



**LAND  
STEWARDSHIP  
PROJECT**

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March 17<sup>th</sup>, 2023

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

Today, I am writing on behalf of Land Stewardship Project's (LSP's) 4,500 member households made up of farmers, rural, urban, and suburban members, and particularly on behalf of LSP's State Policy Steering Committee and members engaged in our regional food systems work in support of SF2900 (Kunesh). This bill represents a historic one-time, equitable investment in Minnesota farmers' markets across the state and support for the thousands of direct marketing producers, including businesses that run Community Supported Agriculture programs (CSAs) or deliver directly to their customers.

These types of business according to data collected from FM360, a metric service for Minnesota's local foodshed, shows that producers in this sector are the most diverse in ethnicity and gender, the youngest, largely employ more soil health and conservation practices than conventional systems, and are exponentially growing in number across the state. Most farmers, when they are starting their farming journey, rely on farmers' markets to sell their products, build their customer base, fine tune their business model and it is a critical space needed for producers to succeed. Many of these farmers will typically, after establishing a loyal customer base, expand their operation to direct-to-consumer sales either through CSA programs, meat shares and more. This one-time money to support a grant program at the Minnesota Department of Agriculture for direct marketing producers is an incredible way to take advantage of our state's surplus and invest in farmers across our state. Investments in marketing materials, food safety and business training and infrastructure improvements will have lasting impact for years to come.

Minnesota has more than 360 farmers' markets covering every county in the state. Our farmers' markets are a space for community, art, and most importantly healthy, local food. Farmers' markets run on incredibly small budgets and a one-time infusion of funds to help with permanent infrastructure investments (such as signage), handwashing stations, establishing SNAP/EBT at all markets, trainings for food safety for farmers' market managers and vendors, would have years long impact and a great return for our Minnesota communities.

For more than 40 years the Land Stewardship Project's mission and work has been to help keep more farmers on the land, stewarding our natural resources in a way that is good for farmers' bottom line, our soil and our communities. Our Farm Beginnings Training Program, which has trained hundreds of beginning farmers and when our 2021 cohort was surveyed, 100 percent sold their products within a 200-mile radius of their farm with a majority selling direct to customers. Taking advantage of our state's more than \$17 billion surplus for a one-time investment of \$4 million for our farmers' markets and new grant program of \$500,000 for direct marketing producers will have decades long impact for Minnesota's growing number of beginning and emerging farmers.

I appreciate your consideration of these investments into our farmers and our communities and on behalf of our members and supporters, I hope that they earn your support.

Sincerely,

Laura Schreiber

Policy Organizer

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The Land Stewardship Project (LSP) is a private, nonprofit organization founded in 1982 to foster an ethic of stewardship for farmland, to promote sustainable agriculture, and to develop healthy communities. LSP is dedicated to creating transformational change in our food and farming system. LSP's work has a broad and deep impact, from new farmer training and local organizing, to federal policy and community based food systems development. At the core of all our work are the values of stewardship, justice, and democracy.