

March 20, 2024

Agriculture Finance and Policy Committee  
545 State Office Building  
St. Paul, MN 55155  
Chair Vang and Members of the Agriculture Committee,

Thank you for the opportunity to share our feedback on HF4908 which redefines emerging farmers. The Food Group is a nonprofit working toward food justice and equity, including the Big River Farms incubator farm which provides access to land, farm resources, and education to help emerging farmers build their businesses in growing sustainable, organic foods.

At our incubator farm this season, we are working with more than twenty emerging farmers, as we have every year for the past decade. In this work, we see firsthand the challenges that emerging farmers face as they work to build sustainable farm businesses. We have been so pleased with all the progress Minnesota has made to support these farmers in the past several years and are eager for that support to meaningfully expand and deepen.

As we work on business planning with farmers in our program, we see that a business model focused mainly on direct-to-consumer sales is highly labor intensive and can be unpredictable in terms of revenue. In recent years as new programs such as Farm to School and the Local Emergency Assistance Farmer Fund (LEAFF) have become available, we regularly emphasize the value of accessing wholesale markets and help connect our farmers with these opportunities. The Food Group also serves as a market opportunity for our farmers. While these programs have proven beneficial to many emerging farmers, selling to wholesale markets does not make a farmer profitable to the point they no longer need resources. We often continue to offer our support for several years while they are building their knowledge and capital towards long-term success. Thus, we believe that the definition of emerging farmers should include those growing their experiences with wholesale markets not just those selling direct to consumers.

We also recognize that there are significant barriers to land ownership. While we currently provide annual leases with our farmers, we realize that there are many other circumstances where a multi-year lease would be ideal to maximize financial stability and provide the opportunity invest in long term soil health and perennial crop cultivation. Even with a long-term lease, farmers will still need support from state programs to make their farm businesses successful and should not be left out of these supports.

We look forward to continuing to have the opportunity to offer our feedback and the experience of our partnership with emerging farmers to ensure the most inclusive definition of limited-resource farmers possible.

Sincerely,



Sophia Lenarz-Coy  
Executive Director



KaZoua Berry  
Farm Director