



March 3, 2023

MFMA Supports S.F. 2158 – the Farm to School & Early Care program

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

Minnesota Farmers' Market Association works to build a strong local foodshed in Minnesota because our state is much more resilient when communities are equipped to produce food and sustain themselves. MFMA stands in support of H.F. 2043, granting money to the Farm to School program.

MFMA supports all farmers' markets in Minnesota, wherever they are. We are at a record-high 362 farmers' markets, with more onboarding this year. We do the research and curriculum development, offering trainings on food safety, MN food laws and licensing, cottage foods, sales tax on foods, business plans, etc. This winter, we have 32 zoominars scheduled, during the day, evenings, weekends – making the training as accessible as possible. We've offered a handful with interpretation into various languages – and need to offer more.

Many of the farmers selling at farmers' markets also sell to schools. Ag Econ 101 confirms that multiple sales channels for local food farmers is a brilliant risk management strategy. With the federal dollars coming to Minnesota to support local food efforts, funding this F2S program leverages those dollars many times over. The 9 farmers' market food hubs operational in the state are already onboarding more farmers so they can streamline orders expected by the schools. Adding Minnesota dollars to F2S at this time helps strengthen the long term viability of F2S beyond the short-term influx of federal monies.

Adding the regional coordinators is critical. MFMA has received dozens of calls for help already *this year* from farmers and schools requesting help, which is stretching our resources quite a bit.

There are many local foodshed initiatives in front of your committee this year that need to get funded – we'll encourage Leadership to set a high budget target for Agriculture so these critical initiatives can get funded during this year's historic budget surplus.

Sincerely,

Kathy Zeman
Executive Director
Minnesota Farmers' Market Association

MISSION

MFMA provides services, programs, and leadership that support and promote farmers' markets across Minnesota.