



March 28, 2022

Minnesota House of Representatives
Workforce and Business Development Finance and Policy Committee
100 Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. Blvd.
Saint Paul, MN 55155

Dear Honorable Chair Noor, Vice Chair Xiong and fellow Committee Members:

It is imperative that the [Headwaters Community Food & Water Economic Resiliency Program Bill \(HF 1332 / SF 1580\)](#) be passed and used to help provide sufficient funding for [state and regional Existing Initiatives \(p. 2\)](#) and [Local initiatives](#) to faster create a statewide [source-to-table food web economy](#) design. This will also greatly help to increase the number of related and needed career and job opportunities and prevent any delays in the urgent work required by unnecessarily "reinventing the wheel."

Five of the most important legislative, executive and regional reports and plans that currently justify and mandate a statewide (urban, suburban and rural) approach and immediate funding are:

- 1) The **House Select Committee on Racial Justice** recommended supporting the program created by the Headwaters Bill in their report to the Legislature in December, 2020 ([p. 43](#)).
- 2) The **House Climate Action Plan** created October 27, 2020 and announcement on January 18, 2022 provided a \$1B spending plan that does not yet include adequate funding for a corresponding program which the Headwaters Community Food & Water Economic Resiliency Program bill would do to significantly help meet the plan's strategies, especially "**Land (including agriculture, forestry and land use)**" and a key area which is "Enhance local food systems including expanding state and regional agriculture markets, building local food processing infrastructure, protecting wild game and fish habitats, and improving access to farmland for new and more diverse farmers." although it would also strongly support the other two strategies of soil health and carbon sequestration. ([p. 4](#))
- 3) The **Minnesota Climate Action Framework** has several goals that the Headwaters Bill would also greatly help to implement including: its Goal 2 for "**Climate-smart natural and working lands**" with 9 "Priority actions" to "Incentivize and expand climate-resilient agriculture and forestry." and "Promote local and community-based agriculture to reduce transportation needs and increase food access, especially in underserved communities." (p. 28-29 of [PDF](#)).

These are further well-defined on p. 34-35 in Initiative 2.5 to "Support local food markets, urban agriculture, and emerging farmers. Food produced and consumed locally can reduce emissions from transportation of goods. It can also support local farmers and entrepreneurs, promoting

economic vitality, and provide underserved communities with access to healthy, fresh food, and economic opportunities." and the "Role" where " Individuals can purchase locally-produced food and consumer goods, reduce food waste, and plant and tend trees and native plants." along with several "Co-benefits of action" as follows:

Climate-smart natural and working land management supports a broad array of ecological services and cultural benefits, including:

- Reduced surface and groundwater pollution, which in turn supports safe drinking water and swimmable and fishable lakes and rivers
- Stronger agricultural, forest, recreation, and tourism economies, especially in rural communities
- A more resilient food supply that supports healthy lives, especially in under-resourced communities
- The many cultural, recreational, health, and spiritual benefits of natural lands and the plant and animal communities they support

Goal 2's "Equity" section on p. 36 states that " All Minnesotans need clean air and water, rely on sustainably produced foods, and suffer from events such as floods, heat waves, and prolonged droughts, but opportunities to enjoy and benefit from Minnesota's natural and working lands are not equitably distributed."

In addition, Goal 3 for the "Resilient Communities" section on p. 37 also requires "Increasing access to and availability of healthy food choices, especially in under-resourced communities, to improve community health, reduce emissions, and support the local economy." and directs in:

Initiative 3.2 on p. 41

"Increase biodiversity and use of climate-adapted species native to Minnesota"

including:

"Parks, community gardens, yards, and other green spaces in communities provide habitat for pollinators and other plant and wildlife species impacted by our changing climate. Pollinators are essential to providing food production, and their habitat will need protection and climate-adapted plant species to increase biodiversity and ecosystem resiliency."

Initiative 3.3 on p. 41

"Resilient buildings, infrastructure, and business"

including

"Prepare the built environment and local economies to become more resilient to climate change as business opportunities."

Lastly, Goal 5 for "**Healthy lives and communities**" includes the "Context" on p. 53 of:

"Our greatest health challenge

Climate change has been called the greatest health challenge of the 21st century because it threatens the very basics we depend upon for life including safe and available drinking water, clean air, and a reliable food supply. We all want our families and communities to be healthy, but what creates health? Health is created by much more than access to quality medical care. Optimal health for everyone requires economic opportunities, safe housing, healthy food, reliable transportation, supportive communities, and much more."

4) In their conclusions on pages 16-17, the "[Iron Range Resource & Rehabilitation Regional Food Assessment](#)" lists four areas for unspecified funding amounts to buttress and expand their regional food economy. Perhaps area 2 would be the top priority for funding, followed by 3, 4, and 1. Page 1 of the report also shared this helpful information to get a sense of how important funding is.

"Localizing food production and consumption for the Iron Range Resources & Rehabilitation service area (hereafter referred to as the Agency service area and/or the Taconite Assistance Area) will **add between 250 and 3500** jobs in agriculture and value-added processing to our region, **retain between \$51 million and \$256 million annually** in food dollars within the region, and have **substantial economic spillover effects to related businesses**. These impacts of localizing the purchase of food under a range of scenarios point to the need to continue activities to support the development of local food systems in the region."

"Currently, the **155,020 people** in 68,428 households of the region **spend \$469 million** on food (\$262 million on food for use at home and \$207 million on food service). Of this \$469 million, only a small percent currently goes directly to local growers and processors (**less than 0.5 percent of total household spending is for food purchased direct from local suppliers**)."

5) In addition, p. 4 of the "[Defining the Agricultural Landscape of the Western Lake Superior Region: Realities and potentials for a healthy local food system for healthy people](#)" report shares that "Food producers in our region work long hours for economic returns usually not sufficient to support their households. Such conditions do not result in an economic sector that draws new producers willing to expand the overall productivity of the regional food system."

Therefore, better state support for food web economies and food producers can help mitigate this problematic situation.

To provide solid funding this important year, perhaps a minimum of \$50M could be spent via \$8.5M to be provided for each of the 6 [Planning Zones](#) (notice the NE Planning area matches the counties of the Iron Range) or \$4.5M per each of the 11 [Economic Development Regions](#) which should, of course, include Minnesota's tribes within each. Funding for this bill should also at least match other substantial amounts in the tens of millions that are being wisely invested in other strategy programs in the current [MN Climate Action Funding Summary](#). In relation to future funding, because the Iron Range has 155K people and the Metro Cities have many more ([see levels](#)), programs in more populous areas would need to be part of funding decisions but statewide locations where more green jobs are most needed. For initial funding, however, it is crucial that the program be launched statewide. Supplemental funding can then also be provided by various other parties and programs who may then want to further assist those particular areas already more established.

In addition, for communities who want or need to pursue rights of nature and ecosystems protections as part of this program, it is important for them to know that the [Community Environmental Legal Defense Fund's Legal Services](#) provides:

"*pro bono* and low-cost legal assistance to grassroots groups and municipal governments seeking to assert the power to expand legal protections for ecosystems,

human environmental rights, worker rights, houseless folks, as well as other social and economic justice rights. Through our legal support of communities, CELDF has worked with close to 200 communities across the U.S. to develop laws to protect against fracking and other threats, and secure community and environmental rights. In addition, CELDF provides legal support to non-governmental organizations and governments around the world to advance the Rights of Nature.

Among the services CELDF provides are:

Assistance with drafting rights-based laws;
Legal research and education; and
Litigation support”

I and others look forward to discussing any of these goals and funding ideas further.

Thank you,
Janette Dean on behalf of the MN350 Policy Action Team
Lisa Chou on behalf of the MN350 Food Systems Team