



**LAND
STEWARDSHIP
PROJECT**

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May 3, 2021

Senator Carrie Ruud
Senator Bill Weber
Senator Andrew Lang
Senator Dave Senjem
Senator Fong Hawj

Representative Leon Lillie
Representative Sydney Jordan
Representative Jay Xiong
Representative John Huot
Representative Steve Green

Dear Omnibus Legacy Bill Conferees:

As the Conference Committee convenes to consider differences in the House and Senate versions of the Legacy Finance Bill (H.F. 1079), we wanted you to know Land Stewardship Project's priorities.

SUPPORT House Position: Invest in Resiliency for Farmers, Rural Communities, & the Land (Side by Side Page R52 to R54, House Lines 58.17 to 58.22 and 59.11 to 60.28)

By ensuring soil-healthy practices are profitable from day one, Minnesota's countryside can be abundant with perennial pastures, perennial cropping systems, cover cropping systems, no-till, and additional soil health practices. When we steward healthy soil, we are cultivating vibrant and resilient rural, urban, and suburban communities and economies. We cultivate thriving and resilient land that soaks up rain and sequesters carbon, while fostering healthy ecosystems with clean water and a sustainable climate for microorganisms, wildlife, and people. Yet, Minnesota's farmers are facing compounding challenges of extreme weather, financial crisis, and degrading topsoil. All Minnesotans depend on having a sustainable and just farm and food system – which requires public investment in farming that provides a public good. Minnesota has an opportunity invest in rural resiliency, capture federal dollars, and makes us a national and international soil health leader.

Side by Side Page R52 to R54, House Lines 58.17 to 58.22

(o) \$2,033,000 the first year and \$2,033,000 the second year are for grants to farmers who own or rent land to enhance adoption of cover crops and other soil health practices in areas where there are direct benefits to public water supplies.

Side by Side Page R52 to R54, House Lines 59.11 to 60.28

(q) \$2,415,000 the second year is for technical assistance and implementation grants to soil and water conservation districts with karst geography and shallow sand aquifers for soil health practices that protect groundwater. (r) \$2,415,000 the second year is for technical assistance and implementation grants to soil and water conservation districts for soil health practices to prevent wind and water erosion to protect surface waters. (s) \$2,415,000 the second year is for technical assistance and implementation grants to soil and water conservation districts for sustainable forestry and soil health practices to protect surface water and groundwater. (t) For the purposes of paragraphs (q), (r), and (s), "soil health practices" means practices that sustain or improve soil health as defined in Minnesota Statutes, section 103C.101, subdivision 10a, including but not limited to: (1) no-till or strip-till; (2) mulching; (3) cover cropping; 60.1 (4) perennial cropping; (5) stand diversification; (6) contour, field edge, pollinator, wildlife, or buffer strips planted with perennials; (7) agroforestry; (8) managed rotational grazing; and (9) management practices that minimize soil compaction or increase aeration.

SUPPORT House Position: Appropriating \$4.5 million to the Forever Green Initiative (*Side by Side Page R41, House Lines 46.14 to 46.20*)

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.

Side by Side Page R41, House Lines 46.14 to 46.20:

(h) \$2,250,000 the first year and \$2,250,000 the second year are for grants to fund the Forever Green agriculture initiative and to protect the state's natural resources by incorporating perennial and winter-annual crops into existing agricultural practices. This appropriation is available until June 30, 2026.

OPPOSE Senate Position and SUPPORT House Position: Funding for Soil & Water Conservation Districts (*Side by Side Page R52 to R53, Senate Lines 55.7 to 55.28; House Lines 58.17 to 58.22; 1st Unofficial Engrossment of SF 959, Lines 181.8 to 181.16.*)

We all benefit from the crucial work Soil & Water Conservation Districts are doing on the ground to support farmers, advance the adoption of soil-healthy practices, and build a resilient and sustainable farming system. We support funding Soil & Water Conservation Districts through the general fund, as the use of the Clean Water Fund for this purpose is unconstitutional. A strong compromise or transition away from this practice is to support the House position above that appropriates \$12,000,000 to Soil and Water Conservation Districts in the first year and to support the proposal in the 1st Unofficial Engrossment of SF 959, Lines 181.8 to 181.16. Doing so ensures that we: 1) Fund SWCDs, 2) move toward honoring the purpose of the Clean Water Fund, and 3) invest both in our SWCDs and implementation of soil-healthy farming practices sufficiently.

Regardless of zip code, SWCDs deserve to have sufficient budgets, staffing, and resources and farmers deserve to have sufficient and equal support, technical assistance, and resources through their local SWCD. Right now, there's an incredibly uneven playing field for our farmers. While the state of Minnesota works toward finding long-term, equitable, and reliable funding solutions for SWCDs outside of the Clean Water Fund, LSP believes that House proposal is an important step in the right direction. Together, we can pitch in to ensure that our SWCDs, farmers, and whole communities are as effective as possible.

Side by Side Page R52 to R53, Senate Lines 55.7 to 55.28;

(o) \$12,000,000 the first year and \$12,000,000 the second year are for payments to soil and water conservation districts for the purposes of Minnesota Statutes, sections 103C.321 and 103C.331. From this appropriation, each soil and water conservation district shall receive an increase in its base funding of \$100,000 per year. Money remaining after the base increase is available for grants to soil and water conservation districts as determined by the board based on county allocations to soil and water conservation districts and the amount of private land and public waters. The board and other agencies may reduce the amount of grants to a county by an amount equal to any reduction in the county's allocation to a soil and water conservation district from the county's previous year allocation when the board determines that the reduction was disproportionate. The board may use up to one percent for the administration of payments. (p) The board may shift grant, cost-share, or easement funds in this

section and may adjust the technical and administrative assistance portion of the funds to leverage federal or other nonstate funds or to address oversight responsibilities or high-priority needs identified in local water management plans. (q) The board must require grantees to specify the outcomes that will be achieved by the grants before making any grant awards. (r) The appropriations in this section are available until June 30, 2026, except grant funds are available for five years after the date a grant is executed. Returned grant funds must be regranted consistent with the purposes of this section.

Side by Side Page R52 to R53, House Lines 58.17 to 58.22 is in the above section.

1st Unofficial Engrossment of SF 959, Lines 181.8 to 181.16:

Sec. 3. [103C.237] SOIL AND WATER CONSERVATION DISTRICT FEE.


Subdivision 1. Fee. (a) A county that contains at least one soil and water conservation district must impose an additional fee of \$25 per transaction on the recording or registration of a mortgage subject to the tax under section 287.035 and an additional fee of \$25 on the recording or registration of a deed subject to the tax under section 287.21. (b) A county that does not contain at least one soil and water conservation district, but carries out the duties of a soil and water conservation district, must impose the fee described in paragraph (a). Subd. 2. Fee deposited; account. The fee described in subdivision 1 must be deposited in a special soil and water conservation district account in the county general revenue fund. Subd. 3. Distribution to soil and water conservation districts. (a) The county treasurer must transfer money from the special soil and water conservation district account to existing soil and water conservation districts within the county in May, October, and December each year. If a county contains more than one soil and water conservation district, money must be allocated equally among each district. (b) A county imposing a fee under subdivision 1, paragraph (b), must use money in the special soil and water conservation account on soil and water conservations duties within the county.

Thank you for your consideration.

On behalf of the LSP Soil Health & Climate Organizing Committee,



Kristi Pursell
LSP Soil Health & Climate Organizing Committee Member
Northfield, MN



Amanda Koehler
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cc:

The Honorable Tim Walz, Governor of Minnesota
The Honorable Peggy Flanagan, Lieutenant Governor of Minnesota
Senator Paul Gazelka, Majority Leader of the Minnesota Senate
Representative Melissa Hortman, Speaker of the Minnesota House of Representatives
Commissioner Laura Bishop, Minnesota Pollution Control Agency
Commissioner Thom Petersen, Minnesota Department of Agriculture
Mr. John Jaschke, Executive Director of the Board of Water and Soil Resources