



March 27, 2025

RE: Support of LD 893 – An Act to Exempt Nonprofit Agricultural Membership Organizations from Insurance Requirements

Good afternoon, Senator Bailey, Representative Gramlich, and members of the Health Coverage, Insurance, and Financial Services Committee. I'm Eric Venturini, President of the Agricultural Council of Maine ("AgCOM"), a nonprofit association that brings together the major sectors of Maine's agricultural economy. I'm here today to support LD 893.

AgCOM supports Maine agriculture by providing a forum for communication among agricultural groups and providing leadership and advocacy on issues that affect all sectors of Maine agriculture.

Our members discussed this bill at our last meeting, and support for this proposal was unanimous. During the discussion, members pointed to benefits of the idea that include the following:

- Producers often struggle to access affordable health coverage and this bill, if passed would help to address a gap in coverage options, allowing more farmers to be secure in their health care.
- One of the most significant barriers preventing new farmers from getting into agriculture, is the lack of health insurance. This bill would help to address this, helping to reverse the 14% loss we've seen in the number of Maine farms over the last decade.¹
- Many farmers are forced to work off-farm to secure health coverage, which takes time away from improving their operations. LD 893 offers an affordable option that could encourage more farmers to farm full-time, better able to dedicate resources to improving the viability of their business.
- Health plans through the Maine Farm Bureau could save farmers up to 70% of their current premiums. This is critical at a time when all other costs are increasing, and farmers are being driven out of business.

¹ USDA National Agricultural Statistics Service. US Census of Agriculture, 2022. 2022 Census by State, Maine. https://www.nass.usda.gov/Publications/AgCensus/2022/Full_Report/Census_by_State/Maine/index.php

- When farmers can afford health coverage, they're more likely to stay on the land, which increases the chance that Maine will reach the State's goal of protecting 7% of Maine's farmland by 2030 and encouraging new farmers to join our industry, preserving our agricultural heritage.

Our members also noted the definition of "farmer" in the bill, and would like to point out that incorporated farm business do not necessarily file a Schedule F on their personal return and could be left out. We encourage the committee and the sponsor to adjust the definition of farmer to be as inclusive as possible for all Maine farmers.

The Maine Farm Bureau has worked to address past concerns, and we appreciate their efforts to create a balanced approach. On behalf of AgCOM, I urge you to support LD 893. Thank you for your time and I'm happy to answer questions.

Sincerely,

Agricultural Council of Maine

Eric Venturini, President

Executive Director, Wild
Blueberry Commission of
Maine
(207) 478-7612

**Shelley Megquier,
Vice President**

Policy and Research Director,
Maine Farmland Trust

Kevin Woltemath, Treasurer

Vice President, Maine Beef
Producers Association

Annie Watson, Secretary

President, Maine Dairy Industry
Association

Member Organizations:

- Maine Aquaculture Association
- Maine Association of Conservation Districts
- Maine Beef Producers Association
- Maine Christmas Tree Association
- Maine Dairy Industry Association
- Maine Farm Bureau
- Maine Farmland Trust
- Maine Organic Farmers and Gardeners Association
- Maine Ornamental Horticultural Council
- Maine State Pomological Society
- Maine Vegetable and Small Fruit Growers Association
- Wild Blueberry Commission of Maine