



April 11, 2023

Minnesota House of Representatives
Ways and Means Committee
Room 479, State Office Building
St. Paul, MN 55155

Dear Chair Olson and Committee Members:

On behalf of the team at Second Harvest Heartland, our region's largest food bank, I am writing to share our support for the \$250,000 ongoing, annual increase in funding for the Farm to Food Shelf program included in the Agriculture Finance and Policy omnibus budget. Specifically allocated to milk purchasing, this funding supports Second Harvest Heartland's ability to provide our state's food shelves with a consistent supply of locally processed fluid milk, which is regularly one of the most in demand items at hunger-relief organizations.

As you all likely know, hunger in Minnesota remains at a record high due to the ongoing consequences of the pandemic, elevated grocery costs, and sunseting federal benefits. Visits to food shelves topped 5.5 million last year, more than 2 million more visits than in 2021. The food we source through Farm to Food Shelf is connected to hunger-relief organizations across all 87 Minnesota counties. Farm to Food Shelf has become an especially important source of food in recent years as food costs for food banks have risen 20% across the board. Milk has been a particularly strong need with milk grant funds from Farm to Food Shelf only lasting three months, compared to six months pre-pandemic. Milk prices are up around 30% on average and demand for milk at food shelves has increased by 40% compared to 2021.

While the \$250,000 increase for milk purchasing is less than our original request in the House Agriculture committee, Minnesota's food banks are grateful for any support to help us meet the growing demand for food assistance. We look forward to our continued work with this legislature to fund this program as we face record rates of hunger in Minnesota.

Thank you for your support and the investments you've made in addressing food insecurity in our state.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Allison O'Toole".

Allison O'Toole
Chief Executive Officer
Second Harvest Heartland

2HARVEST.ORG

651-484-5117 | 888-339-3663

7101 WINNETKA AVE. N., BROOKLYN PARK, MN 55428

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