



Women's Environmental Institute at Amador Hill

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Dear Former Colleagues

I am honored to briefly address the House Agricultural Committee which I enjoyed serving on for many of my years in the legislature. I continue to care deeply about the issues this committee addresses. Today I want to urge you pass an issue near and dear to my heart—HF2391, the bill that funds a comprehensive statewide planning process for Minnesota to develop our aquaculture industry.

I specifically speak today as the Volunteer Executive Director of the Women's Environmental Institute (WEI), an organization I helped found back in 2003. Since its earliest beginnings, WEI has embraced aquaculture as one important strategy for "food security" for culturally and racially diverse, low income families—both rural and urban. For that reason, each year WEI offers a 7-8 month course on how to grow yellow perch, from fingerlings to mature fish on a small scale that can enable a family to grow this rich, clean protein source for themselves, sometimes in their home basement, or in a small community center with neighbors, or on a family farm. WEI grows our fish in a hoop house year-round that is approximately 25' X 50', heated by passive solar and supplemented with a wood burning furnace or propane in winter.

The people who take WEI's aquaponics course, learn about how to build an affordable version of a closed loop aquaculture structure. That structure includes the fish tank plus two higher levels of vegetable beds that grow produce using the fish waste in the circulating water for nutrients, while cleaning the recirculating water that is returned to the fish tank in the process. No waste water is created. We plant our organic vegetables in pots in soil that we have grown from our own organic composting process. Others may purchase their potting soil and compost. In any case, this is the "Will Allen" method—meaning this is a method of providing highly nutritious vegetables that carry the benefit of natural soil microbes into the food being produced. We learned this method from our mentor, Will Allen, a well-known Milwaukee urban farming teacher and food justice organizer who taught us how to do this method and helped us get our first fingerlings and set up going.

I want to leave you with this thought. Aquaculture can be a small **rural** farm family enterprise, or it can be designed as an **urban** family or community-based business. It can be small and low-tech or larger and high-tech with many employees. My own commitment is to help pass this legislation and to include both types in Minnesota's state plan.

For example, currently WEI is working with Nawayee Center School in South Minneapolis to teach the Native American high-schoolers there how to actually physically construct their own aquaponics structure in their school facility and then to learn how to grow this important fresh and nutritious food source for themselves, their families, or their community. We are also confident that these students are learning a job skill that will be in demand as Minnesota's aquaculture industry continues to expand. You will also hear today about East Phillips Neighborhood Institute's aquaculture proposal which WEI strongly supports and assists. On the other hand, each year's aquaponics class at WEI has also helped a number of rural, small town and suburban individuals to explore their interest and options for growing fish for their own food or for commercial sale — sometimes in their basement, sometimes in their front or back yard in a structure they need to get their town or city to approve or permit, sometimes in a larger commercial-scale venture they plan to develop.

It is my earnest hope that each of these opportunities will be part of the MN state aquaculture plan and can help provide our culturally, racially, and income diverse population important economic, public health and food justice benefits. Please support HF 2391 and help us grow Minnesota's aquaculture plan today. Many thanks! Karen Clark