Upper Midwest Agricultural Safety and Health Center ([UMASH](#))

University of Minnesota School of Public Health

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she, her, hers

1220 Mayo | 420 Delaware St SE | Minneapolis, MN 55455

Dear Chair Anderson and members of the MN House Agriculture Committee,

Today I write in support of MN HF 1702 that helps to fund farm safety grants and mental health access. The two challenges are intertwined: stress can increase the demands of safely completing farm labor. With generations of farmers in my family, I remember exactly when I learned that stressful farming is the most dangerous of all careers.

In 2015, my position with the MN Department of Labor and Industry in Research and Statistics, was to report work-related fatalities to the US Bureau of Labor Statistics. I remember learning the stunning data results that work-related farm fatalities were 26 times higher than any other occupation. I couldn't believe my eyes. With that focus, the expert team of researchers at DLI began an interagency effort to request funding for a pilot project to install roll-over protection devices on tractors.

The MN legislature, through wise use of tax-payer monies, funded that project through each successive budget. It has saved lives. The proposed \$200,000 biennial appropriation is much needed but frankly is pennies juxtaposing the lives at risk. I urge the committee to continue funding these grants with an additional increase to \$400,000 to cover mental health resources access as well.

My deepest gratitude for your attention to these vital concerns, to the taxpayers of Minnesota for helping to protect farmers and farm workers. The safety and mental health of our farmers is everyone's bread and butter.

Sincerely,

Nancy J Reeck

(In full disclosure, I am a state employee with the MN Board of Animal Health. My current employment is not connected with this request and in no way benefits from safety funding.)

Sent from my iPhone

Hello,

Please support MN HF1702 that includes financing for farmer mental health outreach and ag safety grants. Please support doubling the amount allocated to \$400k biennially to include greater access for ROPS and grain bin safety grants. Farming is one of the most dangerous occupations and we owe it to our farmers to support them.

Thank you.

Lynne Reeck

Winona, Mn resident



MINNESOTA SAFETY COUNCIL



Chapter of the National Safety Council

March 3, 2025

Honorable Paul Anderson
Minnesota House of Representatives
Centennial Office Building, 2nd Floor
658 Cedar St.
St. Paul, MN 55155

RE: HF1702

Dear Chair Anderson and the members of the House Agriculture Finance and Policy Committee,

The Minnesota Safety Council supports the mental health and safety goals of HF 1702 and urges the committee to consider even more funding.

Farming and agricultural work remain the most dangerous professions in our state. Working alone, away from immediate help, with large equipment and animals, and often under time pressure creates a high-risk situation. Ongoing support for programs like the roll over protection program has and will continue to save people from injury or death.

Stress and mental health challenges make it harder to operate safely. Our farming and rural communities have been under stress for many years. Poor health, family stress, substance misuse, suicide and even reckless driving are direct results of this stress. Seeking help is also a challenge. Access to and distance from readily available treatment or resources remains difficult at best. The mental health support proposed by HF1702 is very much needed.

Lastly, we urge the committee to provide even more funding for these efforts. The proposed \$200,000 biennial appropriation is needed but is a drop in the bucket. \$400,000 for the biennium would help the proposed programs make an on-the-ground difference in our agricultural communities.

Thank you for your attention to these issues and thank you to all the committee members for considering this effort.

Sincerely,

Paul W. Aasen and Lisa Kons
CEO Traffic Safety and Advocacy Manager

Cc: Mark Nisley