



**GREAT PLAINS
FOOD BANK**



February 13, 2023

Minnesota House of Representatives
Agriculture Finance and Policy Committee
545 State Office Building
St. Paul, MN 55155

Dear Chair Vang and Committee Members:

As the leaders of five of Minnesota's Feeding America food banks, we are writing to urge you to support HF 1554 to increase the amount of locally sourced produce, protein and milk provided to our state's food shelves. Since the program was established in 2014, Farm to Food Shelf has been and continues to be a vital part of our efforts to ensure that no family in Minnesota goes hungry. However, at a time when food insecurity remains elevated in our state, additional funding is needed in order to meet increased demand for food assistance.

Collectively, we partner with over 700 hunger-relief organizations across Minnesota and provide the majority of the food these partners distribute to our neighbors in need. We prioritize sourcing to meet the needs of these partners, and produce, dairy and protein are the three most in-demand items at Minnesota's food shelves according to results of the 2019 Minnesota Food Shelf Survey. Farm to Food Shelf ensures our food banks can source these products from local growers and producers.

Unfortunately, Minnesota's food insecurity rates are trending in the wrong direction, and organizations on the front lines of the hunger fight face much of the burden for meeting this growing demand. Statewide, visits to Minnesota food shelves exceeded 5.5 million in 2022, up 50% from the year prior and exceeding the highest levels of need demonstrated during the onset of the Covid-19 pandemic.

The same financial pressures that drive more people to food shelves also affect the emergency food system's ability to meet that need. Across the board, prices for foods sourced by food banks are 20% higher than last year, and we are having to purchase more food to fill gaps left by reduced donations and available foods from federal commodities programs. Last year, the price of milk we purchase using milk grant funds soared 30%, while demand for milk at food shelves was up 40%.

Food banks can't rely on charity alone to end hunger, and investing in hunger-relief efforts has positive impacts on the health, educational, and economic outcomes of Minnesotans across the state. It is vital that this year's state budget supports our state's emergency food system to help us eliminate food insecurity in Minnesota. Increasing Farm to Food Shelf Funding to \$12.2 million over the biennium would allow Minnesota's food banks to fully leverage our state's strong agricultural economy and connect local foods to communities in need.

Thank you for your consideration of this bill and your support for Minnesotans experiencing food insecurity.

Sincerely,



Virginia Merritt, Executive Director
Channel One Regional Food Bank
Rochester, MN



Susie Novak Boelter, Executive Director
North Country Food Bank, Inc.
East Grand Forks, MN



Melissa Sobolik, Chief Executive Officer
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