

February 25, 2022

**To:** The Minnesota House of Representatives Committee on Agriculture Finance & Policy

**Re:** Support for the University of Minnesota Forever Green Initiative (HF3625)

Dear Chair Sundin and committee members,

We, the undersigned organizations, are writing to express our strong support for robust funding for the University of Minnesota's Forever Green Initiative FY23.

### **The Forever Green Initiative**

The University of Minnesota's Forever Green Initiative (FGI) is a nationally respected research effort designed to develop new, economically viable perennial crops and winter annual crops (cover crops that also produce marketable commodities).

Integrating perennial and winter annual crops into existing farming systems provides growers with new revenue streams and new marketing options that can bolster our agricultural economy through the development of high-value, commercially marketable food, feed and fuel products.

In addition, these crops can dramatically help in protecting and enhancing water quality, soil health, wildlife habitat and climate resiliency.

Specifically, Forever Green crops can:

- Foster new economic opportunities for Minnesota family farmers;
- Diversify crop rotations and farm income streams;
- Attract new investment and employment in emerging agricultural industries;
- Protect drinking water and improve public health;
- Improve water quality in surface waters and groundwater;
- Enhance soil health and climate resilience;
- Enhance habitat for wildlife and pollinators; and
- Attract high-quality talent to the University of Minnesota to meet the future state workforce needs of the agriculture, food, energy and natural resource industries.

### **The Forever Green Partnership**

Recognizing the need for a holistic approach to advancing these cropping systems, the Legislature funded the establishment of the Forever Green Partnership (FGP) in the last biennium.

This multi-sector partnership brings farmers, agribusinesses, supply chain companies, researchers, conservation organizations, state agencies and rural economic interests together to advance a real-world framework for successful deployment of Forever Green crops.

State support is vital to continuing this important emerging collaboration.

### **Why robust funding in 2022?**

Multiple FGI cropping systems have reached an inflection point, moving beyond field trials and into landscape production and market development. Maintaining and enhancing funding for this effort is critical to maintaining this momentum and scaling up implementation.

Robust funding for Forever Green is particularly important as it allows for the long-term planning and faculty hiring necessary for successful plant breeding.

In addition, state investment in Forever Green has historically been leveraged many times over in federal grants and other funding that supports this increasingly high-profile effort.

With robust funding from the state's \$7.7B budget surplus, Forever Green will make Minnesota the unquestioned leader in developing sustainable, profitable and diversified cropping systems that improve habitat, water quality, and soil health while boosting farm prosperity and rural economic development.

We urge you to support full funding for Forever Green during the 2022 legislative session.

Sincerely,

Audubon Minnesota  
Bionutrient Food Association  
Clean River Partners  
Clean Water Action Minnesota  
CURE (Clean Up the River Environment)  
Friends of the Mississippi River  
General Mills, Retired Sr. Principal Scientist  
Green Lands Blue Waters  
Healthy Food Ingredients  
ISARA  
Lake Pepin Legacy Alliance  
Lakeville Friends of the Environment  
League of Women Voters Minnesota  
Lutheran Advocacy - Minnesota  
Mad Agriculture  
Minnesota Center for Environmental Advocacy  
Minnesota Environmental Partnership  
Minnesota Ornithologists Union  
Minnesota River Valley Audubon Chapter  
Minnesota Trout Unlimited  
Minnesota Well Owners Organization  
Mn350  
NETZRO, SBC  
Perennial Pantry, SBC  
Pollinate Minnesota  
Renewing the Countryside  
Resilient Cities and Communities  
Sierra Club North Star Chapter  
Sustainable Farming Association - Minnesota  
The Land Institute  
The Plant Pathways Company, Inc.  
University of Minnesota Forever Green Initiative  
University of Nebraska-Lincoln  
University of Wisconsin - Madison, Forages and Perennial Grains Lab  
Vote Climate  
WaterLegacy  
Worthwhile Ventures LLC