



Testimony of Garrett Mason
In Support of LD 550

An Act to Support Outdoor, Agricultural-based and Hands-on Experiential Learning in Public
Schools

Senator Talbot-Ross, Representative Pluecker, and Members of the Joint Standing Committee on Agriculture Conservation and Forestry. My name is Garrett Mason, I am a resident of Lisbon Falls, and am a Partner at Dirigo Public Affairs. I am here today representing our client, the Maine Farm Bureau and am here in support of LD 550.

At its heart, LD 550 invests in children by giving them hands-on learning experiences in growing food, understanding where it comes from, and appreciating the work that goes into producing it. In a time when many young people are disconnected from the land and the food they eat, this legislation will help schools create programs that reconnect them with Maine's agricultural roots. By supporting school gardens, farm-to-school programs, and outdoor experiential education, we can give students the knowledge and confidence to grow their own food, make informed choices about nutrition, and develop a deeper appreciation for the land that sustains us.

These lessons in agriculture are about more than just growing food; they are about self-sufficiency and lifelong skills. A child who learns how to plant a seed, care for a garden, and harvest fresh food will carry those skills into adulthood. They will understand the value of hard work, the importance of sustainability, and the rewards of providing for themselves and their communities. In an era where food security is a growing concern, equipping the next generation with the ability to grow their own food is not just an educational benefit—it is a life skill that fosters independence.

Maine has a proud farming heritage, but as fewer young people enter agriculture, we must do more to ensure the next generation understands the role of farming and food production in our daily lives. LD 550 will not only introduce children to these essential concepts but will also create pathways for them to explore careers in agriculture, food science, and environmental stewardship. By giving students hands-on experiences in farming, fishing, and gardening, we are opening doors for them to consider futures in these vital industries.

Beyond the skills gained, LD 550 strengthens the bond between Maine's farms and its communities. By increasing local food procurement in schools, this bill also creates new opportunities for Maine's farmers and fishermen to provide fresh, local products to students. It fosters a cycle where students not only learn about agriculture but actively participate in



supporting it—building an understanding of the hard work that goes into feeding our communities.

This bill is an investment in our children, our local food systems, and our agricultural future. By supporting LD 550, we are ensuring that Maine’s students gain the knowledge, confidence, and skills to be more self-reliant and better stewards of the land. The Maine Farm Bureau urges the Committee to vote Ought to Pass and help bring this vital program to our schools.

Thank you for your time and consideration. I welcome any questions and appreciate your support of Maine’s students and agricultural heritage.