

Rhiannon Hampson and Gregg Stiner

Grace Pond Farm

Thomaston, Maine

Dear Senator Rotundo, Representative Gatine, and members of the Joint Standing Committee on Appropriations and Financial Affairs,

My name is Rhiannon Hampson, and along with my husband Gregg Stiner and our family, I own and operate Grace Pond Farm, an organic dairy and pastured livestock farm in Thomaston, Maine. I am writing to testify in support of LD 2094, the Maine Agriculture Bond.

You will hear over and over again today that farming is relentless – and it is hard. That is true, there are long days and short nights. Farmers miss vacations and school meetings, birthdays and even funerals all in the pursuit of tending fields and livestock and feeding our communities. I'd also like to make sure you hear a bit about *why* we do it, why we work 80 and 100 hour weeks, often without taking a paycheck. We do it because we know how valuable that work is. We know that Maine's agricultural sector is a critical component of the ways in which our heritage industries are the backbone of this state, both as economic drivers and as an identity. Indeed, there is a farmer on our state seal, because for more than 200 years we have understood collectively that farming is foundational to our state's prosperity.

Nationally, small and midsized farms make up approximately 96% of all producers, and we are responsible for caring for roughly 90% of all agricultural land. Here in Maine, that translates to approximately 1.2 million acres of productive farmland – that is roughly the size of Franklin County - and ~7,000+ Maine farms are critical in ensuring that those lands are stewarded in ways that encourage the conservation and robust production we need to feed ourselves and meet the future. When the pandemic hit and grocery store shelves were empty for long periods of time – we were there. We collectively stepped up to feed our neighbors and when the next crisis hits, we'll do the same again – but not without your support. Here at Grace Pond Farm we are one of just ~104 commercial dairy farms left in this state and while we diversify our offerings across other livestock sectors, those face similar pressures and challenges as well that test our ability to stay afloat.

When we invest public dollars in Maine farms, we all reap the benefit of that stewarded money re-circulating throughout our local economy; that is the multiplier effect. Our farm alone puts more than \$250,000 dollars back into circulation through payroll, the purchasing of feed, bedding, equipment and supplies, property and business use taxes – almost all of those dollars are spent here in the state of Maine.

And make no mistake – the public revenue that will support LD 2094 is our money too. We pay taxes, often more so than many of our neighbors, and like every other small business, we feel that we deserve to have our tax dollars work for us. Unlike other small businesses though, farming *is truly a public service*. We serve our neighbors; when there are celebrations or tragedies, people come together over food. When pandemics strike, Maine farmers step up to meet people's basic

needs. When second home development pressures every acre of land in midcoast Maine, we hold fast – protecting open space that allows the children of our community to be connected with their heritage and with something real.

As farmers, we have been here to support you when you need us, and we humbly ask that you do the same for us today – please support LD 2094 and say yes to Maine's farms, and yes to Maine's future.

Thank you, and we appreciate your thoughtful attention to this testimony.

Sincerely,

Rhiannon Hampson, and Gregg Stiner

Grace Pond Farm

Thomaston, Maine

Rhiannon Hampson
THOMASTON
LD 2094

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