

Allison O'Toole Testimony
MN House Agriculture Finance and Policy Committee
April 7, 2021

Good afternoon. My name is Allison O'Toole and I am the CEO of Second Harvest Heartland.

I'm here today to thank this committee for their decision to continue the Farm to Food Shelf program's current funding levels of \$1.7 million each year of the next biennium.

In addition, we are grateful this committee chose to further the program's reach by including language allowing us to procure locally produced or processed protein. Produce, dairy, and protein are the most in-demand items at Minnesota's food shelves, and Farm to Food Shelf ensures Minnesota's Feeding America food banks can source these products from local growers and producers.

We requested and hoped to receive additional funding to help us meet the increased need for food assistance due to COVID-19, and we are concerned that this request was not granted.

While the flexibility to source protein through this program is a step in the right direction, without additional dollars to support those purchases, the only way to take advantage of this new language is to reduce how much produce or milk we procure through Farm to Food Shelf, which does solve for the increased demand our partners are seeing.

We remain hopeful that additional funding will become available in the coming months to support food banks' efforts to keep the 1 in 9 Minnesotans experiencing food insecurity fed. We know that a COVID vaccine will not solve hunger, and we welcome continued partnership with the state and legislature to address the increased levels of hunger we will see for years to come.