

Dear Chair Anderson and members of the committee,

I am Shawn Feikema and I am writing on behalf of myself and our farm, Feikema Farms Inc./ Circle F Farms, located in Luverne, MN in support of Section 11 of House File 1704. I'd like to first say thank you to Chair Anderson for bringing this section forward and starting a solutions-based conversation.

Our family farm has been in operation since 1950, and over the years our family has tried many new technologies, kept up with the research, and implemented different growing practices to be as successful as possible. We have implemented many nutrient management strategies to reduce our costs and be more environmentally conscience. These practices have made our operation more profitable and has driven us to be better stewards of the resources we have. We also have implemented a stringent nutrient management plan to make sure that our livestock and cropping operations are working together to minimize any potential nutrient losses.

Recently, we've embraced new technologies to minimize the use of commercial fertilizers across our farm, such as microbial nitrogen-producing products. These products don't leach or volatilize, they form a symbiotic relationship with the plant and die off when the plant does. By incorporating this technology, we've been able to reduce our commercial fertilizer use by 40 pounds per acre.

This bill highlights the importance of supporting farmers in their efforts to reduce synthetic nutrients while maintaining crop yields. It encourages farmers who might still be on the fence about alternative sources of nitrogen by bridging a gap of perceived risks associated with using these types of products and lowering commercial nitrogen use.

Minnesota has a unique opportunity to lead a conversation that's gaining traction across the Midwest. Farmers in our state and region are facing increasing pressure to cut nutrient loss, and this bill offers a path forward without imposing burdensome regulations that could have negative consequences. Rather than forcing decisions, rewarding farmers for their efforts is the preferred approach, and I commend Chair Anderson for championing this thoughtful strategy.

I thank you for your time, the opportunity to submit testimony in support of Section 11 of House File 1704.

Shawn Feikema



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Tylor Johnson

Commercial Agronomist Pivot Bio

In support of Section 11 of House File 1704

Good afternoon, Chairman Anderson and members of the committee. I am Tylor Johnson, and I am a commercial agronomist in Minnesota covering the central and southeast portions of the state. I am here today to just provide a brief overview of one type of product a farmer might use to qualify for this incentive program. This is not the only company or the only product that can help farmers reduce their synthetic commercial nitrogen use and replace it with a more environmentally friendly source of nitrogen.

A biological source of nitrogen uses naturally occurring microbes to fix nitrogen from the air and deliver it to the plants. The microbes go on at planting and some are gene-edited to fix nitrogen on the root system of the plant around the clock. The product that I work with specifically has taken microbes that are found naturally in the soil and gene edited them to produce nitrogen specifically for the plant that they are colonized on. Our microbes form a symbiotic relationship with grass crops, the microbe feeds the plant nitrogen fixed from the atmosphere and in return the plant feeds the microbe with exudates from the roots. Once the plant has senesced, the microbes stop fixing nitrogen. Products like ours produce nitrogen for the plant without any risk of leaching, or volatilization.

By taking even a small portion of synthetic nitrogen out of the growing cycle means that potential source of nitrate contamination was never in the system. Just like farmers apply nitrogen annually, they can use biological sources of nitrogen fixing microbes annually to meet part of their nitrogen needs.



BIOECONOMY

COALITION OF MINNESOTA

March 10, 2025

Dear Chair Anderson, Vice Chair Harder, DFL Lead Hansen, and members of the House Agriculture Finance and Policy Committee,

Thank you for the opportunity to provide written testimony on House File 1704 as amended by the DE3 amendment. The Bioeconomy Coalition of Minnesota appreciates this committee's continued support for the Minnesota Bioincentive Program. However, the funding included in this bill is insufficient to fulfill Minnesota's commitment to companies that have invested in the state.

The Bioeconomy Coalition of Minnesota brings together everyone involved in the bioeconomy value chain for collective decision making and action to educate, evaluate environmental impacts and benefits, and incentivize sustainable products to benefit our environment and grow our economy. We envision a thriving Minnesota economy based on biobased products that benefit the environment, support communities, and reduce greenhouse gas emissions.

The Minnesota Bioincentive Program has a track record of boosting Minnesota's economy and creating value across the bioeconomy supply chain. Based on a [report](#) by the University of Minnesota Extension Center for Community Vitality, the economic benefit of the Bioincentive Program far exceeds its cost: Each tax dollar spent on this program has generated \$407.10 for the state's economy and \$8.90 in new tax collections. This program is actively boosting Minnesota's economy and creating value across the bioeconomy supply chain. Additionally, the program only makes payments to participating companies after production has started, making it a low-risk, high-reward investment for the state.

Despite the Bioincentive Program's successful track record, it remains significantly underfunded. The Bioeconomy Coalition of Minnesota urges this committee to increase funding to the levels needed to maximize the program's benefits for Minnesota's economy and fulfill the state's commitments to companies that have invested in projects in the state.

Thank you for your consideration of this legislation, and for the opportunity to submit written testimony.

Sincerely,

Carolyn Berninger
Public Policy Manager, Transportation & Fuels
Great Plains Institute (facilitator of the Bioeconomy Coalition of Minnesota)



March 10, 2025

RE: HF1704

Dear Chair Anderson and Members of the House Agriculture Committee:

As the Director of Sourcing and Demand Planning, I lead the team that administers the state's Farm to Food Shelf program on behalf of the five Feeding America food banks serving Minnesota. In addition to Second Harvest Heartland, **the Farm to Food Shelf program supports North Country Food Bank in East Grand Forks, Second Harvest Northland in Duluth, Great Plains Food Bank in Fargo-Moorhead, and Channel One Regional Food Bank in Rochester**, helping us provide fresh, local food to over 1,100 hunger relief programs across Minnesota.

The Farm to Food Shelf program has historically provided funding for in-demand items like milk, produce, and protein to be procured from local growers and distributed to food shelves and other hunger relief programs around the state. In FY24, the program distributed over 4.2 million pounds of produce, 155,000 pounds of protein, and almost 300,000 gallons of milk, benefitting not only hungry Minnesotans but our farmers, too. In many cases, farmers will recoup costs of harvesting and packing excess product that would otherwise go unharvested or unsold.

While the Farm to Food Shelf program is not the only source of food for food shelves, it plays a significant role in providing fresh, nutritious, and locally grown food to individuals in a time of need. First conceived in 2015, the Farm to Food Shelf program has always received strong, bipartisan support in both the House and the Senate for that reason, even as funding has remained mostly flat. We can source products for this program at a very cost-efficient rate. Produce averages \$0.26 per pound, milk \$0.34 per pound and protein \$1.49 per pound. The costs of these products are significantly less than average for these categories and allow us to stretch these dollars as far as possible in helping to feed our neighbors.

With demand for emergency food assistance at an all-time high – including in Greater Minnesota – this is not the time to reduce funding for fresh, locally grown food. Food shelves and food banks alike have experienced an unsustainable increase in demand for food, culminating in 9 million food shelf visits last year, compared to 7.5 million visits in 2023 and 5 million in 2022. Newly released data shows that 1 in 5 Minnesota households cannot afford the food they need. Food banks and food shelves are doing all we can, but without assistance from the state, Minnesota's hunger relief network will soon reach a breaking point.

And so, on behalf of the five Feeding America food banks serving Minnesota, the hundreds of food shelves and food distribution programs supported throughout the state, the dozens of local growers and producers who benefit, and the hundreds of thousands of Minnesotans who rely on us to put food on their table, we respectfully ask that you reconsider your decision to reduce funding for this critical program.

Sincerely,

Lindsey Ochmanek
Director, Sourcing & Demand Planning

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MEMBER OF
**FEEDING
AMERICA**



March 10, 2025

Chair Anderson and Members of the House Agriculture Committee:

Thank you for the opportunity to testify to the DE amendment to HF 1704. MCEA supports many of the provisions included, but we write to ask that the committee consider **including ongoing funding for addressing nitrate contamination of private wells in southeastern Minnesota.**

In 2024, the supplemental agricultural budget included \$2.8 million in one-time funding for the Department of Agriculture to provide reverse osmosis water treatment systems to households in southeastern Minnesota. This funding is available to households whose well is above the 10 milligram / liter nitrate limit with low incomes (less than 300% of the federal poverty line) and/or with vulnerable individuals in the household. This is a critical public health response to the nitrate pollution issue in the karst region.

HF 821 (Jacob) / SF 1183 (Gustafson) are bipartisan bills that would extend this program from the one-time funding of 2024 into ongoing appropriations. As you deliberate over the FY 2025-2026 agriculture budget, MCEA asks that you also consider including this appropriation.

Section 1. **APPROPRIATION; NITRATE PRIVATE WELL MITIGATION.**

\$3,866,000 in fiscal year 2026 and \$3,866,000 in fiscal year 2027 are appropriated from the general fund to the commissioner of agriculture for nitrate private well mitigation, including reverse osmosis, well repair, and well reconstruction for private drinking water wells with nitrate in excess of the maximum contaminant level of ten milligrams per liter and located in Dodge, Fillmore, Goodhue, Houston, Mower, Olmsted, Wabasha, or Winona County. The commissioner must prioritize households at or below 300 percent of the federal poverty guideline and households with infants or pregnant individuals. The commissioner of agriculture may also use this appropriation for education, outreach, and technical assistance to homeowners. The commissioner of agriculture may transfer money to the commissioner of health to establish and administer a mitigation program for contaminated wells located in Dodge, Fillmore, Goodhue, Houston, Mower, Olmsted, Wabasha, or Winona County. Notwithstanding Minnesota Statutes, section 16B.98, subdivision 14, the commissioner of agriculture may use up to 6.5 percent of this appropriation for administrative costs.

Thank you for considering this request. Please feel free to contact me with any questions or if we can be of assistance to you.

Sincerely,

Aaron Klemz
Chief Strategy Officer
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March 10, 2025

Chair Anderson, Lead Hansen and Members of the House Agriculture Finance and Policy Committee:

On behalf of 300,000 union members who live and work in communities across Minnesota, we are writing to urge you to remove provisions of the Omnibus Agriculture bill that weaken safety standards for broadband installation (House File 1704, Article 2, section 3).

The Broadband Worker Safety legislation passed by the Legislature in 2024 strengthened broadband worker and public safety by supporting the development of a skilled local workforce. A skilled, well-trained workforce will help to protect the integrity of existing public and utility infrastructure.

Reliable high-speed internet service is essential to the well-being of Minnesotans and access to education, health care, job opportunities, and other critical services. The State of Minnesota will soon receive and re-grant more than \$650 million in Federal funding to broadband providers, in addition to more than \$100 million in state funds, fueling well over \$1 billion in total investment in broadband infrastructure. We strongly support Minnesota's goal of providing universal high-speed internet connections to families and businesses in every corner of the state, but we need to do it right.

Many broadband installation workers are paid substandard wages, lack health and retirement benefits, and receive no formal training. Inexperience, lack of training and pressure to work quickly contribute to mistakes that jeopardize the safety of workers and members of the public along with the integrity of existing public utility infrastructure. Contractors that install broadband and other data lines are estimated to be responsible for hundreds of incidents of third-party damage to public and utility infrastructure annually.

Weakening safety standards for broadband installation will make Minnesota workers and communities less safe and risk public and utility infrastructure. Please vote No.

Sincerely,

Bernie Burnham
President

Brad Lehto
Secretary-Treasurer

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On behalf of the 70,000 skilled construction workers represented by the unions affiliated with the Minnesota Building and Construction Trades Council, I am writing to share our strong opposition to provisions of the Omnibus Agriculture bill that weaken safety standards for broadband installation (House File 1704, Article 2, section 3). The provisions undermine the Broadband Worker Safety legislation passed by the Legislature in 2024 that established minimum qualifications for safety-sensitive positions and supports the development of skilled local workforce.

Unions affiliated with the Minnesota Building Trades represent men and women who build every part of Minnesota's transportation, water and energy infrastructure – from highways and bridges to underground electric and gas distribution lines. Our members use skills learned on the job and through best-in-class training and apprenticeship programs to build infrastructure that is safe and reliable. In return, our contractor partners pay family-supporting wages and benefits necessary for our members to pursue construction as a career, not just a job.

Minnesota Building Trades and our contractor partners are all too aware of the growing crisis in broadband installation. After all, it is union tradesmen and tradeswomen who build the underground gas, electric and other municipal infrastructure that is vulnerable to unsafe broadband installation practices, and who must repair the infrastructure after it has been damaged.

Minnesota maintains high standards in every other area of infrastructure construction – both for the quality of the work and the quality of the resulting jobs. Minnesota's public infrastructure is built with prevailing wage protections that provide a level playing field and encourage contractors to invest in a skilled workforce rather than participate in a race-to-the-bottom. Meanwhile, Minnesota's private energy infrastructure is closely regulated, and both investor-owned and cooperative utilities have similar incentives to invest in high-quality workforce and work.

Unfortunately, the cable and broadband industry is the exception. Broadband providers resist being held to basic standards that apply to other types of critical infrastructure. While contractors who install gas and water lines are required to meet minimum workforce qualifications, an industry whose contractors operate drills around – and sometimes straight through those lines – rejects proposed minimum qualifications designed to prevent a catastrophic incident.

There is no reason we should not keep our increasingly vital broadband infrastructure on a similar path by maintaining minimum training standards, holding broadband providers accountable for their contracting practices, and incentivizing best practices.

It is time for Minnesota to treat broadband as critical infrastructure, not only by investing in deployment of fiber to every home and business in the state, but also by holding the industry accountable to the same standards as other infrastructure operators and recipients of public funds. We urge you to oppose House File 1704 which will make Minnesota workers and communities less safe and risk public and utility infrastructure.

Thank you,

Tom Dicklich, Executive Director



Minnesota Professional Fire Fighters

8100 Wayzata Blvd, St Louis Park, MN 55426

March 10, 2025

Chair Anderson, Lead Hansen, and Members of the House Agriculture Finance and Policy Committee,

On behalf of Minnesota's 2,000 professional firefighters, I am writing to urge you to remove provisions of the omnibus agriculture bill that weaken safety standards for broadband installation (HF 1704, Article 2, section 3).

The Minnesota Professional Fire Fighters Association is proud to be the voice of Minnesota's 2,000 Professional Fire Fighters. We are committed to serving our members and making Minnesota safer to live, work, and raise a family. Every day, our members report for duty committed to providing excellence in public safety to the communities we serve.

The broadband worker and infrastructure safety provisions passed by the Legislature in 2024 support the development of a skilled local workforce and hold broadband providers accountable for unsafe construction practices that jeopardize existing utility infrastructure and public and firefighter safety. Broadband installation-related line strikes can have devastating consequences. In 1998, a crew installing broadband cable for high-speed internet in downtown Saint Cloud struck a gas line. The resulting explosion killed four people, destroyed six buildings, and caused \$400,000 in damage. In 2018, a broadband installation-related line strike in Sun Prairie, Wisconsin, led to the death of a volunteer firefighter. In 2023, broadband installation contractors severed the main and backup lines supporting Nebraska's 911 call system, leading to the loss of 911 access for 60 percent of Nebraska's residents for 12 hours.

Telecommunications installation is a leading cause of damage to underground utilities in Minnesota. When telecommunications installation operations hit underground infrastructure, including natural gas and electric lines, they threaten public safety – especially when the damage is not immediately reported. For example, the City of Bloomington recently reported that a fiber installer hit a gas line, patched it with duct tape, and reburied it – putting residents at risk.

With investment in broadband expected to grow significantly over the next five years, the Legislature is responsible for ensuring the safety of workers, infrastructure and first responders. Requiring contractors working near existing utilities to employ appropriately trained workers will make workers and communities safer, including Minnesota's firefighters. Delaying standards and cutting back on training hours will not.

We urge you to remove the provisions that weaken safety standards for broadband installation.

Thank you for your consideration.

Respectfully,

Scott Vadnais

Captain Scott Vadnais

President