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March 23, 2022

Chair Torrey Westrom
Senate Agriculture and Rural Development Finance and Policy Committee
95 University Avenue W.
St. Paul, MN 55155

Dear Chair Westrom and members of the committee:

On behalf of Minnesota Farmers Union (MFU), I write to share my support for Sen. Murphy's proposal to develop a report on local and regional food systems (SF4184). This investment in developing recommendations will direct your committee's work going forward.

MFU is a grassroots organization that has represented Minnesota's family farmers, ranchers and rural communities since 1918. In November of 2021, our members passed a Special Order of Business calling on the legislature to strengthen local and regional processing and food systems, highlighting the significance of these investments "as a matter of food system resiliency and national security."

This investment will help inform your committee's work to support family farmers who sell into local and regional markets. In addition to this, we believe this investment is well timed. When COVID-19 disrupted our largely consolidated food system, local and regional markets were quick to adapt to meet the needs of consumers. Small meat lockers, for example, upped their inspection status and worked to take in more hogs. Directing this study this year will allow the department to catalogue these innovations and best practices and help your committee build on the lessons learned from the pandemic.

This study will inform your committee's work to shorten agricultural supply chains and build an agriculture economy that is more resilient. I appreciate your consideration and hope this proposal earns your support. If you have any questions, please contact our Government Relations Director, Stu Lourey, at stu@mfu.org or (320) 232-2047 (C). Thank you for your work on behalf of farmers and all Minnesotans.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Gary Wertish". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Gary Wertish
President, Minnesota Farmers Union