

March 16, 2023

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



This letter is written in strong support of Senate File 2900 Support for Farmers' Markets and Direct Marketing Producers on behalf of the Aitkin Farmers' Market (AFM) membership.

I am Allison Rian. I am a beginning farmer in Aitkin County and have been a vendor at the AFM for 3 years. I am also the Aitkin Farmers' Market Hub manager. The AFM has worked hard on the online food hub project with various partners for 5 years now, and we are seeing appreciation for and sales of local foods jump dramatically each year. In 2023, we expect more growth and have just partnered with Riverwood Healthcare Center to start providing produce for their new Food Rx program. Our in-person weekly market has seen growth in vendors and shoppers since the pandemic.

We've seen such significant growth, in fact, that this year we need to relocate the market. The move will have benefits and drawbacks. A grant like the one proposed in SF2900 would allow us to invest in infrastructure that would help make the market space safer, more visible, and more convenient for shoppers and vendors. AFM could invest in a small, secure shed for storage, a new handwashing station, signs and ropes for directing cars for parking, and much, much more. The Hub would also benefit from such infrastructure for storage and set-up. Our community partners, in turn, will benefit from a farmers market with a solid presence in the community. We already have relationships with the hospital, a senior services agency, a food shelf, and schools and restaurants.

During the pandemic, we saw local food producers step up and fill nutrition gaps left by long, fragile supply chains and panic buying. With strong community partners, we filled 1,000 food boxes for residents in 2020. We adapted to an online buying system and contactless pick up. We increased our growing capacity over the subsequent years to meet expectations for local food in the face of inflation and poor quality of shipped produce. Small and midsize farms are capable of quick adaptation in the face of uncertain prices, climate, and supply. Farmers markets often act as the anchors for these farms to find sales outlets close to home. Farmers markets have the potential to grow farmers and communities.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Gratefully,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads 'Allison Rian'. The signature is written in black ink on a light-colored, rectangular background.

Allison Rian  
AlliCat Farm, owner  
Aitkin Farmers' Market Hub, Manager  
42153 270th St  
Aitkin, MN 56431  
218-831-8890  
allisonjrian@gmail.com