



Protecting, restoring and enhancing the metro Mississippi River and its watershed since 1993.

106 W. Water St., Ste. 600 | St. Paul MN 55107-2032
(651) 222-2193 | fmr.org | info@fmr.org

June 5th, 2026

Dear Administrator Kader and members of the Clean Water Council,

As you continue your FY 28-29 Clean Water Fund deliberations, Friends of the Mississippi River (FMR) respectfully requests that you recommend an increase in funding for the University of Minnesota's Forever Green Initiative.

The Forever Green Initiative

As you know, the University of Minnesota's Forever Green Initiative is a nationally respected research effort designed to develop new, economically viable 'Continuous Living Cover' (CLC) cropping systems.

Integrating perennial and winter-annual crops into existing farming systems holds soil in place and stops pollutants from leaching into ground and surface water, while providing producers with new revenue streams that can bolster our agricultural economy through the development of high-value, commercially marketable food, feed, and fuel products.

Alignment with Nutrient Reduction Strategy and drinking water protection goals

Minnesota's [Nutrient Reduction Strategy](#) (NRS) calls for millions of acres of CLC cropping systems in Minnesota.

The NRS makes CLC cropping systems a foundational pillar of success, and notes that:

"Nitrogen reduction goals cannot be achieved without transformative changes in crop system rotations and maintaining living cover for more months each year."

Figure ES-1-12. Example scenario showing the magnitude of change needed to achieve nutrient reduction goals in the Mississippi River Basin.



Similarly, CLCs can help protect our drinking water, especially in [vulnerable areas](#) such as coarse-textured soils or karst topography. When it comes to protecting groundwater, few strategies are as effective or scalable as CLC cropping systems. For example:

- Kernza, a pioneering perennial grain, can reduce soil water nitrate concentration by up to 97% compared to corn.¹
- Winter annual oilseeds crops like camelina and pennycress can reduce nitrate concentrations by up to 97% compared to no cover (standard practice).²
- Perennial crops can reduce nitrate losses through tile lines by over 95%.³

Scaling up CLC cropping systems over time

While CLC acreage goals and associated water quality improvements are certainly ambitious, they are achievable with sustained support over time.

- **Putting Down Roots:** The 2023 [Putting Down Roots](#) report, prepared by FMR and the University of Minnesota, found that under a moderate adoption scenario, Forever Green CLC cropping systems could reduce nitrogen loss by 23% and soil erosion by 35% in Minnesota by 2050 while enhancing on-farm profits by 20%.
- **Sustainable Aviation Fuel (SAF) market.** Winter annual oilseeds are particularly well-positioned as a low-carbon aviation fuel feedstock. The emergence of the Minnesota SAF Hub, improved State SAF tax credit, industrywide low-carbon fuel commitments, and federal SAF production incentives have opened the door to rapid commercialization. With robust public investment and policy support, researchers estimate that statewide camelina acreage could - under the right circumstances - achieve [one million acres](#) within as little as 10 years.
- **One Million Acres Scaling Study (IMASS):** The University of Minnesota, MBOLD, and many project partners (including FMR) are collaborating on a [One Million Acres Scaling Study for Camelina](#), identifying a pathway to securing the 1st million acres of camelina.

Alignment with the Clean Water Council Strategic Plan

Investments in Forever Green align with multiple strategies and actions included in the [Final Clean Water Council Strategic Plan for 2024-2028](#), including:

- **Vision: Groundwater is clean and available to all in Minnesota**
 - Goal 1: Protect groundwater from degradation and support effective measures to restore degraded groundwater.
 - Measure: Alternative land management activities supported that protect groundwater such as easements, [perennials, and market-based continuous living cover](#).
- **Vision: Drinking water is safe for everyone, everywhere in Minnesota.**
 - Goal 1: Public Water Systems

¹ Jungers et al. 2019. Agriculture, Ecosystems and Environment.

² Weyers et al. 2019. Journal of Environmental Quality.

³ Randall et al. 1997. Journal of Environmental Quality. strategic and

- Measure: Landowner adoption of practices that protect drinking water through technical assistance, conservation equipment support, financial assistance, easements, drinking water protection/restoration grants, targeted wellhead protection grants, market-based living cover, soil health grants, etc.

- **Vision: All Minnesotans value water and take actions to sustain and protect it.**
 - Goal 1: Build capacity of local communities to protect and sustain water resource
 - Measure: Number of acres with continuous living cover, with a target of five million acres by 2034.

- **Vision: All Minnesotans value water and take actions to sustain and protect it.**
 - Goal 1: Build capacity of local communities to protect and sustain water resource
 - Measure: Acres of income-generating continuous living cover planted.

A Seven-to-One Return

State investment in Forever Green is leveraged many times over in federal grants and other funding that support this increasingly high-profile effort. Historically, for every one dollar of Clean Water Fund support, Forever Green has secured roughly seven additional dollars in complementary funds.

A deserving investment

While traditional on-farm education and BMP cost-share programs remain important, we must acknowledge that BMPs can't do the job alone. Getting to clean water is not just about 'how we grow' our crops - it is about 'what we grow'.

We must find ways to keep the soil covered year-round through economically viable CLC cropping systems that work for farmers and our environment. We urge you to support increased funding for Forever Green in your FY28-29 Clean Water Fund recommendations process.

Sincerely,



Trevor Russell
Water Program Director
Friends of the Mississippi River