

March 17, 2025

Chairman Mike Nathe
House Appropriations Committee
Education and Environment Division
600 East Boulevard Avenue
Bismarck, ND 58505

Subject: SB 2018 - Autonomous Agriculture Grant Program

Mr. Chair and members of the committee,

My name is Matt Wendel, and I serve as the Chief of Staff for Grand Farm. Founded in 2019, we are a collaborative network working together to solve problems in agriculture using applied technology.

I am writing in support of the Autonomous Agriculture Grant Program, which is a part of Governor Armstrong's Department of Commerce budget recommendation

I would like to express our thanks for the Legislature and the State of North Dakota for their foresight to invest in the program. And I want to thank everyone who has attended and supported the events and activities that have come out of that investment.

In the 2021 special session, the legislature created the Autonomous Agriculture Grant Program, and through a competitive application process, Grand Farm was awarded funding in 2022 to further advance agriculture technology through a world-class Innovation Campus and Shop.

Leveraging that funding, Grand Farm partnered with over 50 organizations and families to raise a total \$15.3M to establish and build the Grand Farm Innovation Campus, including the purchase and utilization of 140 acres in Casselton, ND, and completed a 25,000 square foot Innovation Shop.

From being awarded the grant in 2022, Grand Farm selected the Innovation Campus site, purchased land, designed and built the Innovation Shop - all by 2024, quickly delivering on our commitment to the state. This has enabled a hub for collaboration, research, validation, demonstration, and commercialization around agriculture technology.

In 2024, the Innovation Campus facilitated 33 field trials with 26 companies from around the world. These trials were directly focused on solving North Dakota agriculture challenges.

We are now partnered with AGCO, CHS, AgCountry, Microsoft, Bobcat, and USDA, along with 70 other partners from around the world. And have been able to host events with all of them as well as with John Deere, the U.S. Senate Agriculture Appropriations Committee, the Small Business Administration, Farmers Union, FFA, North Dakota State University, the University of North Dakota and more.

The Autonomous Agriculture Grant Program has ultimately enabled Grand Farm to attract private sector investment, secure federal funding, and advance AgTech innovation in North Dakota. It has also led to a strengthened Grand Farm partnership model, driving revenue diversification and sustainable growth. This has all contributed to strengthening North Dakota's position as the global leader in agricultural technology and innovation.

The state of North Dakota has an opportunity to continue to invest in innovation, continue to diversify the economy, and continue to support agriculture, one of our largest industries. An investment completing the original proposed amount into the Autonomous Agriculture Grant Program could enable:

- Colocation of agriculture industry leaders at the Grand Farm Innovation Campus.
- Creation of a federal lab on AI in Agriculture with the United States Department of Agriculture in collaboration with Senator Hoeven.
- Attraction of 25 new companies to develop in ND and expand presence in our state.
- Creation of \$2.4M of tax revenue each year, for ten years, through wages, property tax, etc.
- Drive \$250M of federal funds into North Dakota through collaboration with the National Science Foundation, United States Department of Agriculture's Agricultural Research Services, NDSU, UND, and others.

By leveraging state investment in infrastructure pieces, Grand Farm is multiplying economic impact, accelerating business development, and securing North Dakota's future as an AgTech powerhouse.

Thank you for your consideration.

Matt Wendel
Chief of Staff
Grand Farm