



**Testimony of the Maine Organic Farmers and Gardeners Association
in support of
LD 1528 - *An Act to Support Farmland Conservation*
April 16, 2025**

Good afternoon Senator Talbot Ross, Representative Pluecker and members of the Joint Standing Committee on Agriculture, Conservation and Forestry. My name is Heather Spalding and I am deputy director of the Maine Organic Farmers and Gardeners Association (MOFGA). Thank you for the opportunity to advocate for LD 1528 - *An Act to Support Farmland Conservation*.

A broad-based community, MOFGA is transforming our food system by supporting farmers, empowering people to feed their communities, and advocating for an organic future. MOFGA certifies 537 organic farms and processing operations representing more than \$120 million in sales. We're working hard to create opportunities for Maine's next generation of farmers. Each of these farmers is a Maine businessperson for whom economic health and environmental health are interdependent. While MOFGA envisions a future of healthy ecosystems, communities, people, and economies sustained by the practices of organic agriculture, we attribute our success to collaboration and outreach to growers across the management spectrum.

Last year during the 131st Legislature, MOFGA supported a bill (LD 579) similar to LD 1528 before you today. LD 1528 would do three things:

- Create an account managed by the Bureau of Agriculture, Food, and Rural Resources to facilitate a rapid expansion of publicly funded farmland protection efforts;
- Build staff capacity within this existing state program so it can function as intended when created by the Legislature by establishing one Resource Management Coordinator position; and
- Increase public funding for farmland conservation through a \$1 million appropriation from the General Fund -- the appropriation being the main difference from the last Legislature's bill on this subject.

MOFGA supports LD 1528 because Maine's farmland is precious and finite, and it's a critical aspect of a food system that is healthy and fair for all. The 2022 Census of Agriculture reported that between 2017 and 2022, Maine lost more than 6% of its productive farmland, saw a per-acre farmland cost increase of 44%, and a cost of farm production increase of 25%. Maine Farmland Trust reports that Maine is way behind other states in the Northeast when it comes to farmland preservation. Maine has about 60,000 acres of protected land (less than 5% of Maine farmland) compared to Massachusetts with about 75,000, New York with about 120,000, Vermont with 173,000, New Jersey with 247,000, and Pennsylvania with more than 650,000. Similarly, Maine is way behind all of these states with farmland protection funding.

Increasing Maine's farm conservation easements will help move Maine toward the climate action plan goals of conserving 30% of Maine land by 2030, and increasing the amount of food produced and consumed in Maine to 30% by 2030. We understand that Maine currently relies on producers outside of the state for about 96% of the food we consume though we have the soils, the water, the climate and the know-how to produce a healthy, diverse and delicious diet. Farmland preservation is essential if we are going to increase our self-reliance in the food and agriculture system. LD 1528 would help Maine ensure a land base with continuously improved soil quality in order to have a thriving and resilient agricultural economy that provides a nutritious and delicious diet for all people in Maine and many beyond.

We urge you to support this legislation and we appreciate your consideration.

