

April 5, 2024

Agriculture Finance and Policy Committee
3215 Minnesota Senate Bldg.
St. Paul, MN 55155

Senator Putnam and Members of the Agriculture Committee,

Thank you for the opportunity to share our feedback on SF5049 which provides the definition of limited-resource farmers. Big River Farms is a program of The Food Group, a nonprofit working toward food justice and equity. We support different levels of the food system by partnering with over 400 food shelves, running affordable pop-up grocery stores, and the Twin Cities Mobile Market. At Big River Farms, we provide farmers resources to help them grow organic produce and help them create sustainable businesses.

This season we have 30 emerging farmers who are working hard on building their farm business by accessing land, infrastructure, education, and market support through Big River Farms. In this work, we see firsthand the challenges that emerging farmers face as they work to build sustainable farm businesses. We have been so pleased with all the progress Minnesota has made to support these farmers in the past several years and are eager for that support to meaningfully expand and deepen.

Over 20 years of working with hundreds of emerging farmers, we have gotten consistent feedback about the challenges of accessing land, resources and markets for our small-scale farmers. This has shaped our programs and helps us develop community collaboration and coalitions with other farmer-support organizations. Many of our farmers get income from indirect sales such as aggregating together to be able to sell to larger contracts such as farm to institutions, LEAFF, and other wholesale opportunities.

As a farmer myself, I know firsthand how challenging it is to sell at farmers markets. I also had my own CSA which comes with its own set of difficulties and challenges. I spend less time harvesting and processing my collards and lettuce for restaurant sales, yet make more money than spending half the season selling to the farmers market. CSA's are very intensive and require a lot of time and process to manage. Many of us are moving towards securing indirect markets to support our farms.

There are also significant barriers to land ownership. While we currently provide annual leases with our farmers, we realize that there are many other circumstances where a multi-year lease would be ideal to maximize financial stability and provide the opportunity invest in long term soil health and perennial crop cultivation. Even with a long-term lease, farmers will still need support from state programs to make their farm businesses successful and should not be left out of these supports.

We appreciate this committees ongoing work to ensure the most inclusive definition of limited-resource farmers possible including the following considerations:

- Keeping "limited land access" inclusive of multi-year leases, incubator farms and those without current access to land.
- Focusing on farmers with a net profit of \$75,000 or less.
- Including farmers accessing both direct and indirect markets with limitations.



Growing Farmers. Growing Food.

We look forward to continuing to have the opportunity to offer our feedback and the experience of our partnership as this work evolves.

Sincerely,

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Farm Director

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