



March 20, 2023

Dear Chair Vang and members of the House Agriculture Committee,

I am writing in strong support of the Governor's proposed Emerging Farmers Office and Working Group initiatives, including:

- Eliminating the sunset of the Emerging Farmer Working Group to ensure this important group can continue providing a vital connection between emerging farmers and MDA into the future.
- Expanding the Emerging Farmers Office to include four full time staff to support grant management, oversight, coordination, communication and technical assistance, Tribal consultation, administrative and technical support, with \$700,000 in FY24-25 and \$625,000 per year ongoing support. The current level of staffing with one position is not adequate to meet the need, and this level of support will move us towards the goal of serving emerging farmers around the state.

In our work connecting schools and early cares with Minnesota farms through Farm to School and Early Care initiatives, we have seen first hand the meaningful connections these purchasing relationships support—and also the additional challenges our emerging farmer partners have in navigating systems that were not set up with them in mind. With the significant number of emerging farmers we have in Minnesota, we would like to see commensurate support provided by MDA to help them succeed.

Emerging farmers are a crucial part of Minnesota's farming community, and deserve adequate support to help them succeed. Please include this essential support to expand staffing of the MDA Emerging Farmer Office and continue the important work of the Emerging Farmers Working Group in your final Agriculture Omnibus Bill.

Sincerely,

Erin McKee

Community Food Systems Program Director