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February 26, 2023

Chair Aric Putnam
Senate Agriculture Committee
95 University Avenue W.
Minnesota Senate Bldg., Room 3215
St. Paul, MN 55155

Dear Chair Putnam and members of the committee:

On behalf of Minnesota Farmers Union (MFU), I write to share our strong support for the Agricultural Utilization Research Institute (AURI) and their funding requests reflected in Senator Gustafson's SF1524 and Senator Kupec's SF1525. AURI is a valued and integral partner to many of our family farmer members who are working to start a food business, build a cooperative, or otherwise diversify their farm income through value-added enterprises.

MFU is a grassroots membership organization that has represented Minnesota's family farmers, ranchers, and rural communities since 1918. When the farm economy becomes challenging—like it did in the 1980's when AURI was first chartered—one important way that farmers remain resilient is to develop new markets and add value to what they produce. Doing this on or close to the farm helps farm families keep more of the food dollar and benefits rural communities through new enterprises.

Since the 1980's, this has been AURI's central mission. And at MFU, we can speak firsthand about them delivering on this mission through our shared work on meat processing. AURI's staff have been a necessary partner to our work to develop a modular meat processing system in Central MN that will aid the Minnesota State System in delivering instruction in meat processing and butchery. Consistent with their reputation among our family farmer members, we have found their team to be responsive, resourceful, and often central to project success.

Based on this experience and many from our members we eagerly put our support behind their funding requests this session. They will help them upgrade their facilities, attract and retain staff with industry knowledge, and otherwise continue to provide excellent service to our members and others.

Thank you to Senators Gustafson and Kupec for your leadership on these important requests. If you have any questions, don't hesitate to contact our Government Relations Director, Stu Lourey, at stu@mfu.org or (320) 232-3047. Thank you for considering the needs and perspectives of Minnesota's farm families.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Gary Wertish". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large, prominent "G" at the beginning.

Gary Wertish
President, Minnesota Farmers Union