

March 8, 2022

To: The Minnesota Senate Committee on Agriculture and Rural Development Finance & Policy

Re: Support for the University of Minnesota Forever Green Initiative (SF3711)

Dear Chair Westrom and committee members,

We, the undersigned organizations, are writing to express our strong support for robust funding for the University of Minnesota's Forever Green Initiative in FY23.

The Forever Green Initiative

The University of Minnesota's Forever Green Initiative (FGI) is a nationally respected research effort designed to develop new, economically viable perennial crops and winter annual crops (cover crops that also produce marketable commodities).

Integrating perennial and winter annual crops into existing farming systems provides growers with new revenue streams and new marketing options that can bolster our agricultural economy through the development of high-value, commercially marketable food, feed and fuel products. In addition, these crops can dramatically help in protecting and enhancing water quality, soil health, wildlife habitat and climate resiliency.

Specifically, Forever Green crops can:

- Foster new economic opportunities for Minnesota family farmers;
- Diversify crop rotations and farm income streams;
- Attract new investment and employment in emerging agricultural industries;
- Protect drinking water and improve public health;
- Improve water quality in surface waters and groundwater;
- Enhance soil health and climate resilience;
- Enhance habitat for wildlife and pollinators; and
- Attract high-quality talent to the University of Minnesota to meet the future state workforce needs of the agriculture, food, energy and natural resource industries.

The Forever Green Partnership

Recognizing the need for a holistic approach to advancing these cropping systems, the Legislature funded the establishment of the Forever Green Partnership (FGP) in the last biennium.

This multi-sector partnership brings farmers, agribusinesses, supply chain companies, researchers, conservation organizations, state agencies and rural economic interests together to advance a real-world framework for successful deployment of Forever Green crops. State support is vital to continuing this important emerging collaboration.

Why robust funding in 2022?

Multiple FGI cropping systems have reached an inflection point, moving beyond field trials and into landscape production and market development. Maintaining and enhancing funding for this effort is critical to maintaining this momentum and scaling up implementation.

Robust funding for Forever Green is particularly important as it allows for the long-term planning and faculty hiring necessary for successful plant breeding. In addition, state investment in Forever Green has historically been leveraged many times over in federal grants and other funding that supports this increasingly high-profile effort.

With robust funding from the state's \$7.7B budget surplus, Forever Green will make Minnesota the unquestioned leader in developing sustainable, profitable and diversified cropping systems that improve habitat, water quality, and soil health while boosting farm prosperity and rural economic development.

We urge you to support full funding for Forever Green during the 2022 legislative session.

Sincerely,

Agricultural Utilization Research Institute
Audubon Minnesota
Bionutrient Food Association
Clean River Partners
Clean Water Action Minnesota
CURE (Clean Up the River Environment)
Friends of Minnesota Scientific and Natural Areas
Friends of the Mississippi River
Green Lands Blue Waters
Healthy Food Ingredients
Healthy Gulf
ISARA
Jerry Lynch, General Mills, Retired Sr. Principal Scientist
Kilimo Minnesota
Lake Pepin Legacy Alliance
Lakeville Friends of the Environment
Land Stewardship Project
League of Women Voters - Upper Mississippi River Region
League of Women Voters Minnesota
Lutheran Advocacy - Minnesota
Mad Agriculture
Minnesota Center for Environmental Advocacy
Minnesota Citizens' Climate Lobby

Minnesota Environmental Partnership
Minnesota Ornithologists Union
Minnesota River Valley Audubon Chapter
Minnesota Trout Unlimited
Minnesota Well Owners Organization
MN350
NETZRO, SBC
Perennial Pantry, SBC
Perennial Promise Growers Cooperative
Pollinate Minnesota
Regenerative Agriculture Alliance
Renewing the Countryside
Resilient Cities and Communities
Sierra Club North Star Chapter
Somali American Farmers Association
Sustainable Farming Association of Minnesota
The Land Institute
The Plant Pathways Company, Inc.
University of Minnesota
University of Nebraska - Lincoln
University of Wisconsin - Madison, Forages and Perennial Grains Lab
Vote Climate
WaterLegacy
Worthwhile Ventures LLC