

From: Pakou Hang [<mailto:pakou@hmongfarmers.com>]
Sent: Wednesday, April 20, 2016 10:15 AM
To: Pakou Hang
Cc: #CI-StPaul_Ward2
Subject: Message from the Hmong American Farmers Association

April 20, 2016

Dear Council Member Noecker:

My name is Pakou Hang and I am the Executive Director of the Hmong American Farmers Association (HAFA). I represent over 128 farmers and their immediate and extended families, which numbers over thousands of Saint Paul residents. As you may already know, the Hmong are political refugees who immigrated to the United States (U.S.) after the Vietnam War. Upon their arrival, and with limited resources, many families turned to agriculture to raise their children. Today, Hmong farmers are at the forefront of the local food economy, accounting for more than 50 percent of all the farmers in the Twin Cities' farmers markets, including the Saint Paul Farmers Market.

Unfortunately, despite their experiences, Hmong farmers face numerous obstacles to farming, including lack of access to land tenure, capital, new markets (besides the farmers markets), trainings and research. As a result, the average income of \$35,000 for Hmong farming families (\$35,000) is significantly less than the median income of Minnesota farmers at \$41,899. This is especially relevant considering the larger average size of Hmong families.

HAFA was founded in 2011 by Hmong farmers and is led by Hmong farmers. Our mission is to advance the economic prosperity of Hmong farmers and their families through strategic partnerships, capacity building, community engagement, and advocacy. Programmatically, that means we help farmers' access affordable land, new markets (in addition to the farmers markets), microloans, research opportunities and trainings. Moreover we run a food hub where we train our farmers on food safety and then aggregate their fresh produce and sell it to the Saint Paul Public Schools, Saint Paul and Ramsey County Head Start, Mississippi Market, Saint Paul Public Housing Agency, the food shelf at Merrick Community Services, and many other Saint Paul private institutions and residents.

Since its inception, HAFA has become a collective voice and a thought leader in conversations about community development, wealth creation, and sustainable agriculture in the Hmong and greater community. The founding members designed HAFA as a membership-based organization because they believed that systems change occurs only when a critical mass of people aligned in shares values and acted in solidarity.

In today's City Council meeting, item number 25 will be in front of you for a final vote to amend chapters 157 and 165 of the Legislative Code to permit agricultural vehicles to park on city streets. Specifically as it is currently written, this amendment would allow for only one placard to be issued to a single address. (See below)

"Special parking permit placards shall be issued for the growing season of the year in which they are purchased. Fees for such permits shall be determined by the city council pursuant to Sec. 310.09(b). Only

one (1) placard may be issued for any single address within the city, and only one (1) placard may be issued per applicant, although a placard may be used for any agricultural vehicle owned by the applicant.”

While we applaud the ethos of this amendment and want to thank Council Member Russ Stark for his support, we believe a limitation of one placard per address will be financially harmful to urban farmers in Saint Paul (many of whom are Hmong) and sends the wrong message to the greater community of local food supporters about how Saint Paul views small farming operations.

In the past couple of years a series of decisions around parking meters, light rail construction and, paradoxically, the proliferation of farmers markets by neighborhood groups and churches, have greatly harmed the economic stability of urban farmers. The reality is that many in Saint Paul who farm for their main livelihood, as our Hmong farmers do, have been driven to splitting up their operations and selling at two and even sometimes three concurring farmers markets to make the same amount of money that they used to at just one. For that reason we urge you to change the language in the amendment and instead of limiting the number of placards per address, we ask that a cap is put on the number of placards that can be issued per address to 3 or 2. This way, farmers who need to grow their small businesses may do so without fear of breaking the law, but at the same time, it recognizes that an agricultural business with three box trucks is no longer a “small” business that can be run from someone’s home.

If there are any further questions, please do not hesitate to contact me. I look forward to your support.
Thank you.

Sincerely,

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