



January 17, 2024

Testimony LD 579 - An Act to Support Farmland Conservation and Transition Planning for Farmers

Senator Ingwersen, Representative Pluecker, and honorable members of the Joint Standing Committee on Agriculture, Conservation and Forestry, thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony on LD 579 - An Act to Support Farmland Conservation and Transition Planning for Farmers.

My name is Alex Redfield, I serve as the Co-Director of the New England Policy Program at Wildlands, Woodlands, Farmlands and Communities and Food Solutions New England. Our work seeks to promote the development of policies that can support the resilience of our regional landscape and food system. My work is housed at the University of New Hampshire and, as an employee of an academic institution, I am providing testimony neither for nor against LD 579. Instead, I hope to provide relevant context about how other New England states have decided to invest in protecting farmland as an essential resource for a resilient future.

As you certainly know, Maine's farmers and food producers get things done. Maine's cash receipts across all crops and sectors within the agricultural industry are nearing \$1b in sales as of 2022.

State	Total Ag Receipts (All Commodities)
CT	\$686,023,000
MA	\$503,555,000
ME	\$926,767,000
NH	\$266,520,000
RI	\$76,768,000
VT	\$1,039,155,000

Source: USDA Economic Research Service

And, unsurprisingly, Maine also contains more high-quality agricultural soil currently in production than any other state in New England.

State	Total Agricultural Land (Acres)
CT	261,800
MA	359,000
ME	1,129,600
NH	221,600
RI	41,000
VT	861,200

Source: USDA National Agricultural Statistics Service (NASS)

Currently, Maine lags behind other New England states in several key metrics related to the protection of farmland soils.

State	Total Acres of Farmland Protected	% of Agricultural Land Protected
CT	50,145	19.2
MA	75,037	20.9
ME	54,208	4.8
NH	17,382	7.8
RI	8,252	20.1
VT	170,830	19.8

Sources: USDA NASS, Individual Correspondence w/ State Agencies.

Additionally, Maine has invested less public money over time in farmland protection than all other New England states on both total dollar and per capita basis.

State	State \$ Invested in Farmland Protection Over Time	Per Capita
CT	\$131,842,666	\$37
MA	\$245,290,621	\$35
ME	\$12,574,219	\$9
NH	\$20,563,845	\$5
RI	\$37,143,700	\$34
VT	\$88,794,121	\$135

Sources: Trust for Public Lands Conservation Almanac, Correspondence w/ State Agencies

Only New Hampshire has less dedicated staff time within relevant state agencies tasked with farmland protection planning and implementation:

State	Farmland Protection FTE
CT	5
MA	12
ME	0.5-0.75*
NH	0
RI	2
VT	2.5**

Sources: Correspondence w/ State Agencies, Public Staff Directories

*Maine: The Working Farmland Access and Protection Program ran its first funding cycle in 2021. No new staff positions were added when the program was established, ~0.4-0.5 FTE of a PSC position manages the program within BAFRR. Additional staff support is allocated through the LMF program.

**VT: The Vermont Housing and Conservation Board currently holds 2.5 FTE for farmland protection projects but reported the clear need for more staff capacity to continue conservation work at the current level and is advocating for additional positions moving forward.

Certainly, Maine is different in many ways from our neighbors to the south and west – but we are connected; our supply chains for food, fiber and forest products remain at least somewhat regional. Acting carefully and with intention on questions surrounding the conversion of agricultural soils should be a shared goal across New England.

Thanks for your time and deliberation.

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