



Testimony before the Joint Standing Committee on Appropriations and Financial Affairs
By Eliza Paterson, American Farmland Trust, Senior New England Policy Associate
April 10th, 2025

RE: Support for LD 362 – An Act to Authorize a General Fund Bond Issue to Replenish the Land for Maine's Future Program

Senator Rotundo, Representative Gattine, and esteemed members of the Joint Standing Committee on Appropriations and Financial Affairs, thank you for the opportunity to submit testimony **in support of LD 362.**

My name is Eliza Paterson, and I am American Farmland Trust's (AFT's) Senior New England Policy Associate. Founded in 1980, AFT is the nation's leading conservation organization dedicated to protecting farmland, promoting sound farming practices, and keeping farmers on the land. Established in 1985, AFT's New England Program works to save the land that sustains us across the region. AFT has a long history of working in Maine, stemming back to our role in supporting the first farmland protection projects undertaken through the Land for Maine's Future program.

Maine's farmland plays a vital role in our regional economy and food security. Maine has the most agricultural land of any of the six New England states by far, as well as the largest amount of prime and important farmland. However, the state's farmland is at risk. According to the [2022 Census of Agriculture](#), between 2017 and 2022, more than 82,000 acres of farmland in Maine fell out of agricultural production. At the same time, Maine has protected less than five percent of the state's farmland to date – the lowest percentage of any New England state.

The primary funding source for the Maine Department of Agriculture, Conservation, and Forestry's Working Farmland Access and Protection Program is the Land for Maine's Future (LMF) account. LD 362 proposes a \$50 million bond measure for replenishing LMF funding. As of January 2023, according to AFT's Purchase of Agricultural Conservation Easement (PACE) Survey, since its creation in 1987, LMF has protected over 600,000 acres, including nearly 10,000 acres of farmland and 42 farms. The robust funding LD 362 would provide will be critical for the state to continue farmland protection efforts.

Farmland protection is a key component to the future of Maine's local food system and economy

The significant funding that LD 362 would provide the LMF Program would support the state's food security and economic resiliency. Protecting farms in Maine enhances the state's long term food security, meaning that no matter what disruptions impact the global food system, farmland will be available so local food can still be provided to Mainers. Additionally, Maine's farmland directly supports the state's economy with over 7,600 farm businesses, close to 13,700

producers, and 15,600 farm laborers. In 2021, the state's agricultural sector produced \$2.1 billion in direct sales with an overall economic impact of \$3.6 billion.¹

LD 362 is also in alignment with the goals outlined in the November 2024 [Maine Won't Wait Plan](#). The number one goal of Strategy E, "Protect the Environment and Natural and Working Lands and Water in Maine," is to increase the total acreage of conserved natural and working lands in the state to 30 percent of the total by 2030. One of the primary methods listed to achieve this goal states the establishment of permanent funding for conservation programs such as the LMF program.

Let's promote farmland for the future through the LMF Program

According to a recent report released by New England Feeding New England titled "[A Regional Approach to Food System Resilience](#)," it is estimated that nearly 1 million acres of land will need to be brought back into agricultural production if New England wants to produce thirty percent of the food consumed in our region by 2030. The same report also emphasizes that most of the farmland in the region is located in Maine and Vermont. By passing LD 362, Maine will be able to more fully grow its agricultural sector and rural economy and realize its full potential as the region's "breadbasket."

As a national and regional leader in farmland protection, we support this legislation and urge the committee to pass it this session. If you have any questions, please feel free to reach out to me at epaterson@farmland.org, or Jim Habana Hafner, Ph.D. AFT New England's Regional Director, at jhafner@farmland.org.

On behalf of AFT, thank you for your time and for the opportunity to submit testimony in support of LD 362.

Sincerely,

Eliza Paterson
Senior New England Policy Associate
American Farmland Trust

American Farmland Trust is an agricultural non-profit organization with a mission to save the land that sustains us by protecting farmland, promoting sound farming practices, and keeping farmers on the land. AFT is the only national agricultural organization that approaches its work in this comprehensive, holistic manner. We recognize the connection between the land, forward-looking farming practices, and the farmers who do the work.

¹ Land for Maine's future project data, found at <https://www.maine.gov/dacf/lmf/docs/lmf-brochure-regional-2023.pdf>