



Emerging Farmers Working Group

2025 Legislative Report

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Thank you to all the Emerging Farmer's Working Group members that have served in the past five years for your time, dedication, and steadfast advocacy for those not in the room. The list is too long in thanking people, but I will start off with my biggest thank you to Lieutenant Governor Peggy Flanagan, Commissioner Thom Petersen, and Deputy Commissioner Andrea Vaubel for always supporting emerging farmers wherever they may reside within our state and Minnesota Agriculture. Finally, I want to thank the amazing EFO staff – Lillian Otieno, Director of EFO; Emily Toner, Grant Specialist Senior; and Anthony Adams, Outreach Coordinator – for the fantastic work you do to make sure information and access is not a barrier for all farmers.

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Overview

The Emerging Farmers' Working Group (EWFG) created in 2020 is in its sixth year and the working group continues to work hard to address the needs of all farmers, including emerging farmers throughout the state. In 2025, we had six working group members finish their two-year terms and a lot has been done, thanks to outgoing members. We have members that represent new counties in the state such as Waseca, Mille Lacs, Carver. This report will focus on the success and changes that the EFWG has readjusted to help eliminate systemic barriers to entry into agriculture and the work of the Minnesota Department of Agriculture (MDA) to continue being a national leader in supporting rural and urban emerging farmers all over the state of Minnesota.

Each session of the Emerging Farmers Working Group (EFG) is structured to address and support the evolving needs of Minnesota's emerging farmers. Agendas are designed to include timely updates on policies, programs, and grant opportunities relevant to the emerging farming community, while also spotlighting resources from both state and national perspectives. Presentations from experts, including representatives from the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA), Minnesota Indian Affairs Council (MIAC), and local non-profit organizations like The Food Group and Keystone Community Services, provided members with insights into best practices, food assistance, various resources to food shelves as well as to other agricultural groups that partner with the MDA. Additionally, each working group meeting includes opportunities for interactive community discussions, allowing members to share their unique challenges, exchange ideas, and continue to network with one another as well as share with the community. These discussions foster a collaborative atmosphere and ensure that all voices are heard and valued. By combining informative presentations with open dialogue, each session empowers members with knowledge, resources, and a sense of community, equipping them to make informed decisions and to effectively advocate for their communities. Some highlights to mention in 2025 were: Emerging Farmer Office (EFO) Outreach and Grants as resources for emerging farmers. The EFO did an amazing job with outreach to numerous events as well as the State Fair, making sure that fairgoers got a chance to see various volunteers stopping by the booth and talking about agricultural resources that the Minnesota Department of Agriculture provides.

In working with our agriculture partners such as The Food Group and Big River Farms, who put on the Emerging Farmer Conference, which celebrated its twenty-year anniversary serving emerging farmers. The event was held at the Earle Brown conference center in Brooklyn Park to celebrate this historic event, MDA was present and visible offering various services and resources to all farmers that came from around the state.

I want to highlight one of our emerging farmers working group members, Marcus Carpenter, who owns a farm called "Route One" which has opened pathways for aspiring farmers, particularly those from underrepresented backgrounds. Marcus shared his personal experiences and best practices in which he serves as a key advocate and trainer. Route One provides hands-on agricultural training to new and emerging farmers, focusing on practical skills, sustainable practices, and business development. Another highlight that farmers really connected with was the announcement of the Farm to School and early care grants as well as the Local Food Purchase Assistance program (LFPA). Just recently at the State of Minnesota MLK event held at Ordway, Marcus received the Change Maker Award. The Change Maker Awards honor extraordinary leaders who drive meaningful progress and elevate communities through bold vision and dedicated services.

Lastly, another highlight I would like to mention is the Beginning Farmer Equipment and Infrastructure Grant through the EFO. This was by far one of MDA’s most sought-after grants because we know that equipment is expensive and can be out of reach for emerging farmers and much needed by our farmers as they are looking into agriculture.

Minnesota State Fair 2025

The MDA Emerging Farmers Booth had 19 volunteers which also included Emerging Farmers Working Group members and the state of Minnesota’s Chief Inclusion Officer Priscilla Stalling. These volunteers gave their time and energy engaging visitors in a “did you know” wheel quiz designed to inform and test knowledge on Minnesota agriculture and emerging farmer resources and information. This drew large numbers daily and provided for robust engagement on farming in Minnesota and interests in signing up for the Emerging Farmers newsletter and participating in future MDA activities and events including the EFWG open meetings.



Figure 1. Spinning the wheel at the Minnesota State Fair

Farm Aid

In September, Minnesota hosted the 40th anniversary Farm Aid concert. The Emerging Farmers' Office was there, along with other MDA program staff, to share resources with concert goers. Not only was it a blast to see some legendary performers, we also learned more about [Farm Aid's Resources for Farmers](#).

Emerging Farmers Conference 2025

The 20th annual [Emerging Farmers Conference](#) took place on November 7 and 8, 2025, in Brooklyn Center, Minn.

- 360 plus attendees
- 260 identified as farmers
- 71 farmers received interpretation services
- 7 languages (Burmese, Hmong, Spanish, Somali, Karen, Kirundi, Nepali, Swahili)

The MDA’s collective presence at the Emerging Farmers Conference was led by the Emerging Farmers Office (EFO). One major highlight was the “Marketplace” a part of the Minnesota Farmers Market Association’s Grow Your Green Access to Markets program supported by the EMERG grant administered by the EFO. We hosted our annual EFO Listening Session which drew approximately 45 attendees and provided an overview and highlight on the following MDA programs: EFO Grants; Farm to School/Early Childcare; Poultry Production; Pesticide Drift Information. Additionally, a shared resource table for the MDA programs like Minnesota Grown, Agricultural Water Quality Certification Program, and the Pesticide and Fertilizer Management Division (PFMD) program were made available. The MDA staff also provided 1:1 engagement with attendees at the resource room and promoted the 2026 Organic Conference increasing emerging farmers registration.

Emerging Farmers newsletter

The EFO has produced 10 newsletters in FY25 which has seen an increase in subscribers to a current total of 3,300 subscribers with historic MDA newsletters click rate in July 2025 issue at 1,836 clicks! We attribute this interest to the Equipment and Infrastructure Grant administered by the EFO. The Newsletter has evolved to include audio formats among other updates with more focused content with, and considerations on word count etc.

Inquiries to the EFO

EFO phonline and emails sample inquiries — Beginning Farmers tax credit; Land Access (DPA); fertilizer guide; farm mental health/stress resources; programs to help buy and orchard; soil conservation; grants for urban farming; meat processing; livestock farming grants; translation and help for literacy challenged farmers; insect farming and genetic work for producing pet food; information on water conservation; pesticide drift concerns, etc.

Engagement and events

- Farm Advocate and Farm Mentor Training
- Farmers Market Week (St Joseph MN and N. Mankato MN joining the PE Liaison from the Gov Office)
- Tribal State Relations Training in Mille Lacs Band of Ojibwe in Onamia, MN
- Agrotourism Information event
- Garlic Festival
- Salsa Festival
- Native American Nutrition Conference
- Bimaaji'idiwin Garden Feast
- Dream of Wild Health's Corn Festival
- Chickenhead farms Mohamed Gaabane
- MFMA Conference
- Office of Cannabis Management Grant Listening Session
- New Americans Forums Forum
- Gichi Manidoo Giizis Conference and Pow Wow
- RFA Board Meeting
- Sustainable Farmers Association Conference
- Grow Your Green MFMA/EFO EMERG Project training participation

The Emerging Farmers Office

The EFO continues to work towards a one stop shop for emerging farmers and anyone beginning their farming journey who may be looking for resources and assistance. The EFO has an agency wide purview because emerging farmers are diverse in their farming needs from production, manufacturing, mixed operations, organic farming, incubator models, market access assistance, technical assistance to navigate resources and much more. Notably, entities have begun to engage in this space like:

- Minnesota Farm Bureau, where the EFO Director now serves the newly created Urban Ag Advisory Group which convenes diverse stakeholders to assist with the Minnesota Farm Bureau's Urban Agriculture efforts like outreach, engagement opportunities, and planning the Urban Ag Conference.
- The Ag for All Conference administered by the UMN Extension where the EFO Director also serves on the planning committee alongside other stakeholders like USDA etc. This inclusive conference also centers the needs of LGBTQIA+ farmers.

Today the EFO engagement with multiple farmers groups has increased, a sign that many Minnesotans are encouraged to participate in Minnesota's ag economy. This constituency is also diverse in their geographical locations, ethnicities, culturally unique crops, and unique farming models where they have organized in either incubator models, rent to own lands, CSA models, cooperative farming models and cross-collaborative models between various community farming groups and entities. These partnerships continue to strengthen, educate, and inform the farming communities which include civic education and participation.

As the EFO evolves, we will be working on leveraging the many partnerships, collaborations, and stakeholders' engagements to strengthen:

- Emerging farmers networking with entities who can assist with resources that support their needs – entities are both internal, and external stakeholders, including Minnesota state enterprise.
- Increase the 1:1 engagement/support for farmers either through our established programs like Farm Advocates or farmer to farmer peer networking and information sharing/learnings. Farmers have expressed the value derived from these focused smaller groups or 1:1 support.

Looking ahead

Land access

This continues to be a top inquiry within the merging farmers beginning farmers' space. Farmers are diverse in their needs, and that includes creative ideas in looking at models that allow for community landownership; how to leverage resources and opportunities to access lands within land trusts; securing agricultural lands as generational farms transition; and looking at county/city ordinances to unburden access to infrastructure development on owned and leased agricultural lands.

Grants and financial resources

From grants to loans. Continuing to design financial products that support entry into agriculture and infrastructure and equipment support – see impact stories under the “grants update” of this report. Following up with resources providers like the CDFIs, internal resource providers like the RFA and other divisions providing financial resources to investigate ways to make the relevant resources accessible to emerging farmers.

Technical assistance

Inquiries for technical assistance range from navigating the MDA grants requirements, to complex English language in our resources, keeping records and regulatory requirements. Distinction between the MDA programs and the USDA programs. The EFO will be looking at ways to address these needs in collaboration with our partners.

Data and farmers' stories

The EFO will be looking at ways to either partner with stakeholders or funding to carry out both quantitative and qualitative data. While we have seen an increase in communities of farmers, there is no scientific data that precisely provides results on various data points. Collecting both qualitative (experiences, impact and success stories) and quantitative (metrics and benchmarks) data to inform our program development and help support the MDA's engagement with emerging farmers will support not only EFO programming but will be valuable to the MDA and other stakeholders informing how they can support the diverse smaller scale farmers in Minnesota. Stories by farmers on their journeys, knowledge, etc. have been a welcome resource to many emerging farmers and helps in articulating policy recommendations. The EFO will partner with the MN Historical Society's previous story collection work and other entities in this space.

Translation

The Enterprise Translations Office (ETO) is working with the MDA to create a Translation Data Identifier (TDI) – the EFO is leading this work. This tool ensures that translations consistently reflect MDA's terminology, tone, and style so materials communicate accurately and effectively with Minnesota communities. The MDA division's documents should capture the specific language and priorities of our work. The TDI will reflect the MDA's unique voice across all programs. Without this tool, translations may default to more generic language and miss key nuances. This will make MDA's translations clear, consistent, and accessible. This work is further supported by the MDA's Outreach Coordination Team whose contributions are essential to building this resource as the group participants represent the MDA divisions and programs.

Current programs

The EFO administered several competitive grants for Minnesota farmers during Fiscal Year 2025 (FY25) – the Beginning Farmer Equipment and Infrastructure Grant, the Community Development Financial Institution Technical Assistance Grant, and the Urban Farm Conservation Mini-Grant. The EFO also partnered with several organizations to deliver a three-year federally funded marketing and profitability support program. Below are summaries of this programmatic work.

Beginning Farmer Equipment and Infrastructure Grant (FY25)

- **Purpose of program:** This is a competitive grant program to support new farmers in Minnesota to access equipment and develop infrastructure that will be crucial to the future of their farm business.
- **Statutory basis:** MINN. STAT. 17.055, Subd. 3.
- **Background:** In FY25, the program awarded its first round of grants, using the updated legislative language to give priority to applicants experiencing limited market access and limited land access 2024 MN Session Laws Chapter 126, Article 2, Section 6. Applicants could apply for up to \$20,000 to purchase agriculture-specific equipment or make farm infrastructure improvements. In FY26, the next round of the program will be offered.
- **FY25 Program budget:** \$880,000 (state funded through the Emerging Farmers Office budget plus a [one-time \\$300,000 appropriation](#))

Awardee summary

Table 1. FY25 Applicant and awardee summary

Applications	Awards
1,100 eligible applications	97 awards
\$18.6 million requested	\$857K awarded
85 counties represented	45 counties represented

Frequently requested items

Tractors, building improvements, fencing, electrical improvements, crop-specific equipment, irrigation and well improvements, livestock handling equipment, and walk-in coolers

Summary of grant projects

Fencing (16 grants); specialty crop equipment (15 grants); tractor purchases from small walk-behind tractors to larger row crop tractors (11 grants); livestock chute systems (9 grants) plus livestock equipment including feeding and watering systems, water access improvements and irrigation equipment (8 grants); new infrastructure projects such as high tunnels, equipment storage structures, and walk-in coolers as well as improvements for existing barns and feed lots. Plus, various other needs, including a soybean head, GPS technology for tractors, bee hives, a grain transfer system, hay ballers, and Christmas tree farm equipment.

Impact stories



Figure 2. “We’re beyond happy with the deer/rabbit pest control [our new fence] is providing! The season is off to a great start because of it.” – FY25 Grantee in Watonwan County with cut flower and specialty crop farm



Figure 3. FY25 Grantee in Hubbard County purchased this cattle chute to improve herd management on his first-generation livestock farm (pictured above is the grantee’s son)



Figure 4. “With the help of this grant, I was able to purchase a compact tractor – something I had needed for a long time but couldn’t afford on my own. It has already made a tremendous difference in how I manage my land and complete daily tasks. I still can’t believe my family used to do all of this work manually for so long. I’m truly grateful for this grant – it has made my work more efficient, less physically demanding, and much more sustainable.” – FY25 Grantee in Hennepin County with cut flower and vegetable farm



Figure 5. FY25 Grantee in Stearns County standing in front of the discbine he purchased with the grant, allowing him to improve hay production.

Community Development Financial Institution Technical Assistance Grant (FY25)

- **Purpose of program:** To support certified community development financial institutions (CDFIs) to expand financial services to farmers.
- **Background:** CDFIs providing lending and technical business assistance to communities that traditionally lack access to resources. By leveraging their mission-driven financial services to serve agricultural businesses, it expands financial resources for farmers. Applicants could apply for up to \$200,000.
- **Statutory basis:** Minnesota Session Laws 2023, Chapter 43, Article 1, Section 2, Subd. 5 (s)
- **Program budget:** \$275,000 for awards and administration
- **Funding source:** Minnesota State Legislature

Awardee summary

A total of \$270,000 was awarded to three CDFIs.

Organization	Project name	Amount awarded
Latino Economic Development Center	Enhancing the Internal Capacity of LEDC Staff, Agriculture Lending Program, and Its Reach	\$100,000
Hmong American Partnership	Capacity Building to Increase Technical and Financial Assistance for Farmers	\$90,000
African Economic Development Solutions	AEDS CDFI Emerging Farmers' Technical Assistance and Lending Program	\$80,000

The grant-funded work began in February 2025 and will be completed by June 2026.

Impacts

Initial impacts between February – June 2025 of this work include:

- Latino Economic Development staff members attended professional development opportunities such as the training “Evaluating & Supporting Spanish-Speaking Farmer, Rancher, and Fisher Clients” provided by a national leader in agriculture-focused CDFI work, California Farmlink.
- Hmong American Partnership conducted a comprehensive gap analysis of its existing loan products and lending procedures, with a focus on how they serve emerging and experienced Southeast Asian farmers
- African Economic Development Center staff members completed a survey to assess baseline knowledge in agri-business technical assistance and lending practices, and received training on publicly funded resources available to agribusinesses.

Urban Farm Conservation Mini-Grant (FY25)

- **Purpose of program:** To support commercial urban farmers to implement conservation-focused practices to generate benefits for soil health, water quality, wildlife habitat and more.
- **Background:** These mini grants offered up to \$5,000 of support for urban farmers to pay for equipment, supplies, and services which would help them implement conservation practices.
- **Program budget:** \$200,000, for awards and administration over two award cycles
- **Funding source:** United States Department of Agriculture’s Natural Resources Conservation Service

Awardee summary

In FY25, 12 grants were awarded to this program totaling \$43,427. See the list of awardees below. The second round of this program will be administered during FY26, applications were open in November and December 2025.

Farm name	County	Award purpose
Blessings Farm, LLC	Wright	Microirrigation system for water use efficiency
Carleton College Farm	Rice	Materials for on-site composting systems to improve soil health.
Observation Hill Farm	St. Louis	Amendments and mulch for soil health as well as microirrigation systems for water use efficiency.
The Black Radish	Hennepin	Compost and mulch to improve soil health as well as cover crop seeds and management tools.
California Street Farm	Hennepin	Paper pot transplanting system for reduced tillage and improved ergonomics.
Global Entrepreneurship Week Minnesota	Ramsey	Microirrigation system for water use efficiency, soil testing for soil health improvement and establishment of a pollinator area.
Lake Region Healthcare Foundation	Otter Tail	Rainwater collection system to increase water use efficiency, and shade cloth for plant health.
Community Action Duluth	St. Louis	Compost, straw mulch, cover crop seed, and tools to reduce tillage and increase soil health.
Dormanen Family Farm	Mahnomen	Rainwater collection and drip irrigation system for water use efficiency.
Mutts Unleashed Farm	Clay	Microirrigation system for water use efficiency and raised bed materials for specialty crop rotation.
Maplewood Area Historical Society's Bruentrup Heritage Farm	Ramsey	Rainwater collection for water use efficiency as well as vertical raised bed system for specialty crop rotations.
Nature's Holistic Farm LLC	Ramsey	Microirrigation system for water use efficiency. Also installing composting system.

Grants update – federal

A summary of the federally grant-funded programmatic work that is managed by the Emerging Farmers Office.

Marketing and profitability support program

Program name: Empowering Minnesota's Emerging Farmers: Growing Food System Resilience with Marketing Assistance and Profitability Support (EMERG)

Purpose of program: EMERG is a federally funded project managed by the Emerging Farmers Office which received \$1 million in support from the Minnesota NRCS for work to be carried out 2024-2027. Project partners include Minnesota Grown, Minnesota Farmers' Market Association, Big River Farms and The Food Group, the Emerging Farmers Conference and University of Minnesota Extension.

Background: The project carries on and expands the Grow Your Green farm finance education program previously funded through the state legislature's Emerging Farmer Technical Assistance program. A main point of this MDA programmatic development is expanding Minnesota Grown's reach as a marketing support and market access for local food producers who are emerging farmers. Due to the complexity of federal funding stability in 2025, the program carefully managed the project budget to increase certainty around expenses.

Impacts

The following outcomes are already achieved, and full project impacts will be evaluated by end of 2027:

Twenty farmers were trained as farm finance coaches in February 2025 for small scale, diversified agriculture businesses. Trainers pictured on the left. Each trainer is currently working with five farmers. Including the farmer trainers and their clients, the program supports more than 120 farmers with farm recordkeeping and finance education. Read this [Morning Ag Clips article, March 3, 2025](#) about the program.



Figure 6. 2025 Grow Your Green Farm Profitability Farmer Trainers

The curriculum developed for this training, the [Grow Your Green – Farm Profitability Workbook](#), was published as an open access resource on February 12, 2025. It is a free-to-all curriculum to train direct marketing farmers on farm financial recordkeeping and profitability analysis.

Year Six goals

Continue strengthening the emerging farmers' network

EFWG continued to strengthen connections across communities through informative sessions and interactive discussions. Presentations from organizations like The Good Acre, updates from tribal liaisons, and introductions to legislative and state program leaders allowed members to gain a deeper understanding of the broader support network.

Continue to improve support and resources for emerging farmers

The working group has focused on expanding resources and providing actionable insights. These included down payment assistance, grant opportunities, and we just hired a new Tribal Liaison, Cyndi Bergloff. The EFO shared funding and program access updates, helping members navigate financial pathways and plan for future growth.

Community engagement and feedback collection

Through various outreach events and facilitated discussions, EFWG will continue to gather and share input on emerging farmers' needs, preferences, and experiences with community members throughout the state. Members expressed strong support for EFO's outreach activities, highlighting the importance of educational workshops, networking events, and community engagement. This feedback will shape the outreach officer's role and help tailor EFO resources.

Appendix A: 2025-2027 Emerging Farmers' Working Group Members

- Cameron Bailey, Hennepin County
- Molly Byron, Waseca County
- Marcus Carpenter, Hennepin County
- Tara Conway, Hennepin County
- Katie Drewitz, Fillmore County
- Heather Gaston, Pope County
- LuVessie Knox, Hennepin County
- Rozalyn Maney, Hennepin County
- Tara Ostendorf, Stearns County
- Jason Montgomery Riess, Washington County
- Jina Rahimi, Ramsey County
- Adi Salagram, Hennepin County
- Melanie Woodford, Mower County
- Kelsey Love Zaavedra, Chisago County
- Tim Wilson, Carver County
- Jaton White, Hennepin County
- Haley Ekstrom, Martin County
- Angela Johnson, Washington County
- Cynthia Johnson, Mille Lacs County
- Matthew Ramadan, Hennepin County

Appendix B: Existing Resources for Emerging Farmers

Note: This list of resources is available to emerging and historically underrepresented farmers.

Federal

- USDA American Rescue Plan Technical Assistance
- USDA Small and Mid-Sized Farmer Resources
- USDA Beginning Farmers and Ranchers Loan
- USDA Farm Service Agency (FSA)-Outreach Programs, Pandemic Assistance, FSA Veterans in Agriculture
- USDA Local and Regional Food Sector Toolkits and Handbooks
- USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) Environmental Quality Incentive Program (EQIP)
- USDA New Farmers Website
- USDA Rural Development
- USDA FSA Stakeholder Tool Kit
- USDA Urban Agriculture Tool Kit

State

- Community Financial Development Grant (CDFI)
- Down Payment Assistance Grant
- Beginning Farmer Infrastructure Grant
- Aggie Bond Beginning Farmer Loan Program
- Beginning Farmer Tax Credit
- Board of Water and Soil Resources
- Dual-Training Pipeline (Minnesota Department of Labor and Industry)
- MDA FarmLink
- Farm to School
- MDA Grants
- MDA Agricultural Growth, Research, and Innovation Program
- Farm Business Management Scholarships
- Livestock Investment Grant
- MDA New Markets Program
- Sustainable Agriculture Demonstration Grant
- DEED-Office of New Americans
- Value-Added Grant
- Minnesota Grown
- Starting a Food Business Roadmap
- Workplace Safety Consultation (Minnesota Department of Labor and Industry)

Non-Government Resources

- Agua Gorda Cooperative
- AURI
- Big River Farms
- Black Family Land Trust
- Blue Zones
- Carpenter Nature Center
- Clean Energy Resource Teams
- Compeer Financial Emerging Markets, Local Food & Non-Traditional Ag
- Dairy Grazing Apprenticeship
- Dream of Wild Health
- Driftless Grown
- Emerging Farmers Conference
- Farm at the Arb
- Farm Commons
- Farmer Veteran Coalition
- Farmers' Legal Action Group
- Farmland Access Hub
- Food Animal Concerns Trust
- Grow and Farmer Fund
- Hmong American Farmers Association
- Hmong American Partnership
- Holistic Management
- Iroquois Valley Farmland REIT
- Lake Superior College Eco-Entrepreneurship Program
- Land Access Workshops
- Land Stewardship Project
- Local Food Advisory Committee (MISA)
- Main Street Project (Northfield)
- Midwest Sustainable Ag Working Group
- Minnesota Institute for Sustainable Agriculture (MISA)
- Minnesota Organic & Sustainable Education Service
- Minnesota African Immigrant Farmers Association
- Minnesota State Horticultural Society
- Minnesota Dairy Initiative
- Minnesota Farm Bureau
- Minnesota Farmers Union
- Minnesota Farmers Union-New Leader Academy
- Minnesota State Agricultural Centers of Excellence
- Midwest Organic & Sustainable Education Services (MOSES)
- National Center for Appropriate Technology-ATTRA Sustainable Agriculture Program