

Representative Paul Anderson
House Agriculture Finance & Policy Committee
Centennial Office Building, 2nd Floor
658 Cedar Street
Saint Paul, MN 55155

Representative Rick Hansen
House Agriculture Finance & Policy Committee
Centennial Office Building, 5th Floor
658 Cedar Street
Saint Paul, MN 55155

Re: HF2916, Southeast regional groundwater protection and soil health initiative

April 1, 2025

Co-Chairs Anderson and Hansen, and members of the Committee,

Thank you for the opportunity to comment on HF2916 (Smith) seeking general funds to expand the Olmsted County Groundwater Protection and Soil Health Program to more of southeastern Minnesota.

The Nature Conservancy is a nonprofit organization working to conserve the lands and water on which all life depends toward our vision where nature and people thrive. We strongly support HF2916 and believe this is an opportunity to improve groundwater quality in Southeastern Minnesota through a proven, innovative program that fosters the adoption of sustainable agricultural practices.

The County's program has demonstrated exceptional success in improving groundwater quality by promoting the use of cover crops, reduced tillage, nutrient management, and crop diversification. One of the strengths of this program is that it offers stacked payments for continued improvement, allowing farmers to build on their initial participation and progressively adopt additional practices that enhance environmental sustainability. This has been crucial in driving widespread farmer enrollment and participation, with nearly 40% of producers in Olmsted County now engaged in the program.

Moreover, this program has proven to be more than just an environmental success, it has driven broader economic benefits by supporting the growth of small grains production, which in turn has facilitated the development of mid-scale milling operations in the region. This economic ripple effect underscores the program's importance for environmental protection and regional economic vitality.

This program's comprehensive approach - incorporating a suite of sustainable practices - provides a model for improving soil health and water quality while supporting agricultural producers. The program's design reflects the power of local solutions tailored to local needs, rather than relying on a one-size-fits-all approach.

We encourage the committee to support HF2916 and the continued expansion of the County's program. This is an opportunity to invest in a proven, cost-effective strategy that enhances groundwater quality, strengthens soil health, and supports the livelihoods of farmers in southeastern Minnesota.

Thank you for your consideration,



Stephanie Pinkalla
Government Relations Director
The Nature Conservancy in Minnesota



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The Nature Conservancy in Minnesota