

May 14, 2019

Senator Carrie Ruud
Senator Andrew Lang
Senator David Senjem
Senator Mark Koran
Senator Richard Cohen

Representative Leon Lillie
Representative Mary Murphy
Representative Ami Wazlawik
Representative Rick Hansen
Representative Greg Boe

Dear Omnibus Legacy Finance Bill Conferees:

As the Conference Committee convenes to consider differences in the House and Senate versions of the Omnibus Legacy Finance Bill (H.F. 653 and S.F. 836), we wanted to express our support for fully funding the Forever Green Initiative at the University of Minnesota, a land grant university, at \$10 million for the biennium. This language can be found in the side-by-side on pages R36 and R37.

Forever Green is a critical piece of the puzzle to transitioning the Minnesota landscape to better protect and promote our soil, water and community vitality. Our state has the power and responsibility to publicly invest in programs that move our state forward and benefit our communities. By developing and creating markets for perennials and winter annual crops, this program is helping farmers diversify the landscape, build resiliency, clean our water supplies, sequester carbon and build soil health in a profitable way. This innovative research is beginning to be implemented on the land but cannot be as effective as possible without our state making a significant public investment for it to achieve its full groundbreaking potential.

We respect and appreciate the work of the Clean Water Council and its deliberative process to protect our state's water resources. When the Clean Water Council finalized its recommendations this past fall, it was not possible to foresee many of the conditions that now call for reconsidering priorities for the Clean Water Fund. For example, due to the delay of the Federal Farm Bill and the unpredicted federal government shutdown, the Conservation Reserve Enhancement Program (CREP) has been on hold, and will not be able to again begin accepting applications until, at the earliest, this coming winter (according to the USDA). As a result, it is our understanding that CREP currently has more than adequate funds to meet current and short-term needs.

We believe that reducing the first year of the Clean Water Council recommendations for funding CREP in order to fully fund Forever Green would recognize, not only the changing budget circumstances, but also the many benefits from the Forever Green Initiative. It is a market-based approach that has the potential to have significant, durable impacts on our drinking water, groundwater, lakes, rivers and streams in the state that are most in need of attention. In addition, CREP funding has traditionally been provided through capital bonding, and it should not rely so heavily on resources from the Clean Water Fund.

The Forever Green Initiative has proven that its development and implementation of perennial and winter annual crops is a viable and effective strategy for protecting our state's water and our rural

economies. These recent successes have produced considerable interest and support for these conservation crops. Now is the time to ramp up this promising work in order to secure the future benefit at the scale we need.

Sincerely,

Artisan Grain Collaborative
Austin Chapter of the Izaak Walton League
Baker's Field Flour and Bread
Bang Brewing
Beth Dooley's Kitchen
Birchwood Cafe
Cannon River Watershed Partnership (CRWP)
Central Minnesota Young Farmers Coalition (CMNYFC)
Clean Up the River Environment (CURE)
Environment Minnesota
Fresh Taste
Friends of the Mississippi River
Institute for Agriculture and Trade Policy (IATP)
Izaak Walton League—Minnesota
Land Stewardship Project
League of Women Voters--Minnesota
Minnesota Institute for Sustainable Agriculture (MISA)
Minnesota Interfaith Power and Light (MN-IPL)
Minnesota Farmers Union
Minnesota Native Plant Society
Penner Farms
Pesticide Action Network
Renewing the Countryside
Rural Advantage
Sierra Club-- Northstar Chapter
Sustainable Farming Association of Minnesota
The Food Group MN/Minnesota Food Association