



**CONSERVATION
MINNESOTA**

March 27, 2023

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

We write today in support of several provisions in SF 1955 (Putnam), the committee's Omnibus finance bill.

At Conservation Minnesota, our mission is to protect the people and the places that Minnesotans love. Advocating for the health of our communities, soil, water, and agriculture economy is vital to achieving this goal. Minnesota's agriculture industry adds \$112 billion to the state's total economic impact each year. While this omnibus bill is offering more to support our farmers and food systems than in recent legislative history, currently less than 0.5% of the state's budget is spent on the Minnesota Department of Agriculture. We ask that overall spending and investment in the Agriculture Omnibus bill is increased to ensure a thriving agriculture economy in Minnesota that invests in our producers and stewards.

Healthy Soils

We support the Senate's vital investment in Minnesota's farmers and food systems. The provisions included will make strides in protecting our environment and deliver benefits to our communities, producers, and residents in all 87 counties. Our ability to prevent harmful erosion, protect farmland yields, sequester carbon, and improve water quality is dependent on healthy soils. The funding provided for the Soil Health Financial Assistance Program, Continuous Living Cover Supply Chain Development Grant Program, Forever Green Initiative, and AGRI programming are fundamental resources to work alongside producers. By expanding capacity and providing equipment and services necessary for those working the land, it will mitigate on farm risk and increase positive ecosystem and climate impacts.

Statewide Food Systems & Land Access

Investment in food systems will increase our state's economic resiliency and strengthen rural communities. We appreciate the inclusion of funding for collaboration with Minnesota Tribal governments for agriculture projects and programs, food access and hunger relief such as the Good Food Access Program and LEAFF, and cooperative grants. The benefits of investing in farmland access, farm advocate services, beginning farmers, women and farmers of color, and urban agriculture and youth education will have lasting impacts on Minnesota's farming community for generations. The effort to connect emerging farmers to land and market opportunities and importantly, an investment in an emerging farmer office and farmer outreach coordinator, will increase farm viability and economic output.

Biofuels & Renewable Natural Gas

Conservation MN supports the investment in advanced biofuel production, renewable chemical production, funding support for biofuel equipment, and renewable natural gas and anaerobic digestion projects. This will aid in decarbonizing Minnesota's agriculture economy and assist farmers in offsetting the cost of fertilizer.

There is strong public support for utilizing our historic budget surplus to invest in mitigating the impacts of climate and increasing Minnesota's strong leadership on statewide conservation and water quality. This bill has the opportunity to advance meaningful, cost-effective legislation that benefits the stewardship of our environment and agricultural communities, and we appreciate your consideration and commitment to a strong Omnibus focused on these issues.

Sincerely,

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