

Katherine Clark
Windsor
LD 579

1/17/24

Nate and Katie Clark
The Reed Farm
Windsor, ME

Dear Senator Ingwersen, Representative Pluecker, and esteemed members of the Agriculture, Conservation, and Forestry Committee:

I am writing on behalf of my husband, Nate Clark, myself, and our family organic dairy, the Reed Farm, in support of LD 579 and to urge your consideration of all future efforts to protect farmland in Maine.

Nate and I are both from families in Maine for 10 or more generations. He grew up in Dresden and I grew up in Pittston. We both attended college out of state and returned to live in Maine. We purchased the Reed Farm in Windsor, in 2017, after two years of contested estate settlement in court. We received the help of a conservation easement from Maine Farmland Trust. The farm's previous owner, though deceased by that time, had wished for the farm to remain in active production, and had worked with MFT to create the foundation for the agricultural easement. Our purchasing a farm of this scale would not have been possible without the help of a farmland protection program.

The Reed Farm consists of about 240 protected acres, where we milk 50 Jersey cows (these are the little brown ones) to produce 600,000 pounds of milk annually. We crop an additional 250 leased acres in three towns. We are deeply embedded in the local economy, regularly using the services of:

- 6 local mechanics
- 2 local welders
- 3 fuel companies, two of which are locally owned
- 2 local electricians
- 2 farm equipment dealers
- 2 local veterinarians
- 2 local carpenters
- 2 local excavation contractors
- 3 local plumbers
- 4 farm supply stores, three of which are locally owned
- 2 local hardware stores
- 3 lumber mills for bedding and building materials as well.

An average of 6 commercial trucks per week stop at our farmyard.

In the 7 years we have been at this farm, we have been approached by three local individuals asking if we would sell them a house lot. Subdivision of the farm is not permitted under our easement. We have also been approached by two solar developers asking if we would consider covering our pastures with solar panels. Of course, again, this kind of development is not permitted. We told these folks no, explained the reasons, and suggested that solar panels should be installed on brown rather than green spaces. In 2022, we lost the use of one rented hayfield to a solar development.

In an economic environment where cost and efficiency are high priorities, farmland is tempting to developers. It's cheaper to work with. There are no large rocks and boulders to move, perhaps they were already removed by farmers in bygone years.

In the late 19th century, Maine's landscape was mostly agricultural and mostly open, south of the north woods. As open space gradually declined, our landscape has dramatically changed. On the roadside you may notice the site of an old farmstead—a small depression that was the farmhouse's cellar hole, plus some stonework where a wooden barn once stood. Trees first reclaimed the roughest boulder strewn pasture lands, and later trees invaded tillable lands as it has fallen out of agricultural use. Meanwhile, open viable farmland has become developed in every town. Our modern

building and development technology uses techniques that have a greater impact on land, hydrology, and soils than in the past. Examples include extensive earthwork with large heavy equipment that compacts the soil beneath, removal of topsoil (a resource that takes thousands of years to accumulate), building roads by adding extensive gravel and pavement, impacting the drainage, use of metal and plastic building materials, and especially, large concrete foundations. These things render a developed site unusable for agriculture in future decades, centuries, or even millennia.

Historical events and current trends alike hint at the vulnerability of global systems. The shape of the future is unknown, and will likely see periods of greater and lesser importance of locally produced food crops and animal protein for our human diet. We support this effort to protect farmland from development, and help ensure our ability to produce food locally when necessary.

Thank you for taking the time to hear the perspective of actively farming Mainers working on protected farmland in consideration of LD579.

Sincerely,
Nate and Katie Webb Clark
The Reed Farm
Windsor, ME