

March 3, 2023

Dear Chair Putnam and Members of the Senate Agriculture Committee,

I am writing today in support of SF 2158 (Gustafson) to increase the funding for the farm to school grant in Minnesota and establish regional local foods coordinators. For fourteen years, I've grown fruits and vegetables at my 18-acre farm in Northfield, Minnesota. Eighteen acres isn't much compared to commodity farmers who may farm hundreds or thousands of acres. But the high-value crops I grow enable me—and farmers like me—to make a living, run small businesses, hire local employees, and grow healthy food for our communities. Last year, my crew and I harvested over half a million pounds of healthy, nutritious fruits and vegetables for our community, grossing over \$540,000. Small businesses like mine make big contributions to the communities we serve—in every county in the state.

For six years, I've worked with Minneapolis Public Schools farm-to-school program. Every year, I grow more romaine, squash, and cucumbers for the students than the year before. Public schools are an important customer—representing a growing portion of our overall sales. It's enabled us to scale our operations, staff the farm, purchase seeds and soil, and safely invest in the resources necessary to continue to grow our business.

The purchasing power of our public schools is mighty. That power should be directed at ensuring students have access to healthy, local produce. Instead of purchasing food grown or raised out of state for school lunches, we can choose to invest the same amount of money on local foods within our state, supporting our communities.

We know that every \$1 spent generates an additional \$2.16 of local economic activity. The market that the farm to school bill generates means significant and meaningful effects that continue to ripple outward into our communities. Local farms are growing, even with little—or no—public support. And we can do so much more to help them grow, by systematically supporting and investing in them through the farm-to-school bill and regional local coordinator positions.

In addition to being good for my business, working with the farm to school program aligns with my values of feeding my community healthy food. For me, that means taking NO shortcuts. When I think of planting a crop—say, of broccoli—I aim to grow the best broccoli I can. So I give that broccoli the best conditions—rich with nutrients, water, and sunlight.

When I think of growing the next crop of students, our next generation, I think in similar terms. If we want them to succeed, we need to create a similar environment where they can thrive. For me, that means healthy food. I know I feel best and can do my best job when I eat healthily.

This bill is a win for healthy local businesses, a win for our local economies, and a win for our students, and I hope you will vote yes for the farm to school bill.

Thank you and I hope you support this important and impactful bill.

Sincerely,
Becca Rudebusch

Seeds Farm
6903 115th Street East
Northfield, MN 55057