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**Testimony of Nancy Smith, Executive Director of GrowSmart Maine  
In support of LD 1700 An Act to Protect Agricultural Lands by Creating a  
Permitting Process for Solar Development on Those Lands**

April 26, 2023

Senator Ingwersen, Representative Pluecker, and Honorable Members of the Joint Standing Committee on Agriculture, Conservation and Forestry,

My name is Nancy Smith, I live in Ellsworth, and I am the CEO of GrowSmart Maine. We are a statewide non-partisan non-profit organization helping communities navigate change in alignment with smart growth. We advocate for comprehensive policies and funding for smart growth practices and outcomes.

GrowSmart Maine is working in partnership with American Farmland Trust to support farm productivity and farm viability in Maine. With [Planning for Ag](#), we offer online resources and direct community support, as well as advocacy in support of key bills such as LD 1700.

This bill addresses the potential conflict between using lands to produce renewable energy and farm products, while also recognizing the tension between municipal and statewide oversight. I offer a few points for committee discussion:

- Under definitions, applying the permitting process in this bill to “Viable Agricultural Land” may be appropriate, or we may want to narrow this to farmland with regional or statewide significance.
- Section 3 states that the department may grant a permit only if it determines that the value of the ground-mounted solar installation exceeds the value of the agricultural land. The committee should consider if this is an appropriate approach to the rights of the property owner, who may value solar power over farm productions. Again, this integrates with the definition of which lands will be impacted.
- We support the provisions in Section 3F that require a decommissioning plan and that the entity constructing the panels demonstrate financial capacity to deploy these plans at the end of the solar project’s lifespan.
- Section 5 allows municipalities with suitable capacity to retain authority over permitting for solar installations. This is an important point to get right, and I encourage the committee to reach out to towns that are currently succeeding in this process to ensure agreement with this language.

GrowSmart Maine will assist the committee in any way that is helpful.