

Real alternatives for rural development in Appleton

*As rural Minnesotans experiencing continued disinvestment in our rural communities and a new farm crisis unfolding, we know that we need more than the same old solutions for economic development. **We need bold public policies and real investment in a new economy and culture so we can build thriving rural communities that are strong, resilient, and united.***

*Imprisoning people, whether citizens or immigrants, won't solve our problems – serious investment in community-driven solutions will. Here are some creative and positive ways that would help the people already living here to lead better lives and encourage more people to come and settle in Appleton. **Instead of the \$200 million it would cost taxpayers to re-open the prison, we the people ask for investment in:***

- Support for farmers to stay on their land

The average farm income in Minnesota is the lowest in 23 years and in Swift County specifically, total net cash farm income declined a whopping 41% between 2012 and 2017¹. We need urgent investment now, to stop farms from entering foreclosure and quitting farming. Lang and Miller must work with other State representatives to increase the funding for the Minnesota Farm Advocates program so farmers know their rights, and cover the cost to farmers to restructure loans. We are demanding that the Minnesota Attorney General's office must use its authority to investigate farmer-owned cooperatives that have turned their backs on the farmers who created them. **Please join Land Stewardship Project on Thursday, January 9th at the Kilowatt Center in Granite Falls starting at 5:30 pm for a Farm Crisis Forum (link here).**

- Expand affordable and safe housing

Swift County has zero homeless shelters, and affordable housing is significantly under-resourced. According to the 2015 Swift County Housing Study, more than half of all renters in Appleton are under “a severe rent burden” and over the past 15 years, only nine new housing units were added within the city. In addition, if we invested in affordable housing options for people who currently commute to Appleton for work there would be a reason for these people to move permanently. How can we justify spending hundreds of millions to incarcerate people here when we haven't spent even a fraction of that to house our own working families?

- Expand childcare

Working parents in Appleton do not have enough choices when it comes to affordable childcare. Our city boasts only one childcare facility with a capacity greater than 12 children. Job growth is necessary but incomplete without parallel growth in childcare facilities, or we will continue to lose families as working parents flee to more child-friendly cities.

- Treatment and rehabilitation facilities

We know that 85% of Minnesotans who need addiction treatment are not getting it². We have no treatment programs or rehab facilities in Swift County. We could open a quality facility right here in Appleton to serve people across West-Central MN, providing steady revenue, quality employment, and needed medical services rather than relying on unpredictable prison contracts.

- Invest in local businesses and renewable energy

There are so many business opportunities in renewable energy investment. For example, building a fast charge station in Appleton for electric cars would draw more people from around the area to our Main Street. Investing in existing businesses such as Northern GEO would increase our capacity for renewable energy and put Appleton on the map as a forward-looking, climate-friendly city.

¹ https://www.nass.usda.gov/Publications/AgCensus/2017/Online_Resources/County_Profiles/Minnesota/cp27151.pdf

² <https://opioid.amfar.org/MN>