

Dear Senator Pogemiller and Representative Kelliher,

We are concerned about changes made to the Green Acres program in the 2008 legislative session and urge you to support their repeal.

Green Acres allows the taxable value of farmland to be lowered when it is being driven up due to non-farm development. The program equalizes the taxes on farmland throughout the state and has been an important tool in protecting farmland. In the past the program has allowed for conservation farming practices to be a part of the program. However, changes made to the program last legislative session have long-term negative consequences for stewardship of the land and penalize well-established conservation farming practices.

Key among these changes:

- A distinction is created between “productive” and “non-productive” land, and so-called “non-productive” land is ineligible for Green Acres. This makes wooded acreage, wetlands and other parts of a working farm that are not tillable, but a necessary part of good stewardship, potentially ineligible. The distinction between “productive” and “non-productive” is reminiscent of a “fencerow-to-fencerow” mentality that has been detrimental to water and soil conservation, as well as wildlife habitat.
- Farmland that is in the Conservation Reserve Program (CRP), Reinvest in Minnesota (RIM) or Conservation Reserve Enhancement Program (CREP) is ineligible for Green Acres. This will discourage participation in these important conservation programs.
- A transfer – not a sale – of land triggers a payback of back taxes on so-called “non-productive” land. That means a parent transferring a farm to a son or daughter may have to pay taxes even though they have no money coming in through the transfer. This could force a sell-off of land for development to pay these taxes.

It is important to understand that farms operate as a whole. A well run farm is more than the tillable or so-called “productive” acres. It includes the buffer strips, wetlands and wooded acres that make the farm environmentally sustainable. We want to emphasize that the so-called “non-productive” land and land in CRP, CREP and RIM is producing real and measurable benefits to the community in the form of wildlife habitat, water filtering and storage, and sequestration of carbon. In fact, in the case of CRP, CREP and RIM, we are paying farmers for the creation of these essential public goods.

This session we support an early repeal of the 2008 changes made to Green Acres. This way, landowners will not be pushed to make environmentally harmful and potentially irreversible changes to their farms in order to comply with the new law.

After repeal, we would like to see established a process that allows for broad input from farmers, landowners and conservation and environmental organizations familiar with the program. Green Acres has been in use since 1967, and is built into estate plans, business structures and

conservation plans. There are valid concerns over Green Acres being misused, and we are not suggesting that the Green Acres program is not in need of changing. But any revisions should take into account the thousands of Minnesotans who are using this program effectively. Without broad input, it is easy to make changes that have unintended but very negative consequences.

Sincerely,