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March 8, 2022

Chair Aric Putnam
Senate Agriculture and Rural Development Committee
95 University Avenue W.
St. Paul, MN 55155

Dear Chair Putnam and members of the committee:

On behalf of Minnesota Farmers Union (MFU), I write to share my strong support for Senator Seeburger's work to fund the Forever Green Initiative (FGI) at the University of Minnesota (UMN) (SF1314). This foundational investment is central to the successful development and commercialization of perennial and winter annual crops, which will help our family farmer members add value and diversity to their farming operations, deliver important ecosystem benefits, and remain resilient in the face of climate change.

I am also eager to share our strong support for Senator Gustafson's bill to fund commercialization for perennial cropping systems like those developed by FGI (SF1353). This investment in markets is the next strategic step in developing these new cropping systems in a way that supports small businesses, increases adoption, and ensures a fair price for farmers.

MFU is a grassroots organization that has represented Minnesota's family farmers, ranchers and rural communities since 1918. At MFU, a growing number of our members are growing FGI's first commercialized crop: a perennial wheatgrass called Kernza. Previous funding from the legislature helped make them successful in not only growing this new crop, but also processing, marketing, and otherwise building out the infrastructure necessary for its sustainable commercialization. But there is much work left to be done.

With strong state support, the University can leverage private funding for research, making this a smart investment in the future of rural Minnesota's economy and landscape. We value the University's continued partnership with farmers in developing these new cropping systems in a way that supports both farmers and rural economic vitality.

I appreciate your consideration of these investment and hope they earn your support. If you have any questions, please contact our Government Relations Director, Stu Lourey, at stu@mfu.org or (320) 232-2047 (C). Thank you for your work on behalf of farmers and all Minnesotans.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Gary Wertish". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large, looping initial "G".

Gary Wertish
President, Minnesota Farmers Union