



February 7, 2023

To members of the Honorable 93rd State of Minnesota Legislature,

I am writing this letter on behalf of the Southern Agricultural Center for Excellence to support Minnesota H.F. 586, which would appropriate funding to the Center for Rural Behavioral Health at Minnesota State University, Mankato to establish a mental health training clinic.

Statistically, the mental wellbeing of Minnesotans has never been worse. This is coming at a time in which access to behavioral health services has never been more difficult. As this treatment gap between consumers and providers continues to grow, it's important to note that it is not geographically equitable. While residents of greater Minnesota face similar emotional challenges of residents of the metro area, they have fewer providers who are trained to help.

The impact of poor mental health on the agricultural community cannot be understated. The success of our agricultural partners requires a physical and emotionally healthy workforce. Farmers need local resources available for their employees and their families. Minnesota is already a leader in providing innovative ways to reach agricultural producers and their families through such longtime programs as the state's two rural mental health specialists, a program which was renewed with increased funding in the 92nd State of Minnesota's 2022 Regular Session's agricultural appropriations. But, we can and should do more to reach rural Minnesotan's behavioral health needs.

The Center for Rural Behavioral Health training clinic would provide a workforce development opportunity that would help grow the number of behavioral health professionals who will serve the current, and next generation of Minnesotans. At the same time, this community facing training clinic would help meet an unmet need of providing mental healthcare services for the residents of southern Minnesota.

While H.F. 586 won't solve all the mental health challenges facing our state, it will go a long way to ensure that those who call greater Minnesota home, will have access to mental healthcare when they need it.

Sincerely,

Megan Roberts, Ed. D.
Executive Director, Southern Agricultural Center of Excellence