

March 20, 2024

Dear Chair Vang and Members of the House Ag Policy and Finance Committee,

I write to express my deep concern with HF 4098/SF 5049. This bill proposes to replace the definition of "emerging farmers." I urge you to pause moving forward on this legislation.

The proposed definition for "emerging farmer" is overly restrictive and excludes a large portion of farmers who face significant barriers to success in farming. It fails to consider farmworkers aspiring to start farms but do not currently rent land, established farmers facing barriers or challenges not addressed by the definition, those engaged in diverse farming practices like urban agriculture or specialty crops.

Also, the definition of "limited market access" excludes farmers selling to institutions including aggregators, hunger relief organizations, and farm-to-school programs, which are crucial markets for many farmers who are considered emerging according to the Minnesota Department of Agriculture.

This narrow definition of "limited resource farmer" in HF 4098 fails to encompass the realities faced by many emerging farmers. I believe there are alternative approaches to ensure program access for emerging farmers without compromising equal protection. Additionally, I think there is room to explore economic proxies used in other states as well as the USDA's definition of "Socially Disadvantaged, Beginning, Limited Resource, and Female Farmers and Ranchers" to better define "limited resources."

Minnesota has a chance to lead in addressing historical and ongoing discrimination faced by emerging farmers. The recent decline in farmer numbers and consolidation trends highlight the need to invest in BIPOC and emerging farmers, not retreat due to potential litigation. By prioritizing emerging farmers, we strengthen the agricultural sector, improve food security, and create a more resilient and equitable food system for all Minnesotans.

I appreciate changes that have been made to the bill language, especially the inclusion of farmer incubators. However, I urge you to **pause** H.F. 4098/S.F. 5049 to explore alternative solutions and **meaningfully engage** emerging farmers and agricultural organizations supporting emerging farmers to develop legislation that truly supports emerging farmers and fosters a more just and resilient agricultural system.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,

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