



## LAND STEWARDSHIP PROJECT

LEWISTON OFFICE  
180 East Main St, Box 130  
Lewiston, MN 55952  
507-523-3366

MINNEAPOLIS OFFICE  
821 East 35<sup>th</sup> St, #200  
Minneapolis, MN 55407  
612-722-6377

MONTEVIDEO OFFICE  
117 South 1<sup>st</sup> St  
Montevideo, MN 56265  
320-269-2105

Senator Aric Putnam, Chair  
Senator Rob Kupec, Vice Chair  
Senator Torrey Westrom, Ranking Minority Member  
Senator Bruce Anderson  
Senator Gary Dahms

Senator Gene Dornink  
Senator Heather Gustafson  
Senator Mary Kunesh  
Senator Judy Seeberger

Re: S.F. 5049

April 5, 2024

Members of the House Agriculture Finance & Policy Committee,

**For over forty years, LSP has engaged tens of thousands of Minnesotans in building a more just and sustainable food system and healthy communities, the vast majority of whom are white farmers and rural people.** Decade after decade, our 4,500 members and nearly 60,000 supporters have stood up to say that we must address the historic and ongoing racism within our farm and food system farm and food system.

Our country's agricultural system was built on stolen land and labor. For generations, farmers who are Black, Indigenous, and people of color have been explicitly discriminated against by public and private institutions, unable to access capital, loans, land, and other resources that have been available for their white counterparts. While some progress has been made, institutional racism and discriminatory practices persist today. As a result, BIPOC farmers have significantly less inheritable land and generational wealth than their white counterparts, making it especially hard to start and sustain a farm. These challenges are not limited to those whose ancestors have been in the U.S. for more than a few generations. Immigrant and refugee farmers, on the whole, also lack capital, inheritable land, generational wealth, as well as face institutional racism and discriminatory practices.

**Last legislative session, LSP celebrated that our legislature took an important step towards not only recognizing the importance of emerging farmers but reckoning with our state and country's history of generations of disenfranchisement of historically underserved populations, particularly BIPOC farmers.** Our farm and food system more resilient and just with a diversified farming population and more people on the land. We know that the steps Minnesota has taken in recent years are making a difference. The 2022 Agricultural Census showed a growth in Minnesota's emerging farmer population, particularly BIPOC farmers.

**But now we are here forced to take a step backwards. We should not be in the position of having to choose between the future of these critical programs and the prioritization of emerging farmers within them.** Ultimately, this lawsuit, which is rooted in white supremacy, is a distraction that divides Minnesotans and prevents us from building the solidarity we need to change how our systems are largely failing small and mid-sized farmers, no matter our backgrounds. By pitting emerging farmers and non-emerging farmers against each other, we continue to fight over crumbs instead of coming together to fight for a bigger slice of the pie.

**But because we are, we have been working alongside our BIPOC allies to ensure legislative changes work for emerging farmers. LSP supports the author's amendment to S.F. 5049. Specifically, we appreciate the inclusion of the following:**

- Keeping the definition of “emerging farmer” intact for the purposes of the Emerging Farmers Office and Working Group. Courts continuously upheld the ability to target education, outreach, and technical assistance to historically underserved populations.
- Clarifying that the lessee or renter can be under a lease or other rental agreement. In our experience, many (if not most) rental agreements are “handshake agreements”.
- Including those renting land from an incubator farm.
- Recognizing that land access may look different for those farming on tribal-owned land.
- Including those who currently do not have land access -- owned or rented.
- Replacing limitations around markets with an economic target (under \$75,000 in net farm income in the previous year), as emerging farmers engage in a variety of markets, including aggregated markets and farm-to-institution programs.
- Using an economic target to ensure that BIPOC farmers who own land but still face challenges are included.
- Including those who do not currently have access to land, owned or rented.

To the last point, in the last three years, 146 people have graduated from LSP's Farm Beginnings Program, 35% of which are BIPOC. 49% of our BIPOC Farm Beginnings graduates from the last three years do not currently own or rent land. Moreover, farmworkers seeking to transition into starting their own farm are usually not in their own rental agreement. Those who started farming in an urban or suburban setting but seek to expand by purchasing land in a rural area are not usually under a rental agreement. It is challenging to simultaneously rent land while saving up to purchase land. **If it is the goal of our state to get more farmers on the land and repopulate rural communities, it's critical that these programs are inclusive of those who do not currently have land access.**

**LSP believes that those most impacted by public policy should be deeply engaged in its development – “nothing about us without us”. We want to thank the Minnesota Department of Agriculture and Chair Putnam's Office for their collaboration with our organizations in workshopping new bill language that we all feel comfortable moving forward with.**

**We ask for you to support S.F. 5049 as amended.**

Sincerely,



Amanda N. Koehler

LSP Policy Manager

[akoehler@landstewardshipproject.org](mailto:akoehler@landstewardshipproject.org)

651-431-1117 (cell)