



Testimony of the Maine Organic Farmers and Gardeners Association
in support of certain items in

LD 2214 - An Act to Make Supplemental Appropriations and Allocations for the Expenditures of State Government, General Fund and Other Funds and to Change Certain Provisions of the Law Necessary to the Proper Operations of State Government for the Fiscal Years Ending June 30, 2024 and June 30, 2025

March 4, 2024

Good afternoon Senator Rotundo, Representative Sachs and members of the Appropriations and Financial Affairs Committee, and Senator Ingwersen, Representative Pluecker and members of the Agriculture, Conservation and Forestry Committee. My name is Heather Spalding and I am deputy director of the Maine Organic Farmers and Gardeners Association (MOFGA). Thank you for the opportunity to advocate for certain item in the supplemental budget that support Maine's food and agriculture systems.

MOFGA is working to build a food system that is healthy and fair for all of us. Through education, training and advocacy, we are helping farmers thrive, making more local, organic food available and building sustainable communities. MOFGA certifies 526 organic farms and processing operations representing more than \$120 million in sales and we are working hard to create opportunities for Maine's next generation of farmers. Each of these farmers is a Maine businessperson for whom economic health and environmental health are interdependent. While MOFGA envisions a future of healthy ecosystems, communities, people and economies sustained by the practices of organic agriculture, we attribute our success to collaboration and outreach to growers across the management spectrum.

MOFGA is very happy to see the proposed supplemental budget's support for Maine food and agriculture. Our priorities focus on dairy, PFAS, soil health, climate, and farmland and forest protection:

- A significant and ongoing commitment to Maine's dairy farmers who are struggling against so many odds and whose viability impacts that health of the broader Maine farm and garden economy. We strongly urge you to appropriate funds to help dairy farmers get closer to the true cost of production. Thank you so much for funding the recently released study. We understand that the estimated budget impact for meeting the revised numbers in the Dairy Tier Program would be very significant – possibly \$35 million per year. We appreciate that the Agriculture, Conservation and Forestry Committee unanimously supported a more modest increase in the Tier Program of 25% over current levels. We know that we will continue to lose Maine dairy farms at this level but it is an important allocation and will help many dairy farmers to stay in business.
- \$1,000,000 in a reserve account for addressing PFAS contamination
- \$1,000,000 to help farmers dealing with drought
- \$30,000,000 for the Land for Maine's Future Program
- \$1,500,000 for Maine's Healthy Soils Program

Recent census data is sobering, indicating continued farm decline in the U.S. and a 7.4% decline in the number of farms in Maine. This reflects the disruption that farmers have experienced in recent years due to the Pandemic, escalating costs of production, labor and housing shortages, dramatically shifting weather patterns, geopolitical unrest, and increasing consolidation of agribusiness. The numbers underscore the need for further investment in Maine's food and agriculture system so that farmers are not getting squeezed at



every corner, so that farming is restored to a viable and vibrant livelihood throughout our state, and so that all Maine people can have access to local, healthy foods on their tables each day.

We urge you to consider how important agriculture is to our state – our culture, our economy and our environment. Increasing local production of and markets for Maine farm products will be a vehicle for helping Maine achieve its Climate Action Plan goal of 30% of food produced and consumed in Maine by 2030. We're currently at around 10%. Maine has the natural resources, the climate and the knowledge to be self-reliant with our food systems but we need to make a strong and lasting financial commitment to our farmers to move the needle.

Thank you for your consideration of these important items in the supplemental budget. I would be happy to answer questions if you have any.

The Maine Organic Farmers and Gardeners Association (MOFGA) started in 1971 and is the oldest and largest state organic organization in the country. We're a broad-based community that educates about and advocates for organic agriculture, illuminating its interdependence with a healthy environment, local food production, and thriving communities. We have 15,000 members, we certify more than 500 organic farms and processing facilities representing \$120 million in sales, and we are working hard to provide training and create opportunities for Maine's next generation of farmers. Each of these farmers is a Maine businessperson for whom economic health and environmental health are interdependent. While MOFGA envisions a future of healthy ecosystems, communities, people and economies sustained by the practices of organic agriculture, we attribute our success to collaboration and outreach to growers across the management spectrum.