

May 11, 2017

Dear Governor Dayton and Legislative Leaders,

As farmers and local government officials, we are writing to you with an urgent request with respect to the water buffer law that has become the subject of considerable controversy throughout rural Minnesota. While we are not advocating the repeal of the new buffer law, we must face the fact it is not ready for implementation this year under the current provisions.

Our hope is the Legislature and the Governor could come to a satisfactory agreement yet this legislative session on the critical modifications that are needed for this new law to be effectively implemented. Specifically, changes are needed in the classifications of private vs. public ditches, clarifications on what constitutes acceptable alternative practices and some form of compensation and/or property tax relief for the taking of productive farmland out of production.

Implementation of this new law will be challenging under the best of circumstances. If no modifications are made prior to May 22nd, implementation of the new buffer law will be extremely challenging for the following reasons:

1. There are provisions of the buffer law that are not clear and it is causing confusion among both farmers and local government officials.
2. Local government officials throughout the state are having problems interpreting the new law, and helping farmers with compliance will be very challenging.
3. Crop farmers are already in the field with planting, beginning their busiest cycle of the year through the fall harvest – getting into compliance by November 1st is a real hardship.
4. Approved alternative practices were released just last month with more information forthcoming, making it extremely difficult for land owners to both decide and implement alternatives prior to the beginning of the planting season. With these alternative practices being crucial for many farmers concerned about the loss of productive land, more time to implement is necessary.
5. The lack of financial consideration for the taking of productive farmland is troubling, especially at a time when farmers are experiencing multiple years of low prices and financial stress.

If the Legislature and Governor cannot negotiate acceptable modifications to the buffer law prior to the legislative adjournment, we would respectfully, but strongly, request delaying the implementation effective date of the buffer law. This would not only allow farmers to have the time to understand the law and how best to get into compliance, but also give local government officials more time to decide how to best enforce the law. With insufficient funding in place for county boards and watershed districts, executing the buffer law will be a major issue for local officials.

We stand ready to assist. Thank you.

Chicken and Egg Assn. of Minnesota

Cooperative Network

Minnesota AgriGrowth Council

Minnesota Assn. of Wheat Growers

Minnesota Barely Growers Assn.

Minnesota Farm Bureau

Minnesota Milk Producers Assn.

Minnesota Rural Counties

Minnesota State Cattlemen's Assn.

Minnesota Turkey Growers Assn.

Red River Valley Sugarbeet Growers Assn.

Ron Antony
Yellow Medicine County Commissioner

Eric Christensen
Kittson County Administrator

Theresia Gillie
Kittson County Commissioner

Doug Krueger
McLeod County Commissioner

Leon Olson
Kittson County Commissioner

Betty Younggren
Kittson County Commissioner, Chair

Minnesota Corn Growers Assn

Minnesota Farmers Union

Minnesota Pork Producers Assn.

Minnesota Soybean Growers Assn.

Minnesota Turf Seed Council

Northern Plains Potato Growers Assn.

Southern Minnesota Beet Sugar Cooperative

Joe Bouvette
Kittson County Commissioner

Bob Fox
Renville County Commissioner, Chair

Bobbie Harder
Sibley County Commissioner

Harlan Madsen
Kandiyohi County Commissioner

Corey Wikstrom
Kittson County Commissioner

Cc: All members of the Minnesota House and Senate