

23 January 2024

131st Maine Legislature's Committee on Energy, Utilities and Technology

LD 2077: An Act Regarding Customer Costs and the Environmental and Health Effects of Natural Gas

Chair Lawrence, Zeigler, and esteemed members of the Energy and Utilities Committee, my name is Jenni Tilton-Flood and I come to you as a dairy farmer, a mum, and a Mainer. While some may wonder what a dairy farmer has to do with a ban on gas distribution systems, the simple answer is – a lot.

Many have talked about the benefits of our gas distribution systems or pipeline infrastructure and the value families and businesses realize when they have access to a diversity of affordable, lower-emissions fuel sources like natural gas...and those are all important points; I'm here, however, to talk to you about the potential that gas pipelines have for tomorrow and how that tomorrow is already being realized at Flood Brothers Farm in Maine's Dairy Capital of little ol' Clinton, Maine.

As a farmer, I like to think of myself as a person who feeds the state. I feed my family, my friends, and my neighbours. Through our family dairy farm, cows, and working lands, we produce fresh, quality, local Maine milk that finds its way onto your tables in its natural state of milk or as cheese, butter, or many other products Mainers have come to expect to fill their tummies. Good, sustainable nutrition.

Now, thanks to a partnership with Summit Natural Gas of Maine, Summit's affiliate Peak's Renewables, and Flood Brothers farm, we are feeding Maine in a new way, with homegrown energy utilizing the manure from our amazing cows and those from multiple other dairy farms across the state.

In 2019, Summit and Peaks approached us with an idea. They wanted to create one of the nation's first community dairy digesters at our farm. The project would help family farmers operate more sustainably and increase our circularity by providing a way not just to manage our manure and the emissions from that manure – but to turn it into renewable pipeline-quality gas to warm homes, fuel businesses, and run industry.

Today, that digester is operating and providing many economic, energy, and environmental benefits to rural Maine and the rest of the state.

At this facility, three outputs are created:

- A liquid fertilizer that goes back to all the farmers involved in the project to nourish their soils,
- A solid that the farmers can use to bed their animals; And, most importantly,

- **A carbon-negative gas.**

Yes, you heard me right, by collecting manure from cows, capturing the methane it produces, and then using that methane to heat homes or cook food, the facility is taking more emissions out of the air in the form of methane than is being put back in the air once burned at the burner tip.

Projects like these can't happen if LD 2077 passes! For the digester at Flood Brothers Farm, Summit Natural Gas had to install a new pipeline through a new town to build to our facility. Had this bill been in place, this project wouldn't have been possible.

As a state, we should be looking at innovative projects like this and asking, "How do we do this more?" not passing bans that would halt them from happening again.

At Flood Brothers, we know how important a role Maine's dairy community and industry plays in the strength of the state's economy and our culture, which is why we work hard to find new and innovative ways to ensure our animals thrive, our soils are nourished, our workers and communities are cared for, our milk is fresh for our neighbors, and most importantly that our operations have an eye toward sustainability and environmental impact. Just as we must look for new ways to increase the sustainability of dairy farming and mitigate environmental impacts, it's critical the state must also look for ways to reduce the emissions of the energy being supplied while maximizing our resources. The state's gas pipeline system is an important piece of that puzzle. We are so grateful we have the opportunity to partner with Peaks and Summit – two companies who aren't just talking about sustainability – but investing in it and in Maine— to utilize the abundant resources of our farms and our cows to unlock the potential of home-grown gas and renewable energies that can be used to benefit Maine families, communities and businesses. We were so proud to be the first community digester project in Maine...I'd hate to be the last.

Thank you so much for your time and attention, for your work as citizen legislators, and I hope for rejecting this short-sighted bill.

With Gratitude,

Jenni Tilton-Flood (she/her/Dairy Farmer)

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