



## *Mille Lacs Band of Ojibwe Indians*

*Executive Branch of Tribal Government  
Office of the Chief Executive*

*Via E-mail*

October 22, 2024

To: The Minnesota Department of Agriculture

Re: Spirit Lake Native Farm Firewood Processing Operation

I am writing in support Spirit Lake Native Farm's Value-Added proposal to support a firewood processing operation, which would be essential for enhancing viability for wild rice processing.

Quality processing is one of the biggest challenges facing traditional wild rice harvesters. Once two-person canoe teams gather rice from lakes and rivers, it needs to be parched and then dehulled. Most commercial processors are unable to finish it in a timely manner, resulting in diminished product quality, and they typically use propane as their fuel source. While convenient, propane yields a different finish than wild rice finished with wood fire. Wood fire also carries significant cultural and spiritual importance for Native people.

Spirit Lake Native Farms is increasingly unique in its commitment to providing quality and timely finishing using wood as its sole fuel source. The quality of its finished product stands apart from other commercial processors, which is why so many Native harvesters seek to have their *manoomin* (wild rice) finished there.

Using wood as a fuel source does, unfortunately, bring added labor and transportation costs compared to propane. The support provided by this grant application would allow Spirit Lake Native Farms to significantly increase its ability to process the abundant firewood available in Minnesota's forests, as has been done for countless generations. Additionally, Spirit Lake Native Farms recognizes the cultural significance that fire has in the respectful handling and processing aspects of wild rice finishing for citizens throughout the State.

This application is the exact sort of support the Minnesota Department of Agriculture could provide to help maintain competitive state agricultural production, which is even more important considering wild rice is Minnesota's State grain.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "Virgil Wind", is written over a horizontal line.

Virgil Wind  
Chief Executive  
Mille Lacs Band of Ojibwe