



**Testimony of Shelley Megquier, Policy & Research Director, Maine Farmland Trust, to the
132nd Legislature's Joint Standing Committee on Agriculture, Conservation, and Forestry
March 13, 2025**

Good morning Senator Talbot Ross, Representative Pluecker, and members of the Joint Standing Committee on Agriculture, Conservation, and Forestry. My name is Shelley Megquier and I am the Policy & Research Director at Maine Farmland Trust (MFT). I am providing testimony on behalf of MFT neither for nor against LD 942 – *An Act to Safeguard Sustainable Food Sources Provided by Certain Maine Farmers*.

MFT is a member-powered statewide organization that works to protect farmland, support farmers, and advance the future of farming. Our goals are to keep agricultural lands working and help farmers and their communities thrive. Since our founding in 1999, MFT has helped to permanently protect farmland in every county in Maine, amounting to nearly 57,000 acres across 345 farms. Our Farm Network includes more than 550 farms that have participated in MFT's programming either through an agricultural easement or through one of our programs. Our main program areas are Farmland Protection, Farmland Access, Stewardship, Farm Business Planning, PFAS Support, Climate Resilience, and Policy and Research.

MFT believes that to support Maine's rural economic development, farms must be economically viable. Over the years, MFT has collaborated with farmers, food businesses, and economic development organizations to establish enterprises and deliver a range of programs and services focused on establishing a vibrant and resilient agricultural sector and food system in Maine. We work directly with farms of all sizes and farmers of all experience levels as they develop markets and grow successful businesses. MFT's support services and programs for farmers include individualized farm business planning and workshops and technical assistance that are designed to help farmers develop their businesses strategically and scale up their wholesale operations to obtain more market resilience and economic stability. We also support the expansion of new markets that connect more Mainers with Maine-grown food. In our work we have seen how much Maine farmers need improved processing infrastructure and other innovative opportunities across all agricultural sectors to increase the supply of Maine-grown products and to create new market opportunities for local farms. At the same time, there is enormous growth potential for the food sector in Maine and the sectors that support it like farming. In fact, Governor Mills' 10-year economic development strategy identifies the food sector in Maine as one of the four areas most ripe for economic development because of the state's current strengths, the growing global demand, and the potential for job creation in that sector.

MFT's interpretation of LD 942 is that it seeks to ensure federal funding designated for livestock farmers is fairly distributed in Maine, that State funds are directed towards small and midsize producers (as defined by the commissioner by rule), and that shared-use kitchen programming

is developed to increase processing capacity for agricultural products. The driving force behind the bill is a recognition that Maine farms need support to build their economic stability and that more processing capacity is needed to increase the amount of food grown in Maine, consumed in Maine.

MFT applauds those priorities but has some questions about the approach being taken through this legislative effort:

- How would the directive that federal funding be spent on small and midsize livestock producers interface with federal funding requirements? Could Maine be excluded from eligibility for federal programs if Maine State Statute restricts how those funds can be used? Though MFT also wants to see small and midsize livestock producers able to benefit from federal programs, we wonder if that may be better accomplished through federal advocacy efforts.
- It seems as though the Section 2 on State grants may be redundant to the standing requirements that there to be clear state grant application processes for each respective program. MFT suggests that any feedback in this section would be incorporated into eligibility and/or ranking criteria for state grants administered under Title 7 rather than upheld as a standing requirement in statute. Though equitable distribution of funds and fair evaluation of grant applications are laudable intents, this addition to statute may unintentionally be cumbersome to implement. It is also worth noting that large producers have an important role to play in Maine's agricultural economy and also need access to available resources and supports.
- Could investment in shared-use kitchens be an initiative pursued through the Maine Agriculture, Food, and Forest Products Investment Fund (MAFFPIF) rather than as a standalone effort? It may make sense to hold off on a separate processing investment effort until MAFFPIF priorities are established and more robust funding secured.
- Would shared-use kitchens invested in through this effort also be able to be used for commercial production? The bill calls out personal use and local community demand but not commercial production.

Thank you for the opportunity to provide our comments on LD 942 and for your careful consideration of this bill. MFT would be happy to answer any questions that arise.