



Legislative Summary

2024

In fall 2023, following a consequential legislative session, Minnesota Farmers Union (MFU) members met at the county level to pass resolutions on issues affecting their farms and communities. With these resolutions, elected delegates to MFU's state convention voted to update our grassroots policy and **define top priorities for the 2024 state legislative session:**

- **Making care more affordable and accessible**
- **Curbing monopoly power** and protecting competition
- **Investing in climate resilience**, helping farmers implement on-the-ground practices
- **Addressing the shortage of veterinarians** in rural Minnesota

From there, MFU worked to ensure that lawmakers understood the needs and perspectives of family farmers and rural communities. This was a short session with no mandatory spending and a constrained budget outlook. Knowing this, MFU kept our requests targeted and made sure to defend against changes that would not work well for our members. In all, **MFU maintained a strong presence, testifying nearly 40 times on priority legislation**, helping draft legislation and amendments, writing detailed comments, and building relationships with lawmakers and agency officials.

At midnight on Sunday, May 19, the state legislature adjourned after passing supplemental budget proposals. In all, they represented a step forward on several important MFU priorities.

For agriculture, lawmakers approved a supplemental budget request — something that can't be taken for granted in an off-year. The package led by Chairs Sen. Aric Putnam and Rep. Samantha Vang includes new funding that MFU helped shape.

\$2.5 million to address the shortfall in the Agricultural Growth Research and Innovation (AGRI) program, ensuring it will continue to support a more vibrant and diversified agricultural economy through programs related to meat processing, farm-to-school, biofuels infrastructure, and beginning farmers. This was MFU's top funding request for the agriculture committee.

\$2.8 million for addressing nitrates in groundwater, ensuring that everyone has access to safe drinking water and complimenting investments made through the Clean Water Fund.

\$500,000 for soil health equipment grants, building on a successful program MFU helped create and helping farmers implement new practices.

\$225,000 for high school meat cutting programs, building on a program MFU helped create with the ag educators.

\$125,000 increase for farm-to-school, which includes funding for childcares to serve Minnesota-grown foods.

\$225,000 to address HPAI by funding deterrents that keep wild birds away from domestic flocks.

\$300,000 for beginning farmer equipment and infrastructure grants.

\$225,000 for AURI to support small food businesses.

\$50,000 for a deer and elk damage report.



Beyond funding, the final agriculture package made policy changes aimed at ensuring the sustainability of beginning farmer programs, barring confidentiality clauses in marketing and processing contracts, clarifying rules around sampling at farmers markets, and continuing farmer-funded fertilizer research.

"This year's agriculture budget builds on important work from last year while addressing emerging issues in a way that works for family farmers. There's always more to do, but this is a good bill and we're grateful it made it across the finish line."

-MFU President Gary Wertish

On healthcare, MFU advocated for legislation further defining a public option that would allow farmers and others to 'buy-in' to comprehensive coverage that is currently only available to lower-income Minnesotans. While the legislature did not take additional action, champions were able to **defend the progress made on the MinnesotaCare Public Option**, setting state agencies up for continued work on what could be a nation-leading approach to support farmers, independent business owners, and others on the individual market.

MFU also supported increased reimbursements to pharmacies, helping maintain access to these services in small communities. Finally, the legislature invested an additional \$30 million in rural Emergency Medical Services (EMS), a top priority for both caucuses.

On competition, MFU helped advocate for:

- **New requirements for hospital closures**, including greater notice and opportunity for communities to maintain control. This builds on MFU's work to put checks on hospital mergers.
- **Checks on converting non-profit healthcare assets to for-profit** through Health Maintenance Organization (HMO) conversions.

On climate resilience, MFU worked hard to build the case for voluntary, farmer-led work that builds soil health, reduces emissions, and makes our agricultural economy more resilient to increased storms, drought, or excess moisture. In addition to wins in the agriculture budget, MFU helped secure soil health funding in the legacy budget, including **\$3.5 million in additional funding for the Agricultural Best Management Practices (AgBMP) loan program.**

On the shortage of veterinarians, the legislature approved bipartisan legislation to expand scope of practices for vet techs, allowing veterinarians to delegate more to this license category and freeing vets up for more complex tasks. The veterinary industry's hope is that this will help ease the effects of the shortage while also aiding in recruitment and retention of techs.

Given the short session, there were issues we worked on that were not passed. Legislation guaranteeing farmers the **Right to Repair** did not get a hearing, though the bill did earn new support from bipartisan coauthors, allied agriculture organizations, and the Federal Trade Commission (FTC). Similarly, tax proposals including **expanding the ag homestead tax credit** to serve small farmers, providing additional **funding for Soil and Water Conservation Districts**, **repealing the sales tax on fencing equipment**, and **promoting the Minnesota Agricultural Water Quality Certification Program** through a new per-acre tax credit will have to be picked up next session.

QUESTIONS?

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