



# Legislative Priorities

2024

## MinnesotaCare Public Option

Farmers, like other small business owners, disproportionately purchase insurance on the individual market and are hit hard by the high cost of healthcare— and many can't afford it. This limits rural economic vitality by creating barriers for young people who want to build a life in agriculture and leads to tragic stories from some who cannot afford insurance.

Last session, lawmakers led the nation by authorizing a public option that would allow farmers and other small business owners to 'buy-in' to the comprehensive coverage provided to lower income Minnesotans as part of our state's Basic Health Plan (BHP). However, action is needed this session to ensure it can be implemented and made available to Minnesotans. We support legislation to ensure the public option is public, comprehensive, affordable, and stable over the long term.

## Rural access to care

We support increased support for rural care providers—including emergency medical services (EMS)—and other initiatives that will improve access to care in rural areas.

## Rural childcare

Farm families across the state are being squeezed by the high cost and short supply of childcare. We support investments to make childcare more affordable.

## Stable budget for a resilient food system

The Agricultural Growth, Research, and Innovation (AGRI) program houses popular programs like Farm to School, Beginning Farmer Farm Business Management Scholarships, meat processing grants, value-added grants, and support for urban agriculture. Despite one-time investments in 2023, AGRI faces a funding cliff in 2025 due to the program's expiration. We support fully funding AGRI and maintaining strong funding for MDA, the Agricultural Utilization Research Institute (AURI), and the Board of Animal Health (BAH).

## Biofuels

We support investing in biofuels infrastructure and pursuing market-based initiatives that increase biofuel use.

## Right to Repair

The market for large tractors and combines is controlled by three companies who use digital equipment to block farmers and independent repair technicians from fixing the stuff they own. This monopoly on repair keeps farmers reliant on dealership networks that have continued to consolidate, leaving farmers with fewer options, and forcing them to pay more for repairs.

Last session, Minnesota passed the most comprehensive Right to Repair law in the country. Unfortunately, the legislature exempted farm equipment. We strongly support passing an agriculture-specific Right to Repair law that creates a competitive market for repair and guarantees that farmers and independent repair technicians have access to the parts, tools, and diagnostic equipment needed to fix their own equipment.

## Competitive markets

Corporate consolidation in the food and ag system pushes down prices paid to farmers, increases input costs, stifles innovation, and limits individual farmers' voices in the marketplace. More broadly, our economy is 50 percent more concentrated than it was in 2005 allowing big, multinational companies to increase prices with impunity, contributing to inflation and making it harder for Minnesota's small businesses, workers, farmers, and consumers. To create a more level playing field, we support:

- Strengthening antitrust laws by increasing fines and providing clear, enforceable standards.
- Adopting an 'abuse of dominance' standard to put a check on companies who abuse their market power.
- Prohibiting price discrimination that undermines local retailers.
- Continuing to fund antitrust enforcement at the Attorney General's office.

## Corporate farm law

We support Minnesota's prohibition on corporate ownership of farmland and other ag assets. We also support current limits on foreign ownership of farmland.

## Broadband investment

We support border-to-border broadband development, providing affordable connectivity to every residence.

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## Climate resilience

Farmers are on the front lines of the climate crisis, experiencing drought, extreme weather, unpredictable growing seasons and increased risk of plant and animal diseases. That's why we support:

- Expanding programs that incentivize on-the-ground practices, including MDA's soil health grant program, the Minnesota Agricultural Water Quality Certification Program (MAWQCP), and other programs that help farmers implement soil health practices.
- Increasing funding for researching and scaling new crops that can improve farm finances and make farms resilient.
- Expanding farm-scale renewable energy through tax credits, cost share, and technical assistance.
- Expanding MDA's 'green fertilizer' production incentive with a priority for farmer ownership.
- Promoting farmer and worker ownership of renewable energy projects, including through cooperatives.

## Strengthening local and regional processing

Farmers rely on processors to bring what they produce to market. Unfortunately, processing has consolidated, leaving family farmers with fewer options. Minnesota has made great strides to expand options for meat processing through new training programs, grants, low interest loans, and technical assistance. We support these initiatives and are eager to see them expanded—including across other areas of agricultural production.

## Cooperative development

Many farmers see opportunity in joining together to form cooperatives for processing, marketing, or otherwise adding value to their products. We support all initiatives to help farmers start new cooperatives.

## Farm to School

We support this program because it helps farmers access new, institutional markets and ensures young people have access to healthy, nutritious meals that aid their learning.

## Ag Education

We support funding for 4-H, Extension, and other initiatives that connect young people with agriculture.

## Farm safety

We support continued investments in farm safety.

## Wolf depredation

We support funding for reimbursing farmers who experience losses.

## Rural veterinarian shortage

Minnesota has a shortage of large animal veterinarians that is making it harder for farmers to care for their livestock. This has consequences not just for those farms, but also for public health, research, fairs, and livestock shows. That's why we support establishing a new Certified Veterinary Technician license, expanding training opportunities, and funding scholarships and other incentives.

## Beginning Farmers

The price of farmland in Minnesota is continuing to rise, up nearly 30 percent in 2022. This makes it increasingly difficult for young people to build a life in agriculture. We support:

- Expanding Minnesota's nation-leading Beginning Farmer Tax Credit.
- Expanding access to credit and down payment assistance through Minnesota's Rural Finance Authority (RFA).
- Strengthening MDA's FarmLink program, funding Farmland Access Navigators, and otherwise helping new farmers access land.

## Emerging farmers

We support MDA's Emerging Farmers Office (EFO), the Emerging Farmers Working Group and other policies and programs that remove systemic barriers for emerging farmers by supporting farmland transition, and ensuring that programs are accessible, useful, and responsive to the unique needs of emerging farmers.

## Tax fairness

We believe in a tax code that is fair, reasonable, and easy to navigate. We support:

- Expanding the ag homestead tax credit to allow farmers cultivating less than 10 acres to participate.
- Repealing the sales tax on fencing equipment, grain bins, and equipment tires, to match the current exemptions for agricultural equipment.
- Repealing the sales tax on food sold at farmers markets.

## Rural Finance Authority (RFA)

We support the RFA's work to partner with local lenders to offer low-interest loans that help small and mid-sized farmers.

## Farm Business Management

We support expanding the Farm Business Management program, which helps beginning and established farmers of all types make their farms more financially sustainable.

## Farmer-Lender Mediation and Farm Advocates

We support the Farmer-Lender Mediation and Farm Advocate programs, as well as increasing reimbursements for Farm Advocates.