

Minnesota House (March 28, 2023)

Chair Vang and Members of the Committee,

On behalf of a diverse statewide coalition, I would like to thank you for funding HF1645 introduced by Representative Brand into this year's House agriculture omnibus bill for the Minnesota Department of Agriculture's new Developing Markets for Continuous Living Cover Crops program. We appreciate the constraints on the committee this year to meet the many worthy needs and opportunities in Minnesota agriculture.

This idea was hatched in 2021 in partnership with determined entrepreneurs working every day to create supply chains, markets, and products for new perennial and winter annual crops. Partners' efforts beyond the farmgate are critical to driving the development of new multi-million dollar industries in climate-smart agriculture in Minnesota, which will create new production opportunities and could also avert millions of dollars in expensive water treatment infrastructure, as just one example. Simply put, without supply chains and markets these exciting new perennial and winter annual crops effectively don't exist as real opportunities for growers. In order to scale continuous living cover agriculture, we need markets.

These entrepreneurs' ask was simple: Expand the support being received by scientists and growers to also include entrepreneurs and small and medium-sized businesses as valued partners in advancing continuous living cover agriculture. Like many industries based on new and emerging technologies, from ethanol to renewable energy, State funding is critical to support their establishment and initial growth.

This idea quickly expanded to a diverse coalition of advocates for agriculture, rural livelihoods, water quality, and soil health, including grassroots efforts advancing perennial agriculture systems informed by indigenous leaders creating pathways for emerging, BIPOC, and immigrant farmers. This effort succeeded last year with a \$500k allocation to MDA for a pilot grant program. This program was launched by MDA two weeks ago and applications will soon be rolling in.

This bill was initially introduced at \$10M to reflect the real needs of establishing at least four new climate-smart agriculture industries in Minnesota for Kernza perennial grain, winter camelina, hazelnut, and elderberry. With many other new perennial and winter annual crops in development including regenerative poultry silvopasture systems, perennial sunflower, winter pea, pennycress, and others, the coalition would note that this program is well-aligned for base funding to support the initial development of their associated industries. Should additional resources become available, coalition members request that this committee consider expanded one-time funding to better meet

near-term needs, and setting long-term support in place through initial base funding. Again, the coalition sincerely appreciates being included in this year's House budget.

Finally, tremendous unmet needs and opportunities in Minnesota agriculture and rural communities today. Like the opportunity identified in HF1645, many of these priorities are worthy of expanded support should it become available as the legislative session proceeds.

Thank you again.

Sincerely,

Colin Cureton, MS, MPP
Director of Adoption and Scaling, Forever Green Initiative