

Nancy B Chandler  
Topsham  
LD 258

Testimony to Maine legislature on LD 258 Bureau of Agriculture appropriations for 2023-24

To Appropriations Committee by Nancy B Chandler, resident of Topsham

Dear Senator Rotundo and committee members,

I am a retired organically certified farmer from Monmouth, Maine who now lives in Topsham. I served on the Maine Organic Farmers and Gardeners Board with Chairperson amanda Beal, now Maine Commissioner of Conservation, Agriculture and Forestry, and worked as a VISTA volunteer for the Maine Department of Agriculture from 2022 to 2023. Using healthy soil practices, I restored the soil quality in 8 acres of fields of a neglected dairy farm and taught apprentices and employees how to grow and produce healthy fruits, vegetables, flowers and herbs.

I used cover legume and grass cover corps in succession with commercial vegetable plantings to add nitrogen fertilizer and carbon to the soils. By adding an initial application of rock powders to provide missing nutrients over time, I was able to rebuild soil fertility and develop a growing system that captured atmospheric carbon dioxide to grow plants that were then tilled into the soil increasing soil carbon. I grew enough dry beans and vegetables without added fertilizers to feed 30 seniors, 30 to 40 weekly shareholders for 22 weeks, and sell at 2 Farmer's Markets from 3 acres of fertile soil. I used USDA conservation funding and Maine Department of Agriculture Senior Farm Share funds plus these sales to produce operating income.

I was practicing what has now been developed by Maine DCFA in 2021 into the Maine Healthy Soils Program. This program provides essential information, tools and assistance to Maine farmers as they adopt and improve their healthy soil building practices and increase climate change resilience and mitigation. The measurement and financial payments systems to pay farmers for soil carbon sequestration were just developing, when I finished farming in 2013. Funding for field agents, materials, and outreach to bring this newly developed science of soil management to Maine farmers is greatly needed to demonstrate the value and support farmers transitioning from conventional to organic milk, meat, vegetable and fruit production.

In following closely the work of the Natural Lands Committee of Maine's Climate Action Plan, I share with you the high potential of Maine agriculture and forestry to sequester significantly greater amounts of carbon dioxide from the atmosphere. This potential can only be reached by funding programs that demonstrate better agriculture and forestry management processes to farmers, and small to medium size forest land owners.

Changes in Maine weather patterns in the past 20 years have increased the intensity and irregularity of rainfall greatly. When I farmed from 2004 through 2013, there were regular weekly rainfalls needed to keep crops growing without irrigation. Since then the more scattered, unreliable rainfalls require all Maine farmers to invest in irrigation systems in their fields even as they adopt practices that increase carbon storage and water retention.

Please fund the Maine Bureau of Agriculture \$3 million for FY 2023-24 for the Maine Healthy Soils Program. Please fund also the Farmers Drought Relief Program to protect farmers from economic hardship due to irregular and insufficient rainfall.