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Written Testimony

Testimony presented before the Minnesota House of Representatives Committee on Agriculture Finance and Policy on February 28, 2023

Regarding: Testimony in Support of HF1316

Thank you Chair Vang, Vice-Chair Pursell, and Members of the Committee for the opportunity to provide this written testimony today.

This bill will take a critical next step in providing much needed seed money for food producers to use in pursuit of improving the health of their soil. A 2020 report from the Minnesota Department of Agriculture titled “Vegetative Cover in Minnesota: Prospects and Challenges,” discussed the numerous benefits of the soil health practices referenced in this bill, such as the addition of cover crops, crop rotations, and perennial vegetation integration. These benefits include decreased water contamination, higher quality crops, reduced need for chemical additives, and improved water retention of soil. In addition, this bill will be another step towards including food systems in the fight against the climate crisis. Healthy soil practices can reduce the level of greenhouse gas emissions created by the agricultural sector and improve soil’s capacity to sequester carbon.

The desire for adaptation of such practices by food producers is clear within the data. The above-referenced report noted that the acreage of cover crops in the state increased by 41% from 2012 to 2017, while the use of decreased tillage, another practice incentivized by this bill, increased by 34% in total acreage over that time. These numbers are consistent with trends in agriculture throughout the country, and have almost certainly increased since 2017. And yet, that 41% increase still only reflected a total of less than 5% of all agricultural land in Minnesota using cover crops at that time. Many remain hesitant to invest their capital into projects that require new practices.

That is why this soil health program is urgently necessary. Even as the state makes strides in adopting climate-friendly policies in sectors such as energy, we must be aggressive in all sectors if the worst forms of climate disasters are to be avoided. Soil healthy practices will benefit food producers, food consumers, and the planet. It is clear that these practices will be adopted by growers in increasing numbers over some amount of time. Providing this grant

money will decrease that amount of time and reduce emissions more quickly. Please adopt this bill and provide food producers with the funding necessary to adopt these desired practices. Please also ensure that the benefits of this bill will be shared by small and mid sized farmers, to whom these upfront costs will be most critically needed.

Thank you for your time and consideration,

Jeff Diamond
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