



MLC AGRICULTURE & RURAL AFFAIRS COMMITTEE

InterContinental Saint Paul Riverfront | St. Paul, Minnesota
Sunday, Aug. 30, 2026 – Wednesday, Sept. 2, 2026

Preliminary Agenda

Sen. Paul Thomas, North Dakota, Co-Chair | Sen. Teresa Ibach, Nebraska, Co-Chair
Sen. Robert Kupec, Minnesota, Vice Co-Chair | Rep. Brad Fritts, Illinois, Vice Co-Chair

SUNDAY, Aug. 30 | Committee Meeting | Great River II & III, First Level

2:30 – 3:40 p.m. Welcome and Policy Session

“Building a Rural Development Ecosystem: Minnesota’s Statutory Model”

Minnesota has spent decades building a rural development ecosystem through a mix of regional governance and policy and research institutions — all established in statute by the Legislature. This session will explore how the state’s enduring, collaborative structure has helped foster entrepreneurship while also making the most of public and private resources in order to strengthen rural communities. Panelists will discuss lessons for lawmakers seeking to support long-term rural prosperity.

Speakers: *Jen Wagner-Lahr, Senior Director of Business Development and Commercialization, Agriculture Utilization Research Institute; Julie Tesch, President & CEO Center for Rural Policy Development; Dawn Hegland, Executive Director, Upper Minnesota Valley Regional Development Commission*

3:40 – 4:00 p.m. Discussion and Committee Business

MONDAY, Aug. 31 | Learning Lab | State Suite III, Lower Level

7:30 – 8:45 a.m. Data center permitting and colocation of energy resources

MONDAY, Aug. 31 | Learning Lab | Kellogg II & III, Lobby Level

2:00 – 3:00 p.m. Farmer Mental Health in the Midwest: Challenges, Community, and Policy Solutions

TUESDAY, Sept. 1 | Plenary & Concurrent Session | Rooms noted below

9:00 – 10:00 a.m. Healthcare and AI in 2026: From Novelty to Normalcy

Speaker: *Dr. Robert Wachter, Physician, Author, and Chair of the Department of Medicine at the University of California, San Francisco*

Room: Minnesota Ballroom, Lower Level

10:15 – 11:30 a.m. Healthcare Challenges and Opportunities for the Rural Midwest

The challenge of rural healthcare has been front and center of legislative discussions, as reflected in a new federal law that provides states with funding to transform their systems in areas such as workforce, technology advances, and provider payment models. This session will explore the role of public policy in shaping the future of rural healthcare.

Speakers: Alyssa Meller, COO National Rural Health Resource Center, Dr. Jason Caron, CEO Sanford Bemidji; Andrea Swenson, CEO & Nursing Home Administrator Kittson Healthcare

Room: *Great River I and IV, First Level*

TUESDAY, Sept. 1 | Plenary Session | Minnesota Ballroom, Lower Level

3:15– 4:30 p.m. Data Centers, A Balancing Act

Data centers dominated legislative sessions during 2026, evoking strong feelings about economic development and resource consumption; ratepayer protections; and quality-of-life impacts on local residents and communities. This session will provide ideas for how policymakers can consider balancing these legitimate, competing concerns when crafting legislation and representing their districts.

Speakers: *Brad Tietz, Director of State Policy, Data Center Coalition; and Nicole Turner Lee, Director of the Brookings Institution's Center for Technology Innovation*