



**Testimony of Shelley Megquier, Policy & Research Director, Maine Farmland Trust, to the 132nd
Legislature's Joint Standing Committee on Agriculture, Conservation, and Forestry
March 5, 2026**

Good afternoon Senator Talbot Ross, Representative Pluecker, and members of the Joint Standing Committee on Agriculture, Conservation, and Forestry. My name is Shelley Megquier and I am the Policy & Research Director at Maine Farmland Trust (MFT). I am providing testimony on behalf of MFT in support of LD 299 – *An Act to Support Investment in Agriculture*.

MFT is a member-powered statewide organization that works to protect farmland, support farmers, and advance the future of farming. Our goals are to keep agricultural lands working and help farmers and their communities thrive. Since our founding in 1999, MFT has helped to permanently protect farmland in every county in Maine, amounting to over 58,000 acres across 395 farms. Our Farm Network includes more than 550 farms that have participated in MFT's programming either through an agricultural easement or through one of our other areas of work. Our main program areas are Farmland Protection, Farmland Access, Stewardship, Farm Business Planning, PFAS Support, and Policy and Research.

MFT strongly supports LD 299 because a thriving agricultural economy in Maine is critical to rural economic development, to farmers' ability to keep their land in agricultural production, and to ensuring a vibrant and resilient food system for our state and communities. We often talk about agriculture being the backbone of Maine's economy. We need to ensure that farms have what they need to continue to be that backbone – feeding Maine residents and powering our communities. Capitalizing the Maine Agriculture, Food and Forest Products Investment Fund would provide funding for grants and loans that would allow farmers to grow and diversify their businesses.

In our work at MFT we have seen how Maine farmers need improved infrastructure, processing and other innovative opportunities, on and off the farm and across all agricultural sectors in every part of the state, to increase the supply of Maine-grown products, scale up production, reduce costs, and create and access new market opportunities. For instance, the lack of meat processing capacity has been a long-standing challenge for livestock farmers in the state. As Maine's immigrant population grows, so too does the need for religiously and culturally appropriate meat processing, including halal processing. Improved infrastructure for the dairy sector, including processing capacity for value-added products and in proximity to dairy farms, could help dairy producers grow their businesses and lower costs. And the seasonality of fruit and vegetable production in the state requires innovation to produce shelf-stable local products that can feed Mainers and create market opportunities all year long. The lack of food processing infrastructure weakens Maine's food and agriculture economy and serves as a challenge for individual farm businesses that are seeking to strategically grow and diversify their operations.

At the same time, there is enormous growth potential for the food sector in Maine and the sectors that support it like farming. Governor Mills' 10-year economic development strategy identifies the food sector in Maine as one of the four areas most ripe for economic development because of the state's current strengths, the growing global demand, and the potential for job creation in that sector.¹ But

¹ *Maine Economic Development Strategy (2020-2029): A Focus on Talent and Innovation* (2019) at 14, available at: <https://www.maine.gov/decd/strategic-plan>.

investment in food processing infrastructure is a necessary first step to growing this important segment of Maine’s economy. As the economic development strategy notes, “[f]rom aquaculture to traditional seafood harvesting to value-added food production, growth is anticipated in these food industries and Maine can benefit greatly by growing our capacity to meet these markets.”² This type of investment will also be necessary to meet the state’s climate action plan goal of increasing the amount of food consumed in Maine from state food producers to 30 percent by 2030, including through the strategy of “strengthen[ing] the viability of Maine farms, fisheries, aquaculture, and other food producers through expanded, equitable, and ongoing access to funding, technical assistance, and processing and distribution infrastructure.”³ These strategies recognize the importance of growing our local food sector to ensure food security for the state given the supply chain disruptions that are anticipated to result from climate change in the future as well as economic security for Mainers.

Thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony in support of LD 299. We urge you to support this bill and would be glad to try to answer any questions.

² *Id.* at 18.

³ Maine Climate Council, *Maine Won’t Wait: A Four-Year Plan for Climate Action*, p. 116 (2024), available at: <https://www.maine.gov/climateplan/the-plan>.