



**Testimony of the Maine Organic Farmers and Gardeners Association
in support of
LD 1450 - *An Act Regarding the Voluntary Municipal Farm Support Program*
May 6, 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 1450 - *An Act Regarding the Voluntary Municipal Farm Support Program*.

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 currently certifies 520 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.

LD 1450 would help Maine modernize and strengthen the Voluntary Municipal Farm Support Program (VMFSP), which encourages communities to provide up to 100% of property tax relief beyond the State's Farm and Open Space tax law. This is done with the added benefit of reducing administrative burdens on town officials.

Maine's farmland and the farm businesses that populate it are precious and critical for our rural economy. Our farmers are feeling squeezed at every turn given the escalating costs of production, the labor shortage, the cost of farmland, dramatically shifting weather patterns, a chaotic economy and tariffs, and many other pressures. 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%. We have to do find innovative ways of helping farms attain financial sustainability.

LD 1450 doesn't force anyone or any municipality to initiate tax relief for local farm businesses -- it merely provides a voluntary opt-in for communities that want to promote local agriculture and a thriving rural farm economy. Reducing the tax burden for farms 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. Providing creative and innovative support for Maine farmers is essential if we are going to increase our self-reliance in the food and agriculture system and ensure a resilient agricultural economy that provides a nutritious and delicious diet for all people in Maine and many beyond.

Passing LD 1450 would help more municipal officials understand and appreciate the benefits of tax relief for farm businesses by moving the VMFSP from Title 7 (Agriculture and Animals) to Title 36 (Taxation). It would also cut in half the minimum qualified easement term -- reducing it from 20 years to 10, which would be much more attractive to aging farmers or those uncertain about the longer term commitment. And it would allow for municipalities to adopt a friendlier approval process for individual applications so that farmers could apply to a committee rather than having to appear before the entire community (*e.g.* Town Meeting) to make a request.

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

