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February 22, 2022

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 our support for Vice Chair Vang's proposal to help small and diversified livestock and specialty producers buy federal risk protection (HF3264). Lack of good, tested insurance options has long been a key challenge for small, diversified producers. This proposal would help more farms access insurance and remain resilient to future disasters like last summer's drought.

This past summer, nearly 80 percent of Minnesota faced severe drought conditions that stunted the growth of conventional and specialty crops, dried up water sources for livestock and deteriorated pasture used for haying and grazing. At present, 70 percent of the state is still abnormally dry. We greatly appreciate your committee's attention to this ongoing challenge.

Unfortunately, the federal Risk Management Agency (RMA) has not historically had options that work well for small fruit and vegetable producers. Acknowledging this and with direction from the 2018 Farm Bill, RMA recently introduced a new Micro Farm policy offered through Whole-Farm Revenue Protection (WFRP). This new program will simplify recordkeeping requirements and otherwise make it easier for small operations to participate.

Unfortunately, many producers remain skeptical. Much like the successful Dairy Assistance, Investment, and Relief Initiative (DAIRI) created by the legislature in 2019, providing support to producers who enroll will help them get coverage in the near term. Not only that, but this program has the potential to demonstrate for producers and others the value of the program and increase enrollment going forward. In the case of DAIRI, the program helped Minnesota achieve some of the highest enrollment in the country.

We believe this investment—and with the help of technical service providers—can help more producers manage their risk and achieve long-term resilience. 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 considering the needs and perspectives of Minnesota's farm families.

Sincerely,

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

Gary Wertish
President, Minnesota Farmers Union

CC: Commissioner Thom Petersen, Minnesota Department of Agriculture