



March 2, 2023

Minnesota Senate
Agriculture, Broadband, and Rural Development Committee
3215 Minnesota Senate Building
St. Paul, MN 55155

Dear Chair Putnam and Committee Members:

On behalf of the team at Second Harvest Heartland, our region's largest food bank, I am writing to urge you to support SF 1727, which includes funding for The Good Acre's Local Emergency Assistance Farmer Fund (LEAFF) program. Our primary mission is to end hunger together, and LEAFF is an opportunity for the state to help us achieve this goal while supporting market access opportunities for Minnesota's new and emerging produce farmers.

At Second Harvest Heartland, we partner with over 1,000 hunger-relief programs to support those in our region facing hunger today. On average, we provide 94.1% of all food distributed by our partners, and we are lucky to work with The Good Acre to source hundreds of thousands of pounds of produce from their network of emerging farmers. This partnership allows us to source foods that the people we serve know and love like scallions, lettuce, beans, broccoli, beets, eggplant, carrots, onions, peppers and delicata winter squash. Increased funding for the LEAFF program ensures more fresh produce grown by emerging farmers in Minnesota will make it to local food shelves.

LEAFF is a particularly effective program because of The Good Acre's robust network of farmers of color, who grow foods familiar to different cultural and immigrant communities across the state. The latest data tells us that Black Minnesotans are more than six times as likely to face food insecurity as white Minnesotans, and Hispanic Minnesotans are almost five times as likely to experience hunger. LEAFF lays a framework that will pay farmers of color market rates for their produce and create the market access they need to run a sustainable farm business.

Minnesota reported over 5.5 million food shelf visits last year, and with vital pandemic supports ending in March, we expect to see the demand for food assistance increase in the months ahead. We hope the committee will support SF 1727 to ensure that our neighbors in need have access to the best of Minnesota's bountiful harvest. Thank you for your consideration of this bill.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Allison O'Toole".

Allison O'Toole
Chief Executive Officer
Second Harvest Heartland

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