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May 3, 2019

Senator Torrey Westrom
 Senator Bill Weber
 Senator Mike Goggin
 Senator Rich Draheim
 Senator Kari Dziedzic

Representative Jeanne Poppe
 Representative Alice Hausman
 Representative Gene Pelowski
 Representative Samantha Vang
 Representative Bob Gunther

Dear Omnibus Agriculture Finance Bill Conferees:

As the Conference Committee convenes to consider differences in the House and Senate versions of the Omnibus Agriculture Finance Bill (H.F. 2200 and S.F. 2226), we wanted you to know Land Stewardship Project’s priorities and concerns. This letter will be updated when the side-by-side is available.

SUPPORT House Position: Funding for Additional Meat and Poultry Inspection Services *(First Unofficial Engrossment, Line 3.11 through Line 3.13)*

Increased funding for meat and poultry inspection services is important for Minnesota’s independent meat processors, which are a critical part of a healthy local foods system. This is particularly important for small-and-medium-sized livestock farmers who sell direct.

House Language: \$150,000 the first year and \$150,000 the second year are for additional meat and poultry inspection services.

SUPPORT House Position: Funding for Expanding Domestic Marketing and Farm-to-School Facilitation *(First Unofficial Engrossment, Line 4.24 through Line 4.29)*

Farmers and rural communities need support in networking and building local foods systems like farm-to-school. New market opportunities are critical for our farmers, our land, and our economy. This position should be created and explicitly tasked with working on farm-to-school facilitation as one of its priorities.

House Language: \$200,000 the first year and \$200,000 the second year are to expand domestic and international marketing opportunities for farmers and value-added processors, including staffing to facilitate farm-to-school sales and new markets for Minnesota-grown hemp.

SUPPORT House Position: Bolster the Farm-to-School Market *(First Unofficial Engrossment, Line 7.29 through Line 8.1)*

Farm-to-school is a critical market pathway that would create opportunities for beginning farmers and allow existing farmers to expand their markets. Schools have directly asked for a reimbursement grant program, similar to ones that are working in other states. It is critical that the final bill include “reimbursement” to encourage this idea to be piloted.

House Language: providing funding not to exceed \$450,000 each year to develop and enhance farm-to-school markets for Minnesota farmers by providing more fruits, vegetables, meat, grain, and dairy for

Minnesota children in school and child care settings including by reimbursing schools for purchases from local farmers;

SUPPORT House Position: Provide Critical Support for Farmers in Crisis *(First Unofficial Engrossment, Line 11.18 through Line 11.22 and Line 12.11 through 12.12)*

Family farmers across Minnesota, particularly dairy farmers, are in crisis after several consecutive years of low prices. The Farm Advocates program is a critical resource for farmers in crisis and they need increased funding to provide resources and one-on-one counsel to farmers. Currently, the program is severely underfunded. Advocates are working overtime with no pay—and demand for their services is much higher than what they are staffed to provide. Both the House and Senate increase funding by \$47,000, but the Senate language makes this increased funding temporary. Both budgets increase funding for Farm Advocates from \$220,000 to \$267,000. Their funding must stay at \$267,000 long-term, and, in fact should be higher than this to meet the needs of farmers during this crisis.

House Language: \$267,000 the first year and \$267,000 the second year are for farm advocate services.

Providing a legal assistance hotline will also help keep farmers on the land by letting them know their rights when faced with foreclosure, advising them on mediation and negotiations with lenders, and providing critical resources. Our state must be investing in programs and resources that support keeping families on their farms—in fact, our members believe more is funding is required to meet the needs of farmers during this crisis.

House Language: \$25,000 the first year and \$25,000 the second year are for grants to a nonprofit organization to provide a legal assistance hotline for farmers. These are onetime appropriations.

SUPPORT House Position: Reporting on How to Support Beginning Farmers *(First Unofficial Engrossment, Line 3.11 through Line 3.13)*

For our farm economy to thrive now and in the future, we need our state to invest in young and beginning farmers. This report acknowledges the needs our young and beginning farmers have, and should be paired with bold action by our state leaders. Additionally, we believe that it is our state's responsibility to intentionally provide opportunities for groups of Minnesotans who have been historically and systemically denied access to land and resources.

House Language: No later than February 1, 2020, the commissioner of agriculture must report recommendations to the legislative committees and divisions with jurisdiction over agriculture finance regarding how best to cultivate and support beginning farmers, with priority given to beginning farmers who are women, veterans, persons with disabilities, American Indian or Alaskan Native, and members of communities of color. When preparing this report, the commissioner must consult the commissioners of labor and industry and employment and economic development and consider development of a next generation farmer internship program.

OPPOSE Senate Position: Adds New Language to Statute that Weakens MPCA Authority and Inappropriately Broadens the Definition of Pasture to Include Feedlots in Some Cases (Third Engrossment Line 25.1 through Line 29.7)

This provision goes beyond consolidation of existing statute. New language is introduced throughout the provision that inappropriately broadens the definition of pasture to include what should be considered a feedlot and regulated as such by the Minnesota Pollution Control Agency (MPCA). This language has not been heard in the House and falls under the jurisdiction of the Environment Committees.

The provision, written below and highlighted in Appendix A (lines 24.15 to 25.19, lines 26.31 to 28.2), creates a new exemption for unvegetated land to be considered pasture. This language would allow for an undefined number of animals on an unvegetated plot of land during winter months to be considered pasture. This is especially problematic because the MPCA does not have regulatory authority over pastures, only feedlots.

Pasture is currently carefully defined and is appropriately exempted from feedlot regulation by the MPCA. However, because of this new exemption, land that should be considered a feedlot would not be accountable to state laws that protect land, water, and rural communities.

The new language inserted into these sections must be removed from this bill. Land that is and should be considered a feedlot must be defined as such and ensure that they are following state laws that protect rural communities, our waters, and our land.

Senate Language (New language not currently in law):

1. in sacrificial areas that are part of a larger pasture system and are used to temporarily accommodate livestock and protect other pasture areas when adverse soil or weather conditions pose a risk of damaging the pastures, and on which the vegetation is naturally restored or replanted after the adverse soil or weather conditions are removed and the livestock are moved to other areas of the pasture.

2. Pastures are exempt from the rules authorized under this paragraph, and no feedlot permit shall include any terms or conditions that impose any requirements related to any pastures located on, adjacent to, or in the vicinity of the feedlot.

3. (p) The natural deposit of manure by livestock on pasture shall not be considered a discharge into waters of the state and shall not be subject to any fine or penalty.

See Appendix A

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See Appendix A

Sincerely,

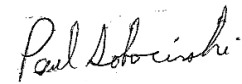
Land Stewardship Project State Policy Steering Committee and Leaders



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Paul Sobocinski
Hog Farmer, Wabasso



Jim Falk
Farmer, Murdock



Dori Eder
Farmer, Minneapolis



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Farmer, Fulda



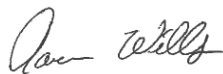
Kathleen Mary Kiemen, SSND
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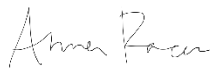
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The Honorable Peggy Flanagan, Lieutenant Governor of Minnesota
Senator Paul Gazelka, Majority Leader of the Senate
Representative Melissa Hortman, Speaker of the House
Commissioner Thom Petersen, Minnesota Department of Agriculture
Commissioner Laura Bishop, Minnesota Pollution Control Agency