



MINNESOTA ELK BREEDERS ASSOCIATION

February 17, 2022

Chair Samantha Vang
House Agriculture Finance and Policy
545 State Office Building
St. Paul, MN 55155

Chair Rick Hanson
House Environment and Natural Resources Finance
407 State Office Building
St. Paul, MN 55155

Chair Vang, Chair Hanson and Members of the Committee,

The Minnesota Elk Breeders Association represents elk farmers from across Minnesota who are working to responsibly raise elk and support our local small-town communities and economy. To that end, we are concerned about proposed changes to the qualifications for Board of Animal Health Board Members in H.F. 911 and ask you to thoughtfully consider our comments.

Officials with the Board of Animal Health and the state of Minnesota have been at a heightened level of awareness with the escalating presence of Avian Bird Flu affecting millions of birds on Minnesota farms as well as the pending threat of African Swine Fever which if found in Minnesota, will have catastrophic impacts on Minnesota's swine producers and the general food supply.

This Board oversees the response to all animal diseases including but not limited to Avian Bird Flu, African Swine Fever, Foot & Mouth Disease, Tuberculosis, Johne's Disease, Transmissible Spongiform Encephalopathies (BSE, Scrapie, CWD), Rabies, Canine Influenza, Equine Infectious Anemia and a host of other horse diseases, new foreign animal disease threats, and the list goes on. It is clear that members of this Board need a high level of understanding pertaining to animal husbandry and disease transmission to oversee a significant number of animal species and diseases.

The current Board is required to have four producers of livestock with at least one of the four also a member of a federally recognized tribe in Minnesota and two practicing veterinarians. While H.F. 911 adds five more members to the Board, it removes almost all of the knowledge Board members must have to deal with current and potential disease threats. With the number of serious current and future diseases on the horizon, it would be prudent to add one or two more practicing veterinarians, not eliminate them altogether. Requiring members to only be knowledgeable about animal agriculture and not currently raising livestock is also a big step down from current requirements. While this bill adds a number of individuals, it fails in every other aspect to improve the ability of the Board of Animal Health to make educated decisions compared to its current level of knowledge.

Most concerning are the proposed changes to the process of selection and approval of the Executive Director for the Board of Animal Health. These changes make it a political appointment and substantially change how the Board will function and carry out its mission. These changes remove the hierarchy of operation between the Executive Director and Board of Animal Health leadership and hence the day-to-day operations of staff which have proven over time to be highly effective. By removing the political separation that currently exists between the immediate leadership of staff and operations, this change will also remove the ability to make difficult but appropriate decisions regarding proper and necessary actions needed to fulfill the Board's mission.

Given the importance that current and emerging animal disease threats pose to Minnesota's farmers and citizens, it is critically important to not advance H.F. 911 until it contains language that would increase the knowledge and expertise of the Board, not decrease it.

Sincerely,
Mark Luedtke, President