



# Minnesota Nursery & Landscape Association

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Chair Sundin, Republican Lead Anderson, and Members of the House Agriculture Finance and Policy Committee:

We are writing to express our sincere and continuing support for the Minnesota Department of Agriculture (MDA) Noxious Weed Prevention Program and specifically the funding for this program that is included in the governor's budget request for the 2022-23 biennium (<https://mn.gov/mmb-stat/documents/budget/2022-23-biennial-budget-books/governors-recommendations-january/agriculture.pdf>; pp. 43-46). The proposed funding maintains the current level of funding (\$900,000; \$450,000 each year) for this important program and highlights the need for ongoing funding for noxious weed management in future years. It is also important to note that, until recently, funding that is specifically dedicated to managing noxious weeds in Minnesota has historically been very limited. In fact, the 2020-21 appropriation is the first direct funding that has been dedicated to the management of noxious weeds as required under the Minnesota Noxious Weed Law since 2002 and this funding has allowed the MDA to expand its assistance to local governments through noxious weed management training, enforcement of noxious weed regulations, and the implementation of state-led eradication and management programs for plant species that have been designated as noxious weeds in the state. Invasive species, including noxious weeds, are a serious and growing concern that deserves our collective attention and consistent funding is needed to keep the problem from getting bigger. We appreciate the MDA's ongoing commitment to noxious weed management as evidenced by their funding request for the 2022-23 biennium and its inclusion in the governor's budget proposal and we respectfully ask for your support of this funding request and for sustained funding for noxious weed prevention and management efforts in the future.

The Minnesota Nursery and Landscape Association (MNLA) has been a supporter of the MDA's efforts to manage noxious weeds for many years and has served on the department's Noxious Weed Advisory Committee (NWAC) since 2009 and on the Noxious Weed Potential Evaluation Committee (NWEPC) before that (1998-2007). In this regard, James Calkins currently serves as the chair of the NWAC and led the effort to develop the *Plant Risk Assessment & Management Protocol for Minnesota* that is used to assess plants for potential listing as noxious weeds under the Minnesota Noxious Weed Law. Without a doubt, the MDA's efforts in partnership with local authorities and landowners are important to agriculture, including horticulture and the membership of the MNLA, natural resource managers, and the citizens of the State of Minnesota.

Noxious weeds and other invasive forest, agricultural, and landscape pests like emerald ash borer, soybean aphid, spotted wing drosophila, jumping worms, and Japanese beetle already pose serious threats to agriculture, Minnesota's natural resources, and the Minnesota economy. In addition, other pests that are not yet established in the state, pests that will undoubtedly jeopardize agriculture and damage and fundamentally change Minnesota's natural and designed landscapes, have already had initial detections in the state or may be here soon. Sadly, more than 300

terrestrial invasive pests are currently established in Minnesota, and other invasive pests – including mountain pine beetle, spotted lanternfly, lily leaf beetle, brown chafer beetle, Palmer amaranth, giant hogweed, elongate hemlock scale, boxwood blight, and, yes, even giant hornets – are present but not yet established in the state or are on their way. Preventing the introduction and establishment of new noxious weeds and managing noxious weed threats that are already established in the state are important efforts in the invasive species battle and now is not the time to back away from a program that is building on the momentum that has been fostered by the funding that the MDA has received in recent years.

With only one exception (poison ivy – a valuable component of native plant communities, but a species that is regulated as a Specially Regulated Plant under the Minnesota Noxious weed Law because it can easily cause serious allergic reactions in some people), all of the noxious weeds that threaten Minnesota’s agricultural, natural, and managed landscape resources are invasive species that cost Minnesota’s economy tens of millions of dollars each year (\$34 billion nationally each year). And the price tag is only going to increase as new invasive species become established in the state and existing pests spread to new areas. The MDA plays a central and important leadership role in addressing these invasive species/noxious weed threats and – supported by legislative funding and on-the-ground noxious weed management grant funding from the Environment and Natural Resources Trust Fund (ENRTF) – has supported successful noxious weed management efforts by cities, counties, and townships across the state. Without a commitment to ongoing funding, these efforts will be severely curtailed and Minnesota will suffer serious consequences in the absence of these efforts.

The MDA is increasingly recognized as a leader in invasive species management and we appreciate their commitment and hard work. This is not to say that the state’s efforts to manage noxious weeds could not be improved. Without question, we could do a better job of preventing the introduction and spread of noxious weeds to new areas and need a more integrated noxious weed management strategy focused on prioritization, enhanced education and partnerships, and a commitment to meaningful and measurable outcomes. Achieving this goal will, however, require reliable and dedicated funding and we believe the MDA is moving in the right direction. And while ENRTF grant funding has been indispensable in supporting MDA grants for local weed management activities, dedicated funding for noxious weed management in the MDA’s budget should be considered. We encourage the legislature to support noxious weed management and ask that legislators remain engaged with this issue and work together with the MDA to achieve better outcomes related to the management of noxious weeds in Minnesota.

While we understand that these are difficult socio-economic times as a result of the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic, we encourage you to maintain noxious weed management as an important priority for the State of Minnesota. The MDA’s efforts to prevent the establishment and spread of noxious weeds is a small but important part of the state budget that should not be overlooked. Once again, on behalf of the membership of the Minnesota Nursery and Landscape Association (MNLA), we ask that you support the requested funding for the MDA Noxious Weed Prevention Program during the 2022-23 biennium and we thank you for your consideration of this request.

Respectfully submitted,

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