



MLC AGRICULTURE & RURAL AFFAIRS COMMITTEE

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

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

SATURDAY, Aug. 29 | Pre-Conference Regenerative Farm Tour | Departure from hotel lobby

1:00 – 5:00 p.m. **Ravenview Farm Tour, Jordan Minnesota**

Nine years ago, Mike Seifert began transitioning his family's century farm to a regenerative model using no-till, cover crops, and diversified crop rotations. With support from state and county conservation initiatives, the 80-acre farm has become more resilient. Tour the farm, learn about Minnesota's soil health and water quality programs, and experience a hands-on rainfall simulator demonstrating the benefits of healthy soils.

Pre-registration is required and available at csgmidwest.org/mlc26. *This outdoor event includes walking on uneven ground. Please dress accordingly. Spouses and guests are welcome. Youth programming will be available.*

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**

Additional Committee Related Policy Sessions and Briefings

MONDAY, Aug. 31 | Breakfast Table Topic | Kellogg III, Lobby Level

7:30 – 8:45 a.m. State water policy, planning and management

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

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

TUESDAY, Sept. 1 | Learning Lab | State Suite I, Lower Level

7:30 – 8:45 a.m. Powering the Heartland: Energy production, storage and transmission

TUESDAY, Sept. 1 | Learning Lab | State Suite III, Lower Level

7:30 – 8:45 a.m. Building Strong Communities Through Responsible Data Center Development

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

Rural healthcare systems are essential providers of care and economic drivers in communities across the Midwest. This panel will examine how rural hospitals are leveraging Rural Health Transformation Program investments while confronting workforce shortages, financial pressures, telehealth challenges, and the transition to value-based care. Through examples from frontline healthcare leaders, participants will explore policy strategies that can strengthen access, stability, and health outcomes in Midwest communities.

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*