

## MFU Legislative Priorities 2021

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**Affordable Health Care:** farmers, like other small business owners, are hit hard with the high cost of health care – and many can't afford it. That's why we strongly support initiatives that would lower the cost of health care for farmers and all Minnesotans, including a public option that would allow farmers to 'buy-in' to a MinnesotaCare-type program. We also support initiatives to support rural care providers, increase reimbursement rates, expand telehealth and otherwise improve access to care in rural areas.

**Strong Ag Budget for a Resilient Food System:** when COVID-19 hit, the Minnesota Department of Agriculture was quick to respond with hands-on support for farms and ag and food business they rely on to market their products. So that they can continue helping farmers build a more resilient food system, we support strong funding for MDA, the Agricultural Utilization Research Institute (AURI) and the Board of Animal Health (BAH). MFU opposes any cuts to ag programs funded by the Legislature in the past biennium.

**Expanding Meat and Poultry Processing:** the closure of large packing plants due to COVID-19 intensified a severe shortage of processing in Minnesota that has put pressure on small producers, limiting their farm businesses. That's why we support investments in expanding small and mid-scale meat and poultry processing across the state, including through:

- ensuring adequate funding for state inspectors;
- supporting the development of a meat processing training course at MN State; and
- working with business development agencies and others to develop model business plans, financing options and other resources for processors.

**Cooperative Development:** in facing challenges – from COVID-19 to consolidation across the ag supply chain – many farmers see opportunity in joining together to form cooperatives for processing, marketing, or otherwise adding value to products they grow. We support helping farmers access the capital needed to start new cooperatives.

**Promoting Biofuels:** the pandemic took its toll on the biofuels industry, which farmers rely on as a local value-added market for their products. We support the increased use of cleaner-burning renewable biofuels, including a move toward statewide E15.

**Farmer-Lender Mediation:** when COVID-19 hit, many farm families were already struggling due to an anemic farm economy. We strongly support the state's Farmer-Lender Mediation, which helps farmers successfully manage debt and at times avoid foreclosure, and call on the legislature to extend the deadline for mediations. We also support dedicating additional resources to farmers who are in mediation.

**Broadband Investment:** farmers rely on high-speed internet to monitor market trends, connect with customers, teach their kids, and access healthcare, but too many still are not able to link up. That's why we support border-to-border broadband development, providing affordable connectivity to every residence.

**Climate Change:** family farmers are on the front lines of the climate crisis, experiencing some of its early effects in the form of extreme weather, unpredictable growing seasons and increased risk of plant and animal diseases. Farmers are also coming up with ways to remain resilient, and even put carbon back in the soil. That's why we support:

- helping farmers earn a fair return on voluntary investments in practices that sequester carbon and deliver other ecosystem benefits;
- incentivizing on-the-ground practices that promote soil health and improve the climate; and

- expanding the use of biofuels, on farm renewable energy, perennial plants, and energy efficiency.

**Emerging Farmers:** we understand that racial inequity persists in our food and agriculture system. We support policies and programs that remove systemic barriers for emerging farmers, including through:

- full public funding of the Minnesota Emerging Farmers Working Group;
- targeted programs and tax incentives, including extending capital gains exemptions, that support farmland access and farm transition;
- expanded access to credit; and
- ensuring that existing programs are accessible, useful and responsive to the unique needs of emerging farmers.

**Beginning Farmer Tax Credit (BFTC):** access to land and equipment are core challenges for beginning farmers and this tax credit helps give them a leg up. We strongly support reauthorizing and expanding it.

**Ag to School Tax Credit:** provide farmers significant property tax relief while at the same time helping rural schools make needed improvements to their facilities. We strongly support this win-win for farmers and rural communities.

**Pandemic Recovery:** family farmers rely on rural care providers, schools, processors, restaurants, other small businesses and local governments, nearly all of whom have been negatively affected by the pandemic. We support additional relief aimed an equitable and sustainable economic recovery.

**Rural Finance Authority (RFA):** financing is a central challenge for farmers, and particularly new farmers, which makes the RFA's work to partner with local lenders to offer low-interest loans that help small and mid-sized farmers so important.

**Farm Safety:** we support continued smart investments in farm safety.

**Transportation Funding:** we strongly support a long-term, sustainable plan to fund transportation, including a responsible increase to the state's gasoline tax to pay for roads and bridges.

**Corporate Farm Law:** we strongly support maintaining the current Minnesota corporate farm law.

**Wolf Depredation:** we strongly support funding for reimbursing farmers who experiences losses.

**Education:** we support funding for ag education including 4-H, Extension and Farm Business Management.

**School Start Date:** we oppose changing state law to allow school districts to start the school year before Labor Day. Our members have concerns about the impact on farm work, the State Fair and resorts.

**Industrial hemp:** we support strategic investments needed to sustain the state's growing hemp industry.

**Right to Repair:** we support legislation to allow farmers to fix electronic parts on their own equipment.

**Cottage Food:** we support the cottage food law and efforts to streamline food licensing for small businesses that use MN-grown products.

**Pollinators:** we support increasing habitat and research to help promote pollinators for crops.

**SWCD Funding:** we support full and sustainable funding for Soil and Water Conservation Districts (SWCDs), who serve as on-the-ground technicians and experts for farmers.

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