

March 5, 2025

Senate Agriculture, Veterans, Broadband and Rural Development Committee
Chair Aric Putnam
Minnesota Senate Building Room 3215
St. Paul, MN 551155

Dear Chair Putnam and members of the Committee

The undersigned organizations want to voice our support for SF 882, the Soil Health Financial Assistance Program appropriation at the Minnesota Department of Agriculture. The program assists Minnesota farmers with financial resources to implement conservation practices to build soil health on their farms.

In 2022, a first of its kind grant program was authorized as a pilot at the MN Department of Agriculture to offer grants to farmers to purchase equipment to aid in soil health practice adoption. In the past as Minnesota farmers have worked to implement practices on their farms they have utilized federal and state cost-share programs. While cost-share programs and programs that allow farmers to rent equipment were helpful for early adopters, it is our organizations stance that programs that encourage ownership of equipment to begin utilizing soil health practices long term, is the best path forward to see widespread adoption of soil health practices across the state. The Soil Health Financial Assistance Grant Program does that by providing down payment assistance on equipment.

Expanding the types of financial assistance can help to de-risk new practice adoption for Minnesota farmers. A lot of attention has been given to cover crops or reduced tillage, which are important and are a component of what this programs looks to accomplish, but the use and management of manure, precision agriculture, crop rotations and grazing management should not be overlooked as beneficial practices for soil health. A broad definition of soil health and eligible practices ensures that state soil health initiatives will not be limited to a one-size fits all approach, but will instead help support farmers in different parts of the state to implement practices that work best for their individual farm operations.

Since the pilot program was passed the response to the program by Minnesota farmers has been overwhelming with over \$24,500,000 in requests compared to the \$5,250,000 that has been made available through general and clean water funds. In the 3 years that the grant program has existed, it has had an impact on over 320,000 acres.

We want to thank the committee for listening to farmers on the need to develop the pilot program in 2022 and for making it a permanent program in 2023. We support SF 882 and the Soil Health Financial Assistance Program because it is a voluntary approach to conservation

practice adoption, is inclusive of a wide array of practices that allow farmers to determine the best fit for their operation and provides financial assistance to reduce risk for new practice adoption.

Sincerely,

Conservation Minnesota

Minnesota AgriGrowth Council

Minnesota Association of Wheat Growers

Minnesota Corn Grower Association

Minnesota Farm Bureau Federation

Minnesota Farmers Union

Minnesota Milk Producers Association

Minnesota Pork Producers Association

Minnesota Soybean Growers Association

Minnesota State Cattleman's Association

Red River Valley Sugarbeet Growers Association

The Nature Conservancy