

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

I strongly support Senate File 2900 Support for Farmers' Markets and Direct Marketing Producers. I am the Farmers' Market and Hub Manager for The Village Agricultural Cooperative in Rochester, Minnesota. We support over 200 families growing culturally relevant produce over 11 acres in 6 urban gardens around the city of Rochester. We are 85% BIPOC from 22 countries all over the world and now we make Rochester, Minnesota our home. We create space for public and market gardens to address the health needs of our people and planet while building hope for future generations. We believe that sustainable agriculture creates healthy communities.

Our market, The Village Farmers' Market, is one year old. We started last year so our farmers could sell their excess produce, create a small stream of income for themselves and proudly share their cultural heritage. We are lucky to partner with the History Center of Olmsted County. They have a covered picnic shelter with 18 tables, within sight of one of our largest community gardens of 5 acres. None of our farmers could afford to purchase tents, weights, tables and pay membership and booth fees to other farmers' markets last year, but this year 3 of them have been encouraged with last year's success and have signed up for the larger Rochester Farmers' Market. This year we have applied for SNAP/EBT and WIC, and hope to be in full swing on those food security programs when our market starts June 6th. We plan to purchase our first tent for a visible Information Booth. We are also in the process of creating an on-line platform through the open Food Network, as some of our families are working several jobs, raising young children, and supporting extended family. It is an extension of The Village Farmers' Market. More of our farmers need GAPs training and several have expressed interest in Cottage Food Production, so more education would make a huge difference for our farmers and our market. Many of our farmers have expressed interest (I would say PASSION) in access to an affordable commercial kitchen space, so they can share the flavors of their countries of origin and others may taste their incredible foods.

Thank you so much for your time and consideration!

Best, Chris

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