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February 28, 2024

Chair Aric Putnam
Senate Agriculture Committee
95 University Avenue W.
Minnesota Senate Bldg., Room 3215
St. Paul, MN 55155

Dear Chair Putnam and members of the committee:

On behalf of Minnesota Farmers Union (MFU), I write to share our support for Senator Gustafson's bill (SF3528) to ensure that home-based early care facilities can benefit from our nation leading farm-to-school program. This program is a win-win-win for farmers, families, and the state providing a reliable market for farmers while ensuring that the youngest Minnesotans have access to healthy, local, food.

MFU is a grassroots organization that has represented Minnesota's family farmers, ranchers and rural communities since 1918. Our members are excited about our state's work to build out farm to school and early care programming because these initiatives stand to improve local markets for the food they work hard to produce. These programs can also help small and beginning farmers earn a fair price and access institutional markets. That's why our members were quick to lift up policy in strong support of this work during our grassroots policy development process.

Much like schools, center- and home-based early care centers face barriers in changing their food service to include locally grown food. Support from the state can help these important community institutions make this change. Serving local farm products in early care settings can also help children and their families learn more about agriculture.

This change is a particularly relevant changes for our members and others in rural Minnesota who rely primarily on home-based childcare. We thank Senator Gustafson for her leadership on this issue. 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 considering the needs and perspectives of Minnesota's farm families.

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