



**Comments of the Maine Organic Farmers and Gardeners Association
In Support of LD 1140 - *An Act to Authorize a General Fund Bond Issue
to Strengthen the Resilience and Growth of Maine's Agricultural Economy***

April 10, 2025

Good afternoon Senator Rotundo, Representative Gattine, and members of the Appropriations and Financial Affairs Committee. My name is Heather Spalding and I'm deputy director of the Maine Organic Farmers and Gardeners Association (MOFGA). MOFGA supports LD 1140 - *An Act to Authorize a General Fund Bond Issue to Strengthen the Resilience and Growth of Maine's Agricultural Economy*.

A broad-based community, MOFGA is transforming our food system by supporting farmers, empowering people to feed their communities, and advocating for an organic future. MOFGA certifies 537 organic farms and processing operations representing more than \$120 million in sales. We're 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.

The \$45,000,000 provided by this bond issue is vital for building and expanding infrastructure investments within Maine's agricultural, food, and forest products sectors. Aimed at supporting the dairy industry, safeguarding working farmland, and offering disaster relief to farmers, these funds are needed to reverse the loss of farms in Maine. The 2022 Agriculture Census data revealed a concerning trend of farm decline in the United States, with Maine experiencing a 7.4% drop in the number of farms since 2017. This decline reflects the challenges farmers have faced in recent years, such as the economic impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic, rising costs for feed, labor, and land, as well as climate disruptions, including droughts. The Mills Administration responded to this downturn with \$20 million invested in federal funds in 2022 to improve critical infrastructure for Maine's farmers and food processors. But this investment did not touch the over \$100 million in requests that came in from Maine farmers for the program. There is pent up demand for investment in Maine's agriculture industry that needs to see investment if we are to see this sector grow.

This bond gives \$35 million to the Maine Agriculture, Food System and Forest Products Infrastructure Investment Fund. This fund was created through a significant effort by Governor Mills and the 130th Maine Legislature to address these issues but has never been adequately capitalized. This fund is designed to support Maine's agricultural and forest products sectors by improving infrastructure, adding value to raw commodities, and increasing market access. Expanding agricultural infrastructure is critical to the state's economic growth and resilience, especially as part of the Maine Won't Wait climate action plan, which aims to increase Maine-grown food consumption to 30% by 2030.

This bond also provides \$5M in funding for the Maine Dairy industry, which as well all know has needed investment for decades. \$2.5M for farmland conservation initiatives is crucial to maintaining agricultural viability in the state. Another \$2.5M in disaster relief recognizes the growing pressures of climate change. Farmers across the state lost buildings and infrastructure in the storms last Winter. Maine's agriculture industry needs investment if we are to stay competitive with products from away and reverse the loss of Maine farms. It is vital in the state's effort to meet our food insecurity needs and to maintain our rural way of life. I hope you will join MOFGA in your support for the bill.

