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May 9, 2022

Dear Omnibus Agriculture, Housing, and Broadband Conference Committee:

As the Conference Committee convenes to consider differences in the House and Senate versions of the Agriculture, Housing, and Broadband Bill (H.F. 4366), we wanted you to know Land Stewardship Project's priorities.

SUPPORT House Position: Appropriate \$100,000 to reimburse small meat processors for food safety & business planning courses.

(Side by Side Page R22, House Lines 25.27 to 26.2 and Senate Lines 23.10 to 23.21)

Meat processors face hurdles when beginning new operations and transitioning existing facilities to new owners. Meat and poultry processors under federal or state inspection need to have [Sanitation Standard Operating Procedures \(SSOP\)](#) and a [Hazard Analysis and Critical Control Points \(HACCP\)](#) plan or plans in place and accessing courses to develop these plans can be costly. In addition, lack of holistic business transition planning leads to processors closing their doors when they reach retirement age or passing on their business to new owners who are not well prepared or informed about how to continue operating small processing facilities. This bill, that was developed with livestock producers and processors, looks to address both of these issues.

SUPPORT House Position: Increase AGRI Meet, Poultry, Egg, and Milk Processing Grants by \$3 million.

(Side by Side Page R11, House Lines 13.35 to 14.9 and Senate Lines 12.6 to 12.16)

During the COVID-19 pandemic, we saw farmers euthanize animals and others booking processing dates even before animals are born. What has become clear is that we need to support small and mid-sized meat processing facilities so that they can serve the needs of farmers and address a lack of adequate processing capacity across the state. This grant program, which just awarded its first cycle of grants, is an important program in helping processors maintain and expand their businesses. If \$3 million is allocated, this program could award grants to most eligible operations that submit proposals.

SUPPORT House Position: Provide funding to educational institutions for livestock processing, butchery, and meat cutting instruction.

(Side by Side Page R23, House Lines 26.3 to 26.9 and Senate Lines 20.23 to 21.27)

Many meat processors cannot recruit and retain consistent and skills workers to keep small meat processing plants running. In addition, when workers are available, plant managers often need to provide extensive training due to workers' lack of previous experience in meat processing and meat cutting. Funding educational programs that train future processors and butchers is an investment that will ultimately yield skills worked for this important industry.

SUPPORT House Position: Launch a Healthy Soils Program with \$6.725 million

(Side by Side Page R5, House Lines 6.24 to 6.27)

Farmers are on the front lines of a rapidly changing climate, encountering extreme flooding in one season to historic droughts the next. Implementing soil health practices is a way to build resiliency both economically and environmentally and ensure we have soils that can generate food and economic prosperity for generations to come. A soil health program would decrease the inherent risk of trying out new practices with upfront grants and technical assistance would allow more farmers to implement soil health practices that clean our water, protect our soils and increase farmers' bottom line.

SUPPORT House Position: Establish a Continuous Living Cover Supply Chain Grant Program with \$9 million.

(Side by Side Page R4, House Lines 5.24 to 6.23 and Senate Lines 21.28 to 22.23)

Diversifying our landscapes is critical to building climate resiliency, fostering biodiversity and diversifying the income streams available to farmers as well as responding to public demand for more sustainable crops and agricultural practices. While we have seen great research and development of continuous living cover crops from the U of M Forever Green Initiative, developing the needed processing and markets for these crops has been led by primarily rural, entrepreneurs that are looking to scale up the adoption of these crops and are a key piece in ensuring these crops can reach not only Minnesotans but consumers across the nation. Public investment in the processing and marketing of these CLC crops means greater economic prosperity and opportunity in rural communities, increased biodiversity on our working and agricultural landscapes and can establish Minnesota as a leader in local, small grain processing.

SUPPORT House Position: Provide \$6.5 million to the Forever Green Initiative.

(Side by Side Page R4, House Lines 5.9 to 5.23 and Senate Lines 5.4 to 5.17)

The Forever Green Initiative is an innovative program that is leading the country in producing crops that are both economically and environmentally sound for both farmers and our communities. In order to continue scaling up the number of farmers adopting these crops and staying cutting edge on these crops we should take advantage of this historic surplus to invest in this program.

SUPPORT House Position: Expand the Farm-to-School Grant Program.

(Side by Side Page R12, House Lines 14.28 to 14.35)

The Farm to School grant program that reimburses purchases from local farmers and helps set up schools to serve locally grown produce and meat is a clear win for both farmers and students. It invests in primarily rural

farmers and provides another secure market for farmers to sell into, and is a win for students to receive healthy, nourishing foods. This program has continued to grow in popularity and currently the funding available does not meet the demand from school districts that want to participate as last year there was nearly \$1.3 million in grant requests with just over \$700,000 available. Additionally, expanding eligibility to early care centers represents another market for farmers and will allow younger children the opportunity to eat nourishing meals and learn about where their food comes from.

SUPPORT House Position: Evaluate, propagate, and maintain the diversity certain plants through the University of Minnesota.

(Side by Side Page R22, House Lines 25.14 to 25.26)

Directing the University of Minnesota to evaluate, propagate and maintain the diversity of oilseeds, grains, grasses, legumes, and other plants including flax, timothy, barley, rye, triticale, alfalfa, orchard grass, clover, and other species and varieties that we in commercial distribution and use in Minnesota before 1970 addresses both cultural and biological risks caused by the decline of seed diversity in recent decades. Seed diversity offers us deeper connection to our roots, ecological resiliency and adaptability, the ability to study pests and disease, and more.

SUPPORT House Position: Direct \$1.25 million to direct marketing producers and farmers markets.

(Side by Side Page R7, House Lines 8.28 to 9.5)

Direct marketing producers have two jobs: raise crops and livestock while developing customer and client bases. This requires two unique sets of skills. Direct marketing producers deserve resources and support to ensure they are successful. Moreover, it's imperative to provide the resources and support needed for farmers markets as the number of farmers who sell at farmers markets and consumers who shop at farmers markets continues to grow.

SUPPORT House Position: Invest in Urban & Youth Education, Urban Ag Community Development, and the Emerging Farmer Account.

(Side by Side Page R12, House Lines 15.1 to 15.6)

Agriculture, from the food we eat to the land we work, affects everybody in Minnesota. Giving opportunities to those in urban areas, including young people, of our state to work the land and learn where their food comes from is something that brings a community together and can provide an opportunity for those who want to farm to learn how to do so. The House language includes funding for urban youth agricultural education, urban agricultural community development, and up to \$10,000 for the Emerging Farmer Account.

SUPPORT House Position: Provide technical and culturally appropriate services to emerging farmers and related businesses.

(Side by Side Page R20, House Lines 23.7 to 23.18 and Senate Lines 24.1 to 24.11)

All farmers deserve to have equitable access to resources and services across race, ethnicity, birthplace, language, and culture. By providing \$2.6 million for the Department of Agriculture to provide technical and culturally appropriate services to emerging farmers and related businesses, we can grow the number of people engaged in stewarding the land and participating in our farm and food system, make our farm and food system more accessible and equitable, and diversify land and business ownership and operation. The Senate included \$300,000 for this, but the House has proposed an amount that closer aligns to the needs on the ground.

SUPPORT House Position: Assist farmers with tuition for Farm Business Management courses.

(Side by Side Page R12, House Lines 14.18 to 14.27)

Farm Business Management courses prepare aspiring, beginning, and established farmers to establish, grow, and sustain their farm. However, many folks struggle to afford the tuition for these courses, especially if they are facing mediation, student loans, and lack inheritable land and capital. By providing tuition assistance, more farmers will be able to build the skills they need to be successful. Prioritizing specialty crop farmers, urban farmers, and farmers facing mediation, as well as including translation and outreach in this funding, will ensure the dollars are directed to those who need them most.

SUPPORT House Position: Create a Down Payment Assistance Grant Program.

(Side by Side Page R22, House Lines 25.9 to 25.13)

A shortage of new farmers threatens the future of agriculture: 400 million acres of American farmland will transition in the next 10 years. While there are people who want to farm, new generations of farmers must overcome significant barriers to start and succeed in farming, particularly for those who cannot inherit or afford land, assets, training, and other resources. Establishing a Down Payment Assistance Grant Program will help get more people on the land, increase population in rural communities, create stronger local economies, and build a resilient future for our state and agricultural system.

SUPPORT House Position: Provide funding for Second Harvest Heartland, the Good Acre LEAFF Program, and the Good Food Access Program

(Side by Side Page R21, House Lines 24.1 to 24.8)

Second Harvest Heartland is a leader in reducing hunger in our state. By providing them with \$2.5 million, we can ensure that more Minnesotans' basic needs are met. Moreover, the Good Acre's Local Emergency Assistance Farmer Fund (LEAFF) program compensates emerging farmers for crops donated to hunger relief organizations in Minnesota. Including a \$500,000 appropriation to the LEAFF program is a direct investment in our emerging farmers and will bolster our state's economy. Finally, one of the largest barriers between people and healthy, fresh food is the ability of grocery stores and other sellers to be able to keep that food fresh and store it. Providing Minnesota's Good Food Access program with \$1 million will increase the availability of and access to affordable, nutritious, and culturally appropriate food for underserved communities in low-and moderate-income areas. These programs are crucial in a time where many lower income Minnesotans are struggling to make ends meet and have their basic needs met and farmers seek out more local and regional market opportunities.

SUPPORT House & Senate Positions: Establish a Cooperative Grant Program

Farmer-led agricultural cooperatives are built to provide local access to needed farm services and to help keep farm dollars within the local community. From providing a local option for meat and dairy processing, to providing needed farm services like repair and propane, farmer cooperatives give farmers the opportunity to provide their own services and help make our meat and food processing system diversified and strong. This proposal will make establishing and strengthening cooperatives easier for Minnesotans engaged in our farm and food system.

SUPPORT House & Senate Positions: Study & Report on the State of Regional & Local Food Systems in Minnesota

(Side by Side Page R7, House Lines 9.6 to 9.14 and Senate Lines 7.17 to 7.26)

Understanding the state of our regional and local food systems in Minnesota will help us identify the next steps we need to take as a state to build a resiliency farm and food system, create local economic opportunities, and address the weaknesses and disparities in our communities.

SUPPORT House Position: \$141,000 to Administer the Beginning Farmer Tax Credit
(Side by Side Page R21, House Lines 24.24 to 24.28)

The House position provides the funding needed to ensure the Beginning Farmer Tax Credit program is successful. This funding will benefit the administration, farmers, and landowners in applying for and receiving the tax credit.

SUPPORT House Position: Steward our Pollinator Populations
(Side by Side Page R5, House Lines 6.28 to 6.31)

Our farm and food system depend on our pollinator populations. Pollinating organisms are needed to produce seeds for forage crops like alfalfa, meaning our livestock farmers are particularly vulnerable to dwindling pollinator populations. Farmers will be unable to feed our communities or provide economic benefits to our state without stewarding the health of our pollinators. Neonicotinoids, commonly found in pesticides, pose a threat to Minnesota's pollinators. Plastic coated fertilizer and pesticides pose a threat to the health of humans and wildlife. The House proposals include language that would protect our pollinators and water, while investing in crucial research.

We look forward to working with you to create a robust agriculture budget that makes our farm and food system more resilient, accessible, and healthy for farmers, rural communities, and our economy.

Thank you,



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cc:

The Honorable Tim Walz, Governor of Minnesota
The Honorable Peggy Flanagan, Lieutenant Governor of Minnesota
Senator Jeremy Miller, Majority Leader of the Minnesota Senate
Representative Melissa Hortman, Speaker of the Minnesota House of Representatives
Commissioner Thom Petersen, Minnesota Department of Agriculture