



LAND STEWARDSHIP PROJECT

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Members of the Senate Agriculture & Rural Development Finance & Policy Committee,

The Land Stewardship Project's mission is to foster an ethic of stewardship for farmland, promote sustainable agriculture, and develop healthy communities. LSP represents over 4,500 member households in Minnesota – primarily farmers and rural residents, as well as urban and suburban allies. Some of the Land Stewardship Project's greatest priorities are keeping independent small and mid-sized farmers on the land, growing the number of farmers stewarding the land, and advancing adoption of sustainable and regenerative agricultural practices.

With a historic budget surplus, we have a unique opportunity to deliver for Minnesota farmers, our food system, and our rural communities this legislative session. By investing just over 4% of our historic budget surplus into soil health, local meat and poultry processing, and regional food systems infrastructure, we can make our rural communities and agricultural economy more resilient for both people and the land.

Therefore, the Land Stewardship Project strongly supports several provisions of the S.F. 4019 DE Amendment and thanks the Chair and original bill authors for their inclusion:

- \$30,000 to reimburse small meat processors for food safety and business planning courses.
- Increase of AGRI Meat, Poultry, Egg, and Milk processing grants by \$700,000.
- \$1 million for livestock processing technical education.
- \$1 million for soil health grants, creating a state-wide soil health plan, and developing soil health goals.
- \$50,000 to develop continuous living cover supply chains.
- \$50,000 for the Forever Green Initiative.
- A grant program to help farmers finance new cooperatives.

We particularly applaud the Senator for including strong provisions to support small meat processing. However, the DE amendment falls short. It has stripped or significantly cut key investments from the initial bill that are desperately needed in the countryside. Restoring the bill to its original form and adding a few appropriations would make a tangible difference for all Minnesotans, particularly those engaged in our farm and food system. As it stands, it would fail to make a meaningful difference for most small and mid-sized farmers.

The DE amendment fails to include:

- \$27 million into healthy soils programs through MDA and BWSR to ensure all farmers have the resources they need to invest in the health, resiliency, and diversity of their land and pocketbook. Establish a base appropriation for these programs of \$5.5 million. (*As introduced, line 5.4 to 5.10 and Line 25.21 to 25.26*)

- Language to establish a Soil Health Cost-Share Program through BWSR , as well as direct BWSR to pursue federal funds consistent with the program and collaborate to foster mutual understanding and provide recommendations for standardized specifications for soil health and related conservation and climate protection practices, projects, and goals. *(As introduced, Line 24.12 to 25.16)*
- The creation of a Certification Navigator position through the MDA with \$150,000 to help processors develop HACCP and Sanitation Standard Operating Procedures (SSOP) plans for their operations and navigate certification and inspection processes. *(Senate File 3964)*
- Double funding for the Farm to School grant program to \$1.6 million and allow early childcare providers to be eligible for reimbursement for purchases from local farmers. *(S.F. 4310)*
- \$250,000 to expand co-packing and shared cold storage capacity through grants to co-packers, commercial kitchens, restaurants, community entities with the capacity to provide commercial production space, and cold storage facilities. *(As introduced, line 13.21 to 13.28)*
- Full funding of \$10 million to the University of Minnesota Forever Green Initiative to develop continuous living cover supply chains. *(As introduced, 4.24 to 5.3 – included in DE amendment at \$50,000)*
- Full funding of \$20 million to the University of Minnesota Forever Green Initiative. *(Included in DE amendment at \$50,000)*
- \$500,000 for grants to local governments, regional planning and economic development organizations, and Tribal governments for planning and plan implementation activities for value-added food and agricultural economic development. *(As introduced, line 14.5 to 14.25)*
- \$300,000 for farm business management tuition assistance with priority to specialty crop farmers, urban farmers, and farmers facing mediation, and support for new urban and specialty crop instructor positions, including translation and outreach. *(As introduced, line 13.29 to 14.4)*
- Support farmers markets and direct marketing producers with an appropriation of \$1.5 million. *(As introduced, line 6.28 to 7.5)*
- Provide a \$1 million grant to The Good Acre for the Local Emergency Assistance Farmer Fund (LEAFF) program to compensate emerging farmers for crops donated to hunger relief organizations in Minnesota. *(As introduced, line 23.27 to 23.34)*
- Bolster food access by providing \$1 million for grants that facilitate the start-up, modernization, or expansion of grocery stores, corner stores, farmers' markets, and related food retailers. *(As introduced, line 13.7 to 13.20)*
- Create and implement a hunger relief program through Second Harvest Heartland and The Food Group with \$3 million. *(As introduced, line 22.31 to 23.14)*

On behalf of our members, we urge you to pass a robust Agriculture & Rural Development Omnibus bill that reflects the agency's proposal as introduced, with the additions reflected in our comments above. This will make a tangible difference for all Minnesotans, particularly those engaged in our farm and food system. Now more than ever, we need these investments in our communities.

Sincerely,



Mike McMahon
LSP Executive Director

cc: Governor Tim Walz, Majority Leader Jeremy Miller, Speaker Melissa Hortman, Commissioner Thom Petersen, House Chair Mike Sundin

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