



RE: HF4366 Omnibus Agriculture, Housing, and Broadband Bill

May 11, 2022

To: Chair Sundin, Chair Westrom, and Members of the Conference Committee on HF4366

On behalf of the members of Conservation Minnesota located in all of Minnesota's 87 counties, we write to share our strong support for provisions considered for inclusion in the final version of HF4366, the Omnibus Agriculture, Housing, and Broadband Bill. As an organization, our mission is to protect the people and the places that Minnesotans love, and we're hopeful that you'll join us in this effort by passing a productive, common-sense bill to promote sustainable, viable agricultural communities and supply chains for generations to come.

Despite obvious differences between Senate and House versions of the Omnibus, we believe that the Conference Committee has a long list of available provisions that can serve to safeguard our environment and the people who rely on it, while delivering substantial incentives or co-benefits for Minnesota's agricultural producers, local communities, and residents across the state. There is a unique opportunity to invest in the agriculture economy at this time; and as we understand how important agriculture is to the overall Minnesota economy, there is a need to increase targets and invest in our farmers and food systems.

Soil Health Financial Assistance Program, Agriculture Best Management Practices Grant Program

Our ability to improve water quality, sequester carbon, prevent harmful erosion, and protect yields on millions of acres of farmland is dependent on agricultural producers' capacity for establishing and stewarding healthy soils. Financial assistance and grant programs are a vital resource for working alongside producers to expand this capacity and to provide equipment and services necessary for landowners to take on risk and adequately improve soil health. We urge the inclusion of comprehensive investment in soil health assistance, through *both* the House's Soil Health Financial Assistance Program and the Senate's Agriculture Best Management Practices Grant Program.

Forever Green, Perennial Cover Commercialization Support, CLC Supply Chain Grant Program

Sustainable crop development is a straightforward, win-win investment for Minnesota's agricultural communities and for our shared environment. Crops and innovative cropping systems promoted by Forever Green and further established by cover crop development grants cut fertilizer costs, improve yields, maintain soil moisture, and protect water quality while bolstering long-term economic opportunities, research, supply chains, and markets for state-based agriculture and industry. We support the funding of Forever Green and these cover crop grant appropriations that are currently included in HF4366 language.

Statewide Food Systems Support

Our Minnesota food system and its ultimate health and prosperity are worthy of direct investment. There are several provisions that will assist our growing food economy, including hunger relief efforts, support for emerging farmers and farmers markets, farm to school grants, and a vital food system report. The MDA directed report on the state of local and regional food systems will outline indicators, further build internal capacity for investment, begin to develop and deepen resilience within Minnesota's farm economy, and rely on collaboration between consumers, governments, supply chains, and institutions. We support funding the Good Acre's Local Emergency Assistance Farmer Fund (LEAFF), increased grant funding for Farm to School, and investment in Farmer's Market resiliency. An important facet of our farming community comes through



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emerging farmers, and we are at a crucial moment for successful investment. We support funding equitable access to culturally appropriate and technical state resources for emerging farmers, down payment assistance, and state-funded cooperative development grants that will increase equitable market access, supply chain development, and community support for new and emerging agricultural products.

AGRI Bioincentive Program

Our state lacks sources of major fossil fuels. However, we do have the natural resources and the agricultural community necessary to create renewable fuels and energy via biofuels and renewable biomass produced right here in Minnesota. The Bioincentive Program provides the push needed to accelerate the development of commercial-scale production of advanced biofuels, renewable chemicals, and biomass thermal energy through production incentive payments. This development can provide local economic opportunities while encouraging sustainable management and energy practices. We urge the inclusion of Bioincentive Payments.

Pollinator Research Account, Neonicotinoid-Treated Seed Regulation

Pollinators play an extremely important role in the maintenance of agricultural crops and local ecosystems. These species have a significant impact on the health of agricultural landscapes and food, and bees alone provide \$18 to \$27 billion in crop yield support every year in the United States. We have a responsibility not only to our environment, but to our agricultural communities to safeguard pollinator species. Investing in research and limiting the use of neonicotinoids deadly to pollinators represent key pathways to continued stewardship. We urge the inclusion of provisions establishing a Pollinator Research Account and Neonicotinoid-treated Seed Regulations.

Chronic Wasting Disease Prevention

Cervidae—whether deer, elk, or moose—are culturally, ecologically, and economically important species to the State of Minnesota. The expansion of chronic wasting disease is a major concern for cervid populations and will have profound impacts on hunting practices and local ecosystems. While CWD remains rare for now, we know that captive deer herds and their movement present a common source of proliferation. The movement and creation of new captive herds present a threat not only to the wild population, but also to existing deer farms. With reasonable exceptions for in-family transfers, a registration prohibition for new deer farms can directly limit a substantial risk to Cervidae across the state without undue harm to existing farm owners. We urge the inclusion of this vital chronic wasting disease prevention.

Due to strong public support for sustainability and a rare but substantial budget surplus, we believe that this Conference Committee has the opportunity and the capacity to advance meaningful, cost-effective provisions that benefit the shared stewardship of our environment and our agricultural communities. We appreciate your consideration, and we remain committed to supporting a strong, bipartisan Omnibus.

Please don't hesitate to contact us with any questions/ concerns.
Thank you for helping to protect the Minnesota we love.

Sincerely,

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