



# Maine Farm Bureau Association

525

**TESTIMONY IN OPPOSITION TO LD 398 AN ACT TO MAKE**  
**AGRICULTURAL WORKERS AND OTHER RELATED**  
**WORKERS EMPLOYEES UNDER THE WAGE AND HOUR**  
**LAWS**

Senator Tipping, Representative Roeder and honorable members of the Committee on Labor and Housing:

My name is Julie Ann Smith and I am the Executive Director of the Maine Farm Bureau Association, the state's largest farmer-run advocacy organization. We have represented the voice of all agriculture in Maine for the past 70 years and I am grateful to have the opportunity to serve as the voice of our farmers today.

Our farmer members voted to strongly oppose this bill. The majority of Maine's 7,600 farms are small, family-run operations. The culture of Maine agriculture is not the large-scale monocrop farms that are present in other states. We are proud of the many families in Maine that choose to grow food for their neighbors. It is an arduous undertaking with little thanks and little pay. These small family farms, most of whom do not participate in interstate commerce, are exactly why agricultural laborers were excluded from the National Labor Relations Act. Congress wanted to protect family farmers from having to pay what they could not afford and did not think it necessary to equate the family farmer with big business.

Maine farmers are price-takers, not price-makers. Increased costs of labor are taken from the farm owner's marginal paycheck, and are rarely passed to the consumer. Most food produced in Maine is sold to retailers and restaurants, who purchase wholesale and limit what they will pay by the need for their own profit margins.

If these small family farms were forced through union contracts to increase their labor costs, the most likely result would be that harvesting would be mechanized, resulting in the loss of jobs completely. Ag workers would not have higher paying jobs, they would not have a job at all.

Furthermore, if ag workers unionized and chose to strike during harvest season, there would be a devastating economic effect on the entire community. Crops would rot in the ground while Mainers across the state suffer from food insecurity. Many food banks in Maine rely upon donations from Maine farmers and without help during harvest, farmers would not be able to make those donations.

I would like to further point out that in 1997 agricultural worker in egg facilities were given the right to unionize, but not one union was formed.

This bill is unnecessary. You do not have masses of agricultural workers clamoring for unionization. But you have farmers pleading with you not to destroy their livelihoods. If this

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bill were to pass, the culture of Maine agriculture would be forced to shift from small family farms to a few big businesses to accommodate union demands. Small family farms will no longer be independent businesses, but will be subsidiaries of large producers contracting out production processes or out of business completely.

Maine farmers treat our employees like family, and want to provide the best working environment possible for those that help us produce our food and those that eat it. We respectfully ask you to vote Ought Not To Pass on LD 525.

Thank you for your time today and your service to the people of Maine, especially our farmers. I would be happy to answer any questions.