

Written Testimony

Testimony presented before the Minnesota House of Representatives Committee on Agriculture Finance and Policy on March 1, 2023

Regarding: Testimony in Support of HF2043

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

As a parent of two children in early childhood education, one of whom will soon enter Kindergarten, and someone who has studied food and agriculture systems at a graduate level, I whole-heartedly support a drastic increase in the connection between the local food producers of Minnesota and the school and early childhood education systems. This bill is a step in the right direction. As this program expands, I am confident that the program evaluation prescribed in this bill will show improvements in child health and support from local producers, which I hope to see spur continued expansion in future years.

For parents of children in early childhood education, the desire to provide children with locally-sourced healthy foods is not an external cost or second-hand consideration. Centers with these food priorities cost more, and as parents, we must choose to pay more. At best, this is a further strain on our budgets, on top of child care costs that are already extremely high. At worst, it is exclusionary towards those who do not have access to such centers, financial or otherwise. Grants such as those provided by this bill should be utilized to level the playing field. When parents can afford to choose centers that will support local food producers, we will do so, and we will encourage our childcare centers to participate in this program.

For schools, this bill is well-timed considering the advancement of HF5, which would provide universal meals to kids attending schools across Minnesota. By definition, schools will need to purchase more food, and a concerted, intentional effort should be made to ensure that as much of this food as possible is locally sourced. Regardless of the fate of universal school meals, I believe that maximizing the connection between local food producers and our schools will improve child health and school food quality, reduce the environmental footprint of the school food system in Minnesota, and help support small and mid-sized farmers.

Please support this bill,

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