



Cottonwood | Jackson | Lincoln | Lyon | Murray | Nobles | Pipestone | Redwood | Rock

04/21/2026

Dear Legislators,

On behalf of the Southwest Regional Development Commission, I am writing to strongly urge the continuation of funding for the Minnesota Department of Agriculture's Meat Train and Retain Grant Program. The current grant contract is scheduled to sunset on June 30, 2026, and extending it is essential to sustaining the momentum and impact this program has already generated.

In early 2024, the Southwest Regional Development Commission {SRDC} partnered with the Mid-Minnesota Development Commission {MMDC} and the Upper Minnesota Valley Regional Development Commission (UMVRDC) to prepare a \$250,000 grant application for the Minnesota Department of Agriculture's {MDA} Meat Processing Train & Retain Grant program. The partnership was awarded the grant in May 2024, launching the Southwest Minnesota Meat Processor Workforce Development Initiative. This funding has supported small- and medium-sized meat and poultry processors by helping them hire, train, and retain new employees, strengthening the region's processing workforce and long-term industry capacity.

The critical role of the meat and poultry processing industry in Southwestern Minnesota's economy cannot be overstated. Our meat and poultry processors provide essential services to farmers, consumers, and businesses alike. They also provide a wealth of opportunity for family-sustaining employment. This initiative to invest in on-the-job and formal training is helping our processing businesses onboard and retain skilled workers.

The SRDC, serving as the fiscal host, has advanced critical workforce development efforts by partnering with the Southwest Private Industry Council and Central Minnesota Jobs and Training Service. Both organizations are recognized leaders within CareerForce and have long-standing success supporting job seekers, students, and employers. Through this initiative, they have delivered a range of contracted services, including Career Navigator support, which tracks participant engagement and outcomes through an established software system. Ridgewater College has also played a pivotal role, leveraging its expertise in the meat and poultry processing industry to identify key challenges and contribute targeted solutions throughout the initiative.

The Southwest Regional Development Commission strongly supports extending the current MDA Meat Processing Train & Retain Grant program contract beyond its scheduled sunset date of June 30, 2026. Continuing this investment will strengthen workforce capacity, bolster local processing infrastructure, and help secure a more resilient and prosperous agricultural sector in Southwest Minnesota for generations to come.

Sincerely,

Robin Weiss

Robin Weis | Deputy Director

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Latino Economic Development Center

Centro para el Desarrollo Económico Latino

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 www.ledcmn.org

April 22, 2026

Co-Chair Frazier
Co-Chair Torkelson
Ways and Means
Capitol 120

Dear Co-Chair Frazier, Co-chair Torkelson, and committee members:

On Behalf of the Latino Economic Development Center (LEDC), I am writing to express my support for H F 4372 to allow Meat Processing training and retention incentive grantees more time to complete our projects in support of small meat processors.

The current grant contract is scheduled to sunset on June 30, 2026, and extending it is essential to sustaining our outreach to meat processors and potential workforce we continue to generate and further the impact this program has already generated. LEDC was awarded a grant in the late Spring of 2025

This funding is helping our processing businesses onboard and retain skilled workers. LEDC strongly supports extending the current MDA Meat Processing Train & Retain Grant program contract beyond its scheduled sunset date of June 30, 2026, for up to 3 years. Continuing this investment in agriculture will strengthen workforce capacity, bolster local processing infrastructure, and help secure a more resilient agricultural sector in Minnesota.

Sincerely,



Aaron Blyth

Director of Agriculture

[\(He/ Him/ His\)](#)

[Latino Economic Development Center](#)

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April 21, 2026

Co-Chair Cedrick Frazier
Co-Chair Paul Torkelson
House Ways and Means Committee
5th Floor Centennial Office Building
St. Paul, MN 55155

RE: MFU support for Meat Processing Train and Retain Grant Extension (HF4372)

Dear Co-Chair Frazier, Co-Chair Torkelson, and members of the committee:

On behalf of Minnesota Farmers Union (MFU), I write to share strong support for Chair Vang's bill to extend an appropriation for meat processing workforce training and recruitment incentives (HF4372). This funding is one important way the legislature has helped rebuild local and regional meat processing, and an extension will help ensure the existing appropriation best serves meat processors, workers, and farmers.

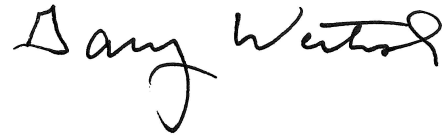
MFU is a grassroots membership organization that has represented Minnesota's family farmers, ranchers, and rural communities since 1918. In 2023, we supported the creation of the Meat Processing Train and Retain Grant program, which helps meat processors find, recruit, and train people who are new to meat cutting. This builds on work the legislature initiated to establish meat cutting technical training programs at MN State, helping new employees afford tuition and otherwise transition to a new career.

This program comes after the pandemic helped Minnesotans realize that we need a more distributed, resilient system for meat processing, and that a consolidated model does not work well for farmers, workers, or consumers. During that time, as the Minnesota Department of Agriculture and others worked to increase capacity at local and regional plants, plant owners identified workforce as a central challenge to expanding, transitioning ownership, or starting new facilities.

Today, an extension is needed, because the economic development organizations charged with administering the grants are not through with their projects. That said, they have experienced successes. For example, in the early months of this year, an MFU member helped work with a family who moved from the Twin Cities to work with a meat processor in St. Louis County.

We thank Representative Vang for her work to extend the appropriation for these grants and hope her bill earns your support. If you have any questions, don't hesitate to contact our Government Relations Director, Stu Lourey, at stu@mfu.org or (320) 232-3047. Thank you for considering the needs and perspectives of Minnesota's farm families.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Gary Wertish". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large, stylized "G" and "W".

Gary Wertish
President, Minnesota Farmers Union



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