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Testimony

Testimony presented before the Minnesota House Agriculture Finance and Policy Committee

Regarding: Testimony in Support of HF 2784

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

MN350 Action would like to express our support for bill HF 2784, to assist in the creation of a farm incubator project run by the Women's Environmental Institute (WEI). The MN350 Action food systems team has spearheaded a number of food systems initiatives in recent years, including policy advocacy, projects promoting food waste minimization and plant-rich diets, and projects in support of regenerative agricultural practices. One such project was a podcast that discussed best practices for implementing regenerative practices. In 2021, we interviewed an organic Hmong farmer, who spent years improving her farming skills at a farm incubator and hoped to one day establish an incubator of her own. We support a growing culture of incubators in Minnesota, and we hope the state will facilitate projects such as the one described in this bill.

Steadily increasing costs of farmland have made purchasing land increasingly difficult and have increased rental prices, creating another barrier to entry within an industry that has included both subtle and overt barriers to entry for underserved communities for centuries. It is clear that we need to expand the pathways towards farmland use and ownership if we hope to create the regenerative farming system we will need to minimize the impact of agriculture on the climate crisis. That is why we are excited to support this bill.

With farm incubator programs, a land owning entity provides low cost land, use of equipment, and technical assistance to cohorts of farmers, providing them with skills, experience, and business connections to use in assessing their farming future and pursuing financing. This is the type of innovative program that can help overcome the land access issues faced by new and emerging farmers. With this program, WEI will be allowing the use of organically certified land by historically underserved Black, Indigenous, and People of Color farmers to develop regenerative farming practices. This represents a much-needed step towards equity within

agriculture, financial support for the expansion of climate-friendly farming methods, and a further proof of concept for this type of program.

We urge you to fund this WEI program throughout its development and implementation, and to consider future legislation to provide grants to all eligible farm incubator projects proposed by non-profit organizations. This bill would continue to establish Minnesota as a state that is committed to supporting new and emerging farmers.

We strongly urge you to provide sufficient funding to match the demand, and to continue to create new and innovative programs that will foster farmland ownership transitions and prevent removal of land from farming due to cost considerations.

Thank you,
Tee McClenty
MN350 Action