

February 7, 2023

To: The Minnesota Senate Committee on Agriculture, Broadband, and Rural Development

Re: Support for the University of Minnesota Forever Green Initiative (SF 1314)

Dear Chair Putnam 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 FY24-25.

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 collaborative network.

Why robust funding in 2023?

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, long-term funding for Forever Green is particularly important because successfully breeding and commercializing new crops requires dedicated researchers with stable funding over multiple years.

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 \$17.6B 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 2023 legislative session.

Sincerely,

Albert Lea Seed
Bluffsong
Conservation Minnesota
CURE (Clean Up the River Environment)
Fountain Ark Farms
Friends of the Mississippi River
Great River Greening
Harvest Nation Inc.
Land Stewardship Project
Lake Pepin Legacy Alliance
League of Women Voters Minnesota
League of Women Voters Upper Mississippi River Region ILO
Mad Agriculture
Midwest Elderberry Cooperative
Minnesota Crop Improvement Association
Minnesota Environmental Partnership
Minnesota Rural Water Association
Perennial Promise Growers Cooperative
Regenerative Agriculture Alliance
Region Five Development Commission
Rock County SWCD/Land Mgt
Roots Return Heritage Farm LLC
Rural Advantage
Sustainable Farming Association
The Land Institute
True Vine Specialty Farms
Veterans Farming Initiative
Vote Climate
Welker Farms, LLC
West Central Initiative
Yield10 Bioscience