



March 2, 2022

Chair Torrey Westrom

Senate Agriculture and Rural Development Finance and Policy Committee

100 Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. Blvd. St. Paul, MN 55155

Dear Chair Westrom and members of the committee:

On behalf of Land Stewardship Project (LSP) 4,500 member households, I write in strong support of the drought relief provisions brought forward by Chair Westrom to provide rapid relief grants to livestock and specialty crop producers and funding for the state's Rural Finance Authority Revolving Loan account with priority given to drought relief loans (SF 3479).

We have heard from our farmer-members that they have had to make incredibly difficult decisions this past season: ending Community Supported Agriculture (CSA) deliveries early or entirely, selling or processing livestock early to save costs, paying to dig deeper wells or new ones entirely, and investing in new irrigation equipment. And some farmers even had to make the difficult decision to leave farming altogether. This package will provide some critical relief for the costs incurred from the drought and will help to keep more farmers on the land stewarding our soils and feeding our communities.

Easy access to disaster recovery loan options is a repeated need we have heard from our members and thank Chair Westrom for the \$5 million allocated to the Rural Finance Authority's Disaster Recovery Loan program. We are especially supportive of the measures to amend the eligibility requirements for the Disaster Recovery Loan Program from 50 percent to 20 percent of annual gross income from farming in the past year that was included in the House proposal, ensuring that new and beginning farmers can have access to these funds. As well as the inclusion of outreach to emerging farmers through the Department of Agriculture's Office of Emerging Farmers to ensure any affected farmer can access these funds.

Thank you to Chair Westrom and the Department of Agriculture for leading this work. I appreciate your consideration and hope to see the committee's support. Thank you for considering the needs and perspectives of Minnesota's farmers.

Sincerely,

Laura Schreiber

LSP Policy Organizer

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The Land Stewardship Project (LSP) is a private, nonprofit organization founded in 1982 to foster an ethic of stewardship for farmland, to promote sustainable agriculture, and to develop healthy communities. LSP is dedicated to creating transformational change in our food and farming system. LSP's work has a broad and deep impact, from new farmer training and local organizing, to federal policy and community based food systems development. At the core of all our work are the values of stewardship, justice, community, health and democracy.