

FSDTF/FIT Member Compensation Discussion

We have established that Minnesota Department of Agriculture (MDA) legal counsel determined that current language in M.S. 28A.21 prevents the MDA from administering member compensation, directly or through an outside organization. The FIT was advised that statutory language change would be required for the agency to include compensation, directly or through an outside organization, in Task Force activities.

Consideration #1 - Could we get around this entirely by using the definition of "member" in statute (i.e., only official, governor-appointed members of the FSDTF)?

No. Although this may not be a violation of law, it would be an ethics issue. The outside organization could appear to be lobbying or paying for compensation to influence the group that advises policy. In other words, this would violate the principles of equitable access to decisionmakers.

Consideration #2 - Is this similar to what is being discussed within the Emerging Farmers' Workgroup and can we use language from that as a model for FSDTF?

No. Current consideration for the Emerging Farmers' Workgroup would be to actually set aside state funds as a stipend for participants. This would be different from more "sponsorship"-type assistance as originally discussed among FIT.

Take-Aways

MDA counsel cannot "yay" or "nay" language being proposed. The FSDTF is an independent, governor-appointed group that has the ability and authority to make recommendations for statute change, which involves input from more than the MDA membership. However, FSDTF members should consider what might come along with these statute changes. Similar issues were discussed when this language was originally established. For example, the FSDTF would be responsible for facilitating this compensation. How would sponsorships be selected or approved? How would the FSDTF ensure that sponsorships are offered in an equitable manner?