



SIERRA CLUB

NORTH STAR CHAPTER

Sierra Club North Star Chapter
2300 Myrtle Avenue, Suite 260
Saint Paul, MN 55114

March 19, 2025

Environment and Natural Resources Policy and Environment Committee

Minnesota House of Representatives
100 Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. Blvd.
Saint Paul, MN 55155

RE: Support for:

- [HF1611 \(Hansen\)](#) - **Lawns to lunch pilot program funding provided, and money appropriated.**

Dear Co-Chairs, Vice Co-Chairs, and Committee Members:

Founded in 1968, the Sierra Club North Star Chapter is a non-profit environmental organization representing over representing over 50,000 members and supporters across Minnesota. The Sierra Club works to safeguard the health of our communities, protect wildlife, and preserve our remaining wild places through grassroots activism, public education, lobbying, and litigation.

As a leading grassroots voice working to preserve and protect Minnesota's environment, we empower volunteer leaders to act through environmental advocacy, community organizing, and outdoor exploration. We participate in the administrative process to encourage environmental and human health and sustainability, long term wildlife and habitat protection, and biodiversity goals.

As part of our work, we share the beneficial objectives of the Sierra Club's nationwide [Agriculture and Food Policy](#) including the following relevant:

"Food Policy:

Agriculture's fundamental objectives should include optimizing output of critical nutritional needs and protection of the environment, rather than being limited to maximizing quantities produced per acre. Particularly in developed countries, there should be a reduction in excessive food consumption and waste patterns to allow maintenance of diet quality at lower environmental cost. An important first step would be to develop a greater reliance on vegetable protein....

1. Policies should prioritize local food self-sufficiency and sovereignty above concentrated food production and long-distance transport of food. Such policies include those that encourage institutional procurement from local food producers, zoning codes that allow for urban, home, and community-based food production, and appropriate-scale regulation of farm/food safety."

In addition to healthier foods including vegetables and fruits and pollinator-friendly plants that the Lawns to Lunch pilot program would help encourage and support now and as an additional catalyst over time, our state chapter and its Forests and Wildlife Stewards Group members believe that local

food production in Minnesota's residential landscapes and community spaces will then also help protect forests as well as other lands plus wildlife due to a) less land, water and other resources being required in other states and locations nationally and globally to produce foods for Minnesota residents (including where preferred sustainability practices and renewable energy may not be yet heavily in use), and b) reduced food dependence on others when national or global transportation of foods are not possible due to severe weather, tariffs, resource limitations or other challenges that may be occurring.

Our state example could also inspire other states who are not yet also supporting more residential and community food gardens.

We thereby support the intent and language of the Lawns to Lunch House bill, especially parts a and b:

A bill for an act relating to natural resources; appropriating money for lawns to lunch pilot program.

BE IT ENACTED BY THE LEGISLATURE OF THE STATE OF MINNESOTA:

Section 1. LAWNS TO LUNCH PILOT PROGRAM; APPROPRIATION.

(a) \$1,000,000 in fiscal year 2026 is appropriated from the general fund to the Board of Water and Soil Resources for a lawns to lunch pilot program to provide financial and technical assistance to plant residential landscapes and community spaces with food gardens, including:

- (1) vegetables;
- (2) fruits, including fruit trees;
- (3) other foods; and
- (4) flowering plants necessary to facilitate pollination of the vegetables, fruits, or other food plantings.

(b) The board may enter into agreements with local governments, the University of Minnesota Extension Master Gardener volunteer program, and nonprofit organizations to support this effort.

(c) Money appropriated in this section must not be used for:

- (1) greenhouses or other buildings; or
- (2) planting food for sale or for another commercial use.

(d) This is a onetime appropriation and is available until June 30, 2030.

In summary, along with other food garden supporters, we at the Sierra Club North Star Chapter look forward to the bill's passage and a successful pilot program and hope it will lead to additional general fund appropriations and/or increased residential and community food garden interest and production support through any number of avenues.

Thank you,

Sierra Club North Star Chapter
2300 Myrtle Avenue, Suite 260
St. Paul, MN 55114

Including the following:

Janette Dean
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Jina Rahimi

March 19, 2025

Minnesota House of Representatives
Agriculture Finance and Policy Committee

Subject: Written Testimony in Support of HF1611 – Lawns to Lunches Program

Dear Rep. Anderson, Rep. Hansen, and the Members of the Agriculture Finance and Policy Committee:

My name is Jina Rahimi, and I am an emerging farmer, a food justice advocate, and founder of Emerald Path Farm located in Marine on St. Croix. I am writing to express my strong support for **HF1611**, which establishes and funds the Lawns to Lunches program. This is a great initiative in transforming underutilized land into spaces that would benefit Minnesota's residents while improving the local food chain infrastructure.

During my time farming, I have noticed that both urban and suburban areas have limited access to affordable fresh produce, which creates a significant barrier for many working families. By repurposing lawns into thriving vegetable gardens, this bill empowers communities to take ownership of their local food systems and fosters long-term self-sufficiency.

Additionally, this program promotes environmental benefits such as increased biodiversity, soil regeneration, and reduced water consumption compared to traditional turf lawns. It is an investment in both food security and climate resilience, which ensures that Minnesota's landscapes are used to their fullest potential for the well-being of its residents.

I urge the committee to support HF1611 and appreciate the committee's investment in advancing innovative solutions for a more food-secure and environmentally friendly Minnesota.

Sincerely,

Jina Rahimi
Emerging Farmer, Emerald Path Farm
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POLLINATOR FRIENDLY ALLIANCE
PO BOX 934, STILLWATER, MN 55082
WWW.POLLINATORFRIENDLY.ORG

To: Environment & Natural Resources Finance and Policy Committee, Chair Rep. Peter Fischer
For: Written testimony for Environment & Natural Resources Finance & Policy March 20th, 2025
Date: March 18, 2025

Support for *HF1611 Lawns to Lunch Program*

Support Summary:

[Pollinator Friendly Alliance](http://WWW.POLLINATORFRIENDLY.ORG) strongly supports Bill# HF1611 Lawns to Lunch Program. Pollinator Friendly Alliance is a conservation organization that protects pollinators and understands the importance of plants for pollinators. Many garden vegetables are a good source of pollen and/or nectar. We work with local communities and residents to create healthy pollinator-friendly communities. We know healthy backyards increase property values as people want to live where there is clean water, air and land.

In a world where urban sprawl and industrial agribusiness are replacing family farms, green spaces and natural habitats, backyard habitats and gardens are more and more crucial to holding together an increasingly fragmented natural landscape for pollinators and songbirds. As Rachel Carson said, "These insects, so essential to our agriculture and indeed to our landscape as we know it, deserve something better from us than the senseless destruction of their habitat."

Major factors contributing to species decline include loss of habitat, fragmentation of habitat, pesticide contamination, and climate change. Native plant diversity within a garden makes the habitat more resistant to climate change than landscapes with fewer plant species such as a mowed lawn. Gardeners and homeowners are uniquely positioned to make a positive impact in supporting pollinators in their landscape. Recent research has indicated pollinators may be faring better in urban and suburban environments where they are protected from the widespread use of pesticides and monocultures found in agricultural lands. While habitat fragmentation and pesticide use are also of concern in suburban and urban environments, residents can directly make changes to their backyards, parks, and community gardens, and work with neighbors and community leaders to create habitat and adopt pollinator-friendly practices.

We are living during a historical time when climate crisis and species extinctions are upon us, and we need to take immediate actions to mitigate. Supporting residential gardens for pollinator keystone species is one step in the right direction.

Thank you for your work,
Laurie Schneider
Executive Director, Pollinator Friendly Alliance
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