



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 1140 – An Act to Authorize a General Fund Bond Issue to Strengthen the Resilience and Growth of Maine’s Agricultural Economy

Dear 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 1140**.

My name is Eliza Paterson, and I am American Farmland Trust’s (AFT’s) Senior New England Policy Associate. 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.

LD 1140 requests \$45 million to fund multiple agricultural priorities. The bond measure would provide the following:

- \$35 million to the Maine Agriculture, Food and Forest Products Investment Fund;
- \$5 million to support the dairy sector;
- \$2.5 million for farmer disaster relief; and
- \$2.5 million for working farmland access and protection.

These priorities support a thriving agricultural economy in Maine, which is essential for rural economic development, the viability of farm businesses, maintaining agricultural land in production, and ensuring a resilient food system.

LD 1140 is investing in Maine’s farmland and farm businesses for current and future generations. This legislation allocates \$2.5 million to Maine’s Working Farmland Access and Protection Program and \$35 million to the Maine Agriculture, Food, and Forest Products Investment Fund, helping to secure the future of Maine’s farmland and farm businesses. With over 7,600 farm businesses, nearly 13,700 producers, and 15,600 farm laborers, Maine’s farmland is vital to the state’s economy. In 2021, the agricultural sector generated \$2.1 billion in

direct sales and had a \$3.6 billion economic impact.¹ Protecting farms and supporting agricultural businesses ensures long-term food security and economic resilience, allowing local food production to continue despite global disruptions.

LD 1140 aligns with the November 2024 [Maine Won't Wait Plan](#), specifically Strategy E's goal to conserve 30% of natural and working lands by 2030. The programs funded by LD 1140 can help achieve this goal.

The proposed funding of \$2.5 million in **LD 1140 could provide immediate relief for farmers facing losses from extreme weather events**. Investing in farmer disaster relief is crucial as these severe weather events become more frequent. Maine's farmers must adapt to maintain viable and resilient businesses in unpredictable conditions. This funding support is vital to prevent farmland loss to development and to help businesses stay afloat and productive.

As a national and regional leader in farmland protection, we fully 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 1140.

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 [lmf-brochure-regional-2023.pdf](#)