

# VOICES NEED TO BE HEARD

## People's Town Halls: A Report

Key themes from 10 town hall  
meetings held across the  
state of Minnesota.

March 18 - April 8, 2025



THE VOICE OF RURAL MINNESOTA

# People's Town Halls: A Report



Welcome to the 2025 People's Town Hall summary from the Minnesota Farmers Union. This project attempts to represent the many concerns expressed at the 10 town halls held across the state from March 18 through April 8.

We held the town halls because people are frustrated that their voices aren't being heard in Washington, D.C., and St. Paul. We organized town halls and listened. Several themes emerged, and they are highlighted in the following pages.

This report speaks for people who want a fair chance to earn a living and the freedom to live their lives in rural Minnesota. They want vibrant small towns, a strong agricultural economy, affordable healthcare, and a government that works well for everyone.

Since its founding in Jackson County in 1918, Minnesota Farmers Union has worked for fair prices and fair markets for family farmers. We've supported cooperatives and we've invested in the education of young people and all our members to support a thriving rural economy.

We look forward to working with you to address the concerns raised by the citizens of Minnesota at the People's Town Halls.

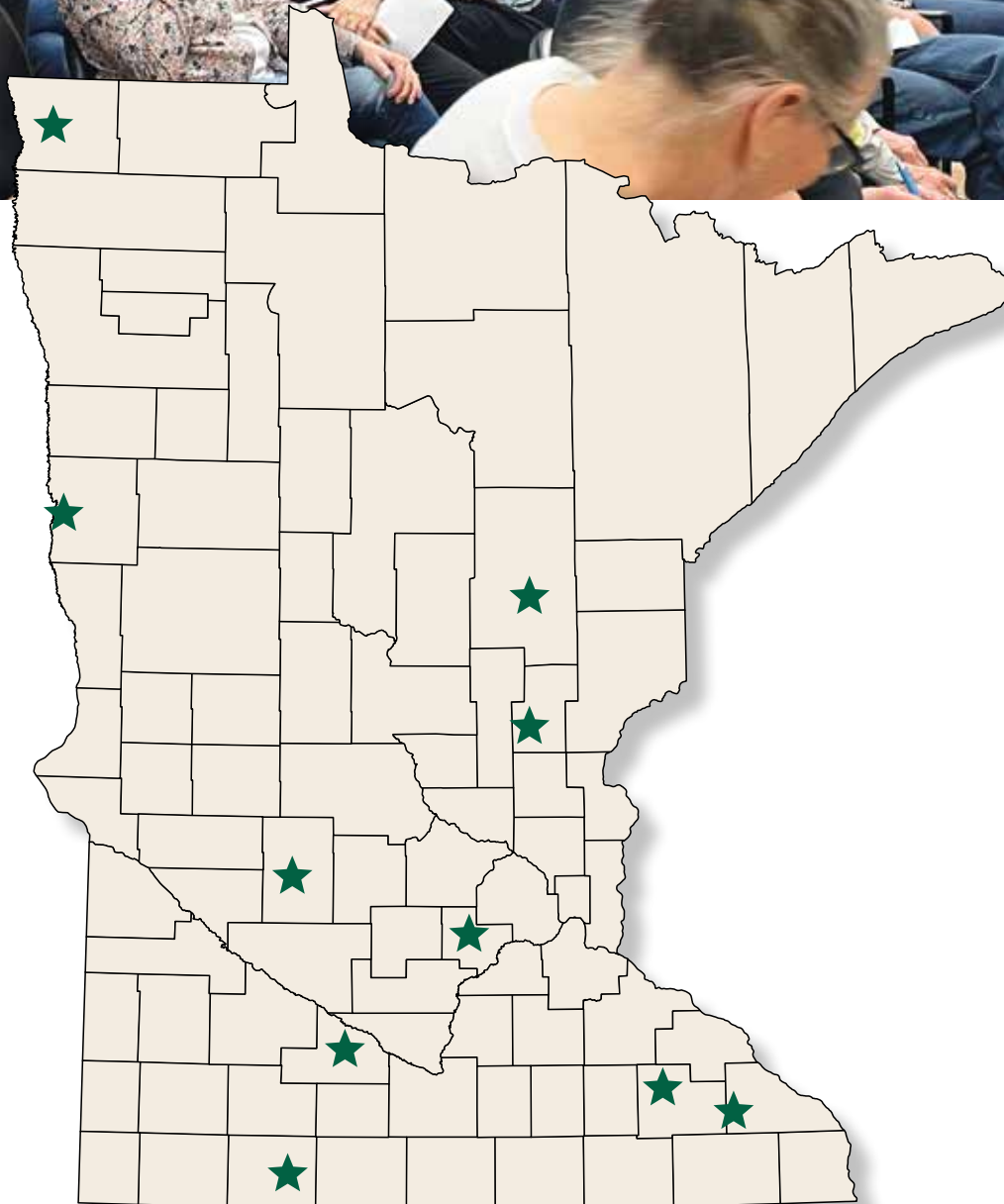
Sincerely,

Gary Wertish  
President, Minnesota Farmers Union



**The 10 town halls were held in:**

- Jackson
- Sleepy Eye
- Ogilvie
- McGregor
- Willmar
- Oronoco
- Moorhead
- Hallock
- St. Charles
- Waconia



# Executive Summary

Minnesota's family farmers are accustomed to managing uncertainty. However, with razor thin profit margins, increasingly concentrated markets, the lack of a new Farm Bill, federal funding freezes and escalating tariffs leading to a trade war, the uncertainty is overwhelming.

Minnesota Farmers Union (MFU) hosted 10 People's Town Halls around the state from March 18 through April 8 to better understand the strain farmers and rural people are feeling and learn how MFU can work alongside the state and federal government to meet their needs. **More than 600 people** attended the People's Town Halls to make their voices heard and share concerns and ideas about how we move forward.

Attendees raised concerns not only about the impacts on agriculture, but also about cuts to health-care, education, Social Security and veteran's benefits. These and other issues are explored in the themes in this report.

While there was broad agreement that waste, fraud and abuse should be addressed, many felt that federal actions justified by this goal are haphazard, overly punitive and harmful to people and rural communities. Attendees called for more balanced and targeted strategies that uphold integrity without causing chaos and disruption.

There was also concern about the erosion of our nation's democratic institutions, disregard for the judicial process and undermining the rule of law. Others said the executive branch has surpassed constitutional limits, leading to the consolidation of power that weakens the United States system of checks and balances.

Many attendees expressed frustration at the lack of in-person and public town halls held by their own representatives and the feeling that they are not being represented by their elected officials.

Sen. Amy Klobuchar attended the People's Town Halls in Ogilvie and McGregor. Her staff attended many of the other town halls. In addition, staff from the offices of Sen. Tina Smith, Rep. Tom Emmer, Rep. Angie Craig, Rep. Brad Finstad and Rep. Michelle Fischbach attended at least one People's Town Hall. Minnesota Agriculture Commissioner Thom Petersen attended the People's Town Halls in Orono and Waconia, while staff from the Minnesota Department of Agriculture (MDA) attended eight town halls. Chief Deputy Attorney General John Keller attended the Willmar meeting. Other state, county and local representatives also attended the meetings.

MFU is honored to elevate the voices of farmers and rural community members through this report and hope it contributes to critical national conversations.





MFU President Gary Wertish speaks during the first People's Town Hall in Jackson. More than 30 people came to share concerns.



*"It's important that we do things together, and that's why these town halls and these meetings are important, to bring people together, to provide a value of hope and concern that our government will be there for our children and our grandchildren," said Ted Winter.*

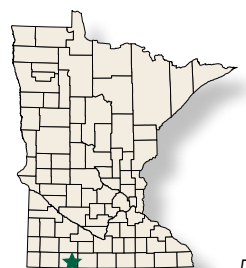


MFU President Gary Wertish opened each People's Town Hall by welcoming attendees and emphasizing the importance of coming together to find common cause. "This is democracy. People need to speak, and they need to be heard," Wertish said.



Following the town hall, attendees at the Jackson meeting enjoyed fellowship and food.

**Jackson**



# 15 ways to read more about the People's Town Halls

The People's Town Halls were covered by reporters from local, regional and statewide media outlets.

Here's 15 links to learn more about the town halls.

- **Jackson County Pilot**, *Tariffs, cuts, Congress are top concerns*. Residents discussed tariffs and trade wars, immigration and entitlement reform, and cuts to the federal work force.

Read more at <https://bit.ly/JacksonCountyPilotPTH>.

- **Explore Okoboji**, *MFU discusses ag funding at forum in Jackson*. At an MFU town hall meeting in Jackson, MFU President Gary Wertish discusses barriers to ag funding at the state and national levels, and the uncertainty these funding questions create.

Listen at <https://bit.ly/ExploreOkobojiPTH>.

- **MPR News**, *Rural voices, farmers push for government accountability in town halls*. At an MFU town hall in Sleepy Eye, over 60 people gathered to share their concerns about tariffs, health care, and impending trade wars.

Read more at <https://bit.ly/MPRNewsPTH>.

- **New Ulm Journal**, *It's time to come together*. At an MFU town hall meeting in Sleepy Eye, Farmers Union leaders discussed an array of issues such as preserving Medicare and Medicaid, advocating for maintaining government programs that support agriculture and preventing trade wars.

Read more at <https://bit.ly/NewUlmJournalPTH>.

- **Kanabec County Times**, *Klobuchar, others address tariffs, state of farm bill*. MFU President Gary Wertish, Sen. Amy Klobuchar and Deputy Agriculture Commissioner Andrea Vaubel met with local farmers to discuss tariffs, ag spending in Minnesota and the Farm Bill. Some farmers expressed concerns over local food programs that have been halted by the federal government.

Read more at <https://bit.ly/KanabecCountyNewsPTH>.

- **West Central Tribune**, *Passionate crowd voices alarm at town hall in Willmar, Minnesota*. A passionate crowd filled the Willmar Community Center with speaker after speaker standing up to decry moves by President Donald Trump and Elon Musk — moves that the various speakers said will hurt rural areas most of all, and put the country into an economic recession.

Read more at <https://bit.ly/WestCentralTribunePTH>.

- **Fox 9**, *Fears of farm crisis mount in ongoing trade war*. Minnesota State Auditor Julie Blaha joined a national virtual press conference to sound alarm over newly imposed 10 percent tariffs on all imports. The president of the Minnesota Farmers Union says the alarm is justified. Gary Wertish worries we're on the verge of a crisis like what we saw in the 1980s if trade deals aren't finalized very quickly.

Read more at <https://bit.ly/Fox9PTH>.

- **The Free Press**, *Tariff uncertainty roils area farmers, agribusiness.* Tariffs are causing disruptive uncertainty for farmers. This is true for both bigger and smaller farmers. MFU has been holding town halls to gather input from farmers, including a recent Town Hall in Sleepy Eye.  
Read more at <https://bit.ly/MankatoFreePressPTH>.
- **KIMT**, *Farmers and southeastern Minnesota residents voice their concerns at People's Town Hall.* At a People's Town Hall meeting in Oronoco, concerns were shared about contracts being cancelled, local food programs ending and the impact of tariffs.  
View the coverage at <https://bit.ly/KimtPTH>.
- **KAALTV**, *Southeast Minnesota farmers talk tariffs at town hall.* At a People's Town Hall meeting in Oronoco, concerns were shared about contracts being cancelled, local food programs ending and the impact of tariffs. State elected officials Sen. Liz Boldon, Rep. Kristi Pursell and Rep. Andy Smith were in attendance, as well as staffers for Sen. Klobuchar, Sen. Smith, Rep. Finstad and Rep. Craig.  
View the coverage at <https://bit.ly/KaalPTH>.
- **AgWeek**, *Speakers at Minnesota Farmers Union event highlight rural strain of federal actions.* MFU President Gary Wertish discusses objections to the actions of the federal government at a series of Town Hall events put on by MFU around the state.  
Read more at <https://bit.ly/AgWeekPTH>.
- **The Fence Post**, *Senate Ag GOP focuses on milk, Dems on nutrition cuts.* During a discussion on a bill that would allow whole milk in school meals, Sen. Klobuchar discussed a recent tour around Minnesota including stops at MFU Town Hall meetings.  
Read more at <https://bit.ly/TheFencePostPTH>.
- **Inforum**, *Minnesota Farmers Union town hall highlights shared concerns of rural, urban residents.* Despite a snowstorm, about 20 people attended an MFU town hall event in Moorhead on April 2 to discuss tariffs, potential cut to Medicaid and Medicare, and layoffs of federal employees.  
Read more at <https://bit.ly/InForumPTH>.
- **Aitkin Independent Age**, *People's Town Hall held in McGregor.* MFU has sponsored several People's Town Hall events, including one in McGregor on March 20, to hear from rural residents and farmers. Sen. Klobuchar was in attendance and discussed USDA funding, the Farm Bill and tariffs.  
Read more at <https://bit.ly/AitkinAgePTH>.
- **WCCO**, *Farmers grapple with more tariff threats as trade war escalates and markets fall.* MFU President Gary Wertish discusses the continuing People's Town Hall meetings and the impact of tariffs on farmers.  
Listen at <https://bit.ly/WccoPTH>.



# Key Themes from People's Town Halls

## Tariffs and Trade Relationships

Agricultural markets have yet to recover from the lasting impacts of President Trump's trade war during his first term. In response to U.S.-imposed tariffs, many of our trading partners turned to other suppliers—most notably Argentina and Brazil—and have not returned.

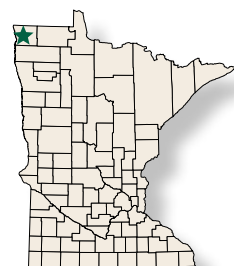
While some policymakers continue to frame tariffs as “short-term pain for long-term gain,” attendees expressed deep skepticism about the merits of steep and sweeping taxes on imported goods. Of equal concern is the long-term damage to the United States' reputation as a reliable trading partner. Once trust is broken, it is difficult—and costly—to rebuild.

Minnesota's farmers depend heavily on global markets. Those markets have been built and maintained over decades with the help of farmer-funded checkoff programs. For example, Minnesota exports soybeans to China and turkey to Mexico, and relies on Canada for potash fertilizer. At the People's Town Hall in Waconia, Minnesota Agriculture Commissioner Thom Petersen said, “One out of every three rows of crops from our state are exported; we're a global market here. The USDA wants to bring the Minnesota commissioner on trips because we have a lot to offer.”



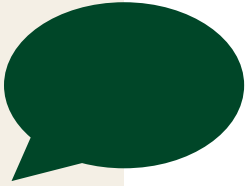
*Above: A crowd gathered for the People's Town Hall held at Far North Spirits, a distillery owned by Mike Swanson and Cheri Reese and located on their farm in the northwest corner of Minnesota in Hallock. Mike, pictured speaking, shared how their business has been impacted by Canada's decision to stop importing American liquor.*

*At left, Kittson County Commissioner Theresia Gillie said she's concerned about how cuts to Medicaid will impact rural communities.*



**Hallock**





## People's Town Hall Tariffs and Trade Relationships:

"I think Trump is betting the farm with these tariffs. The problem is that he's not betting his farm, he's betting our farms." - Winona County

"I'm 83 years old. Over the years I've spent a lot of money on checkoffs for corn, soybeans and hogs. We grow more in this country than what we use by far. I'm concerned that we may be losing our markets because of the tariffs. Our partners are up in arms and don't want to do business with us because we're unreliable." - Jackson County

"I'm just a plain Jane corn and soybean farmer starting up a small livestock operation, but I'm telling you, growing corn and soybeans in this environment is really difficult. What's making it so different from the first trade war in 2018 is the prices that we're paying for our inputs are so much higher than they were in 2018...the squeeze is unbelievable. For people that aren't in the space, it's hard to describe because it is crazy. I think our farm is going to make it through, but there's going to be some consolidation that happens here. I'm sure of it." - Freeborn County

"We can't have a tariff destroy the value of the soybean market. We all paid into checkoffs for years to develop our markets, and this is what we get? We can't afford to have people not buy our product anymore because we're not dependable. If our partners go somewhere else, they're not coming back for a long time." - Rock County

"We can get by this year but we're probably not going to pay ourselves or save any money to refresh the equipment in coming years...I'm not sleeping at night." - Freeborn County

"We still haven't recovered from 2018 tariffs that took away business from American farmers and incentivized Brazil and Argentina to expand production." - Renville County

"Tariffs are setting the table for everyone to have less to spend." - Red Lake County

"In our own lives, you treat your neighbors well, and that is the way it should be with countries too." - Renville County

"I'm worried about losing the Canadians that come down to our local events, shop in our stores. They are a big part of our economy." - Kittson County

"I'm very concerned about foreign policy. Like it or not, a lot of our products are exported like corn and soy. It seems like our foreign policy is being handled haphazardly. I'm very concerned about that. The other is regulatory agencies being gutted. They are guard-rails. [Our local ethanol plant] has been a huge success story in creating demand for our products. If you take away ethanol production, what will that do to us? Business doesn't always come back to us when the tariffs go away." - Brown County

## The Farm Bill: Farm Safety Net, Conservation and Nutrition Assistance

Many attendees expressed concern about the delayed passage of the Farm Bill and emphasized the importance of maintaining strong conservation and nutrition titles. They highlighted how the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) is a critical component of the bill that helps ensure food access for millions of Americans.

Some farmers themselves are among those who rely on SNAP benefits. And others believe it's a moral imperative for a country with such abundance to feed hungry people. Even beyond those merits, the coalition created through marrying nutrition and farm programs is essential for passage of a new Farm Bill.

Participants stressed the need for a robust and updated safety net, including expanded risk protection options for smaller-scale and specialty crop producers. With increasing uncertainty due to weather variability, volatile markets, economic pressures and other challenges, farmers underscored the need for consistency in federal support programs.

Minnesota is among the states leading the nation in utilizing conservation programs. Attendees voiced their support for conservation programs as an essential tool for incentivizing and supporting sustainable practices across Minnesota's vast agricultural landscape. At the People's Town Hall in McGregor, Sen. Amy Klobuchar emphasized, "When it comes to a Farm Bill, we need conservation programs. There is a huge use of conservation programs in Minnesota and the nutrition programs, including SNAP, which is especially used in rural areas."



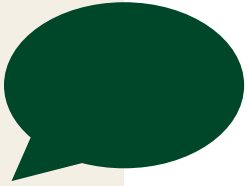
*Sen. Amy Klobuchar spoke at the Ogilvie People's Town Hall. Deputy Minnesota Agriculture Commissioner Andrea Vaubel looks on.*



*Farmer Allison Rian shared information about the Veggie RX program, which helps improve healthy eating habits for people who have diseases that can be improved by changing their diets. It targets people who are food insecure. Rian also said her employer's USDA grant has been frozen, and she suspects she will soon not be paid.*

**McGregor**





## People's Town Hall

### The Farm Bill: Farm Safety Net, Conservation and Nutrition Assistance:

"I'm nervous, lots of farmers went out of business in 1987. I don't want that to happen again." - Lac qui Parle County

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"What I'm grappling with right now is the pushback on farmers receiving support at all, which feels really hard. We work so hard and are already barely making ends meet. How do we explain why it is important to invest in farmers?" - Pine County

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"We need our conservation, EQIP [Environmental Quality Incentives Program] and water quality programs." - Kanabec County

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"The SNAP program is something a lot of people rely on. SNAP cuts will impact farmers." - Winona County

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"I volunteer at a food pantry, and we've seen our clientele numbers skyrocket over the past four years. We're really concerned that with SNAP cuts we're going to have even more clientele coming." - Becker County

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"Farmers understand that you can't separate SNAP from the Farm Bill for moral and political reasons. Politically, it's important to understand the importance of keeping SNAP. Our congressional representatives have a lot to learn about agriculture." - Kittson County

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"The average SNAP family gets \$6 a day. I don't understand where the mentality of people abusing the system comes from." - Kittson County

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"I have a younger, disabled brother who receives payments from SNAP every month and it's \$24...his monthly check for disability. None of us could live on that." - Olmsted County

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"There is potential to expand crop insurance. We're trying to normalize these specialty crops as part of the Farm Bill and make it clear that it's just as important as commodities are." - Aitkin County

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"As a dairy farmer, I can tell you we don't get a dairy subsidy. The only thing we have is crop insurance for our grain, so I don't want anyone to take that away. We pay for it. The way things are going with the weather, we would be broke." - Fillmore County

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## Livelihoods and Access to Care

Attendees at People's Town Halls voiced concern about proposed federal cuts to essential programs—including Medicaid, Medicare, Social Security and Veterans Affairs—and the impact these cuts would have on their livelihoods and those of their families and neighbors. People are worried not only about financial security, but also about their ability to access the care and services they rely on.

Particularly in rural communities, where healthcare infrastructure is already stretched thin, these funding cuts will impact rural hospitals and healthcare services, which poses a serious threat to people living in greater Minnesota. People are worried that access to care will be increasingly limited.



*Brian Rohrenbach called for a moratorium on foreclosures. His message to President Trump and Elon Musk is to keep their hands off what is working: Social Security and veteran's benefits. There are 17,000 disabled people in the 7th Congressional District who are receiving Social Security disability benefits and 8,300 children receiving survivor's benefits, he said.*



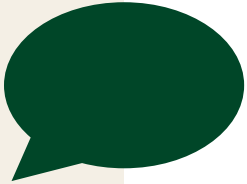
*Chief Deputy Minnesota Attorney General John Keller answered questions about the deportation of immigrants at the Willmar meeting.*



*Wendell Bakker, who was a MFU field representative for 23 years, said he has two daughters who work in education and their jobs are at stake with the federal budget cuts. He added that MFU wouldn't have Mr. Wertish as president if he didn't sign him up.*

**Willmar**





## People's Town Hall Livelihoods and Access to Care:

"I'm concerned that Trump will amend the Constitution with executive orders, not spend money that Congress has appropriated for programs ... If things need to change, it should be done in a thoughtful manner, not by moving fast and breaking things. This is the federal government; we need to move diligently and abide by contracts and laws."

- Brown County

"I'm concerned about Medicaid going away... I worked in assisted living and have a good idea of how it operates. It is very different from what we're seeing on a federal level. Lots of people in my county are on Medicaid. No one wants to talk about it because it means you're on welfare. It pays for about half of nursing home costs. If that funding goes away, what will people do? Medicaid also helps to pay for long-term care for seniors. Our rural hospitals are at risk."

- Kandiyohi County

"I have a brother-in-law that has dementia, what is he going to do if he can't receive the care he needs? My brother was a career veteran. Tell me how we're not going to be cutting services to our vets with all these cuts to VA jobs. I don't understand how we can treat our vets that way."

- Meeker County

"As a physician, I think it is going to be devastating to all our rural areas if the Medicaid cuts go through. This is the fifth year in a row of cuts to Medicare, and I think Medicare reimbursement rates are where they were 50 years ago. Frankly, our rural healthcare infrastructure just can't sustain this. We're going to lose whatever we have left in terms of community hospitals, nursing homes, clinics."

- Olmsted County

"If they take away our services, are they still going to take our money?"

- Jackson County

"I am deeply concerned about my severely handicapped granddaughter and the services she needs."

- Big Stone County

"I have a right to Social Security because I paid into it, even if I could afford not to have it."

- Clay County

"I'm a single parent to four kids. My kids depend on medical assistance, and the food pantry has been hugely helpful. The grocery store is so expensive. My youngest was in Head Start. We need to invest in our youth through these programs, programs where we help feed our children and educate them."

- Carver County

"Where is our tax money going, and who's making sure it comes back to us? They don't get to spend it on something else when it was already approved for farmers and food banks and veterans. That money needs to come back to our states so we can fund these programs."

- Olmsted County

## Cuts to USDA Programs and Workforce, USAID, Medical Research

Many farmers and community members at People's Town Halls expressed frustration with the administration's decisions to eliminate or weaken programs that are critical to their success and provide reliable markets. There were concerns over the dismantling of USAID from both moral and market perspectives, as well as the rollback of farm-to-school efforts and programs that support regional food systems —investments that have helped beginning farmers access markets and have provided consumers with easier access to healthy, local food.

With funding frozen in certain USDA programs, people are concerned about existing government contracts not being honored, including for farmers and small businesses that have made investments in their operation on a reimbursement basis.

In addition, attendees raised alarm about significant job cuts at their local Farm Service Agency (FSA) and Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) offices. These agencies provide essential support to farmers. With fewer staff and resources, farmers fear delays in accessing the services and programs they rely on.



*Dairy farmer Christine Leonard said she's lucky to be a sixth-generation farmer as she wouldn't be able to afford to start farming on her own. She also spoke in favor of funding for young farmers and added that "we need to make sure we have an industry to support those farmers."*

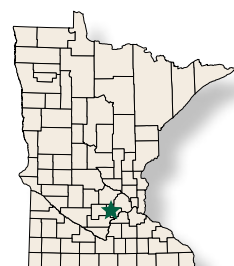


*Minnesota Agriculture Commissioner Thom Petersen spoke about the importance of agricultural research. It's critical to develop new crops and new markets at the same time, he said. Petersen also said that since the pandemic, people have become more interested in where their food comes from.*

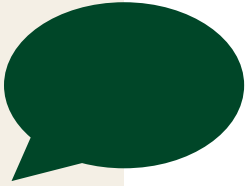


*MFU President Gary Wertish listens as Minnesota Agriculture Commissioner Thom Petersen makes a point during the Waconia People's Town Hall.*

**Waconia**







## People's Town Hall

### Cuts to USDA Programs and Workforce, USAID, Medical Research:

"Foreign aid is well spent money. Feeding people and children is not waste, fraud and abuse." - Renville County

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"We're farmers; farmers don't let people starve." - Brown County

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"American farmers are fantastic ambassadors for American products and agriculture overseas." - Winona County

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"I'll put up with expensive gas and eggs, but American farmers are not the people that watch people starve to death." - Brown County

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"My employer hasn't been paid because our USDA grant is frozen, which means very soon I will not be paid. I don't get why that's okay. I have a mortgage; I don't have 90 days to wait." - Aitkin County

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"For an administration that claims they like business, they're not doing a good job of showing it. Any business that is reputable would honor their contracts." - Jackson County

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"I'm concerned about USDA offices and NRCS offices being shut down throughout the nation and how it will impact people in our region." - Wright County

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"My concern with the funding issues is how some of these conservation and business programs, which are based on reimbursements, have been impacted. When funding is pulled back, how do debt lenders come in to make up the difference? There are existing contracts in place. I understand if there's a decision not to fund the program going forward, but for farmers and business owners who have already invested and are depending on reimbursements, not honoring those commitments can be very detrimental." - Benton County

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"With slashing funding to USDA, CDC, etcetera, how are famers going to get coordinated and up-to-date info they need on the avian flu so they can make informed decisions on their livestock? What resources will be available to them?" - Winona County

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"I own an organic produce storage and supply business, and my focus is on trying to build up our local food system and ensure kids get healthy food. I'm contracted with Minneapolis Public Schools but have been told that cuts will impact our partnership and that grant funds will be limited going forward. To me, LFPA [Local Food Purchase Assistance program] is a way to reinvest in our communities. Federal funding was helping to get the ball rolling and show it's a worthwhile investment to be making, as a lot of our produce comes from far away." - Norman County

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## The Risk to Rural Communities

Agriculture is the backbone of Minnesota's rural economy, and when farmers struggle, the ripple effects are felt across the state. With continued uncertainty in the markets and already slim margins, many farmers are worried about making ends meet—and when farmers have less to spend, local businesses suffer too. When a farmer gets a dollar and spends it in their community, it circulates multiple times within that economy. The economic health of rural towns is both directly and indirectly tied to the success of their farmers.



*Bjorn Solberg said his focus is on building a local food system and ensuring that kids get healthy food. He owns an organic produce storage and supply business, and he's learned that federal budget cuts will impact his local foods contract with the Minneapolis Public Schools.*



*Charlie Sobocinski said the federal government cut more than \$220 million in funding for the Minnesota Department of Health, which will result in people losing their jobs and services being reduced. He's concerned about what will happen to Medicare and Social Security.*



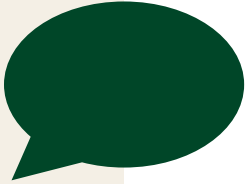
*Attendees at the Moorhead town hall, which happened to coincide with a snowstorm, talked about immigration, local foods, water and the impact of tariffs.*



*MFU Vice President Anne Schwagerl, Melany Thomas of Clay County, MFU President Gary Wertish and Assistant Agriculture Commissioner Patrice Bailey at the People's Town Hall in Moorhead.*



**Moorhead**



## People's Town Hall The Risk to Rural Communities:

"AGCO in Jackson manufactures farm equipment. I have a concern with the uncertainty this year that many farmers aren't planning on buying new equipment. I'm concerned about layoffs as they employ a lot of people here. There's not a lot of other employment opportunities for people in the area. So, if people lose their jobs, it will have a ripple effect across the counties." - Jackson County

"If farmers are struggling, everybody in the community will struggle in one way or another." - Aitkin County

"As a business owner, I can say that when farmers hurt, we all hurt." - Jackson County

"I know a lot of our neighbors voted for these characters, but I think we're seeing that not only do our friends in DC not care about ag and rural communities at large, they don't care about the people that elected them either. I think we really have a critical fight for the future of rural America on our hands." - Kandiyohi County



*Sen. Amy Klobuchar visited with Carol Anderson at the People's Town Hall in Ogilvie.*



*Deputy Agriculture Commissioner Andrea Vaubel spoke at the town hall in Willmar.*



*The importance of a Farm Bill, rural mail delivery, Medicaid and Social Security were among the topics discussed at McGregor. Many also spoke about the negative impact of tariffs.*



## The Relationship between Immigration and Labor

Attendees shared passionate and personal stories highlighting the disconnect between current immigration policies and the labor shortages faced by farmers and rural communities. Many emphasized how immigrant labor is essential not only to on-farm operations but also to the broader food system, including food processing and meatpacking.

Concerns were raised about the climate of fear surrounding deportation for legal immigrants due to heightened law enforcement and lack of due process. This fear has disrupted families and communities and created uncertainty for workers and employers alike.

Immigrants help keep rural agricultural communities vibrant both in Minnesota and across the country. Attendees expressed deep concern about the long-term impact on these communities and the nation's food system if immigrant workers are too scared to go to work or forced out of their jobs.

Some farmers also noted ongoing challenges in securing reliable labor and stressed that, without immigrant workers, they would struggle to find local labor and maintain operations.



*MFU President Gary Wertish welcomed the attendees to the People's Town Hall in Sleepy Eye and asked them to share their comments.*



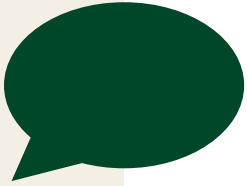
*Dan Zimmerli said he's concerned about democracy. Congress, not Elon Musk, should be setting the federal budget, he said.*



*At left, Paul Sobocinski said the farm-to-school program has helped to develop the local food economy while making sure that students have the best food available. It's a food system and it all connects together, he said.*



**Sleepy Eye**



## People's Town Hall

### The Relationship between Immigration and Labor

"We have to milk our cows seven days a week, twice a day. We rely on immigrant labor, and they are hard workers and go over the top. They tell me, 'We don't want to cause trouble, we just want to work.' They are like family to us, and we don't want to see anything bad happen to them. This is a personal issue for our family." - Fillmore County

"With Trump's tariffs and stance on immigration, what is going to happen in this part of the state with dairy and pork producers? I worked at JBS. The people, mostly immigrants who work there, their lives are under threat everyday now. If they cut all exports, those plants are looking at less production. We are going to see the degradation of the farm economy from all sorts of angles. And if immigration scares people away from jobs, communities are going to dry up." - Rock County

"Worthington was subject to ICE raids when Trump last held office. At that time, the church was a sanctuary space and ICE couldn't go there. That has since been changed and it ain't right. I've been around a lot of those folks, and they are hardworking people just trying to take care of their families and children. What we're doing, this isn't America. It just isn't." - Jackson County

"If we deport people out of JBS and Jennie-O, for example, if they get scared and can't work, who is going to process the pork on the line? It will be backed up like COVID times. If you put ICE in Worthington, you'd remove a third of the town. You wouldn't be able to start the processing plant. Let's face it -- immigrants do the hard work. The pork industry needs to be vigilant. The majority that comes out of these plants is for export." - Rock County

"People don't realize the impact immigrants have on our food system." - Olmsted County



*Eunice Biel said they rely on immigrant labor on their dairy farm. They are hard workers, she said. They tell her they don't want to cause trouble, they just want to work.*



*Deporting immigrants without due process, cuts to education funding and veteran's benefits, and the loss of small dairy farms were among the issues raised at the Willmar town hall.*



## Concern for the Next Generation of Farmers

Farmers are facing a difficult economic squeeze as commodity prices decline while input costs remain high. This pressure is especially intense for many young and beginning farmers, who often lack the equity and financial buffer that more established farmers and landowners have. For them, enduring “short-term pain” – a phrase used to downplay the effects of tariffs and proposed cuts to federal support programs that support market access for beginning farmers, for example – may not be an option. For some, it could mean being pushed out of farming altogether.

Access to farmland and the capital required to start farming is already a major barrier. Many fear the combined impacts of policy changes will accelerate farmland consolidation. Throughout the town halls, people wondered how the next generation will manage to build a life in agriculture.

At the same time, proposed cuts to the Department of Education have raised alarms among community members. There is growing fear that these reductions could lead to school closures. Residents expressed concern about the impact this will have on their children and the long-term vitality of their rural communities if they lose young families.



*Dan Wilson asked what items within the state budget are dependent on federal dollars.*



*Rod Peterson and his granddaughter attended the St. Charles town hall.*

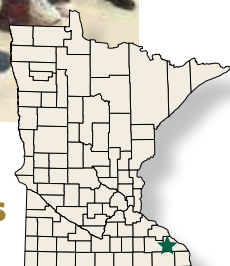


*Linda Larson asked about the H2A visa program for immigrant workers.*

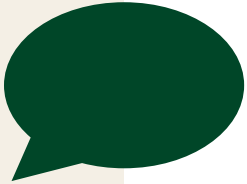


*More than 50 people attended the People's Town Hall in St. Charles. The importance of immigrant labor, SNAP and crop insurance were among the many topics discussed.*

**St. Charles**







## People's Town Hall

### Concern for the Next Generation of Farmers:

"District 8 has the fastest growing population in the state of emerging farmers. Local buying programs are a way to secure a market, which helps us build a future in farming. Cutting these programs is so impactful in the worst ways." - Chisago County

"The LFPA is not only vital for emerging and beginning farmers of all crops to help find a market, it's also a way farmers markets can support the grower by buying what they don't sell and providing transportation to bring it to the most vulnerable communities. We are in southeastern Minnesota, and with so many cuts to climate-smart programs, how are those of us farming in nutrient depleted and water risk areas going to be able to modernize and keep up with taxes and maintain the land we're on? Transitioning is going to be nearly impossible because it might have no infrastructure on it. How are we going to keep farming in the future when, in the short term, the degradation of our resources is being accelerated by cuts to programs?" - Rice County

"I'm an ag schoolteacher and work with many low-income kids. I'm scared that my programs are going to go away. Students are our future, and these cuts are going to hit rural schools. DOE programs also support teacher shortages through loan forgiveness programs, which has helped me stay in education." - Swift County

"One issue I'm really worried about - and that I've heard from parents about - is that special needs education is going to go away. As a teacher, the conversations around ending the Department of Education is worrying. If we lose federal funding, hopefully Minnesota will want to do right. I'm scared about my job but mostly for my students with high needs that are the most vulnerable." - Freeborn County

"I'm concerned about federal dollars being cut for school districts and services for kids with special needs. We depend heavily on federal dollars coming in, otherwise we know what happens in rural areas when the schools go away - they die." - Kittson County

"I have two daughters that work in education and their jobs are at stake. Both my daughters are in their 50s. I hope it doesn't happen, but I'm afraid it will." - Renville County

## Recap

Farmers and rural residents who joined MFU's People's Town Halls were concerned about the damaging impacts of a trade war, lack of action on a new Farm Bill, cuts to rural healthcare programs and the climate of fear created for immigrants in rural communities. They fear these actions could have lasting impacts on the next generation. Attendees also expressed appreciation for the opportunity to make their voices heard and a sincere hope that lawmakers will listen.

With these stories and others, the Minnesota Farmers Union (MFU) and National Farmers Union (NFU) will continue to educate and advocate at both the state and federal levels to foster the health and vitality of agriculture and rural communities and to ensure fairness for farmers. The Farmers Union remains committed to making sure farmers' voices are heard where decisions are made.

For generations, MFU has been bringing the perspectives of family farmers and rural communities to policy discussions. That commitment remains steadfast – we will continue working to ensure elected officials understand how their decisions directly impact the lives and livelihoods of farmers and rural communities.

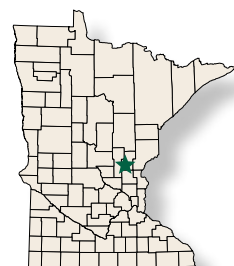


*Sen. Amy Klobuchar attended the People's Town Hall in Ogilvie. She said pressure from constituents will be the driving force for senators to get to the table and work on the Farm Bill.*



*At left, Kelsey Zaavedra asked Sen. Klobuchar how she is going to advocate for small farmers. Zaavedra said market access is more important than crop insurance for small farmers.*

Ogilvie





Chuck Ackman, Sen. Amy Klobuchar's Outreach Director, said the senator's agriculture team has expanded with her new role as ranking member on the Senate Agriculture Committee. He encouraged people to continue sharing their stories because stories convince senators to make changes.

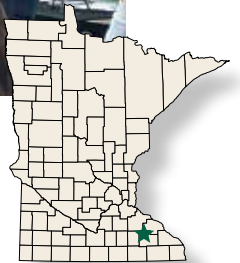


Mike Frost talked about when he worked in Germany through the Future Farmers Abroad program. He remembers being called Ronald Reagan's Little Diplomat at the time. They developed relationships, he said, and those are important.



Randy Sorg said it's very important to keep farmland in local, private ownership.

## Oronoco



Several staff members attended the People's Town Hall in Willmar. Pictured, from left, Peter Ripka, Justin Stofferahn, MFU President Gary Wertish, MFU Vice President Anne Schwagerl, Lisa Holm, Gail Donkers, Claudine Arndt and Danielle Isaacson.



MFU State Secretary Missy Bakker Roach at the McGregor People's Town Hall.





THE VOICE OF RURAL MINNESOTA

Minnesota Farmers Union is a grassroots, member-driven organization working for family farmers and rural communities. MFU works toward fair farm and rural policy that guarantees a safe and abundant food supply, provides family farmers with fair prices for their labor, and revitalizes rural Minnesota.

**Learn more about MFU at: [www.mfu.org](http://www.mfu.org)**

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## Get social with Minnesota Farmers Union!

Find out about events, policy happenings, photos and more.



Minnesota Farmers Union



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MFU is now on Blue Sky social



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