

FRESHWATER

April 15, 2024

Chair Samantha Vang
House Agriculture and Finance Committee
545 State Office Building
Saint Paul, MN 55155

Re: Support for nitrate response, safe drinking water and soil health funding in HF3763DE1 amendment

Chair Vang and committee members,

We appreciate your work in addressing nitrate pollution and soil health issues in southeastern Minnesota this legislative session. While these issues persist across many parts of our state, the karst region is especially vulnerable to contamination of underground aquifers, the source of private drinking water wells for thousands of Minnesotans.

The DE amendment to HF3763 contains several provisions that are critical to providing safe drinking water to those who need it most, helps farmers purchase and upgrade equipment for soil health practices, and provides a funding framework to continue providing safe drinking water. We encourage these appropriations be targeted to the counties in southeastern Minnesota where private wells are susceptible to nitrate contamination due to the porous geology of the region.

While disappointed that most of the provisions of [HF4989](#) (clean water, climate-start, and soil-healthy farming) were not included, we hope discussions will continue on strategies to protect drinking water sources by utilizing multiple conservation practices. Sound science shows adopting multiple strategies, such as no-till combined with cover crops, achieves long-term water quality improvements.

As you consider this bill, however, please note that Freshwater supports the following items:

- **Line 2.3** – \$300,000 for the [soil health financial assistance program](#), for projects located in southeastern Minnesota.
- **Line 5.26** – \$3.072 million to the Department of Agriculture for nitrate response.
- **Line 5.29** – transfers \$223,000 million to the Department of Health for a drinking water assistance program in southeastern Minnesota.
- **Article 3, sections 24 – 28, starting on line 51.3** – Establishes the private drinking water account; which will be used to provide safe drinking water, where it is needed most, in the Agriculture Fund by using the .40¢ fertilizer tax starting July 1, 2026.
- **Article 3, section 53, starting on line 64.28** – Creates a stakeholder working group to explore a carbon credit program for farmers in Minnesota.

These strategies represent an important first step toward addressing nitrate contamination in private wells and include strategies for ongoing provision of clean drinking water. The situation in southeastern Minnesota demands immediate attention, but additional funding and strategies will be needed in the next biennial budget to implement the [state agency work plan](#).

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Freshwater is a nonprofit organization working to inspire and empower people to value and preserve water.

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We look forward to continue working with you on this matter, and we thank you for your commitment to clean water.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Michelle Stockness". The signature is written in a cursive style.

Michelle Stockness, PE
Executive Director, Freshwater