



Dear members of the Committee on Agriculture, Conservation, and Forestry,

On behalf of Maine's organic dairy farmers, I'm writing to express support for LD 1227, An Act to Balance Renewable Energy Development with Natural and Working Lands Conservation. As you are aware, Maine has seen an incredible increase in commercial solar energy projects in the last 4 years and the vast majority of this development has occurred on farmland. While we absolutely need a swift transition to renewable energy to help avoid the worst effects of climate change, we also must not recklessly consume our state's limited agricultural lands. While leasing land for solar development has provided needed income for some farmers, for many others it has become a barrier to land access. Many farmers rely heavily on leased land for their farming operations and this is especially true of beginning farmers and those in the dairy industry. We simply cannot compete with the lease rates the solar industry offers for land.

There is great promise in dual use solar development that maintains existing agricultural uses while generating renewable energy. However, after several years of interacting with the solar industry as both a landowner and former member of the Agricultural Solar Stakeholder Group, it has become clear to me that without state incentives, that industry will not move in this direction. It is my hope that the provisions in LD 1227 will serve as a first step in fostering cooperation instead of competition between Maine's agriculture and solar industries.

Sincerely,

Andrew Smith
President of Maine Organic Milk Producers