

Written Testimony of Andrew Jura

In Opposition to LD 2096

Submitted to the Joint Standing Committee on Agriculture, Conservation and Forestry

To Senator Talbot-Ross, Representative Plueker, and members of the Agriculture, Conservation and Forestry Committee:

My name is Andrew Jura. I serve as First Vice President of the Union Fair, and I am a Maine small business owner. I have spent most of my working life in Maine's agricultural fairs—27 years as a vendor across the state, and the past three years working directly with the Union Fair.

To many people, a fair is just a weekend event. In Maine, however, a fair is something much deeper than that. It is where towns come together, where children see their first calf or chicken, where neighbors reconnect, where local nonprofits raise funds, and where small businesses earn the income they need to survive another year.

The Union Fair is not a recent tradition. It began in 1869 and has served its community for more than a century and a half. In that time, the fair has closed only during extraordinary moments in history—World War II and a worldwide pandemic. This year marks the Union Fair's 155th year. Its continuity reflects generations of volunteers, farmers, families, and community members who have worked tirelessly to preserve an institution deeply rooted in Maine's agricultural and cultural heritage.

This testimony is submitted in opposition to LD 2096.

As currently written, LD 2096 would change the definition of an agricultural fair in a way that does not reflect the realities of rural Maine. Many smaller fairs do not have the number of farms, exhibitors, volunteers, or financial resources available to larger fairs. If these changes are adopted, some of Maine's smaller fairs will not be able to continue operating.

Such an outcome would represent a loss not only for fairs, but for Maine communities.

Maine's agricultural landscape has changed. There are fewer farms than there once were, particularly in smaller towns. Yet fairs like the Union Fair have adapted. They continue to provide agricultural education through demonstrations, youth activities, and competitions that are realistic and sustainable within their communities. This work is carried out largely by volunteers, with limited budgets and significant commitment.

The Union Fair has long been part of its community's identity. It is where grandparents bring their grandchildren because they remember attending themselves. It is where residents who may not see one another throughout the year reconnect. It is where rural towns maintain a sense of shared identity and place.

A one-size-fits-all definition of an agricultural fair may appear orderly on paper, but it does not reflect the practical realities of Maine's diverse communities. If the state establishes standards that only larger fairs can meet, the result will not be a stronger agricultural system, but the gradual disappearance of smaller fairs that sustain rural community life.

When a fair disappears, the loss extends beyond the event itself. Opportunities for young people to learn about agriculture diminish. Local organizations lose important fundraising opportunities. Communities lose one of their most meaningful gathering places.

Every fair in Maine is different because every community in Maine is different. That diversity is not a weakness; it is a defining strength of Maine's agricultural tradition.

For these reasons, the committee is respectfully urged to reconsider LD 2096 and to preserve the current definition of an agricultural fair. Protecting Maine agriculture should not come at the cost of losing Maine's agricultural fairs and the communities they sustain.

Respectfully submitted,

Andrew Jura

First Vice President, Union Fair