

Written Testimony

Testimony presented before the Minnesota Senate Agriculture, Broadband, and Rural Development Committee

Regarding: Testimony in Support of SF 2604 and SF 2556

Thank you Chair Putnam, Vice-Chair Kupec, and Members of the Committee for the opportunity to provide this written testimony today.

As someone who has devoted their career to advocating for climate justice, I have chosen to focus on food and agriculture systems based on what I see as great potential for a net reduction in greenhouse gas emissions. Practices that improve soil health such as cover cropping, crop rotations, rotational grazing, and perennial vegetation integration will be advantageous for food producers, food consumers, the environment, and our ecosystems. An abundance of small or emerging farmers, many committed to such practices through a combination of tradition and innovation, await the opportunity to farm. We have a unique, critical opportunity to facilitate land transfers to a generation of motivated land stewards. Unfortunately, costs of land access have steadily increased, creating another barrier to entry within an industry that has included both subtle and overt barriers to entry for underserved communities for centuries. That is why I am excited to support bills such as SF 2604 and SF 2556.

SF 2604 appropriates funds towards a farm incubator program, to be run by the Women's Environmental Institute (WEI). Within these programs, a land owning entity provides low cost land, use of equipment, and technical assistance to cohorts of farmers, providing them with skills, experience, and business connections to use in assessing their farming future and pursuing financing. This is the type of innovative program that can help overcome the land access issues faced by new and emerging farmers. With this program, WEI will be allowing the use of organically certified land by historically underserved Black, Indigenous, and People of Color farmers to develop regenerative farming practices. This represents a much-needed step towards equity within agriculture, financial support for the expansion of climate-friendly farming methods, and a further proof of concept for this type of program. I urge you to fund this WEI program throughout its development and implementation, and to consider broader legislation to provide grants to all eligible farm incubator projects proposed by non-profit organizations.

Similarly, SF 2556 would direct additional funds to small or emerging farmers. This bill would piggyback off of USDA loan and grant programs, such as the recently created "Increasing Land, Capital, and Market Access Program," to which the federal government recently provided up to \$300 million to fund increased access to land, capital, and markets for underserved communities. This bill will provide funding to financial institutions that participate in distribution of these much needed grants or loans.

These bills continue to lay the groundwork for establishing Minnesota as a state that is committed to improving equity within agriculture and facilitating increased land access for new

and emerging farmers. I strongly urge you to provide sufficient funding to match the demand, and to continue to create new and innovative programs that will foster farmland ownership transitions and prevent removal of land from farming due to cost considerations.

Please support these bills,

Jeff Diamond (63A)
Food Systems' Advocate
3917 37th Ave S
Minneapolis, MN