



Testimony before the Joint Standing Committee on Agriculture, Conservation and Forestry
May 6th, 2025

RE: Support for LD 1450 – An Act Regarding the Voluntary Municipal Farm Support Program

Dear Senator Talbot Ross, Representative Pluecker, and esteemed members of the Joint Standing Committee on Agriculture, Conservation and Forestry,

Thank you for the opportunity to submit testimony **in support of LD 1450.**

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 supporting the first farmland protection projects undertaken through the Land for Maine's Future program.

Maine's farmland and farm businesses play vital roles in the state's economy, rural communities, and food security – and are regionally important. However, the state's farmland and farmers are 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. Because 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, protecting Maine farmland while supporting farm businesses is important to the region's food system and food security. Maine needs to pursue multiple strategies simultaneously to accelerate farmland conservation and strengthen the viability of its farm businesses.

An important strategy to advance farmland protection and support tax abatement for farms is The Voluntary Municipal Farm Support Program (VMFSP). Established in 2007 during the 123rd Legislature, the VMFSP provides a tool for municipalities to maintain and protect local farms and farmland. The program allows towns to create local, non-permanent agricultural conservation easement programs while lowering the property tax burden on farms.

However, VMFSP is currently underutilized. If fully leveraged, the VMFSP can help accomplish two goals simultaneously: increasing farmland protection while supporting the viability of Maine's farm businesses.

We support **LD 1450, which aims to update and improve the existing VMFSP based on input from municipalities and farmers since the program's inception.** These updates include:

- Relocate the program from Title 7 to Title 36 (Taxation), improving its visibility among town councils, which are often looking to improve farm viability.
- Amend the statute to allow municipalities themselves to determine how they approve each individual farm support arrangement rather than requiring in statute that each arrangement go before the town council. This will allow more flexibility and alignment with specific localities.
- Reduce the minimum qualified easement term from 20 years to 10 years. This provision will broaden farmers' interest and participation in the program, as it can be difficult for a farmer to commit to longer agreements.

The above amendments to the VMFSP can have strong impacts on the program's visibility, accessibility, and overall utilization in Maine. Many communities in the state recognize the importance of local agriculture and have a strong interest in pursuing initiatives that increase farmland protection and promote farm viability in their area. LD 1450 can help Maine's communities achieve these goals.

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.

On behalf of AFT, thank you for your time and the opportunity to submit testimony supporting LD 1450.

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.