

Written Testimony

Testimony presented before the Minnesota House of Representatives Committee on Agriculture Finance and Policy on March 14, 2023

Regarding: Testimony in Support of HF 1057 and HF 1361

Thank you Chair Vang, Vice-Chair Pursell, and Members of the Committee for the opportunity to provide this written testimony today.

As someone who has devoted their career to advocating for climate justice, I have chosen to focus on food and agriculture systems based on what I see as great potential for a net reduction in greenhouse gas emissions. Practices that improve soil health such as cover cropping, crop rotations, rotational grazing, and perennial vegetation integration will be advantageous for food producers, food consumers, the environment, and our ecosystems. An abundance of small or emerging farmers, many committed to such practices through a combination of tradition and innovation, await the opportunity to farm. We have a unique, critical opportunity to facilitate land transfers to a generation of motivated land stewards. Unfortunately, costs of land access have steadily increased, creating another barrier to entry within an industry that has included both subtle and overt barriers to entry for underserved communities for centuries. That is why I am excited to support bills such as HF 1057 and HF 1361.

HF 1057 commits cost matching appropriated funds to eligible farmers in the form of grants of up to \$15,000 to assist with down payments to acquire farmland within Minnesota. An eligible farmer may gross no more than \$250,000 per year from the sale of farm products, which focuses this program on small or mid-sized farmers. Furthermore, half of this designated money is committed to assist emerging farmers. This much needed assistance will help lower the cost barrier to entry and will be an effective investment in the future of Minnesota.

Similarly, HF 1361 would direct additional funds to small or emerging farmers. This bill would piggyback off of USDA loan and grant programs, such as the recently created "Increasing Land, Capital, and Market Access Program," to which the federal government recently provided up to \$300 million to fund increased access to land, capital, and markets for underserved communities. This bill will provide funding to financial institutions that participate in distribution of these much needed grants or loans.

These bills continue to lay the groundwork for establishing Minnesota as a state that is committed to improving equity within agriculture and facilitating increased land access for new and emerging farmers. I strongly urge you to provide sufficient funding to match the demand, and to continue to create new and innovative programs that will foster farmland ownership transitions and prevent removal of land from farming due to cost considerations.

Please support these bills,

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