

Minnesota Senate (March 27, 2023)

Chair Putnam and Members of the Committee,

On behalf of a diverse statewide coalition, I would like to thank you for including expanded funding in this year's Senate agriculture omnibus bill for the Minnesota Department of Agriculture's new Developing Markets for Continuous Living Cover Crops program. We appreciate that the committee had limited resources to address many needs and requests.

This idea was hatched in 2021 in partnership with motivated entrepreneurs working everyday to create supply chains, markets, and products for new perennial and winter annual crops. Their efforts are critical to more MN growers having opportunities to grow these crops, Minnesota having clean water and healthy soil, and consumers having new products on their tables that align with their values. Simply put, without supply chains markets exciting new perennial and winter annual crops effectively don't exist as real opportunities for growers, and won't scale. Their ask was simple: expand the support being received by scientists and growers to include entrepreneurs as valued partners in advancing continuous living cover agriculture, and its many benefits to our natural resources, economy, and communities.

This idea quickly expanded to a diverse coalition of advocates for agriculture, rural livelihoods, water quality, and soil health, including grassroots efforts advancing perennial agriculture systems informed by indigenous leaders creating pathways for emerging and immigrant farmers. This effort succeeded last year with a \$500k allocation to MDA for a pilot grant program. This program was launched two weeks ago and applications will soon be rolling in.

The allocation you have included in this year's budget expands this funding to more meaningfully accelerate the industries for these new crops, and begins to stabilize this program through initial base funding. Again, thank you for your leadership and foresight on this issue.

This work has had major ripples, encouraging other nearby States to consider developing a similar program, and this coalition's work being featured in a recent campaign on climate solutions at COP27 in Egypt. This funding further solidifies Minnesota's role as a national leader in policy innovation and cross-sector collaboration, and will help root exciting new industries here in MN to advance continuous living cover and regenerative agriculture for years to come.

Finally, tremendous unmet needs and opportunities in Minnesota agriculture and rural communities today. Were additional resources to become available for this body this year, our State's economy, natural resources, and communities would stand to benefit. Thank you again.

Sincerely,

Colin Cureton, MS, MPP
Director of Adoption and Scaling, Forever Green Initiative