

February 21, 2023

**To:** The Minnesota House Committee on Agriculture Finance and Policy

**Re:** Support for the University of Minnesota Forever Green Initiative (HF1492)

Dear Chair Vang and committee members,

We, the undersigned organizations, are writing to express our strong support for robust funding for the University of Minnesota's Forever Green Initiative in FY24-25.

### **The Forever Green Initiative**

The University of Minnesota's Forever Green Initiative (FGI) is a nationally respected research effort designed to develop new, economically viable perennial crops and winter-annual crops (cover crops that also produce marketable commodities).

Integrating perennial and winter-annual crops into existing farming systems provides growers with new revenue streams and new marketing options that can bolster our agricultural economy through the development of high-value, commercially marketable food, feed and fuel products.

In addition, these crops can dramatically help in protecting and enhancing water quality, soil health, wildlife habitat and climate resiliency.

Specifically, Forever Green crops can:

- Foster new economic opportunities for Minnesota family farmers;
- Diversify crop rotations and farm income streams;
- Attract new investment and employment in emerging agricultural industries;
- Protect drinking water and improve public health;
- Improve water quality in surface waters and groundwater;
- Enhance soil health and climate resilience;
- Enhance habitat for wildlife and pollinators; and
- Attract high-quality talent to the University of Minnesota to meet the future state workforce needs of the agriculture, food, energy and natural resource industries.

### **The Forever Green Partnership**

Recognizing the need for a holistic approach to advancing these cropping systems, the Legislature funded the establishment of the Forever Green Partnership (FGP) in the last biennium. This multi-sector partnership brings farmers, agribusinesses, supply chain companies, researchers, conservation organizations, state agencies and rural economic interests together to advance a real-world framework for successful deployment of Forever Green crops.

State support is vital to continuing this collaborative network.

## **Why robust funding in 2023?**

Multiple FGI cropping systems have reached an inflection point, moving beyond field trials and into landscape production and market development. Maintaining and enhancing funding for this effort is critical to maintaining this momentum and scaling up implementation.

Robust, long-term funding for Forever Green is particularly important because successfully breeding and commercializing new crops requires dedicated researchers with stable funding over multiple years.

In addition, state investment in Forever Green has historically been leveraged many times over in federal grants and other funding that supports this increasingly high-profile effort.

With robust funding from the state's \$17.6B budget surplus, Forever Green will make Minnesota the unquestioned leader in developing sustainable, profitable and diversified cropping systems that improve habitat, water quality, and soil health while boosting farm prosperity and rural economic development.

We urge you to support full funding for Forever Green during the 2023 legislative session.

Sincerely,

A-Frame Farms  
Albert Lea Seed  
Artisan Naan Bakery  
Audubon Minnesota Iowa Missouri  
Bluffsong  
Central Minnesota & Duluth Young Farmers Coalition  
Clean River Partners, Southern Minnesota, Northfield, Rice County  
Conservation Minnesota  
CURE (Clean Up the River Environment)  
Fountain Ark Farms  
Friends of the Mississippi River  
Great River Greening  
Harvest Nation Inc.  
Land Stewardship Project  
Lake Pepin Legacy Alliance  
League of Women Voters Minnesota  
League of Women Voters Upper Mississippi River Region ILO  
Mad Agriculture  
Midwest Elderberry Cooperative  
Minnesota Crop Improvement Association  
Minnesota Environmental Partnership  
Minnesota Rural Water Association  
Minnesota Well Owners Organization  
MN350  
*[More signatories on next page]*

Perennial Pantry  
Perennial Promise Growers Cooperative  
PURIS  
Regenerative Agriculture Alliance  
Region Five Development Commission  
Rock County SWCD/Land Mgt  
Roots Return Heritage Farm LLC  
Rural Advantage  
Sustainable Farming Association  
The Good Acre  
The Land Institute  
True Vine Specialty Farms  
Veterans Farming Initiative  
Vote Climate  
Welker Farms, LLC  
West Central Initiative  
Yield10 Bioscience