



**LAND  
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PROJECT**

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March 3, 2023

Dear Chair Putnam and Members of the Senate Agriculture, Broadband and Rural Development Committee,

Today, I am writing on behalf of Land Stewardship Project's (LSP's) 4,500 member households made up of farmers, rural, urban, and suburban members, and particularly on behalf of LSP's State Policy Steering Committee and members engaged in our regional food systems work.

Before the committee today there are a number of bills that will strengthen our farm and food system, invest in small and mid-size farms, and beginning and emerging farmers while ensuring more Minnesotans have access to fresh, healthy and local food. It is critical to invest in programs that support our farming communities across the state, from urban to rural, to ensure we can keep farmers on the land and growing nutritious food for our communities.

SF 2158 (Gustafson) Expanding the Farm to School Grant Program and Establishing Regional Local Food Coordinators:

- The Farm to School program supports hundreds of LSP farmer members across the state and is a critical program for scaling a sustainable, profitable market for farmers and investing, especially, in our rural communities. Last year, with a \$4.25 million federal grant for the Farm to School program, the Department of Agriculture was still not able to keep up with demand from schools and fully fund all projects. Increasing this funding is critical to supporting a long-term market for farmers, for farmers to be more secure investing in their operation (with equipment purchases such as carrot harvesters, for examples) to sell at wholesale levels and allow schools to serve local, healthy food. This type of incentive for schools to source locally and take that initial step of building relationships with area farmers, creatively expand their menus and train kitchen staff to support these ingredients is a way to build long-term engagement and commitment to farm to school sourcing.
- In talking with hundreds of our members across the state leading up to the legislative session, the need for investment in our regional food systems is clear. Establishing regional local food coordinators will support farmers accessing new markets, having a point person to ask food safety and handling questions to, build relationships with new buyers and act as a connector within their community.

SF 1727 (Gustafson) Good Acre's Local Emergency Assistance Farmer Fund

- By investing in the LEAFF program, more fresh produce grown by emerging farmers in Minnesota will make it to local food shelves. Communities of color are more than twice as likely to be facing hunger in our state. Supporting farmers of color to be part of the solution to providing healthy and culturally specific crops for Minnesota's food shelves is an incredible opportunity to support food access and equity. Additionally, the training

and technical assistance that the Good Acre provides to the farmers it works with is an invaluable asset to supporting more farmers in their farming business.

#### HF 2016 (Gustafson) Urban Agriculture Grant Funding Provided

- As land access continues to be a barrier for beginning and emerging farmers, urban farming has become a key way that farmers can grow their operation and skills. This grant program also provides opportunities for youth to participate in agricultural education and have a connection to stewarding our lands and feeding our communities. Program such as Urban Roots in Saint Paul, provide incredible opportunities for youth to get outside and engage in farming.

All of these bills represent an investment in a more equitable farm and food system in Minnesota. These investments build us toward a system where our small and med-size producers are supported, our local food economy is vibrant, Minnesotans at all ages and income levels have access to fresh, healthy food and make Minnesota a leader in supporting our farmers and communities.

I urge the committee to support these bills and take advantage of our historic surplus to support these innovative and critical programs.

Sincerely,

Laura Schreiber

Policy Organizer

Land Stewardship Project

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The Land Stewardship Project (LSP) is a grassroots 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 community, stewardship, health, justice, and democracy.