



Testimony before the Joint Standing Committee on Agriculture, Conservation, and Forestry
By Eliza Paterson, American Farmland Trust, New England Policy Associate

February 28, 2024

RE: Support for LD 2212 – An Act to Strengthen Maine’s Agriculture, Food and Forest Economy
By Funding the Maine Agriculture, Food and Forest Products Investment Fund and Amending
Related Provisions of Law

Speaker Talbot Ross, Senator Ingwersen, Representative Fay, Representative Guerrette,
Representative Hall, Representative Osher, Representative Pluecker, and members of the Joint
Standing Committee on Agriculture, Conservation, and Forestry:

Thank you for the opportunity to submit testimony **in support of LD 2212**.

My name is Eliza Paterson, and I am American Farmland Trust’s (AFT’s) New England Policy Associate. AFT is the nation’s leading conservation organization dedicated to protecting farmland, promoting sound farming practices, and keeping farmers on the land. Since its founding in 1980 by farmers and citizens concerned about the rapid loss of farmland to development, AFT has helped protect over 6.5 million acres of farmland and has led the way for the adoption of conservation practices on millions more. Established in 1985, AFT’s New England office works to save the land that sustains us across the region.

LD 2212 provides an opportunity to ensure a sustained funding source for Maine’s (ME’s) agriculture, forest, and food product businesses through strategic investments, helping them to maintain long-term viability, innovation, and growth while supporting the resiliency of ME’s food supply and production chains. These businesses and supply chains are critical to supporting the state’s economy, climate resiliency, and food security.

ME’s farmland and forestland play a vital role in our region’s stability. ME has the most acreage of these land types of the six New England states by far, as well as the largest amount of prime and important farmland. However, without additional support to promote the economic viability of family farms, farmers are more susceptible to selling their land to the highest bidder.

According to AFT’s [Farms Under Threat: The State of the States](#), roughly 18,000 acres of ME’s agricultural land were converted to urban development or low-density residential land use between 2001 and 2016. This loss of farmland is enough to generate \$10 million in annual revenue. The amount of loss also further perpetuates the adverse impacts of extreme climate events through decreased carbon sequestration, healthy soils, and biodiverse habitat.

LD 2212 will help agricultural and forest lands stay protected by providing tools, business and technical assistance, and equitable financial support, among others, to essential members of ME's supply chains. Keeping agricultural, food, and forestry businesses viable will help to ensure that they stay sustainable for the long-term, in turn keeping farmers in business, protecting forest economies, and ensuring these incredibly valuable resources are safeguarded from development threats.

LD 2212 implements and aligns with ME's Climate Action Plan, Economic Development Strategy 2020-2029, FocusMaine, and ME's Ending Hunger by 2023 Plan, among others. AFT is confident that through the implementation of and alignment with these various state plans and strategies, LD 2212 will aid ME in progressing as an equitable, food-secure, and climate-resilient state.

Thank you for the opportunity to submit supportive testimony on LD 2212. Please feel free to contact me at epaterson@farmland.org or Chelsea Gazillo, AFT's New England Policy Manager, at cgazillo@farmland.org with any further questions you may have.

Sincerely,
Eliza Paterson