



**Written testimony of Shelley Megquier, Policy & Research Director, Maine Farmland Trust, to the 131<sup>st</sup> Legislature's Joint Standing Committee on Agriculture, Conservation and Forestry  
February 13, 2023**

Good afternoon Senator Ingwersen, Representative Pluecker, and members of the Joint Standing Committee on Agriculture, Conservation, and Forestry. My name is Shelley Megquier and I am providing a written statement on behalf of Maine Farmland Trust (MFT) in support of LD 315 - An Act To Provide Funding for Drought Relief and Other Programs Benefitting Maine Farmers.

MFT is a member-powered statewide organization that works to protect farmland, support farmers, and advance the future of farming. Since our founding in 1999, MFT has helped to permanently protect more than 330 farms and keep nearly 60,000 acres of farmland in farming. In 2022 alone, MFT supported 48 farm businesses with workshops, technical assistance, and grants – delivering over 680 hours of technical assistance and \$309,000 in business and seed grants to help businesses grow their profitability. Our main program areas are Farmland Protection, Farmland Access, Stewardship, Farm Business Planning, PFAS Support, Climate Resilience, and Policy and Research. In response to the needs we are hearing about from farmers, MFT is actively expanding MFT's Climate Resilience Program. We are broadening the reach of our current programming to expand the services we provide to include assisting more farms with on-farm soil health research, creating climate adaption plans, and providing farms with technical assistance and funding to adopt climate-smart practices and infrastructure projects.

Maine farmers are already experiencing climate change impacts, and are needing to adapt to the increasing frequency of extreme weather events, including excessive precipitation and drought.<sup>1</sup> Increased drought coupled with increased frequency of heavy precipitation has already and will continue to negatively impact crop and livestock production in the Northeast.<sup>2</sup> The State's updated climate action plan makes clear that "[w]arming temperatures and increasingly variable precipitation, including droughts and extreme weather events, are causing damage to farm livelihoods, impacting farmers, workers, crops, and livestock."<sup>3</sup> In a University of Maine survey of agricultural producers about their experience with the 2020 drought, over half of farmers surveyed reported that they did not have sufficient water to meet their farms' needs during the drought. Farmers reported an interest in adjusting their water use, including expanding irrigation and investing in new water ponds and wells. The resulting report from this survey notes the need for additional information, technical assistance, and financial assistance for practices such as water quality assessments, soil moisture monitoring, navigating surface and groundwater regulations, measuring the volume of water needed for agricultural purposes, and ensuring sufficient water access to meet production needs.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> News Center Maine, "[Maine's changing climate could intensify droughts and heavy rains, hurting dairy farmers](#)" (August 15, 2022); Portland Press Herald, "[Drought intensifies, threatening crops and groundwater supplies](#)" (September 24, 2020)

<sup>2</sup> Wolfe, et al. "Unique Challenges and Opportunities for Northeastern U.S. Crop Production in a Changing Climate." *Climatic Change*, (2018), 146: 231-245, available at: <https://www.fs.usda.gov/research/treearch/56681>

<sup>3</sup> The Maine Climate Council, "Maine Won't Wait: A Four-Year Plan for Climate Action," (Dec. 2020), 25, available at: [https://www.maine.gov/future/sites/maine.gov/future/files/inline-files/MaineWontWait\\_December2020.pdf](https://www.maine.gov/future/sites/maine.gov/future/files/inline-files/MaineWontWait_December2020.pdf)

<sup>4</sup> Schattman, R. E., Goossen, C., and Calderwood, L. "The 2020 Maine Drought and Agriculture Report." University of Maine, Orono, (2021), 4, available at: <https://umaine.edu/climate-ag/2021/04/29/2020-maine-drought-and-agriculture-report/>

Given the importance of drought support for farmers, we deeply appreciate the recommendations contained in the Department of Agriculture, Conservation and Forestry January 2023 report, *Findings and Recommendations for Streamlining Permitting New Sources of Water for Irrigation in Maine*. We fully support LD 315's inclusion of funding for a short-term consultant and 3 full-time, permanent staff positions within the Departments of Agriculture, Conservation, and Forestry and Environmental Protection.

Increased capacity within key state agencies will ensure that the State is able to assist in the effort to provide farmers with the technical assistance and support they need as they consider permitting options for new water sources, apply for vital funding through the Farmer Drought Assistance Fund, and implement new water management systems. Producers critically need this support as they grapple with the impacts of climate change on their operations and livelihoods. MFT is also supportive of the link between the proposed position in the Department of Environmental Protection's Northern Maine Regional Office and the nascent Maine Healthy Soils Program, which MFT has been a strong supporter of since its inception.

Thank you for the opportunity to share comments in support of LD 315.