

Molly DellaRoman
Brooklin
LD 593

Good afternoon Members of the Agriculture, Conservation and Forestry Committee, My name is Molly DellaRoman and I live and farm in Brooklin, ME. My partner Tim Skillin and I own and operate 5 Star Nursery and Orchard. We are a small, diversified farm with a MOFGA- certified organic, heirloom orchard and a native plant nursery. This orchard was planted by the previous owners in the 1980's. We took over the farm in 2017. They searched for 6 years to find someone to purchase the land and to keep it running as an orchard. They had no heirs to pass the orchard onto with their wishes of it remaining as farmland. To say it was lucky we found each other is an understatement. Right on the shores of Allen Cove with views of Acadia National Park across the bay and sandwiched between multi-million dollar summer homes, this small orchard may have had a very different fate. Sadly, this is not the fate of most farmland in Maine. Without funding from land trusts or public sources like the Land for Maine's Future Program, we will continue to lose land to development at an outstanding rate.

When I committed to becoming a full time farmer 20 years ago, there was one main reason I was drawn to. Having undergraduate and graduate degrees in the physical and environmental sciences, it was very clear to me that farming sustainably was the way I could best contribute to fighting climate change. Maine can play an incredibly important role in growing and feeding New England as we navigate how to deal with the devastating effects of climate change. Having farmed for just as many years in MA as ME, I can attest that the support for the agriculture industry here in Maine is top-notch. Together with publically funded farmland protection, Maine can meet the State's climate goals of doubling the amount of permanently protected farmland with dedicated funding for farmland conservation by 2030.

Currently, only 5% of our farmland is protected. With federal funding frozen for many conservation projects farmers have already invested money in, indication that there will be no funding for climate smart agriculture going forward with the new federal administration and the damaging effects of tariffs on the horizon, it is a very real possibility that more farms will have to succumb to selling their land. To have measures in place to protect land from increased pressures from development is paramount to Maine's most traditional industries and slowing the effects of climate change.

LD 593 serves as an important source of support for Land for Maine's Future Program until ongoing funding is secured.

Thank you for your time today and I urge the committee to vote ought to pass.