



**Testimony of Shelley Megquier, Policy & Research Director, Maine Farmland Trust, to the 132nd
Legislature's Joint Standing Committee on Agriculture, Conservation, and Forestry
April 24, 2025**

Good afternoon Senator Talbot Ross, Representative Pluecker, and members of the Joint Standing Committee on Agriculture, Conservation, and Forestry. My name is Shelley Megquier and I am the Policy & Research Director at Maine Farmland Trust (MFT). I am providing testimony on behalf of MFT in support of LD 1605—*An Act to Support Farmers and Food Banks Affected by Federal Funding Cuts to Their Existing Contracts*.

MFT is a member-powered statewide organization that works to protect farmland, support farmers, and advance the future of farming. Our goals are to keep agricultural lands working and help farmers and their communities thrive. Since our founding in 1999, MFT has helped to permanently protect farmland in every county in Maine, amounting to nearly 57,000 acres across 345 farms. Our Farm Network includes more than 550 farms that have participated in MFT's programming either through an agricultural easement or through one of our programs. Our main program areas are Farmland Protection, Farmland Access, Stewardship, Farm Business Planning, PFAS Support, Climate Resilience, and Policy and Research.

Farms are the backbone of our rural communities. LD 1605 proposes establishing a mechanism to ensure that farmers and food access points are kept whole in times of crisis. Investment in Maine farms in times of extreme hardship through either a zero- or low-interest loan is an investment in the livelihoods of working Mainers, rural economic development, and food security in our communities. Many farms don't have the savings needed to remain financial solvent if expected income is lost – whether that income loss is the result of a signed contract not fulfilled; damage or crop loss caused by an extreme weather event; or for some other reason outside of their control. It makes sense to have a suite of tools and resources poised and ready to provide temporary and much-needed support to farmers in situations such as these so they can remain viable.

Investing in our working farms makes good economic sense since when farmers have the tools they need to grow thriving businesses that feed our communities, our local economies flourish too. Though MFT supports LD 1605, one question that we have about the bill is whether an existing State program can be used to fulfil the purposes of the legislation rather than a new program created. Another topic for consideration is whether situations beyond federal funding cuts should be considered.

Thank you for the opportunity to share our support of LD 1605. Please reach out if you have any questions or follow-ups.