Casey Cole
Maine Veterinary Medical Association
LD 113

Sentaor Talbot Ross, Representative Plueker, and members of the Committee on Agriculture, Conservation and Forestry,

I am Dr. Casey Cole, I am an emergency veterinarian from Portland that has practiced in Maine for over 10 years and am the chair of the Maine Veterinary Medical Association's Legislative Committee. I am testifying on behalf of the MVMA against LD113. This bill would unnecessarily stigmatize a tool in maintaining herd and public health before it is even developed. At this time, there are no messenger Ribonucleic Acid vaccines approved for use in livestock, but they have the potential to be rapidly developed and produced which makes them valuable when facing large outbreaks, such as the current bird flu outbreak that is harming poultry farmers across the country. mRNA vaccines also have to go through a rigorous approval process before being approved for administration to livestock.

Vaccines are integral to maintaining herd health in our farms. We utilize vaccines to prevent viral diseases that may be untreatable, to reduce use of antibiotics, prevent diseases from causing a human health crisis, and to ensure a farm isn't financially ruined by a chance disease outbreak. Vaccines have been essential to farmers, but they have their drawbacks.

Conventional vaccines work by injecting either part of a virus or a bacterial antigen into a patient, the patient's immune system then learns to react to that antigen. These antigens have to be grown in a lab, harvested, and then mixed with adjuvants/preservatives to ensure that they remain stable before they are administered. Messenger Ribo Nucleic Acid vaccines are a recent development in vaccine technology that works by utilizing a patient's cells to produce the antigen. mRNA exists in every living cell. The function of mRNA is to relay information from DNA to protein "printers" that decode that information and produce other proteins that the cell needs. mRNA vaccines utilize the same proteins to produce the antigen by relaying a code for that antigen, which means that the antigen no longer needs to be grown in a lab or harvested. This also allows new vaccines to be developed quickly as the 'code' for the antigen can be swapped out. This allows an mRNA vaccine to move on to safety testing far more rapidly than conventional vaccines.

The vaccines used in livestock are regulated by the U.S. Department of Agriculture's Center for Veterinary Biologics (CVB). Multiple studies and tests showing efficacy and safety of a vaccine must be submitted and approved by the CVB through a rigorous process. Even after the approval process, the USDA monitors for any adverse effects of the vaccine to ensure its safety.

Labels such as the one proposed by LD 113 are generally applied to products that are known to be unsafe, and this label is implying that to the general public. Consumers may be hesitant to purchase produce with the label. Farmers may not want to use any mRNA vaccines to avoid the label. Companies may not even pursue developing these vaccines. It is understandable that people want to know what goes in the produce they are eating, but there is already a free market solution to this. If mRNA vaccines for animals are produced and there is demand for mRNA vaccine free produce, farmers that elect to not use the vaccines can simply advertise "mRNA vaccine free". This does not have the connotations against mRNA vaccine and does not require government overreach.

To reiterate, this bill unnecessarily stigmatizes a class of vaccine that has not been developed yet, impacting the ability of farms to utilize a future tool in maintaining herd and public health.

I appreciate the opportunity to submit testimony today and appreciate the work that this committee does to ensure that Maine continues to have healthy, viable farms throughout our state.

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