

Dear Chair Anderson and members of the committee,

I am Shawn Feikema and I am writing on behalf of myself and our farm, Feikema Farms Inc./ Circle F Farms, located in Luverne, MN in support of Section 11 of House File 1704. I'd like to first say thank you to Chair Anderson for bringing this section forward and starting a solutions-based conversation.

Our family farm has been in operation since 1950, and over the years our family has tried many new technologies, kept up with the research, and implemented different growing practices to be as successful as possible. We have implemented many nutrient management strategies to reduce our costs and be more environmentally conscience. These practices have made our operation more profitable and has driven us to be better stewards of the resources we have. We also have implemented a stringent nutrient management plan to make sure that our livestock and cropping operations are working together to minimize any potential nutrient losses.

Recently, we've embraced new technologies to minimize the use of commercial fertilizers across our farm, such as microbial nitrogen-producing products. These products don't leach or volatilize, they form a symbiotic relationship with the plant and die off when the plant does. By incorporating this technology, we've been able to reduce our commercial fertilizer use by 40 pounds per acre.

This bill highlights the importance of supporting farmers in their efforts to reduce synthetic nutrients while maintaining crop yields. It encourages farmers who might still be on the fence about alternative sources of nitrogen by bridging a gap of perceived risks associated with using these types of products and lowering commercial nitrogen use.

Minnesota has a unique opportunity to lead a conversation that's gaining traction across the Midwest. Farmers in our state and region are facing increasing pressure to cut nutrient loss, and this bill offers a path forward without imposing burdensome regulations that could have negative consequences. Rather than forcing decisions, rewarding farmers for their efforts is the preferred approach, and I commend Chair Anderson for championing this thoughtful strategy.

I thank you for your time, the opportunity to submit testimony in support of Section 11 of House File 1704.

Shawn Feikema



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Tylor Johnson

Commercial Agronomist Pivot Bio

In support of Section 11 of House File 1704

Good afternoon, Chairman Anderson and members of the committee. I am Tylor Johnson, and I am a commercial agronomist in Minnesota covering the central and southeast portions of the state. I am here today to just provide a brief overview of one type of product a farmer might use to qualify for this incentive program. This is not the only company or the only product that can help farmers reduce their synthetic commercial nitrogen use and replace it with a more environmentally friendly source of nitrogen.

A biological source of nitrogen uses naturally occurring microbes to fix nitrogen from the air and deliver it to the plants. The microbes go on at planting and some are gene-edited to fix nitrogen on the root system of the plant around the clock. The product that I work with specifically has taken microbes that are found naturally in the soil and gene edited them to produce nitrogen specifically for the plant that they are colonized on. Our microbes form a symbiotic relationship with grass crops, the microbe feeds the plant nitrogen fixed from the atmosphere and in return the plant feeds the microbe with exudates from the roots. Once the plant has senesced, the microbes stop fixing nitrogen. Products like ours produce nitrogen for the plant without any risk of leaching, or volatilization.

By taking even a small portion of synthetic nitrogen out of the growing cycle means that potential source of nitrate contamination was never in the system. Just like farmers apply nitrogen annually, they can use biological sources of nitrogen fixing microbes annually to meet part of their nitrogen needs.



March 10, 2025

RE: HF1704

Dear Chair Anderson and Members of the House Agriculture Committee:

As the Director of Sourcing and Demand Planning, I lead the team that administers the state's Farm to Food Shelf program on behalf of the five Feeding America food banks serving Minnesota. In addition to Second Harvest Heartland, the Farm to Food Shelf program supports **North Country Food Bank in East Grand Forks, Second Harvest Northland in Duluth, Great Plains Food Bank in Fargo-Moorhead, and Channel One Regional Food Bank in Rochester**, helping us provide fresh, local food to over 1,100 hunger relief programs across Minnesota.

The Farm to Food Shelf program has historically provided funding for in-demand items like milk, produce, and protein to be procured from local growers and distributed to food shelves and other hunger relief programs around the state. In FY24, the program distributed over 4.2 million pounds of produce, 155,000 pounds of protein, and almost 300,000 gallons of milk, benefitting not only hungry Minnesotans but our farmers, too. In many cases, farmers will recoup costs of harvesting and packing excess product that would otherwise go unharvested or unsold.

While the Farm to Food Shelf program is not the only source of food for food shelves, it plays a significant role in providing fresh, nutritious, and locally grown food to individuals in a time of need. First conceived in 2015, the Farm to Food Shelf program has always received strong, bipartisan support in both the House and the Senate for that reason, even as funding has remained mostly flat. We can source products for this program at a very cost-efficient rate. Produce averages \$0.26 per pound, milk \$0.34 per pound and protein \$1.49 per pound. The costs of these products are significantly less than average for these categories and allow us to stretch these dollars as far as possible in helping to feed our neighbors.

With demand for emergency food assistance at an all-time high – including in Greater Minnesota – this is not the time to reduce funding for fresh, locally grown food. Food shelves and food banks alike have experienced an unsustainable increase in demand for food, culminating in 9 million food shelf visits last year, compared to 7.5 million visits in 2023 and 5 million in 2022. Newly released data shows that 1 in 5 Minnesota households cannot afford the food they need. Food banks and food shelves are doing all we can, but without assistance from the state, Minnesota's hunger relief network will soon reach a breaking point.

And so, on behalf of the five Feeding America food banks serving Minnesota, the hundreds of food shelves and food distribution programs supported throughout the state, the dozens of local growers and producers who benefit, and the hundreds of thousands of Minnesotans who rely on us to put food on their table, we respectfully ask that you reconsider your decision to reduce funding for this critical program.

Sincerely,

Lindsey Ochmanek
Director, Sourcing & Demand Planning

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MEMBER OF
**FEEDING
AMERICA**



March 10, 2025

Chair Anderson and Members of the House Agriculture Committee:

Thank you for the opportunity to testify to the DE amendment to HF 1704. MCEA supports many of the provisions included, but we write to ask that the committee consider **including ongoing funding for addressing nitrate contamination of private wells in southeastern Minnesota.**

In 2024, the supplemental agricultural budget included \$2.8 million in one-time funding for the Department of Agriculture to provide reverse osmosis water treatment systems to households in southeastern Minnesota. This funding is available to households whose well is above the 10 milligram / liter nitrate limit with low incomes (less than 300% of the federal poverty line) and/or with vulnerable individuals in the household. This is a critical public health response to the nitrate pollution issue in the karst region.

HF 821 (Jacob) / SF 1183 (Gustafson) are bipartisan bills that would extend this program from the one-time funding of 2024 into ongoing appropriations. As you deliberate over the FY 2025-2026 agriculture budget, MCEA asks that you also consider including this appropriation.

Section 1. APPROPRIATION; NITRATE PRIVATE WELL MITIGATION.

\$3,866,000 in fiscal year 2026 and \$3,866,000 in fiscal year 2027 are appropriated from the general fund to the commissioner of agriculture for nitrate private well mitigation, including reverse osmosis, well repair, and well reconstruction for private drinking water wells with nitrate in excess of the maximum contaminant level of ten milligrams per liter and located in Dodge, Fillmore, Goodhue, Houston, Mower, Olmsted, Wabasha, or Winona County. The commissioner must prioritize households at or below 300 percent of the federal poverty guideline and households with infants or pregnant individuals. The commissioner of agriculture may also use this appropriation for education, outreach, and technical assistance to homeowners. The commissioner of agriculture may transfer money to the commissioner of health to establish and administer a mitigation program for contaminated wells located in Dodge, Fillmore, Goodhue, Houston, Mower, Olmsted, Wabasha, or Winona County. Notwithstanding Minnesota Statutes, section 16B.98, subdivision 14, the commissioner of agriculture may use up to 6.5 percent of this appropriation for administrative costs.

Thank you for considering this request. Please feel free to contact me with any questions or if we can be of assistance to you.

Sincerely,

Aaron Klemz
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