



Minnesota House Agriculture Finance and Policy Committee  
Chair Samantha Vang

February 28, 2024

Re: Supporting HF 4135

Chair Vang and Members,

The Minnesota Environmental Partnership and undersigned organizations support HF4135 (Hansen) which establishes an account to pay for mitigating nitrate pollution of private wells, a \$0.99 per-ton fee on nitrogen fertilizers that goes into this account and requires testing of land-applied biosolid fertilizer for PFAS “forever chemical” pollutants. HF4135 is an important response to a public health crisis in southeastern Minnesota, while addressing an emerging issue statewide.

Every Minnesotan has a right to clean, safe drinking water, whether they get their water from a private well or from a public drinking water system. The State of Minnesota has committed to the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency that it will undertake a comprehensive response to address the nearly 10,000 households in 8 counties in southeastern Minnesota whose wells exceed the 10 ppm drinking water standard for nitrate. Drinking water above this threshold risks “blue baby syndrome,” and research shows that even lower levels are correlated with increased levels of colorectal and bladder cancer and birth defects.

The Minnesota Department of Health estimates the cost to address these wells (with treatment systems or well repairs) will exceed \$40 million in the 8-county area. Testimony by state agencies this session has suggested the cost to mitigate private wells contaminated with nitrate statewide could exceed \$100 million. A permanent fund with a dedicated funding source is needed, and it’s appropriate that the product that causes the pollution include a fee to pay for the impact on private wells. The money raised would then be distributed to county health boards for this work. This model has worked well in Iowa, whose Grants-to-Counties program has used fertilizer fees to pay for similar activities since 1987.

The \$0.99 / ton fee in HF4135 will have a negligible financial impact on individual farmers while raising approximately \$3 million per year to pay for well mitigation. With current prices of approximately \$700 / ton for anhydrous ammonia fertilizer, this is a minimal impact of approximately 0.15%. In addition, this fee would be tax deductible for farmers as a cost of doing business, which further reduces the impact.

The testing provisions for PFAS are also important. Currently, there is no requirement in law or rule to test land-applied biosolids used as a fertilizer for PFAS compounds. Some states such as Maine have gone so far as to ban land-applied biosolids due to PFAS contamination. It’s common sense that

Minnesota should require testing to determine the extent of PFAS contamination in land-applied biosolid fertilizer.

We thank Representative Hansen for bringing this bill forward. We urge the committee to vote to approve these commonsense steps to protect our state's valuable drinking water.

Sincerely,



Steve Morse  
Executive Director

*Submitted on behalf of the following organizations:*

Alliance for Sustainability

Clean Water Action Minnesota

Climate Land Leaders

CURE

Environmental Working Group

League of Women Voters Minnesota

Minnesota Center for Environmental Advocacy

Minnesota Trout Unlimited

Minnesota Well Owners Organization

Northern Waters Land Trust

Pollinator Friendly Alliance

Renewing the Countryside

Resilient Cities and Communities

Roots Return Heritage Farm LLC\*

Save Lake Superior Association

Save Our Sky Blue Waters

WaterLegacy

*\*Denotes non-MEP member*