



## TESTIMONY OF THE WILD BLUEBERRY COMMISSION OF MAINE

May 13<sup>th</sup>, 2025

**Re: Support for LD 1739, An Act to Authorize a General Fund Bond Issue to Support Maine's Agricultural Sector, to Create an Agricultural Buildings Property Tax Exemption and to Direct the Department of Agriculture, Conservation and Forestry to Study Barriers to Its Financial Assistance Programs and Study the Potential for a Common Application for Those Programs**

Senator Rotundo, Representative Gattine, and esteemed members of the Appropriations Committee, my name is Eric Venturini, and I am the Executive Director of the Wild Blueberry Commission of Maine. We thank Representative Pluecker for bringing forward this bill and continuing the conversation on constructing the most strategic bond package to deliver critical support to Maine's agricultural sector.

The Wild Blueberry Commission (WBCM) works on behalf of Maine's 512<sup>1</sup> farms who grow wild blueberries on 47,600<sup>1</sup> acres across the State. In 2024, Maine produced approximately 85 million pounds of wild blueberries representing nearly 100% of all **wild blueberries** and approximately 10% of all **blueberries** grown in the US. Our industry contributes \$361 million dollars to the state's economy annually<sup>2</sup> and is the **only** state with significant commercial production of wild blueberries.

The wild blueberry industry in Maine, like many other agricultural sectors, is facing significant challenges. The cost of growing wild blueberries remains for many producers, below the selling cost. We are facing mounting competition from an increasingly globalized blueberry industry and the production of Canadian wild blueberries is continuing to grow. A more detailed assessment of the state of the wild blueberry industry can be found in my recent testimony in support of LD 1140 before this committee.

Several bond issues have been proposed to support agriculture. They offer Maine's wild blueberry producers with opportunities for increased strategic investment and relief. I thank Representative Pluecker for his attention to the agricultural sector and the thoughtful approach that he has taken to crafting this proposal. There are several differences between LD 1140, *An Act to Authorize a General Fund Bond Issue to*

---

<sup>1</sup> USDA National Agricultural Statistics Service. 2022. Berries: 2022. United States Census of Agriculture.

<sup>2</sup> Camoine Associates. Unpublished Data. Economic and Fiscal Impacts of the Maine Wild Blueberry Industry. Wild Blueberry Association of North America – US, October 2023.



*Strengthen the Resilience and Growth of Maine's Agricultural Economy*, and LD 1739.

The most critical difference between these two bills is the difference in the level of allocation to the Maine Agricultural and Forest Products Investment Fund.

LD 1140 allocates \$35M to this fund, with 1/3 going to forest products infrastructure and 2/3 allocated to agricultural infrastructure. LD 1739 allocates \$25M to the same program and does not segregate the allocation between agriculture and forestry. The oversubscribed Agricultural Infrastructure Investment Fund, which invested \$20M in agricultural infrastructure a few years ago, left \$160M in agricultural infrastructure requests unfunded. Considering this demonstrated need, and the importance of infrastructure investments for building an economically viable future for the wild blueberry industry, infrastructure investment is the most critical priority, and we suggest that any legislatively supported bond issue for agriculture should reflect that priority through its funding allocations.

**Comparison of LD 1140 and LD 1739:**

	<b>LD 1140 - An Act to Authorize a General Fund Bond Issue to Strengthen the Resilience and Growth of Maine's Agricultural Economy</b> (Pres. Daughtry)	<b>LD 1739 - An Act to Authorize a General Fund Bond Issue to Support Maine's Agricultural Sector, to Create an Agricultural Buildings Property...</b> (Rep. Pluecker)
<b>Total Bond</b>	<b>\$45M</b>	<b>\$55.6M</b>
Ag. and Forest Products Infrastructure Fund	\$11.66M allocated to forest products, \$23.33M allocated to agriculture	\$25M, no separate allocation by sector
Dairy	\$5M	\$5M
Farmer Disaster Relief	\$2.5M	\$0
Ag. Conservation and Easements	\$2.5M (Land for Maine's Future)	\$0
Ag. Marketing Loan Fund	\$0	\$5M
Ag. Focus of Dirigo Bus. Incentive Fund	\$0	\$10M
Ab. Building Tax Exemption	\$0	\$5M (tax exemption from increased value of agricultural structures)
Ag. Business Recovery and Resilience	\$0	\$5M
Dev. a Common Application	\$0	\$600k

Thank you for your time and consideration.

