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Maine's Rural Development Council



**Testimony of GrowSmart Maine In support of LD 1450,
An Act Regarding the Voluntary Municipal Farm Support Program**

May 6, 2025

Senator Talbot-Ross Representative Pluecker, and Honorable Members of the Joint Standing Committee on Agriculture, Conservation and Forestry,

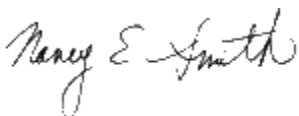
My name is Nancy Smith, I live in Ellsworth, and I am the CEO of GrowSmart Maine. We are a statewide non-partisan non-profit organization helping communities navigate change in alignment with smart growth. We advocate for comprehensive policies and funding for smart growth practices and outcomes.

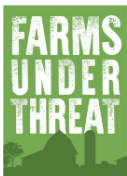
We support the proposed changes to the current Voluntary Municipal Farm Support program because it will broaden its use, to the benefit of farmers and their neighbors. When I lived in Monmouth, we became the second town to adopt the ordinance for this program, but still have not have farmers sign on.

While the bill language appears to be new, that is simply denoting its move to a more appropriate statute. There are two changes proposed:

- Reduce from twenty to ten years, the minimum length of a qualifying easement. This will make the program more appealing to farmers because it eases this requirement, while we can agree that ten years is still a significant commitment.
- Moves the decision-making for individual farm applications to municipal staff or elected officials, rather than a town-wide vote. This provides a professional level of review not currently a part of the program.

The purpose of this program is to provide financial support in recognition of the economic, environmental, social and fiscal values provided by farmers to their community, while also reducing the fiscal burden of new development in rural areas. While Maine is striving to create more housing, we must also be protecting farmland from sprawling development. I have attached an American Farmland Trust Fact Sheet that outlines the risks of such development. Providing property tax relief through this program is one more way we can ensure the financial viability of Maine's farms.

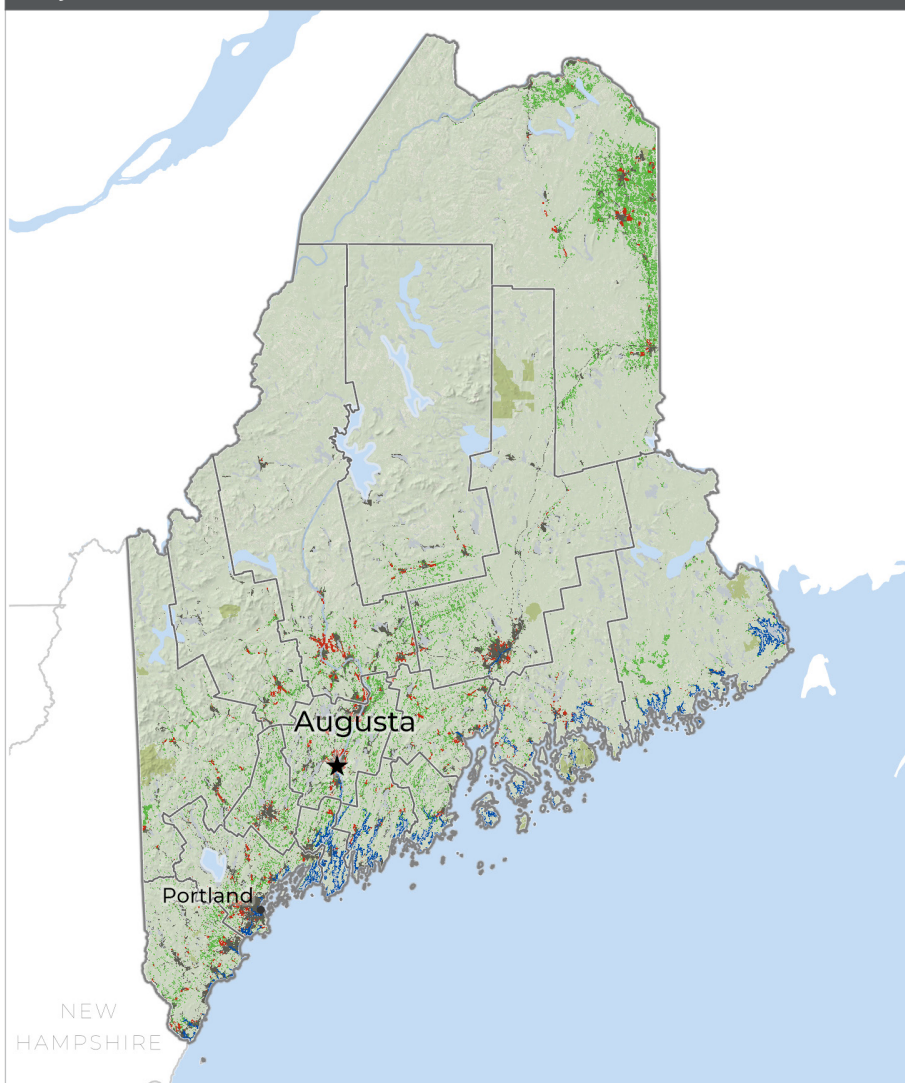




2040 Future Scenarios Maine

Farms Under Threat 2040: Choosing an Abundant Future mapped three scenarios of development between 2016 and 2040. If recent trends continue, **53,400 acres** of Maine's farmland will be paved over, fragmented, or converted to uses that jeopardize agriculture. **That's 5%.** Mainers can slash conversion, save farmland, and safeguard the future of agriculture and the environment by choosing compact development.

PROJECTED AGRICULTURAL LAND CONVERSION 2016-2040



Projected agricultural land conversion from 2016-2040 in the *Business as Usual* scenario.

Projected Conversion and Flooding (2040)

Urban and highly developed (UHD) and low-density residential (LDR) Coastal flooding

Land Cover (2016)

Farmland* Other lands Urban areas
Forestland Federal (no grazing) Water

*Farmland is composed of cropland, pastureland, and woodland associated with farms.

On recent trends, from 2016 to 2040:

Mainers will pave over,
fragment, or compromise

53,400 acres
of farmland.

That's the equivalent of losing

400 farms,
\$32 million
in farm output, and
1,400 jobs
based on county averages.¹

50% of the conversion
will occur on Maine's best
land.²

Hardest-hit counties:

► **Somerset**
► **Aroostook**
► **Cumberland**

¹ Census of Agriculture 2017
² Freedgood et al. 2020

WHICH FUTURE WILL WE CHOOSE?

How Mainers choose to develop will shape the future of farming. The scenarios in **Farms Under Threat 2040** show the impacts:



Business as Usual: Development follows recent patterns. Poorly planned development and low-density residential sprawl continue to rapidly convert farmland and ranchland.



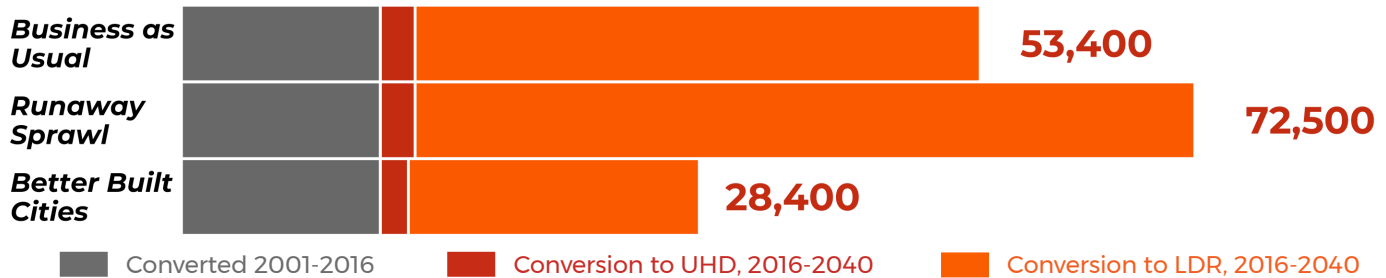
Runaway Sprawl: Development becomes even less efficient than in *Business as Usual*. Low-density housing sweeps across the countryside, displacing farmers and ranchers.



Better Built Cities: Policymakers and land-use planners promote compact development and reduce sprawl, saving irreplaceable farmland and ranchland from conversion.

COMPACT GROWTH CAN SAVE FARMS

Acres of Projected Conversion 2016-2040



Maine's farmland will be converted to:

Urban and highly developed (UHD)

land use includes commercial, industrial, and moderate-to-high density residential areas.

Low-density residential (LDR)

land use includes scattered subdivisions and large-lot housing, which fragment the agricultural land base and limit production, marketing, and management options for the working farms and ranches that remain.

LDR PAVES THE WAY FOR FURTHER DEVELOPMENT

Agricultural land that was in LDR areas in 2016 is

7 TIMES MORE LIKELY

to be converted to UHD by 2040, compared to other agricultural land.

DEVELOPMENT CHOICES MATTER

By choosing the *Better Built Cities* scenario instead of *Runaway Sprawl*, Mainers can save

44,100 acres

of farmland.

That's the equivalent of saving

300 farms,

\$27 million

in farm output, and

1,200 jobs

based on county averages.¹

¹ Census of Agriculture 2017

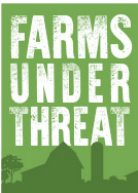
COASTAL FLOODING



By 2040, 300 acres of agricultural land may be affected by rising seas due to climate change.

WHAT POLICYMAKERS CAN DO

- **Encourage compact development** to minimize sprawl.
- **Permanently protect our best farmland** with voluntary conservation easements.
- **Forge a path to success** for a new generation of farmers.



Farms Under Threat is American Farmland Trust's multi-year initiative to document the status of and threats to U.S. farmland and ranchland and to identify policy solutions to protect and conserve America's diverse agricultural landscape. For questions and to access the data, please contact AFT's Farmland Information Center: www.farmlandinfo.org or (800) 370-4879.

Explore our interactive maps and read the full report at

www.farmland.org/farmsunderthreat

