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March 11, 2025

LD 593 An Act to Extend Funding for the Land for Maine's Future Program

Thursday March 13, 2025

Dear Senator Talbot Ross, Representative Pluecker, and members of the Joint Standing Committee on Agriculture, Conservation, and Forestry,

As buyers of protected working farmland, we are writing to urge your support of LD 593 funding for the Land for Maine's Future program.

My husband and I own and operate our organic dairy farm in Windsor. We purchased our farm in 2017 with a conservation easement on the property. Without that easement, our dream to own our own family dairy farm may have remained out of reach.

The search for our forever farm was long and frustrating. Numerous times we expanded the geographic region that we would consider, combing ads, calling realtors, knocking on doors, and driving down every country road in multiple counties. Our search lasted 3 years and included 4 purchase and sale agreements on various properties that all fell through. Finally a land trust-protected property came our way and the many moving parts came together quickly to finalize our purchase. Cows arrived a few months later and we have been working and raising our kids here together ever since.

Sometimes our neighbors stop by and thank us for keeping the farm land open, for keeping cows on the pastures. Drivers stop and take pictures. They tell us they drive our road with their little boy after school just to see the tractors. One older man from our town said if he could give us a million dollars for keeping the farm alive, he would.

The rapid loss of working farms in Maine is alarming, and something I believe we all lament. Why is this happening? Do Mainers no longer want to live and work on a family scale farm? Is it the young people that are the problem?

As a multi generational farmer from a Maine family, I am thoroughly convinced that in a scenario where the regional economy is structured in such a way that a Maine-scale farm honestly offers a viable living, we would see flocks of Mainers, young people, and folks from far and wide lining up for the opportunity. Our second daughter graduates from high school this year and plans to attend community college, but her dream is to own a veggie and cut flower farm with a few small livestock.

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How do we arrive at such a vibrant farming future? The possible paths to such a scenario are many and disputed.

Entertaining a vision of Maine with a thriving farm economy requires farm land must still be intact, as it was when we purchased the Reed Farm. Development pressure is extremely high at present and I don't believe it will ease in the coming decade. The fields and farm buildings must survive this. Housing is needed but residential locations are more negotiable. Agricultural soils must be protected from irreversible development until the economic conditions are right for prime lands to be naturally valued for their productive capacity. At this time we can hold the potential to grow food here in Maine.

It takes foresight, focus, determination, and resources to run a family farm. It takes the same to protect farmland. We as farmers are extremely grateful to the State of Maine for recognizing the need for farmland protection (as well as forests and waterfronts alike) and we hope our story and perspective will help inspire continued funding for the work done by Land for Maine's Future.

Please feel free to reach out with any questions.

Sincerely,

Katie Clark & Nate Clark

Reed Farm

Windsor, ME