



Supporting the “Continuous Living Cover” workforce

Highlights from partners and the importance of investment

Photo: Dodd Demas for FMR

Program Purpose

This DEED program would fund early commercial development of value chains and markets for “continuous living cover” (CLC) crops and cropping systems including regenerative poultry, winter camelina, Kernza® perennial grain, hazelnuts, elderberries, and more. It would complement a smaller-scale, existing MDA effort.

Impact and History

CLC crops and cropping systems reduce nitrate leaching and soil erosion to benefit water quality, while allowing growers to diversify their income streams and build soil health.

Supply chains for these novel crops are still in early stages of development, which hinders broader adoption by growers and puts a cap on consumer demand. By providing grants to small- and mid-sized Minnesota businesses, the program will help to speed up — and scale up — these crucial enterprises.

The MN Legislature appropriated \$1m total for a similar program within the MN Department of Agriculture in the 2022 & 2023 sessions, which has aided numerous businesses with small (<\$50k) grants, as highlighted in this factsheet.

DEED is well-positioned to deliver support for larger scale efforts that expand the sector’s workforce and overall economic impact.s

Award spotlight: Perennial Pantry

Amount: \$50,000

For: Operationalizing a new facility in Northfield, MN, that will allow the business to more quickly scale up and meet demand for Kernza products, such as crackers.

“The grant dramatically accelerates everything, which really opens the door to a lot more growth and a lot more Kernza. ... It means increased viability for us as a business, and more Kernza we can source from water-quality plantings. And it means much wider availability of what we’re making.”

— Christopher Abbott
President, Perennial Pantry



Credit: Midwest Elderberry Cooperative

Award spotlight: Midwest Elderberry Cooperative

Amount: \$50,000

For: Prototyping a new de-stemming machine that will help Midwest Elderberry Cooperative growers capitalize on the untapped North American elderberry market.

"The confidence expressed by the Legislature in our efforts as farmers is very helpful in getting our story told. It should help us get interest from other investors and partners."

— Christopher Patton
President, MEC

Making an impact

Targeted investments in supply chain infrastructure and enterprise capacity fill a critical gap in financing, enabling grantees to take the next step in growing strong regional supply chains with benefits to soil, water, biodiversity, and economic development in Minnesota.

So far MDA funds have been awarded to Gertens Greenhouses (propagation of 10,000 hazelnut trees); MSX Nexgen Inc. (winter camelina handling equipment); Rookie Farmers LLC (mobile camelina seed cleaner); Perennial Promise Growers Cooperative (Kernza marketing and business development); Regenerative Agriculture Alliance (hazelnut harvester and de-husker); Nine Hazels Farm (hazelnut seedling greenhouse improvements); and numerous others.

A new DEED program would build upon these early successes by providing funding and business development expertise for enterprises positioned for commercial breakthrough. Such a program would also allow for better integration of the sustainable agriculture sector into the State's overall workforce strategies.

2025 and Beyond: Need for Continued Support

Demand for funding has exceeded available resources, but support from the Legislature and DEED in 2025 and beyond will enable the next round of entrepreneurship and enterprise scaling, amplify progress to date, and ensure that our investments in CLC basic research translate to better market and environmental outcomes for Minnesota.

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