

STATE OF MAINE

—
IN THE YEAR OF OUR LORD
TWO THOUSAND TWENTY-FOUR

—
S.P. 511 - L.D. 1274

Resolve, to Establish the Task Force to Support Commercial Dairy Farms in the State

Emergency preamble. Whereas, acts and resolves of the Legislature do not become effective until 90 days after adjournment unless enacted as emergencies; and

Whereas, market instability, labor shortages, inflation, limits on milk production, supply chain delays and distribution disruptions are driving dairy farmers in the State out of business; and

Whereas, the State has lost approximately 1/3 of its dairy farms since 2020, and dairy farms are integral to the State's rural communities and agricultural economy; and

Whereas, this resolve establishes the Task Force to Support Commercial Dairy Farms in the State to study and report on these issues; and

Whereas, it is necessary to immediately begin the work to examine the dairy stabilization program, also known as the tier program, to determine what can be done to strengthen the program and to address some of the challenges to its success; and

Whereas, this legislation must take effect before the expiration of the 90-day period in order to complete the study and make recommendations to the Legislature; and

Whereas, in the judgment of the Legislature, these facts create an emergency within the meaning of the Constitution of Maine and require the following legislation as immediately necessary for the preservation of the public peace, health and safety; now, therefore, be it

Sec. 1. Task force established. Resolved: That the Task Force to Support Commercial Dairy Farms in the State, referred to in this resolve as "the task force," is established.

Sec. 2. Task force membership. Resolved: That the task force consists of at least 10 members and no more than 15 members, one of whom is the Commissioner of Agriculture, Conservation and Forestry or the commissioner's designee. The commissioner shall invite the following to participate as members of the task force:

1. The chair of the board of directors of the Maine Dairy Industry Association or the chair's designee;
2. The Executive Director of the Maine Milk Commission;
3. One representative of a milk processor;
4. One representative of a Maine milk retailer familiar with dairy purchasing on the national market;
5. One representative from each of the 4 milk pricing tiers;
6. An economist with expertise in dairy markets and policy; and
7. At the discretion of the commissioner, up to 5 additional at-large members, who may be invited if they possess specific knowledge or technical skills useful for accomplishing the duties of the task force.

Sec. 3. Convening of task force; chair. Resolved: That all invitations to join the task force must be made pursuant to section 2 no later than 30 days following the effective date of this resolve. The commissioner or commissioner's designee shall call and convene the first meeting of the task force, at which the members shall elect a member to serve as chair.

Sec. 4. Compensation. Resolved: That members of the task force are not entitled to reimbursement for their expenses.

Sec. 5. Duties. Resolved: That the task force shall review and provide recommendations on potential investments and policies to support the long-term sustainability and resiliency of the State's dairy sector, including but not limited to:

1. The development of in-state milk processing capacity, including for value-added products;
2. The development of new or enhancements to existing state grant, loan and other funding support programs, market development and access programs and technical assistance programs; and
3. Recommendations to preserve and enhance the effectiveness of the current dairy stabilization program, also known as the tier program, established in the Maine Revised Statutes, Title 7, section 3153-B.

The department may work with a 3rd-party organization to accomplish these duties if existing resources allow.

Sec. 6. Staff assistance. Resolved: That, within existing resources, the Department of Agriculture, Conservation and Forestry shall provide staffing services to the task force.

Sec. 7. Report. Resolved: That, no later than January 6, 2025, the task force shall submit a report that includes its findings and recommendations, including suggested legislation, to the joint standing committee of the Legislature having jurisdiction over agricultural matters. The joint standing committee is authorized to report out a bill to the 132nd Legislature in 2025 based on the recommendations of the task force.

Emergency clause. In view of the emergency cited in the preamble, this legislation takes effect when approved.