



Stacy Brenner  
Senator, District 30

THE MAINE SENATE  
131st Legislature

3 State House Station  
Augusta, Maine 04333

*Testimony of Senator Stacy Brenner supporting LD 1274, "An Act to Increase Land Access for Historically Disadvantaged Populations"*  
*Before the Joint Standing Committee on Agriculture, Conservation and Forestry*  
April 3, 2023

Senator Ingwersen, Representative Pluecker, and Distinguished Colleagues on the Joint Standing Committee on Agriculture, Conservation and Forestry, my name is Stacy Brenner. I represent Senate District 30, which includes all of Gorham and most of Scarborough. I am here to speak in favor of LD 1274, "An Act to Increase Land Access for Historically Disadvantaged Populations."

There are folks planning to speak today that will address the statistics and the history that brings us to this moment in time: an opportunity to consider legislation that will uplift Black farmers in Maine.

In February 2022, LD 870, "Resolve, Directing the Permanent Commission on the Status of Racial, Indigenous and Maine Tribal Populations To Study the Impact of Policies Regarding Agriculture, Access to Land, Access to Grants and Access to Financing on African American and Indigenous Farmers in the State," which was signed into law on June 8, 2021, formed the Permanent Commission on the Status of Racial, Indigenous, and Tribal Populations. This resolve assembled a research team to examine the history of Federal and State policies impacting access by Indigenous and African American, as well as Afro-Indigenous farmers, in the State of Maine to land, grants, funding, and other programs.

The report titled, "Land Access for Indigenous & African American Farmers in Maine," provides a series of recommendations to consider, and this bill converts research into action, formalizing a commitment by Maine's State legislature to take the bold steps needed to ensure all those interested in farming are able to realize their goal. This legislation proposes one of the recommendations laid out in this report.

As a farmer, I have witnessed the disparities in who chooses to pursue a career in agriculture. The lack of diversity in this farming community of peers shows the depth of the disparities that exist.

I always wanted to be a farmer. My experience has been a lifetime of constantly being humbled by the weather, the soil, and the fickleness of markets. I was humbled by my sweet dairy cow who would make me slow down every day — even twice a day — for the chore of getting down on my knees next to her. She let me coax another bucket of milk for my family and community each time. I was humbled again when the deer ate 30,000 tulips in a single night that I had banked on selling for Mother's Day.



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A career in farming is filled with challenges that every one of us experiences when we choose to make our livelihood from the land. Facing discrimination as a Black farmer should not be one them.

By establishing the Black Farmer Restoration Program and the Farm Conservation Corps within the Department of Agriculture, Conservation and Forestry, we would be creating equitable opportunities for historically disadvantaged populations. We have long passed the time when we would only find ways to achieve equality. It is now time to take the next step and work towards equity within our farming community.

In Maine, we are facing a shortage in the agricultural workforce that is adversely impacting the viability of many farms. Encouraging and empowering Black farmers to train and work in the field of agriculture and become business owners would help directly address the challenges farmers currently face. Agricultural land grants and apprenticeships are an effective way to incentivize Mainers from disadvantaged groups to begin careers in agriculture. We would address two issues in agriculture through these programs by simultaneously addressing the chronic workforce shortage and creating vehicles for diversity, equity, and inclusion in the field of agriculture.

Maine Agriculture seems to benefit more than most industries from the so-called "rising tide lift all boats" adage. When our neighbor succeeds, our farm seems to also benefit. I am always open to a visiting farmer to walk through our greenhouse, check out our equipment, even chat about our markets. This is proof that the scarcity model of competition does not apply to Maine farming. The opposition may invoke this fear of scarcity in their arguments. Don't buy it. Maine agriculture will absolutely be stronger with direct encouragement to diversify.

Thank you for your time and consideration. I would be happy to answer any questions.