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**Testimony of Nancy Smith, CEO of GrowSmart Maine
In Support of LD 579 An Act To Support Farmland Conservation**

January 17, 2024

Senator Ingwersen, Representative Pluecker and Honorable Members of the Joint Standing Committee on Agriculture, Conservation and Forestry,

My name is Nancy Smith, I live in Ellsworth, and I am the CEO of GrowSmart Maine. I am also proud to be an alum of this committee, serving two terms more than ten years ago. I regret I cannot provide this testimony in person, due to scheduling conflicts.

GrowSmart is a statewide non-partisan non-profit organization helping communities navigate change in alignment with smart growth. We advocate for comprehensive policies and funding for smart growth practices and outcomes. Farmland protection and farm viability are key components of smart growth, and it is from that perspective that we support this bill.

As you have read, the January 11th sponsor's amendment creates and funds within the Department of Agriculture, Conservation, and Forestry, a full-time permanent Resource Management Coordinator position to support public-private partnerships to carry out the purposes of the Maine Working Farmland Access and Protection Program.

This added capacity will allow Maine to more nimbly access a variety of funding sources to support farmers by protecting farmland and the economic viability of those who work the land. This funding may come from federal or other government sources, as well as the private sector.

Maine is losing farmland at an alarming rate. According to the American Farmland Trust resource, Farms Under Threat, **Maine lost almost 150,000 acres or 10% of its farmland between 2012 and 2017**. This has negative implications on all aspects of Maine's economy and culture:

- fewer rural jobs directly on and associated with farms
- reduced access to healthy, local foods
- increased municipal and household budgets due to sprawling growth on lost farmland
- diminished quality of life due to less access to open space

GrowSmart welcomes discussion on this issue, and will assist the committee in any way that is helpful.

With gratitude,

CEO