



Emerging Farmers' Working Group

Legislative Report

01/15/2023



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This report cost approximately \$1,000 to prepare, including staff time, printing, and mailing expenses (MINN. STAT. 3.197).

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Introduction

“I am grateful for everyone that was part of the Emerging Farmers’ Working Group and the opportunity to speak about the challenges and barriers I’ve experienced. This space allowed me to share my land access challenges as well as capital access. I was able to connect with other black, indigenous, people of color (BIPOC) farmers who shared similar barriers but more importantly, it was powerful to exchange ideas in ways we can overcome some of these issues. It’s important to have the emerging farmers working group because it’s crucial that all voices are heard and I’m grateful that MDA is leading this very important discussion.”

--Naima Dhore, member of the 1st Emerging Farmers’ Working Group and president of the Somali American Farmer’s Association (SAFA)

In 2022, Minnesota agriculture experienced numerous obstacles. Supply chain shortages and bottlenecks, inflation, interest rate hikes, direct government payments on the decline, and severe weather all affected the agricultural sector and access to food. At the same time, Minnesota continues to be the epicenter of the nation's racial reckoning and a place of healing, with a great deal of community action focused on bringing communities together around healing and gardening. For example, a focal point of George Floyd Square in Minneapolis is a community garden that represents growth, strength, and everyone coming together. Minnesota is seeing urban agriculture and mobile food hubs on the rise as strategies to address food deserts in urban communities.

However, the agricultural opportunity is not equally available to all Minnesotans. For example, several factors have contributed to the decline of Black-owned farms in the United States, including federal programs and policies that excluded Blacks from land purchases. Taken together, the inability of Black Americans to fully participate in the land market has resulted in a lost opportunity for generational wealth creation. “Today, just 1.4 percent of farmers nationally identify as Black or mixed race compared with about 14 percent 100 years ago.” (*McKinsey & Company 2021*). These farmers represent less than 0.5 percent of total US farm sales.

With the average age of a Minnesota farmer at 56 years old, farm transfer and succession planning are critically important for the future of the sector. The Emerging Farmers’ Working Group (EWFG) was created in 2020 to address the needs of emerging farmers throughout the state. The Minnesota Department of Agriculture’s (MDA) Emerging Farmer Office (EFO) is exploring pathways and opportunities that will help emerging farmers to overcome disparities regarding land access and transfer, limited experience with farming, lack of knowledge about business planning, and other issues. This report highlights, reflects, and builds upon the work that has been done to boost the growth of the emerging farmers movement and the work of Minnesota’s Department of Agriculture to adapt and become a national leader in supporting rural and urban emerging farmers.

What are “Emerging Farmers?”

“Emerging” can refer to something that is starting to exist, or something which is just beginning to be noticed. In this regard, the term “Emerging Farmers” encompasses both those individuals who are entirely new to farming as well as those who have been farming for generations but were outside the scope of traditional state and Federal agricultural support programs. The focus on emerging farmers is relatively new to government agencies.

While the USDA often uses the term “historically underserved,” the MDA currently uses the term “Emerging Farmers” to includes women, veterans, people with disabilities, Native Americans/Alaska Natives, Black farmers, farmers of color, young and beginning farmers, LBGQTQIA+ farmers, and more. The term is intended to encompass the diversity and intersectionality of farmers, and the way that barriers can affect multiple communities at the same time. For example, a young, African American woman interested in farming will likely face several systemic barriers, many of which may be similar—and some different—than an older, non-English speaking male immigrant. Using the term “emerging” farmer helps to frame the conversation around the shared experiences of many communities within the conversation.

Table 1 shows the most recent Census of Agriculture numbers for various Emerging farmer groups in Minnesota. A new farm census is currently underway, and the MDA anticipate the number of farmers of color and indigenous farmers in Minnesota will increase.

Table 1. Farmers in Minnesota by race

Race	Number of farmers in Minnesota
African American/Black	39
American Indian/Alaska Native	180
Asian	399
Hispanic/Latino	651
Multiracial	296
Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islander	22
Young	11,520
White	110,824
Total	111,760

Source: 2017 USDA Census of Agriculture

While the work of the EFWG centers on the experience of emerging farmers, its recommendations and insights have a bearing on all farmers in Minnesota. Established farmers have a significant role to play in advocating for, and providing mentorship to, emerging farmers. Equity and justice in the agricultural system improves the overall sector and can create a more robust and resilient economy for all Minnesotans. Land ownership and agricultural professions are a key pathway to building inter-generational wealth, both within family units and within communities. Opening pathways for emerging farmers can also revitalize rural communities and increase economic activities in Greater Minnesota.

The Emerging Farmers' Working Group

The EFWG was initiated by a legislative request in 2019 and formally signed in law in 2020.

"To advise the commissioner and legislature regarding the development and implementation of programs and initiatives that support emerging farmers in this state, the commissioner must periodically convene a working group consisting, to the extent possible, of persons who are, and organizations that represent, farmers or aspiring farmers who are women, veterans, persons with disabilities, American Indian or Alaskan Natives, members of a community of color, young, and urban, and any other emerging farmers as determined by the commissioner. No later than January 15 each year, the commissioner must update the chairs and ranking minority members of the legislative committees and divisions with jurisdiction over agriculture regarding the working group's activities and recommendations." (MINN. STAT. 17.055)

The definition of an emerging farmer expanded throughout the 2019 listening sessions to encompass several historically underserved communities, farming practices, and values. Appendix A lists many of the barriers emerging farmers experience.

The largest tension that persists between the MDA and the EFWG is the balance between providing critical information and time for open dialogue. The MDA has retained an outside facilitator, who helps guide discussions, identify key themes, and bring all voices into the conversation. The facilitator also helps develop meeting agendas and responds to feedback from working group members and other stakeholders.

During meetings, the facilitator has worked to assure time for conversation, so that MDA staff and members of the working group learn from one another. Moreover, members have learned that other farmers in their personal networks want regular updates on the progress of this body.

In early June 2022, the EFWG held a closed meeting – with facilitation, but without MDA staff present. Below are examples of needs discussed during the session that have already shaped the work of the MDA EFO.

- Find ways to integrate EFWG priorities across the entire agency.
- Provide educational opportunities to the staff of the MDA about emerging farmers and the history of emerging farmers in Minnesota.
- Strengthen the relationship between tribal nations and the MDA through our Tribal Liaison and develop strategies to support Native producers.
- Continue conversations about land access and down payment assistance.
- Explore new outreach approaches to reach emerging farmers, e.g., social media, website accessibility, translation, etc.
- Increase staffing support for emerging farmers.
- Provide resources and assistance for farm business planning and grant writing.

In 2022, the MDA partnered with other groups and organizations to address the needs of emerging farmers. For example:

- Worked with Minnesota State Colleges and Universities to provide a metro area Farm Business Management Instructor.
- Participated in a Minnesota Africans United trade mission to Ghana and Cameroon to encourage trade with Minnesota's emerging farmers. This mission trip included the Assistant Commissioner Patrice Bailey, EFWG Facilitator Michael Birchard, and EFWG member Ben Dossman. This is the first time in the MDA's history that the agency has participated in a trade mission to the continent of Africa.
- Hosted a "Concept" training opportunity for MDA staff that focused on the challenges emerging farmers face and featured an EFWG member panel.
- Provided trainings for other state agencies (e.g., Board of Water and Soil Resources) focused on the obstacles emerging farmers face and strategies to lessen them.
- Hosted listening sessions at various events throughout the state. Participated in panel discussions with EFWG members at events such as the Sustainable Farming Association and Emerging Farmer conferences.

EFWG members understand that their participation must focus on supporting emerging farmers throughout the state. Members are self-directed, the facilitator encourages them to advocate for ideas and strategies in ways that are self-serving, but that serve the entire emerging farmer community throughout the state.

Process, membership, and terms

Membership on the EFWG is a two-year term that begins in November meeting. We advertise the opportunity with a press release from the MDA, social media posts through the MDA Twitter and Facebook accounts, external partners' email newsletters, and outreach to stakeholder groups. We received 45 applications for the opportunity to serve on the EFWG. They came in from every part of the state, and included a wide range of demographics including age, race, ethnicity, farming practices, professional experience, LGBTQIA+ identity, and gender.

The applications were reviewed by a committee which included the MDA Commissioner, Deputy Commissioner, Assistant Commissioner, Tribal Liaison, EFO Coordinator, and EFWG Facilitator. The selection process was designed to ensure geographical, racial, gender and generational diversity, and to consider specific targeted populations from the legislative language.

Nine applicants were selected to serve on the EFWG; six of them were returning members.

EFWG members

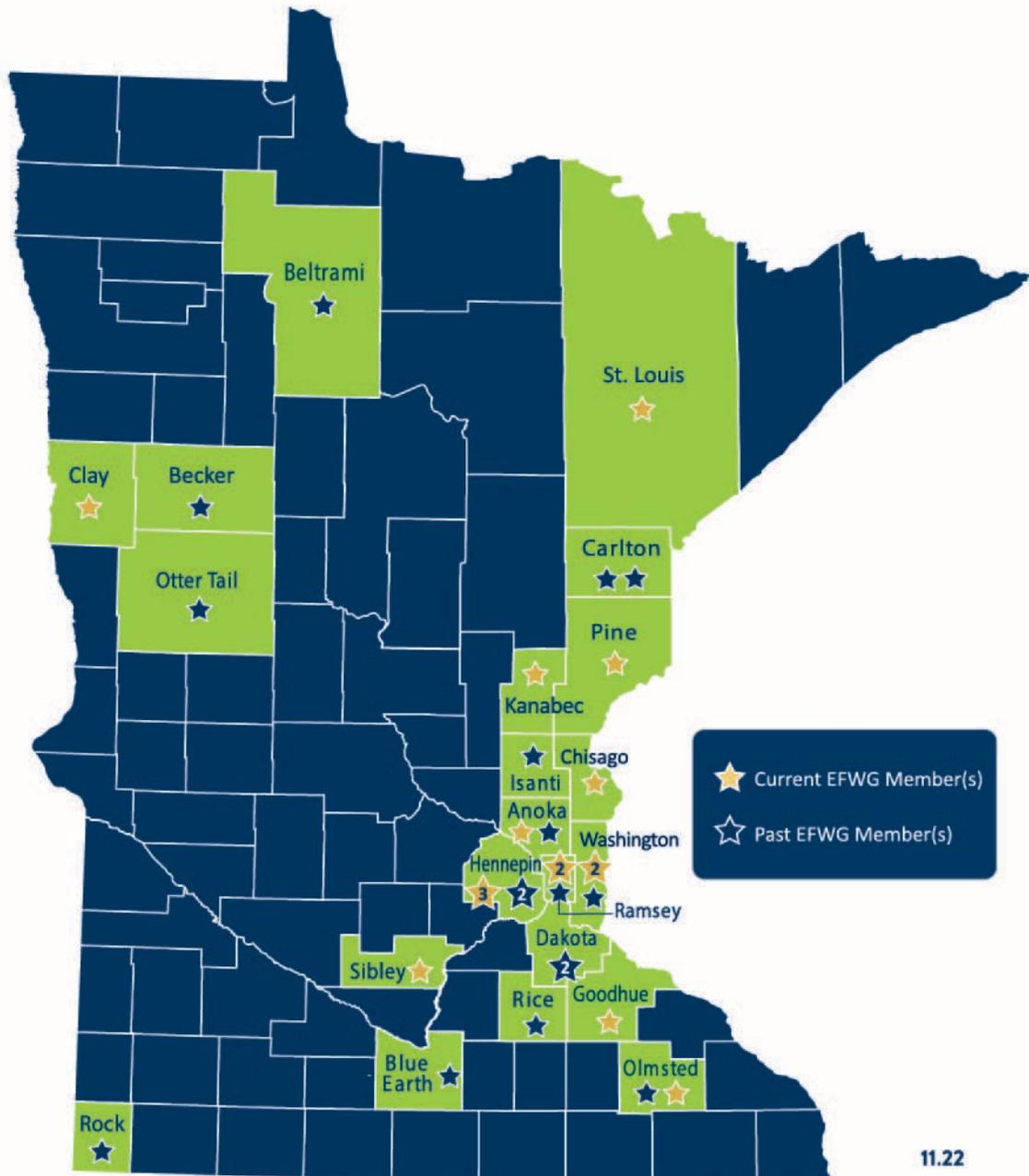
Current

- Ngozi Akubuike, Ramsey County
- Hannah Bernhardt, Pine County
- Nikki Crowe, St. Louis County
- Alexandra Diemer, Hennepin County
- Ben Dossman, Hennepin County
- Mark Gutierrez, Ramsey County
- Kyle Huneke, Goodhue County
- Kelsey Love-Zaavedra, Chisago County
- Murigi Mutiga, Washington County
- Caliton Ntahompagaze, Clay County
- Ian Oundo, Anoka County
- Lisa Schultz, Olmstead County
- Celeste VerHelst, Hennepin County
- Jane Windsperger, Kanabec County
- Shelly Woods, Sibley County

Past

- Gina Aguilar, Hennepin
- Elizabeth Bryant, Rice
- Naima Dhore, Ramsey
- Rebecca Dosch Brown, Hennepin
- Jessika Greendeer, Washington
- Bridget Guiza, Becker
- Janssen Hang, Dakota
- Mohammed Hassan, Olmstead
- Denise King, Anoka
- Lucas Kruse, Blue Earth
- David Manuel, Beltrami
- Moses Momanyi, Isanti
- Albert Nyamari, Ramsey
- Hindolo Pokawa, Hennepin
- Emily Reno, Otter Tail
- Erika Resendiz Alonso, Carlton
- Sai Thao, Dakota
- Miah Ulysse, Ramsey
- Michael Walgrave, Rock
- Kaitlyn Walsh, Carlton

Figure 1. Map showing counties of current and past EFWG members



Additionally, the MDA has chosen to contract with a facilitator. The facilitator helps with guiding the discussion, identifying key themes, and bringing all voices into the conversation. The facilitator also assists with setting the agendas, following a structure of the meetings, and responding to feedback from working group members and other stakeholders. The facilitator provides guidance and support to MDA leadership and EFWG members.

2022 EFWG meetings

November 2021

The November meeting began with the introduction of the new members to the EFWG. Commissioner Thom Petersen opened the meeting with a welcome and each member had an opportunity to introduce themselves. Emerging Farmer Outreach & Engagement Coordinator Lillian Otieno discussed the guidelines and expectations of the group and group members. The Assistant Commissioner announced the new Ag License plate will be coming in early 2022. The Director of Government Relations Peder Kjeseth gave a legislative update. Assistant Commissioner of DEED Anisa Hajimumin discussed a recent project she is working on to look at what state policies and systems hinder immigrants and refugees from starting businesses or finding jobs. She and Assistant Commissioner Bailey provided updates on how this impacts emerging farmers.

February 2022

The February meeting gave Commissioner Petersen an opportunity to announce Peder Kjeseth in the new role of Assistant Commissioner and to introduce Michelle Medina as the new Director of Government Services. Lillian Otieno provided an update from the MDA Emerging Farmer Outreach and Engagement Office. MDA employees Valerie Gamble and Alex Cortes discussed a new opportunity for the MDA to participate in a federal grant called the Local Food Purchase Assistant Cooperative Agreement Program. Gamble and Cortes also asked for volunteers to participate in an additional meeting to generate ideas to include in the grant application. MDA employee Lebo Moore asked EFWG members to participate in and share with community networks the Cooperative Partnership Producer Survey.

April 2022

The April meeting featured a video from Lieutenant Governor Peggy Flanagan thanking inaugural and current working group members for their advocacy and leadership. Deputy Commissioner Andrea Vaubel provided an update that included developments in the legislature, a conversation around the avian influenza outbreak, a budget forecast, and drought relief funding. Lillian Otieno provided an update from the MDA Emerging Farmer Outreach and Engagement Office which included her work with the Midwest Farmers of Color Coalition and the African Growers and Producers Alliance. Otieno also announced that she would be working out of the Governor's office for two months. MDA employees Valerie Gamble and Alex Cortes provided an update on the progress toward the Local Food Purchase Assistant Cooperative Agreement Program grant. Gigi DiGiacomo, University of Minnesota Professor of Applied Economics in the College of Food, Agriculture, and Natural Resources discussed the Farm Business Management Scholarships available to emerging farmers. Working Group member Emily Reno facilitated a visioning/brainstorming conversation amongst the membership around what the ideal 'user experience' with the MDA is like for an emerging farmer.

August 2022

The August meeting opened with Deputy Commissioner Andrea Vaubel providing an update on developments in the state legislature and that the online portal to submit legislative ideas for the 2023 session was open. Commissioner Vaubel also discussed the Down Payment Assistance Program. Facilitator Michael Birchard and Working Group member Emily Reno provided a recap of the June Special Meeting (without the MDA present).

Facilitator Birchard and Assistant Commissioner Patrice Bailey discussed the application process to recruit new members. MDA employees Valerie Gamble and Alex Cortes provided an update on the progress toward the Local Food Purchase Assistant Cooperative Agreement Program grant.

October 2022

At the October meeting we began by honoring the members that were cycling off the working group and provided time for each outgoing member to give reflections, solutions, and recommendations. Deputy Commissioner Andrea Vaubel provided an update on developments in the state legislature and that the online portal had over 350 submissions. Deputy Commissioner Vaubel also gave an update on the Down Payment Assistance Program. Assistant Commissioner Patrice Bailey discussed the upcoming Emerging Farmers Conference and the listening session sponsored by the MDA. MDA employees Valerie Gamble and Alex Cortes discussed the USDA Land Capital and Market Access Grant and provided a brief update on the Local Food Purchase Assistant Cooperative Agreement Program grant. Leaders from the Minnesota Farmers' Market Association provided an update on the Farm Financial Resource Collaborative.

November 2022

The November meeting began with the introduction of the new members to the EFWG. The MDA Legal Counsel, Chris McNulty, reviewed the Data Practices Act and the Open Meeting Laws. Lillian Otieno provided an update from the MDA Emerging Farmer Outreach and Engagement Office and gave a recap of the Emerging Farmers' Conference. Assistant Commissioner Patrice Bailey provided a brief legislative update. Deputy Commissioner Vaubel and MDA employee Jenny Heck gave an update on the Down Payment Assistance Program. The working group heard a presentation from Farm Business Management Specialty Crops Instructors.

The MDA Emerging Farmer Office

The MDA created the EFO on the recommendation of the first EFWG. It was funded by the Minnesota Legislature in 2021.

The EFO's charge is to:

- Act as a liaison between farmers and all the MDA divisions as a kind of one-stop shop to address equity in policies, processes, procedures, and programs.
- Listen, engage, and learn from emerging farmers to continue to inform the structure, evolution, and development of the EFO.
- Address language barriers that include translation and interpretation of materials and resources. Intentional language access at inception, development and delivery of materials and services.
- Help farmers navigate public-private partnerships in agriculture and connecting with nonprofits.
- Support and partner with allies who are not emerging farmers, but who are interested in sharing their expertise and resources to impact addressing equity and justice in agriculture for all.
- Expand interagency collaborations and advocate for emerging farmers with other Minnesota state agencies.

The above vision comports with the Governor's [One Minnesota](#) guidelines and principles on equity and inclusion, notably, "ask how your actions are reinforcing or removing structural inequity" and "include voices from communities who will be most impacted." The EFO has seen a significant increase in inquiries from diverse Minnesotans interested in participating in the agricultural economy; we think this is due to the fact that they now have direct contact at the MDA who will listen to their challenges and respond to their needs.

Engagement

The EFO's sole staff member is an Outreach and Engagement Coordinator, who has spent her first year building relationships, expanding on existing relationships, and connecting emerging farmers with MDA programs or external partners and stakeholders. In 2022, some of those groups and activities included:

- Women farming groups like "Soil Sisters" in southern Minnesota, and "Tulime" in Lino Lakes;
- Amish, Mennonite (Plain) farmers in St Charles and Chatsfield, Minn.; Black, Indigenous, and People of Color (BIPOC) farming communities in Rochester, Minn.;
- Urban agriculture events in north Minneapolis and Midwest Farmers of Color Collective sessions;
- Afghan community and Somali farmers interested in opportunities in raising livestock, slaughter, and butcher of animals for halal meats;
- African immigrant farmers from Nigeria, Senegal, Somalia, Kenya, Ethiopia, Sudan, and others are looking at growing traditional vegetables and produce and value-added opportunities; presentation at African Growers and Producers Alliance (AGAPA) inaugural annual event;
- Engagement with Hmong American Partnership (HAP) in support of federal funding request opportunities and further collaboration in support of Hmong farmers; and
- Presentation at the Governor's Latino Leaders Monthly Meeting about the EFO and EFWG.

The EFO held a helpful listening session at the 17th Annual Emerging Farmers Conference and gathered valuable feedback to inform ongoing work and future focus areas (Appendix B).

The EFO also participates in the Farm Financial Resource Collaborative, which is a group of 10 organizations (Renewing the Countryside, Latino Economic Development Center, Minnesota Farmers Market Association, the MDA, The Good Acre, Land Stewardship Project, Central Lakes College, The Food Group, Minnesota Institute for Sustainable Agriculture, and the University of Minnesota) and works to address financial education and technical assistance for emerging farmers.

The EFO organized eight informational sessions with MDA division and program staff on state and federal grants development, positioning the Emerging Farmers' Working Group's mandate to advise and recommend on development of grants and programs like the Local Foods Purchasing Assistance Program; Local Foods for Schools; Down Payment Assistance Program; and Statewide Cooperative Partnership Agreement surveys. Internal engagement and collaboration with six MDA divisions, programs, Tribal Liaison Coordinator, Diversity-Equity-Inclusion (DEI) Coordinator on outreach and engagement activities and opportunities is ongoing.

The EFO participated in inter-agency conversations and collaborations with the Department of Employment and Economic Development (DEED) Assistant Commissioner of Immigrant and Refugees Affairs, community conversations; and the Minneapolis/St. Paul Immigration Forum. The EFO also participates in an interagency working group that includes the Minnesota Department of Education, Department of Human Services, and Minnesota Department of Health and focuses on leveraging services for emerging farmers.

Communication

Engagement and communication is the foundation of the EFO, which has developed the following communication channels:

- Emerging Farmer Newsletter, which comes out quarterly
- Emerging Farmer Office e-mail address, mda.emerging.farmers@state.mn.us
- Emerging Farmer Office Helpline, (651) 201 6200
- Emerging Farmers webpage, <https://www.mda.state.mn.us/emerging-farmers>
- Emerging Farmers' Working Group open meetings

The EFO advocated, supported, and funded the translation of materials and consecutive interpretation at MDA-led information/listening sessions and meetings. Examples include MDA legislative feedback and information gathering sessions to inform the agriculture budget proposal, the Emerging Farmers Conference exhibit area and listening sessions, and Local Food Purchasing Assistance Program sessions.

Focus

Looking ahead, the EFO intends to focus on the following areas:

- Land Access
 - Finding land to farm close to metro areas is a big challenge.
 - Some rural land is not in areas that farmers feel welcome.
 - The cost of farmland is often not affordable.
- Culturally Relevant Technical Assistance
 - Emerging farmers are diverse in their farm operations, language, culture and therefore require assistance that is relevant to their needs.
 - Continue to participate in Farm Finance Resource Collaborative, 10 organizations working on developing financial literacy training for direct marketing, emerging, BIPOC, specialty and small-scale farmers.
- Grants and Resources
 - In 2022, the MDA received a new Down Payment Assistant Grant and [Rep. Samantha Vang](#) (DFL-Brooklyn Center), was the chief author of bill [HF3263](#). This bill would provide grants up to \$15,000 per eligible farmer through the Department of Agriculture, which would receive \$3 million for the program in fiscal year 2023. This new grant is a game changer since acquiring land is always the number one barrier for entry into agriculture. See Appendix D for the flyer that explains the new grant program.
 - Emerging farmers need grants to buy equipment, improve their farms, transportation needs, assist with training, education costs and more.
 - They need resources to help them apply for grants and meet reporting requirements.
 - Review current MDA grants to determine how to address equity in the design and requirements of the grants, including legislative recommendations.
- Language Accessibility
 - Emerging Farmers speak many languages and, in some cases, more than one language.
 - Most MDA resources are in English and sometimes difficult to understand.
 - The MDA needs adequate resources to provide necessary language resource translation and interpretation, as well as alternative delivery methods like audio to address literacy challenges.
- Data Collection Resources
 - Farmer stories are important to better advocate for and develop resources and programs that meet the needs of emerging farmers in a meaningful way to promote agriculture for all in Minnesota.
 - The EFO does not have resources and capacity to collect data that can also inform MDA programs to advocate for emerging farmer needs. These resources can also provide more access and education on the Agriculture Census.

The EFO will pursue more engagement and communication opportunities with communities in Minnesota by developing informational materials, social media presence, training, language accessibility and more. Federal and state grants require long term administrative support and management as emerging farmer communities are empowered to participate in the agricultural economy – beyond the farm to value added products and more. This work will not be possible without addressing the infrastructure and capacity of the EFO.

Recommendations

The following recommendations are a starting place to support and cultivate emerging farmers in the state.

- Add additional staff to the Emerging Farmer Office (EFO) to assist in scope of work.
- Address health insurance costs and student loan debt for emerging farmers.
- Support equity and inclusivity training in farming communities to strengthen connections between current farmers and emerging farmers.
- Create specific grant opportunities for emerging farmers that will help them establish farm business, rather than improving or expanding an existing farm business. Consider higher percentages of cost-sharing, and/or longer loan terms for emerging farmer groups.
- Implement advanced payment options for grant funding to emerging farmers, (For example, the USDA's Natural Resources Conservation Service Environmental Quality Incentives Program issues advance payments to historically underserved farmers -- before they implement new practices.
- Provide trainings to farm service providers to help reduce barriers for emerging farmers, including equity and implicit bias training, and alternative models of agriculture (regenerative, direct-marketing, perennial etc.).
- Provide funding for farm service providers to translate materials and trainings.
- Dedicate further attention to the history of land ownership and farming in Minnesota. University research on the cultural and social history of agriculture in the state would provide context for emerging farmers and the communities in which they live.
- Advance Farm-to-School/Institution initiatives as a market development tool for emerging farmers.
- Articulate a vision for agriculture in Minnesota that encompasses emerging farmers and small/midsize farming businesses.
- Work to reframe the story of farming as an opportunity for underserved communities. Market the stories of emerging farmers to show examples of how farming can be practiced.

Looking to the Future

As the EFWG enters its third year, it will reduce meetings to six per year, which is in closer alignment with other MDA advisory groups. The MDA will continue to provide support and technical assistance to the group, along with a contracted facilitator. Moving forward, the group's process will follow the recommendation of Working Group members to promote active participation, transparency, and sustainability. In Appendix C we have listed additional resources. The MDA and the EFWG will continue to pursue the following:

- Additional translation services
- Farm Advocates program in the metro
- Develop a one-stop shop for emerging farmers at the MDA: It would focus on resources for emerging farmers, which includes training resources, grants and funding opportunities, and other materials. One model is the Starting a Food Business Roadmap, hosted by the MDA and developed in partnership with community organizations and businesses.
- Focus on farmland access: Dedicate further attention to the history of land ownership and farming in Minnesota. University research on the cultural and social history of agriculture in the state would provide context for emerging farmers and the communities in which they live.
- Focus on infrastructure for emerging farmers/local & regional markets
- Additional items to be determined after conversations with key stakeholders.

Appendix A: Ongoing Barriers that Emerging Farmers Face

The themes listed have and continue to be the mainstay barriers that continue to exist as emerging farmers look to ways of entry to become successful in agriculture.

Definition of an emerging farmer

- young
- person of color
- career change
- farm worker to farm owner
- no family ties to farming
- conscious decision to farm
- anyone who wants to be a farmer
- urban farmer
- culturally diverse
- Somali/halal
- new immigrant farmer
- grows specialty crops, crops from another country
- trying to change the status quo
- having another job in addition to farming
- beginning farmer tax credit is too limiting
- agriculture classifications are too limiting to new farming structures
- infrastructure is expensive- drilling a well costs 15k
- healthcare
- student loan debt
- networks and community are limited in rural setting
- information availability
- consolidation of farmland
- lack of mentorship
- no family background
- lack of equipment
- capital gains tax

Barriers

- money
- knowledge gap
- access to viable markets
- access to finances, facilities
- pricing
- true cost of food
- navigating financial & technical assistance
- lack of training programs
- language barriers
- economies of scale
- blending of traditional and new practices
- lack of insurance
- finding resources
- machines
- no room for error or risk
- lack of training programs
- business training and record keeping
- lack of appreciation
- navigating the transition to farming

Racism

- rural communities need to be more open to changing demographics
- meetings need to be intentional about who is invited to table
- treaty rights must be acknowledged
- cross-cultural mentorships
- churches and civic groups have role
- more minorities in leadership positions
- young farmers, POC on boards and in leadership positions
- safety for farmers of color, and women
- culturally diverse crops
- community dinners to bridge gaps
- address perception in communities of color that land is too expensive, showcase success stories of POC landowners
- targeted outreach into communities of immigrants, POC
- more POC instructors

Facilities

- make organic certification more accessible
- partnerships and space sharing
- HAFA, WEI, The Good Acre
- aid food hubs in work
- work with cities to rezone for agricultural uses
- community co-op solutions
- shared equipment, employee sharing, facility sharing
- shared slaughter, mobile slaughter, halal markets
- curing stations, cold storage, delivery assistance
- educating local governments, agencies about local food needs
- co-op everything
- contract for deed rental agreements
- support SWCD's buying shared equipment
- facilitate greenhouse use expansion

Financing

- need something similar to SCORE for emerging farmers
- funding to attend conferences
- farm business education for all emerging farmers
- increase awareness of financing opportunities
- targeted campaigns, translated materials
- financial literacy training
- templates for certain documents
- simplifying process to access resources
- central shop, road map
- explore VC partnerships
- credit score barriers
- ag business planning funding
- loan guarantee programs
- religiously sensitive borrowing options
- tax increment financing
- banking hub, info hub specific to emerging farmers

Legal

- tax increment financing
- food production subsidies like corn/soy
- increase incentives for co-op land use
- land trusts specific to ag
- more education on legal coop models
- anticorporate farm law
- purchase and development rights
- longer term land leases

Various

- rural internet
- childcare at conferences
- coordinating various conferences
- research into quantifying monetary benefits of small farms on a rural community
- increased focus on seed saving
- new process for introduction of accepted crops/practices
- MDA facilitated meetups
- connect successful grant recipients to those seeking grants
- state mandated funds for ag education
- FFA in emerging and immigrant communities
- renewed back to the land movement
- interfaith/intercultural collaborative programs
- collaboration with native communities
- create central resource hub
- scholarships for nontraditional education
- RFA could grant riskier loans
- build and support incubator, accelerator programs like LSP, SFA
- most growers' associations don't reach emerging farmers
- work and learn models for school credit
- lack of accredited programs, degrees
- navigators to connect farmers to ed opportunities

Appendix B: Listening Session, 2022 Emerging Farmer Conference

MDA staff present: Assistant Commissioner Patrice Bailey, Lillian Otieno, Jenny Heck, Stephanie Ende, Mallory Forseth, Kate Seybold, and Alex Cortes

Facilitator: Michael Birchard

Approximately 25 attendees participated. Attendees arrived throughout the session; approximately 12 were present at the beginning of the session when Michael asked some initial questions to get a sense of who was in the room through a show of hands:

- ~3 attendees farming 5 year or less
- ~1 attendee farming ten years or less
- ~6 farmers of color
- 1 – 2 current landowners
- 4 – 5 attendees looking for land
- 0 aspiring farmers
- 4 ag professionals
- All have previously heard of the MDA

Priorities

AC Bailey and Lillian provided an overview of the EFO's current priority areas:

- Land access
- Culturally relevant technical assistance (TA)
- Grants and resources
- Language accessibility
- Data

Question

What's your reaction to these priorities? Are they hitting the key needs?

- Yes, hitting the priorities. I've been in Minnesota for a while. Land access is very big. Have been looking at land access and how I can get it. This year is the year that I see MDA actively talking about this. Culturally relevant TA is also important – we have diverse communities in Minnesota. Can people find help on vegetables that they grow and that they eat? If you go to a master gardener, you don't find people that look like you. They talk about shrubs and flowers. We grow vegetables. We come from underrepresented areas, have our regular jobs, have our families, want to feed them healthy stuff. When you look at language access, most of the documents are in English. A lot of immigrants don't speak the language fluently but still want to know the laws, regulations. And data - it's true. We're doing it, but we're not collectively sharing the data.

- I think emerging farmers are connected to these priorities. The problem is in the process of being able to navigate. Especially with land access, we'll see how that pans out, because that's one of the impediments for growth for us. The resources are there, but it's a daunting process. For example – there are a lot of loan programs to access land. We hit a snag with the traditional banks, come back to the agency, still a snag. You hear testimony from someone's that's been denied, and then where do you go? Something in that whole process that needs a review from your agency to make it more friendly. Maybe part of that's in education, there's not enough training and education in how to prepare yourself for the program. Invest in that outreach and education.
- Yes, most of the things are right. But for me there are some things missing. Especially when you are saying language accessibility. Most of the time there's only one or two communities represented in the language, and then there are some communities left out. People who don't speak English at all, people who don't document. We need an office where we can walk in and say "hey, I have people who don't speak English. Can you help them?"
- Land access is another problem, before I get to own my own land, can the office do something as an intermediary step, to support farmers before they grow to own their own land?
- Getting to the resources on how to fill out grants is terrible. If we can have an office where people can go, that would help.
- Census – I didn't understand what the need is or how to do it. Please explain it again.
- This is all great. I'm glad that I've gotten to go through the process of growing and learning how hard it is. I had a quarter acre plot, I had that much produce, and boy was it hard to get rid of it. One of the things that we need to get very creative on how we support these farmers is the marketability and helping farmers find markets. Otherwise, we can go through all this [the EFO priorities], we help them to get growing but then what if they can't sell. Is there something we could do better than what's happening now?
- Outreach is missing from these priorities. I think what we are doing here is outreach but we could benefit more from having more of these types of conversations outside of these events. That would help us understand all of this better. More listening sessions. More outreach.
- Give us somewhere to start from. Let us have information on where to go. Need somebody who we can go to and ask. And need to hear the languages, not just from one type of emerging farmers, but all of them.
- I second the language, the outreach, the need for more of it.
- I started two years ago as an emerging farmer. I've seen a lot of improvement. I've seen a lot of a work on the ground. I cannot thank Lillian enough for just pushing us into farming. Never dreamt in my life that I'd be a farmer. Now more mature and realize what's important. I've found a lot of therapy in farming. Almost every event I go to, she's talking about farming. And Moses M. for giving us that energy, reenergizing us. The need is growing, it's bigger and bigger. Farmers are helping each other with outreach. Baby steps, but heading in the right direction. Even just coming here.
 - With regards to land access – there are folks that are willing to share, but they have other things that they're tackling – family dynamics, challenges. My disappointment personally is I live in Carver County. I chose to be there, so I'm not complaining. Called my local [USDA] office initially. They were not receptive. And I wasn't sure whether it was my accent. I don't play the race card, I don't do that, but it supported everything that I'd heard about the county. We need to work on inclusion in rural areas. More training, to support folks out there. That's where all the land is. They were so rude, it was so unnecessary, but I didn't give up. Feedback for the local offices: they are representing the whole community.

Engagement

EFO Coordinator Lillian Otieno presented information about current communications and engagement tools used by the EFO and ways farmers can connect with the office.

Question 1

What is your reaction to the communications that are happening?

- The communication outlets presented will serve the community, but you need to make sure that you're getting the right communication out. And presented in a way that can be digested by the recipients. You mentioned a small budget. Looking at the landscape here, everyone that turned out here at the conference – what do we do as a community to expand the budget to meet the obvious needs? We are hungry, passionate about what we do. I'm afraid we might miss the opportunity to meet the need for emerging farmers. I think Lillian can work with the Emerging Farmers' Working Group to see how they can be a teammate, support her to serve the community better. To manage that with the meager resources that we have.
 - The other thing I wanted to mention, outside of this, is that there's been a mention of urban farmers [*during the presentation*]. Some of us are not urban. Want to make sure that those of us that are in the boonies are not excluded.
- To expand on that, Lillian doing an amazing job. I believe that at the end of the day, one of the things I've told AC Bailey and why I became a member of the Emerging Farmers' Working Group is that I see this as a family. Because we are a family, it also is on us to be a part of the conversation. With as big of a showing of the people that showed up today, the need is there. We also have to be ambassadors for AC Bailey and Lillian. They're a one-man, one-woman office. We need to be talking to our elected officials, and asking "what are you doing to support that office?" In order for them to support us, they need support.
- This is a great session; I'm so excited to learn about this office. I work for an electric cooperative. Related to the ideas of creativity in innovation and equitable impacts that have been discussed – something that we have today in the north metro is 120 acres of solar projects. And that's just one of Minnesota's 28 electric coops. Looking forward, we're going to have another 120 acres, and then another 120 acres. There are a lot of solar projects coming that could easily carve out portions of land, quarter acres spots, to serve new and immigrant farmers. Our motivation as a cooperative is to think about how we can provide benefit for our members. It doesn't solve the land access issue, but there are opportunities for land to be used for solar + small farmer access. Would love to be in dialogue with MDA about how we can be part of this solution. Lot of money going into that space, some of that could be peeled off to support issues related to prime farmland and solar development.
 - Who would MDA contact? We're at the very beginning of that process. Looking forward to plan ahead. Today that contact person would be me – Rob Davis at Connexus Energy.
- I work with the new host organization for the New Roots Farm Incubator Project. Quick story about a different place, Pelican Rapids. Has a large concentration of BIPOC residents, many of whom work at the turkey processing facility. Many speak Spanish, another large group from Somalia. A couple of years ago the community had a Local Food Local Places grant. Identified farm incubator as part of their community plan. Have done some investigation there. There's a missing piece to doing it. Need community initiators, navigators, organizers, to find the people who would want to participate in a farm incubator and increase their production. I spent several days at the food shelf last winter and found 25 people who were interested. But because there's no navigator, it's been slow moving. We need people whose function it is to serve as the bridges/community liaisons/community organizers between new projects, to find folks that would really like to scale up their production.

Question 2

How many people had previously heard about the new Down Payment Assistance Program prior to walking into this room?

~4 people raised their hands.

Using that as an example – you heard about it here, how would you like to learn about it if you hadn't heard about it here?

- I think by tapping community partners, other nonprofits and agricultural organizations, like Katie from SFA. I'm the Cannon River SFA coordinator. I read Katie's newsletter, and if it's in there then I would have passed it on. Sometimes the things from MDA have a lot of text. It's a little overwhelming.
- The working group should be tapping this info to the people. We are in just the beginning now; we are going to expand so we can reach others. If the emerging farmers can put this information into all of the counties, e.g., Kanabec County, then I can get the information there.
- Let's all play a part, besides the working group, let's each take part in sharing the information as well. I believe referrals are very powerful. When you get information, you pass it on to a contact. We don't read all the information, that's a weakness, let's try and read the information we get. For the outreach for the office, I know it's too much for one person. Hopefully they're working on it. But we're here in the meantime.
- Maybe we can leverage our FSA offices and get more info through those offices. Obviously, there's some concerns, I share the experiences previously mentioned. Let them know ahead of time though, prep them to work with emerging farmers, and equip them with the information. No, we're not all just gathering, coming to your office, you can send us there. Also partnering with Extension, can channel information through there because they also have a lot of offices.
- We should advocate for more staff, and not just the one person in the office. We need to know how. As farmers, we don't know necessarily know how this office can be expanded. Knowing what our role is, and how we can support. The farmers I work with, we're going to be growing every year. Unless we have more people from the office, the farmers are going to be explaining what the office is instead of the office itself explaining what it is. The more that continues, the harder it is to access those resources because of misinformation at the grassroots level. The sooner the better, to have the right relationship with the farmers.

Question 3

Say there were (for example) 14 of Lillian working for the office, what would the services look like?

- Come out to the farmers, see what is happening there. Do they have water? Do they have produce? Can they sell it? You would know whether the working group is connecting the office to the farmers.
- And you'd have more data about it too.
- Obviously, there's a lot of different agencies, whether FSA, etc. Someone talked about Carver County – even if the office exists, if they can't relate, it's useless. Having this office more supported, more Lillians, able to go out to Carver County, wherever. Empower the office to do the same job that you're asking those other agencies to do.
- Rather than more Lillians in Saint Paul, we need people out around the state who are able to do this kind of liaison work. I mean, you can have one or two more Lillians there [laughs] but we do need one or two up in Moorhead, Minnesota.
- Most of us are emerging farmers. Shouldn't forget that a lot of us are not coming from formal background/training on how to run a farm. Might be unintentionally setting people up for failure if they get all the resources, but don't have the technical know-how of production. Shouldn't forget that. Intuitional push for technical know-how as well. Start supporting the farms that are offering those kinds of services, build capacity.
- I learned at today's conference that farmers have 2x as much risk to commit suicide than any other career. When you think farming should be very therapeutic, a relaxed career, it pains me to think about that. Is it because of you're out there by yourself, isolated? Could we do things more communally? Instead of you being out there on 30 acres all by yourself. Could we reduce those numbers by doing things together? I think it's something we really need to focus our energies on.
- Sometimes identifying those kinds of support needs a community coming together. I'm very fortunate to have this man here [Moses] supporting a lot of African farmers. Whenever you go to him, he'll stop whatever he's doing. If we identify those kinds of people, we'll get support. Getting my land – I'd never seen a greenhouse; I don't know wells. I'm overwhelmed, but I'm not going to commit suicide. I have support, people in my community who are knowledgeable and can help me out with the greenhouse.
- I've learned so much just sitting here listening, thank you. I work for Compeer Financial. Compeer is part of the Farm Credit System. There's Fannie May, Freddy Mac, and Farm Credit. Have historically worked with more traditional farmers. The struggles you're feeling – the isolation, crop failures, questions about where I sell my product... they feel that too. I want to put a plug in too for Farm Business Management educators. My dad farmed and milked cows for 40 years of his life, he did FBM until he passed away. Thank you for your time and everything we've learned today.

Appendix C: Existing Resources for Emerging Farmers

Note: This list is a snapshot of resources available to emerging and historically underrepresented farmers.

Federal

- USDA American Rescue Plan Technical Assistance
- USDA Small and Mid-Sized Farmer Resources
- USDA Beginning Farmers and Ranchers Loan
- USDA Farm Service Agency (FSA)-Outreach Programs, Pandemic Assistance, FSA Veterans in Agriculture
- USDA Local and Regional Food Sector Toolkits and Handbooks
- USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) Environmental Quality Incentive Program (EQIP)
- USDA New Farmers Website
- USDA Rural Development
- USDA FSA Stakeholder Tool Kit
- USDA Urban Agriculture Tool Kit

State

- Aggie Bond Beginning Farmer Loan Program
- Beginning Farmer Tax Credit
- Board of Water and Soil Resources
- Dual-Training Pipeline (Minnesota Department of Labor and Industry)
- MDA FarmLink
- Farm to School
- MDA Grants
- MDA Agricultural Growth, Research, and Innovation Program
- Farm Business Management Scholarships
- Livestock Investment Grant
- MDA New Markets Program
- Sustainable Agriculture Demonstration Grant
- Value-Added Grant
- Minnesota Grown
- Starting a Food Business Roadmap
- Workplace Safety Consultation (Minnesota Department of Labor and Industry)

Non-Government Resources

- Agua Gorda Cooperative
- AURI
- Big River Farms
- Black Family Land Trust
- Blue Zones
- Carpenter Nature Center
- Clean Energy Resource Teams
- Compeer Financial Emerging Markets, Local Food & Non-Traditional Ag
- Dairy Grazing Apprenticeship
- Dream of Wild Health
- Driftless Grown
- Emerging Farmers Conference
- Farm at the Arb
- Farm Commons
- Farmer Veteran Coalition
- Farmers' Legal Action Group
- Farmland Access Hub
- Food Animal Concerns Trust
- Grow and Farmer Fund
- Hmong American Farmers Association
- Hmong American Partnership
- Holistic Management
- Iroquois Valley Farmland REIT
- Lake Superior College Eco-Entrepreneurship Program
- Land Access Workshops
- Land Stewardship Project
- Local Food Advisory Committee (MISA)
- Main Street Project (Northfield)
- Midwest Sustainable Ag Working Group
- Minnesota Institute for Sustainable Agriculture (MISA)
- Minnesota Organic & Sustainable Education Service
- Minnesota State Horticultural Society
- Minnesota Dairy Initiative
- Minnesota Farm Bureau
- Minnesota Farmers Union
- Minnesota Farmers Union-New Leader Academy
- Minnesota State Agricultural Centers of Excellence
- Midwest Organic & Sustainable Education Services (MOSES)
- National Center for Appropriate Technology-ATTRA Sustainable Agriculture Program
- National Farmers Union-Beginning Farmer Institute
- National Sustainable Agriculture Coalition
- Northeast Farmers of Color Land Trust
- Northern Growers & Markets Conference
- No-Till Growers



Down Payment ASSISTANCE GRANT



Applications open 9 a.m. on January 4, 2023

www.mda.state.mn.us/down-payment-assistance-grant-program

GRANT DETAILS

Minnesota Department of Agriculture's Rural Finance Authority (RFA) is offering matching funds up to \$15,000 for qualified farmers to purchase their first farm. Funding will be available using a first-come, first-served application process.

AM I ELIGIBLE?

- ✓ Individual (*LLCs, partnerships, non-profits, and other businesses not eligible*)
- ✓ Minnesota resident
- ✓ Earn less than \$250,000 annually in gross agricultural sales
- ✓ First time owning farmland
- ✓ Will provide the majority of labor and management on the farm
- ✓ Will farm the land for at least 5 years



WHAT ELSE?

Minnesota Legislature appropriated \$500,000 in fiscal year 2023 for these grants. RFA expects to award 30-40 grants in this cycle, depending on the size of requests. Applications will be accepted until a wait list of 100 applicants forms, or May 15, 2023, whichever comes first. Approved applications will remain valid for purchases closing within 90 days of approval or until May 15, 2023. A second cycle of \$750,000 in funding is secured and will begin July 1, 2023.

INFORMATIONAL WEBINARS

Learn more and ask questions. Interpretation will be available in Spanish, Hmong, and Somali. RFA is happy to provide additional interpretation if requested one week before each webinar. Please send requests and other questions to jenny.heck@state.mn.us or 651-201-6316

- Tuesday, December 6, 2-3 p.m.
- Thursday, December 15, 6-7 p.m.

Zoom links available at: www.mda.state.mn.us/down-payment-assistance-grant-program