



Testimony before the Joint Standing Committee on Agriculture, Conservation and Forestry

May 13th 2025

RE: Support for LD 1925 – An Act to Improve Access to Grant Funding for the Maine Farms for the Future 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 1925.**

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.

Farmland and farmers play a vital role in the state's economy, rural communities, and food security – and is regionally important. Efforts to keep Maine's farmland in active agricultural production will have lasting impacts on the state's resilience. This includes investing in programs that assist all farmers, including both farmers who own land and farmers who lease land, as well as small-scale operations.

LD 1925 seeks to expand farmer participation in the Farms for the Future Program in the following ways:

- Open eligibility for farmers who lease land, in addition to those who own land.
- Ensure farmers who farm on land that is already protected by an agricultural conservation easement can fully participate in the program.
- Allow farmers who farm on less than 5 acres of land to fully participate in the program.

This legislation also increases the maximum allowable amounts for grants and agricultural marketing loans awarded through the program to keep up with inflation.

According to the 2022 *Census of Agriculture*, 20 percent of Maine farms lease some or all the land they use for farming, and over 1,200 farms are in the range of 1 to 9 acres in size. Farms of this size have a product market value averaging close to \$30,000 per year. To contribute to the viability of the state's agricultural producers, it is important that farm businesses operating on leased land and/or are under 5 acres are eligible for programs such as Farms for the Future. However, investment support is currently only available to farmers who have at least 5 acres of

land in agricultural use and own the land they farm. This excludes some farmers from being able to participate in the program, making it more difficult to invest in their viability and keep their farms protected.

By including leased farmland, farms under 5 acres in size, and land already under agricultural conservation easements to fully participate in the Farms for the Future Program, **LD 1925 provides essential provisions to ensure Maine's agricultural and economic resiliency.**

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 for the opportunity to submit testimony in support of LD 1925.

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.