

Subject Agriculture
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Overview

This bill establishes soil-healthy farming goals and a new program to provide financial support to farmers who implement or maintain soil-healthy farming practices. Funded with state general fund dollars, the Soil-Healthy Farming Program would be coordinated at the state level by the Board of Water and Soil Resources (BWSR) and administered at the local level by soil and water conservation districts.

Summary

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| 1 | <p>Soil-health farming data.</p> <p>Modifies the Minnesota Government Data Practices Act to prevent public access to the names, locations, and contact information of farmers who have their soil health measured and reported under section 4. Classifies this information as private or nonpublic data, which is not accessible by the public but can be accessed by the subject of the data – in this case, the farmer.</p> |
| 2 | <p>Soil-healthy farming goals.</p> <p>Establishes three soil-healthy farming goals for the state of Minnesota and the rationale for these goals.</p> |
| 3 | <p>Soil-Healthy Farming Program.</p> <p>Establishes the Soil-Healthy Farming Program. BWSR would provide technical and financial support to participating soil and water conservation districts, and these districts would award funding to participating eligible farmers.</p> <p>Subd. 1. Definitions. Defines key terms including soil health, soil-healthy farming, and eligible farmer.</p> <p>Subd. 2. Program. Requires BWSR to provide technical assistance and funding to soil and water conservation districts, which would award grants to farmers who</p> |

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implement and/or maintain eligible soil-healthy farming practices. Requires program applications to be simple and accessible to farmers.

Subd. 3. Upfront cost grants. Requires participating soil and water conservation districts to provide cost-share grants to eligible farmers who implement a new soil-healthy farming practice. Limits grants to \$15,000 lifetime per farmer and establishes cost-share rates that range from a high of 90 percent for those farming 160 acres or less to a low of 30 percent for those farming more than 1,000 acres. Requires grant recipients to furnish documentation of costs incurred and requires the district to increase a grant if the farmer's costs are greater than initially anticipated.

Subd. 4. Direct payments. Requires participating soil and water conservation districts to award per-acre payments to eligible farmers who maintain eligible soil-healthy farming practices on up to 1,000 acres per farmer. Payment amounts would be based on several factors including farm size, farming practice, ecosystem benefits, and the amount necessary to incentivize participating farmers to implement a practice. Limits payments per farmer to \$12,500 for cropping practices and \$17,500 for managed rotational grazing.

Subd. 5. Equity. Requires participating soil and water conservation districts to prioritize socially-disadvantaged, small-, and mid-sized farmers in the priority order established in this subdivision.

4 **Soil health data collection.**

Requires the University of Minnesota's Office of Soil Health and Institute on the Environment, as well as BWSR and participating soil and water conservation districts, to collaborate and measure the soil health of each field for which an upfront cost grant or direct payment is awarded under the Soil-Healthy Farming Program. Requires reporting of this data once every five years.

5 **Appropriation.**

Appropriates an unspecified amount of money from the general fund to BWSR for purposes of this act.



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