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Farmington  
LD 716

Hello,

I am a Maine Livestock/Poultry Farmer. In the last three years alone, I have lost approximately eighty birds and two barn cats to predators in spite of all my efforts. My efforts include meeting with two Game and Fish Conservation Officers, acquiring a livestock guardian dog, fencing, brush management, scents, lights, even feeding predators at distant locations on the property from lamb, ewe, and pig losses. I tried keeping them in the coop too which went horribly.

The bottom line is that these predators just can't pass up an easy meal and will devastate my flocks before moving on. My neighbor, although has smaller flocks, has lost an equal percentage of her flocks as I have. We communicate anytime we experience loss to prepare one another for what's coming.

Poultry take about six months to reach egg laying age. However, that's about when winter starts, so these birds really don't start to produce for me until the following spring, or about one year old. That is a lot of time, energy, effort, and money just to have the coyote show up and take it away in a matter of days.

I bought a dozen expensive meat birds that are a delicacy and can sell for as much as \$80.00 - \$100.00 each. I only have five left. My flock has aged out as all of my new birds have now been consumed by predators. What this translates to is poor egg production and poor egg quality, and ultimately a poor product for the community that purchases from me. I'll be starting over again this spring with the hopes of having new birds make it to the egg laying age.

Yes, my birds are free ranged and live very happy lives which is important to me. I expect losses, but not devastation. I live on the outskirts of Farmington for crying out loud, a college town, not Aroostook!

I have seen a population explosion over the last year of all predator species, not just the coyote. I understand that I can protect my animals when they are in danger, but I have to be here and see it happening which isn't realistic. I have to be able to hunt in order to protect my animals, or I won't be able to have anything... ever. I know this because I live it.

The proposed no hunting season is during my lambing season. I breed Tunis sheep which are a very docile breed and currently on the watch list due to low numbers. You know who's not currently on the watch list due to low numbers? The coyote.

These predators are not dumb. After a successful hunt or two, my losses are usually curbed for weeks if not months, however I need to be able to hunt when the predators are here, and I never know when that will be. Season restrictions take away my ability to protect my flocks should they decide to wreak havoc on my farm in during the no hunting season. LD 716 is clearly a bill to protect the coyote and not farmers or their livestock/poultry.

These animals are already unbelievably bold, and it's dangerous how close they will come to the house to get that meal. I have personally been circled by a coyote on my own property one evening. As I mentioned, I have lost two domestic cats, and I currently am not able to let my house dog out to go to the bathroom without checking for predators first. It's that bad!

I feel like I am already losing this battle, and LD 716 is just another nail in my farming coffin. As a farmer, LD716 is a nightmare on my doorstep. How about some consideration for the farmer please.