

BLUEWAVE

April 10, 2023

Joint Standing Committee on Agriculture, Conservation and Forestry

BlueWave Testimony in Support of LD 1227 – An Act to Balance Renewable Energy Development with Natural and Working Lands Conservation

Good morning Senator Ingwersen, Representative Pluecker, and members of the Joint Standing Committee on Agriculture, Conservation, and Forestry. My name is Kaitlin Hollinger and I am testifying today on behalf of BlueWave Solar in support of LD 1227, which would allow for the creation of a dual-use (solar plus agriculture) pilot program in Maine. Thank you for your consideration of this important piece of legislation today.

BlueWave is a solar and energy storage developer and a leading innovator of dual-use solar projects in the Northeast. BlueWave developed the first dual-use project in Maine on a wild blueberry farm in Rockport, which was completed in 2021. We are partnering with the University of Maine to study the impact of differing construction techniques on the blueberry crop.

I was proud to represent BlueWave as a member of the Agricultural Solar Siting Stakeholder Group, created by LD 820 and convened by the Maine Department of Agriculture, Conservation and Forestry (DACF) and the Governor's Energy Office (GEO). After a robust stakeholder process, the group submitted a report to this committee in January 2022 with recommendations to ensure agricultural lands are protected while helping the state reach its renewable energy goals. One key recommendation was the creation of a dual-use pilot program, which this bill would enable. The report also recommended that future state-sponsored programs to support the development of solar resources, such as the successor to the NEB program currently being discussed, include consideration and prioritization of agricultural siting characteristics consistent with dual-use best practices.

The term "dual-use" (or agrivoltaics; solar plus agriculture) refers to solar projects that allow for continued agricultural production under and around the solar panels, so that the same parcel of land can serve two uses. Dual-use solar projects are designed to provide appropriate height and spacing between the panels to allow for continued or renewed agricultural activity either around, between, or under the panels. Representing real investment in local communities, dual-use projects provide important benefits such as stable revenue for farmers, increased food security in the face of climate change, and electric savings to residents, nonprofits, municipalities, and small businesses.

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Farmers who participate in clean energy often do so as an alternative to selling off their farmland to a form of development in which it would be irreversibly lost, such as housing or industrial use. Dual-use offers farmers another option as it is not a permanent form of development. In BlueWave's experience, dual-use solar projects provide the long-term financial resources that farmers need to keep their farms viable in the face of development and other economic pressures by preserving and reactivating farmland that would otherwise lay fallow. As a result, farmers can pass on land to the next generation, or lease land to new farmers entering the field. Dual-use is an important tool to achieve economic stability for farms and meet Maine's ambitious climate and clean energy goals.

LD 1227 would direct DACF, in collaboration with the Governor's Energy Office, Public Utilities, and other stakeholders, to develop a plan for a dual-use pilot program and authorizes DACF to implement that plan. We look forward to a continued conversation about dual-use and the role it can play towards reaching Maine's clean energy and climate goals. Empowering farmers while allowing them the flexibility they need to diversify and expand their operations through dual-use will be a key step towards preserving farmland and farmers' livelihoods in Maine. Please don't hesitate to use BlueWave as a resource if you have any further questions about dual-use. Thank you for your work, time, and consideration.

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