



March 17, 2023

### **MFMA Supports S.F. 2900 - the Farmers' Markets & Direct Marketing Farmers Support Bill**

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

On behalf of the Minnesota Farmers' Market Association (MFMA), our [362+ farmers' markets](#) and their 10,000+ vendors, and the multiple thousands of direct marketing farmers – so many who are emerging and beginning farmers - thank you very much for hearing this bill. In addition to the 362+ farmers' markets listed in our database, there are dozens more in the Tribal Nations and Urban American Indian communities.

In the direct marketing food sector, most of it is either excluded from licensing as product of the farm (M.S. 28A.15, subd. 2) or exempted from licensing as cottage food (M.S. 28A.152). As such, there are very few state supports provided for food safety and compliance training, outside of what MFMA and our numerous allied organizations provide via grants and private funding. 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 had 32 webinars scheduled, during the day, evenings, and weekends – making the training as accessible as possible. We were able to offer a handful with interpretation in various languages – and would like to offer more.

Farmers' markets in Minnesota predate Minnesota's 1858 statehood (St. Paul 1854); Minnesotans know how to grow food in our incredibly resource-rich state and feed their communities. Farmers' markets are part of the bed rock of many communities throughout the state, both urban and rural, and provide a key place for farmers to sell their products and grow their businesses. Given the \$17.5 billion dollar surplus for our state, a one-time infusion of funds for farmers' markets would make a tremendous impact for our local markets and allow for long-term improvements.

This \$10,000 grant per market could help with, but is not limited to:

- Infrastructure: Infrastructure improvements, signage, tents, handwashing stations, small structures to store all the supplies and equipment.
- Training and Education: On food safety for vendors and producers, food code, and sales taxes.
- Food Access: Establishing incentive programs like SNAP & Market Bucks (less than 1/3 of our markets can afford to offer SNAP), Power of Produce or Proteins, etc.
- Food Hubs: Farmers' markets that are licensed food hubs could use it for purchasing cold storage or cold transportation units, onboard more farmers to their platforms, do more outreach and education with their buyers.

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#### MISSION

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

- Data collection through FM360. FM360 is a metrics service for Minnesota's local foodshed including farmers' markets, vendors, and consumers. FM360's goal is to articulate the value of farmers' markets, and the value of small and medium-sized farms in Minnesota's food system. The UMN is the custodian of the data.

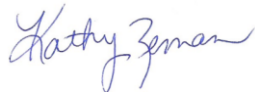
\$500,000 is for the Minnesota Department of Agriculture to create a grant program to support direct marketing farmers – the foundation of farmers' markets – and this funding could be used for:

- Training and Education: Profitability and farm financial courses specific to small scale farming, marketing, food safety training, etc.
- Marketing and Social Media: Utilize funds for promoting their farm business through purchasing marketing platforms or consultant services.
- Infrastructure: on-farm cold storage, delivery upgrades, investments for on-farm sales.

This bill represents a step forward in equitably funding and investing in Minnesota's food agriculture. FM360 data shows producers in this sector are the most diverse in ethnicity and gender, the youngest, employ more soil health and conservation practices, and are growing in numbers. It's this direct marketing food farming sector where the number of *people* in farming is expanding. This sector is so thirsty for growth that in less than 24 hours, we had 224 (and counting) people sign on to our support letter. The need for public investment in Minnesota's local foodshed has an incredible return on investment for our farmers and for all Minnesotans.

I urge the committee to take advantage of this unique opportunity to provide critical support to our farmers' markets and farmers in Minnesota and humbly ask for your support.

Sincerely,



Kathy Zeman  
Executive Director  
Minnesota Farmers' Market Association

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