

March 14, 2022

Senate Agriculture and Rural Development Finance and Policy Committee
Chair Torrey Westrom
3201 Minnesota Senate Building
St. Paul, MN 551155

Dear Members of the Committee,

The undersigned organizations want to voice our support for SF 3737, a bill that proposes to establish a new grant program at the Minnesota Department of Agriculture that would assist Minnesota farmers with financial resources to implement conservation practices to build soil health on their farms.

Over the last year, our groups have worked together to develop the legislation contained in SF 3737. Our organizations all have programs we are working to implement with our members focused on conservation practice adoption, some with a specific emphasis on soil health. As members and farmer-leaders from our organizations have worked to implement practices on their farms using federal and state cost-share programs, they have identified and encountered barriers to increased adoption.

We believe that the approach in SF 3737 would help address those barriers. Financial assistance under this grant program would not be limited to just traditional cost-share but could also include down payments on equipment, purchases or subscriptions of equipment technology for precision agriculture, low interest loans, the purchases of seed and soil amendments or technical assistance for conservation plans. Expanding the types of financial assistance can help to de-risk new practice adoption for Minnesota farmers.

Further, our organizations also think it is important we expand the definition of the types of practices that can build soil health. A lot of attention has been given to cover crops or reduced tillage, which are important, but the use and management of manure, precision agriculture, crop rotations and grazing management should not be overlooked as beneficial practices for soil health. A broad definition of soil health and eligible practices ensures that state soil health initiatives will not be limited to a one-size fits all approach, but will instead help support farmers in different parts of the state to implement practices that work best for their individual farm operations.

Finally, the bill sets up a stakeholder process to develop a soil health plan for the state to identify what is feasible, and to establish a baseline of already adopted practices across Minnesota farms. This process could also identify and help leverage federal financial assistance to augment potential state resources and scale-up practice adoption.

Thank you for your consideration of SF 3737. We support this legislation because it is a voluntary approach to conservation practice adoption, is inclusive of a wide array of practices that allow farmers to determine the best fit for their operation, provides financial assistance to reduce risk for new practice adoption, and engages interested stakeholders around a comprehensive plan for soil health adoption.

Sincerely,

Minnesota AgriGrowth Council

Minnesota Corn Growers Association

Minnesota Crop Production Retailers

Minnesota Farmers Union

Minnesota Farm Bureau Federation

Minnesota Milk Producers Association

Minnesota Pork Producers Association

Minnesota State Cattlemen's Association

The Nature Conservancy