

FRESHWATER

March 18th, 2024

House Committee on Agriculture Finance and Policy

545 State Office Building

St. Paul, MN 55155

[HF 24-07701](#)

Dear Chair Vang and Committee Members:

Freshwater applauds the intent of this legislation. We appreciate the discussion the Committee has had surrounding the issue of high levels of nitrates in drinking water, especially in the southeastern part of the state where karst topography makes groundwater particularly vulnerable.

Freshwater supports legislation like this to protect private wells by preventing nitrogen pollution. This bill accomplishes this goal by promoting regenerative agricultural practices. The bill defines and describes incentives to improve water quality, increase climate-smart practices, and achieve soil-healthy farming goals. We know the need for a multi-faceted solution is critical in southeastern Minnesota. This bill provides that. Everyone has acknowledged that farmers need to be a part of the solution, this proposal helps do that by paying farmers who use at least three clean-water practices.

Why three? To achieve necessary nutrient-reduction goals, research has shown that multiple soil health practices (e.g. no-till or strip till *plus* cover cropping *plus* nutrient management) are needed and on significantly more acres. The 2008 Gulf Hypoxia Action Plan set a nitrogen reduction goal for Minnesota of 45% by 2040 from the 1980-1996 baseline. A 20% reduction goal has a provisional date of 2025. Of the average 80,000 metric tons leaving the state, 75,000 are from agricultural land. It is therefore appropriate that the most problematic acres contributing nitrogen to the Mississippi from tile and shallow groundwater and recharging bedrock aquifers are targeted and with urgency.

Finally, the bill provides for data collection and monitoring. We think it is important to demonstrate achievable results and, in this way, encourage greater participation across our agricultural communities.

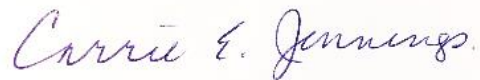
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Freshwater is a nonprofit organization working to inspire and empower people to value and preserve freshwater resources.

Clean water, reduced greenhouse gas emissions, and sustainable farming are linked. Reactive nitrogen lost from agriculture negatively impacts Minnesota's water and air and makes farming expensive. Improved soil health increases moisture infiltration and retention thereby resulting in less nitrogen loss. Improved soil health sequesters carbon. Crops grown for soil health use less nitrogen resulting in less lost to the environment.

We ask the Committee to continue to work together to provide solutions to high levels of nitrates in Minnesota's drinking water.

Respectfully,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Carrie E. Jennings". The signature is written in a cursive style and is centered within a light beige rectangular background.

Carrie E. Jennings
Freshwater Research and Policy Director