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Good moring, Senator Ingwersen, Representative Plueker and members of the Agriculture, Conservation and Forestry Committee,

My name is Annie Watson. I am here today speaking on behalf of the Maine Dairy Industry Association, in support of LD 1227.

The Maine Dairy Industry Association (MDIA), which represents all of Maine's dairy farms, believes any legislation should strike a balance between the need to support renewable energy sources and support the long-term viability of agricultural operations in our state.

As the committee is well aware, Maine dairy farmers have felt the pressure of many years of depressed pricing, and most recently, inflationary conditions. When solar companies look to site projects on farmland historically rented to local farmers, it is hard for farmers to compete with well-financed energy projects. Competition between two beneficial land uses, agriculture and solar development delays the siting of needed renewable energy resources and threatens prime farmland and food systems when we take an either/or perspective. This is why we fully support piloting dual-use siting of solar projects. By conducting a pilot program, the state can learn valuable lessons from a "boots on the ground" application of these techniques in siting solar arrays. The pilot program gives the DACF and its partners the opportunity to collect data to further determine how solar projects affect agricultural production and what kinds of benefits, costs and support needs are associated with this type of development.

We can all recognize the impact solar arrays have had on our landscape as we drive throughout the state. This is why we feel it is more important than ever to balance the important interests of agriculture and solar to ensure the two can co-exists in Maine.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify today, and I am happy to answer any questions.