

**Testimony of Behalf of the University of Maine System
Presented by Hannah Carter, Dean of University of Maine Cooperative Extension
In Support of Extension-Related Appropriations (Page A-648)
of the Governor's Proposed FY24-25 Biennial Budget (LD 258) – Feb. 28, 2023**

Senators Rotundo and Ingwersen, Representatives Sachs and Pluecker, and distinguished members of the Joint Standing Committees on Appropriations & Financial Affairs and Agriculture, Conservation & Forestry:

My name is Hannah Carter and I am Dean of University of Maine Cooperative Extension. I am also a proud County native and a product of the Extension system through my early years in 4-H and later as a summer insect and disease scout when I was an undergraduate student at the University of Maine Presque Isle. I am here today on behalf of the University of Maine System to **encourage your support of the General Fund appropriation and Special Revenue allocation that advance the statewide activities of UMaine Extension**, which you will find on Page A-648 of the Governor's biennial budget proposal.

Extension brings research, education and outreach from Maine's R1 university to homes, schools, farms, and communities in your legislative districts. Breeding more resilient potato varieties. Partnering with wild blueberry producers to improve the shelf life and quality of fresh packed berries. Providing food safety planning assistance to help new meat processors pass inspection. These are just some of **Extension's statewide activities that strengthen and grow Maine's agricultural economy and dependent rural jobs, and protect public, plant and animal health.**

Tick Laboratory & Pest Management Fund (A-648)

In 2014, the Legislature and Maine voters generously funded the construction of the University of Maine Extension Diagnostic and Research Laboratory (DRL) to bring Extension scientists — including students — together to do research that matters to Maine and to provide unique diagnostic and testing services that matters to Mainers. Thank you.

Today, the DRL supports aquatic animal health research necessary to the development of the state's aquaculture and biotechnology sectors; veterinary diagnostic services vital for vets, game wardens and pet owners; plant disease testing that farmers depend on for crop management; and as Mainers increasingly appreciate, testing of ticks and other insects.

Extension is generally supported within UMaine's existing budgetary resources and by other local, state and federal competitive and formula funds and our own program revenue. However, in recognition of the DRL's critical importance to our state, the 129th Legislature established a 15-cent container fee on registered pesticide products charged to consumers at the point of sale, with a large portion of the proceeds benefiting the lab. Given the complexity of administration, with the full support of the University of Maine System and

Maine retailers, the 130th Legislature and Gov. Mills repealed the fee and instead provided this more predictable source of ongoing operating resources for the DRL's ever-expanding education, outreach and research activities, including testing each year of thousands of tick samples, more than one-third of which are positive for Lyme.

There is no new initiative proposed for the DRL in the upcoming biennium.

University of Maine Cooperative Extension (A-648)

There is also no new initiative for the Extension integrated pest management (IPM) and pesticide safety education programs on Page A-648, which are funded by special revenue.

IPM is a science-based approach to pest management that reduces the use of pesticides and their impact to public and environmental health while preserving the crop being treated. Extension leverages the State's investment to attract external funding to further extend the positive impact of our proven IPM programs on Maine farms. We estimate that each year, **our IPM recommendations generate more than \$10 million in increased crop/yield and reduced pesticides costs just for Maine's potato industry and more than \$5 million on Maine's apple industry.** There are similar success stories for the state's strawberry, cranberry and sweet corn growers, and with this flat-funded allocation, we can continue this important work to grow Maine's agriculture economy.

Additionally, as reported to the ACF Committee earlier this session, the pesticide safety expert supported in part by this initiative provides regular research-based trainings to those licensed — or seeking to become licensed — in pesticide application. In 2022, in-person training included sessions at the Agricultural Trades Show in Augusta that provided credit opportunities for more than 1,400 attendees and online sessions that collectively trained 446 applicators. Topics included, but were not limited to, IPM, safety, labeling, forestry and rights-of-way, greenhouse best practices and worker protection standards.

I want to **thank you for your continued commitment to University of Maine Cooperative Extension and to Maine's public universities.** Your investment allows us to help Maine's people help themselves through education and research. It also enables us to strategically partner with many of the other organizations you've heard from today, including the Maine Department of Agriculture, Conservation and Forestry, the Wild Blueberry Commission of Maine and the Maine Potato Board, all of which are equally deserving of your support and are vital to the future of Maine's agricultural-dependent economy and communities.

Thank you, and I look forward to taking your questions.