



June 22, 2020

Lisa Bender  
President, Minneapolis City Council  
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Dear Councilwoman Bender,

The Institute for Agriculture and Trade Policy (IATP) is a 34-year-old nonprofit organization based in Minneapolis. We work to ensure fair and sustainable food, farm and trade systems. IATP's home has been 2105 First Avenue S. in the Whittier neighborhood for more than 20 years. Many of our staff live in Minneapolis neighborhoods close to our office.

Racism persists in every area of our work, and we are committed to uprooting the structural inequities that are the direct result of generations of injustice and exploitation. In light of the recent murder of George Floyd, we write to urge the Minneapolis City Council to take meaningful action to close the many racial gaps in Minneapolis and dismantle the Minneapolis Police Department.

To us, the intersection of racism and farm policy is apparent: farmlands stolen from Native people, white wealth built from hundreds of years of slavery in agricultural fields, forced displacement of farmers of color from their land, ongoing exploitation of farmworkers and food workers, and the deliberate denial of resources and support from government agencies and banks to Black and Native American farmers in particular, but also to other food producers of color.

Major disruptions to our food system from the COVID-19 pandemic have made clear the fragility of our agriculture economy and the disproportionate impact on communities of color. Recent outbreaks at meat processing facilities have not only disrupted supply chains, they have also exposed meatpacking workers – predominantly immigrants and people of color – to a deadly virus, leaving them to choose between their health and their livelihood.

We are writing to thank you for your leadership and to thank the entire City Council for approving the resolution to disband the Minneapolis Police Department and explore a new model of public safety. We also support your long overdue action to ban chokeholds and neck restraints. At the same time, police reform has never been a top priority of the City Council, and we ask you to take meaningful action that leads to long-term change. This work needs to center Black voices, and we urge you to reach out to multi-generational Black leadership to hear their concerns and needs.

We ask that the City Council place a charter referendum on the November 2020 ballot to amend the city charter to remove the Minneapolis Police Department and establish a new department for community safety. In the immediate term, we also call on the City Council to cut the 2020 Minneapolis Police Department budget and reinvest the money in existing public safety programs. The lives of our Black and Brown friends, family and neighbors depend on the City Council taking action.

Thank you,

Ben Lilliston  
Interim Co-Executive Director  
Institute for Agriculture and Trade Policy

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