

Minnesota Young Farmer Coalition Policy Position Paper 2021 Legislative Session

The Central Minnesota Young Farmers Coalition and Duluth Young Farmers Coalition are chapters of the *National Young Farmers Coalition*, a national advocacy network of young farmers fighting for the future of agriculture. Visit NYFC on the web at www.youngfarmers.org

✓FarmLink

We support investment in Minnesota FarmLink. Access to land is the primary barrier for young farmers, as reported in both the Minnesota Emerging Farmers' Legislative Report (2020, [link](#)) and the National Young Farmers Coalition Survey (2017, [link](#)). FarmLink programs exist around the country, with many including additional "wrap around" services, including technical support and outreach to underserved communities, beyond listing available land. A recent report details the best practices for developing and strengthening FarmLink programs ([link](#)).

The proposed one-time investment of \$150,000 will improve the service and reach of the program. Beyond investment in upgrading the technology of the FarmLink platform, we support further engagement with FarmLink stakeholders on how to best improve the platform and service. To achieve this, **we recommend giving the Commissioner of Agriculture increased flexibility in the appropriation toward FarmLink.**

✓Farm Transition Teams

We support the creation of a Farm Transition Team pilot program. The pilot, based on the successes of the Farmland Access Navigator program developed by Renewing the Countryside, has the potential to provide one-on-one technical assistance to emerging farmers looking to secure farmland.

The proposed pilot will lay a foundation for statewide efforts to support young and emerging farmers. Structured as a competitive grant process, we recommend allowing organizations to propose the best structure using available funds to support the goal of the program, with a priority for serving emerging farmers. To this end, **the enabling legislation should avoid specifying the number of farmland access coordinators, and should allow for funds to be used beyond time and travel as identified by applying organizations with experience serving farmers.**

✓Emerging Farmers' Working Group

We celebrate the establishment and work of the MDA Emerging Farmers' Working Group. **We support the funding and staffing of this group, as recommended in the 2021 Legislative Update.**

✓Local Regional Food Systems

We support further investment in Minnesota's local and regional food system.

Minnesotans rely on farmers' markets, community-supported agriculture, and other direct marketing efforts, a fact that was made especially clear when the traditional supply chains were strained by the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic. Local and regional foods support economic development, rural/urban linkages, and farm viability.

We recommend that the Commissioner report on the progress of local and regional food systems at regular intervals, and prioritize efforts to enhance and develop the sector.

✓Meat Processing

We support further investment in small to midsize meat processing. Livestock are important to young and emerging farmers, as livestock are a high-value product that can be raised on smaller land parcels. Bottlenecks in processing can lead to challenges with market access. Building out infrastructure for meat processing throughout Minnesota will support beginning, young and emerging farmers who rely on small to midsize processors, particularly equal-to processors. **We recommend allowing business development expenses, in the form of feasibility studies or business planning services, for new and existing meat processing enterprises.**

✓AGRI Grants

Business development in agriculture is vital to our economy. We champion the Agricultural Research, Growth and Innovation (AGRI) grants offered by the MDA. We know that cash flow and access to capital are one of the most highly referenced barriers to young and emerging farmers. **We recommend increasing the reimbursement rates for grants to emerging farmers, particularly the livestock investment grant, and we encourage the utilization of advance payments for all grantees.**

✓Beginning Farmer Tax Credit

We support the Beginning Farmer Tax Credit and the support it provides to future generations of Minnesota farmers. Minnesota led the nation in adopting this policy in 2017 and we support the continuation and expansion of accessibility of the BFTC. **We recommend expanding the credit for sale of agricultural assets (land, equipment, and livestock) by eligible sellers to be increased from 5% to 10% for sale to socially disadvantaged farmers as well as opening eligibility to include family members to assist with generational farmland transfer.**