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March 24, 2021

Chair Mike Sundin
House Agriculture Finance and Policy Committee
100 Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. Blvd.
St. Paul, MN 55155

Dear Chair Sundin and members of the committee:

On behalf of Minnesota Farmers Union (MFU), I write to share my support for Vice Chair Vang's bill to establish an Emerging Farmer Office at the Minnesota Department of Agriculture (MDA) and provide support to emerging farmers (HF 2298). Building on MDA's work, this proposal would be a meaningful step toward making sure that Minnesota is a place where everyone can build a life in agriculture.

MFU is a grassroots organization that has represented Minnesota's family farmers, ranchers and rural communities since 1918. This fall at our annual convention, delegates had a meaningful conversation about the ways Minnesota could combat the racial inequities that persist in our food and agriculture system and passed a special order of business calling for initiatives like those outlined in HF 2298.

In particular, I want to highlight the importance of a full-time emerging farmer outreach coordinator. This coordinator could help ensure that existing programs are accessible, useful, and responsive to the unique needs of emerging farmers. We are glad to see this and other provisions in the bill echo key recommendations from MDA's Emerging Farmer Legislative Report that was requested by the legislature and heard by the committee earlier this year.

I appreciate your consideration of these proposals and thank Vice Chair Vang for her leadership. If you have any questions, please contact our Government Relations Director, Stu Lourey, at stu@mfu.org or (320) 232-2047 (C). Thank you for your work on behalf of farmers and all Minnesotans.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Gary Wertish". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large, looped "G" and "W".

Gary Wertish
President, Minnesota Farmers Union

CC: Vice Chair Samantha Vang