



MOFGA Testimony In Support Of

LD 1881 - *An Act Regarding Compensation Fees and Related Conservation Efforts to Protect Soils and Wildlife and Fisheries Habitat from Solar and Wind Energy Development and High-impact Electric Transmission Lines Under the Site Location of Development Laws*

May 10, 2023

Good morning Senator Ingwersen, Representative Pluecker and members of the Joint Standing Committee on Agriculture, Conservation and Forestry My name is Heather Spalding and I am deputy director of the Maine Organic Farmers and Gardeners Association (MOFGA) MOFGA is working to build a food system that is healthy and fair for all of us I am speaking today in support of LD 1881 This bill requires developers of solar and wind energy projects to pay fees to offset the negative impacts of their operations on prime agricultural soils and wildlife and fisheries habitat The Department of Agriculture, Conservation and Forestry also would adopt rules and define "prime agricultural soils" and "soils of statewide importance" and the Department of Environmental Protection would also adopt rules and define "wildlife and fisheries habitats" subject to compensation fees or other conservation efforts

MOFGA enthusiastically supports efforts to protect Maine farmland and keep it in agricultural production, while finding ways to reduce energy consumption and convert our fossil-fuel-based energy system to renewables Maine's precious and finite farmland is threatened by commercial and residential developments, dramatically changing weather patterns, and synthetic chemical contamination, so we must do everything we can to minimize impact from other industrial developments including renewable energy farms The most recent USDA Census of Agriculture indicated that between 2012 and 2017 Maine lost 10% of its farmland – representing more than 145,000 acres of pastureland, cropland, and woodland Maine can and should be self-reliant with its food supply We need to put more land into agricultural production if we hope to achieve our climate action plan goal for reducing food miles by supporting local farms

We know that MOFGA farmers already are feeling the pressure of hayfields being sacrificed to solar arrays We recognize that renewable energy systems like 20-100 megawatt solar arrays take up a lot of space (100 to 500 acres) that could be used for other important climate challenges like wildlife habitat, and carbon sequestering fields and forests We believe that future projects must be assessed based not only on ratepayer benefits, but also on whether the projects avoid or minimize natural resource or agricultural impacts We want to ensure responsible assessment of how renewable energy arrays can be added to farm and open space tax programs, so that Maine's prime agricultural lands are protected for farming generations to come Thank you very much and 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 \$90 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

